

Romantic Moments in Poetry

M myriad are the manifestations of love, endless its expressions, varied its impact on civilisation, diverse the ways in which it is understood and countless the manners in which it is glorified and celebrated. So central is love to the human condition that it touches the *raja* and the *praja*, the *bhakta* and the *rasika*, the poet and the potter; its songs are sung in the streets and its hymns are chanted in temples, its messengers walk in the corridors of a *haveli* and fly in the boundless sky, at times it is heard in the rhythm of the dancer's bells and at others in the whisper of the wind, for the *apsara* it is an elixir and for the *ganika* an intoxicant, some loves survive in the glory of monuments while others in the plaintive cry of the *chakravaka* bird that calls for its mate, for some, love is the fulfillment of a cherished dream while for others it is a culmination of a political conquest. For us in the Indian tradition *shringara rasa*, the word deriving from the root *shringa* or peak, is *rajarasa*, the king of *rasas*, the peak of human experiences, the supreme human emotion, the quintessence of what it is to be human and a celebration of that love is to extol the splendour and exult in the many nuances of that beautiful emotion.

Love is an overarching term and denotes affection and attraction between two individuals and thus incorporates a variety of relationships. *Rati* or love between a man and a woman, among the various loves of mankind, takes on different shades and hues, nuances and experiences, and within this love between man and woman one can differentiate at least three distinct strands. There is the romantic, the erotic and the settled *dampatya* love within marriage. We separate the three strands while fully recognising that they are three parts of a larger whole, one reinforcing, even anticipating the other. However, these three aspects of *rati* have their own aesthetic dynamics and equally their very special artistic expressions and therefore we feel justified in exploring only one aspect of love, namely the romantic. Fleeting but intense passion whether of union or longing, the thrill of an amorous moment and the excitement of a charged sensuality are the hallmarks of romantic love and this kind of love is best expressed in the brevity of *khandakavya* or *muktaka*, fragmented poetry and the beautiful and sensual space of a miniature painting. It does not take an epic or a mural to depict the thrill of the exchange of glances, the hushed joy of a clandestine meeting, the expectation and anticipation of a tryst or the pathos of longing, for this can be done even with

a few well-sculpted words of a poet or deft strokes of a miniature painter. Romantic love is all about that beautiful, charged, amorous, intense, albeit transient moment, it is not an elaborate love story. By their very nature romantic moments are evanescent, spontaneous, unexpected and unrehearsed and it is only the skilled poet or the consummate artist who is able to capture that heart-throbbing moment and convert it to a moment of beauty in an artistic creation. These evanescent romantic moments are complete in themselves, for what they lack in their narrative content they more than make up in their emotional surcharge, for in that momentary and intense romantic happening there is not only the outpouring of the heart but in that poetic moment is the fulfillment of one's very being. The beauty of that moment can only be captured poetically, whether it be through the lyrics of the poet or the brush of the artist. That poetic moment is alive and throbbing, moving and sensuous, a whole universe of feeling, it is a still moment within orbits of amorous movements and activities. It is sheer romantic beauty, be it of longing or rejoicing, of belonging or expectant waiting, of bubbling joy or heart-rending remorse, of anger or jealousy, of the many seasons and faces of romance, all of that and more, fully alive and present in that brief but beautiful poetic moment. It is this moment which we shall explore on this journey. Our tradition of *smriti*, *purana*, *mahakavya* and *natya*, grand epics, mythic lore, epic poetry and drama, are rich with the treasure of love stories where romantic moments are a small part of a larger narrative. Romantic moments in these art forms are subservient to the unfolding of cosmic and human drama, the expression of religious and metaphysical truths, as well as the dynamics of storytelling and therefore, will not form a part of our study.

Like any other human activity, *shringara rasa* or the artistic expression of the romantic emotion in the Indian tradition can elicit a sociological analysis and can lead to ethical questions. It is true that the people and places, the heroes and heroines, the ethos and the ambience depicted in romantic poetry and painting are those of the upper and leisured class, the royalty and the nobility. It is equally true that romantic love is idealised through the arts and is not a historical or photographic representation of love. What is also true is that the model of the romantic couple that is most often used is that of *parakiya shringara* or illicit love. This however in no way diminishes the aesthetic beauty and artistic splendour of that emotion, for *shringara rasa* is indeed a testament and document of the creative imagination of the poet and the painter and equally the re-creation of that emotion by the *rasika*. Some would argue that *shringara rasa* both in poetry and painting was meant merely as a solace for the repressed desires and passions of women in harems, and even if this is partly true it should not detract from the sheer refinement and exquisite grace that romantic poetry and painting exude. Romantic poetry and painting should be considered and celebrated on their aesthetic merits. Aesthetic truth need not subordinate itself to any sociological or ethical norms and standards and indeed, has never done so in the Indian tradition.

And finally, in the Indian tradition we can never separate romantic love from the beautiful relationship of Radha and Krishna, for they are the prototypical romantic couple. In their love, sensuality merges imperceptibly into spirituality, *shringara rasa* blends into *shringara bhakti* where romantic longing breaks out of ethical norms and is no different from the human quest for bliss and ecstasy.

The Indian tradition is quintessentially oral and in that pristine bubble of air was created, preserved and transmitted our sacred hymns and our religious chants, our many songs and our countless stories. The origins of the romantic emotion are to be found in poetry, which in its primeval form was oral and from that primal art form many new art forms were to emerge. For when poetry was recited with a certain metre and melody a song was created. When that poetry was turned into a *bandish* it lent a certain emotional content or *khayal* to a *raga*. And when *ragas* were converted to *ragamala* paintings the inspiration for it arose from a poetic imagination of a *raga*. And when a song was performed on stage with gesture and movement we had *natya* or dance drama. And when that oral poetry was given a spatial dimension it became *shilpa* or sculpture. And when that very poetry inspired artists to create a painting it led to *chitra* which was visual poetry. So it was the spoken or the chanted romantic and poetic word that led to so many different art forms, each with its special aesthetic, ambience and audience. The poet was therefore not just a writer but a performer. The charmed atmosphere of hearing poetry whether it was heard by caravan traders or by royalty or nobility in a court, gave a certain life to that poetry. It touched the sensitive listeners in the innermost recesses of their minds. Monks and merchants alike heard, repeated, remembered and transmitted this poetry, as it was taken along the ancient trade routes of our country. For these trade routes were alive not only with people and products, carts and caravans, but equally with poetic idioms and images which travelled great distances on these routes. Romantic poetry for these travellers was perhaps at one level mere entertainment, but at another it was more than that, it was for them the living expression of a way of life, a world view, and above all a certain aesthetic truth. Thus, while the basic emotion of love remains the same, it is interesting that the aesthetic experience it creates changes significantly as it is transformed into varied art forms, each art form with its unique formal and structural characteristics and the ambience in which it is enjoyed.

The Sanskrit word *shringara* captures within it the many meanings of love. *Shringara* (*shangar* in the *bhashas*) is adornment of the expectant *nayika*, it is equally the sensual thrill of romance, the sentimental pathos of longing and the joy and exhilaration of union, and finally it is also *bhakti* or a love divine, of the human for the ultimate. The exploration of this romantic poetic word and its manifold meanings will take us on a journey where we will encounter the beauty of poetry, the charm of miniature paintings and finally the hushed world of the devotee and his loving devotion to his chosen deity. This will be

our journey, our celebration. On this journey we will pass monuments and mausoleums which are glorious testaments to love, we will peer into the pages of the book of history which has recorded the loves and lives of our royalty and nobility and their political and social intrigue in the pursuit of romantic love, we will see footsteps of ordinary men and women who built no grand monuments but whose love stories are no less magnificent and touching, but we will leave all these behind as we pursue the aesthetics of romance in poetry and painting.

To seek a historical beginning of the emotion of love in the Indian tradition would be to try and attempt to catch the first breath of our civilisation. Historicity, in the Western sense, has never been a strong pre-occupation with us, as a historical approach brings with it concepts of linearity and causality, while for us the ideas of *anitya* and *brahat*, eternal and vast, *apaurusheya* and *svayambhu*, untouched by humans and spontaneous, best describe our world view. The Indian tradition is pluralistic and not monolithic, inclusive rather than exclusive, joyous and celebratory and it is no different when it comes to the human manifestation and the artistic expression of the emotion of love. Even so, within these qualifications the emotion of love has been variously understood and diversely expressed and there is some justification in tracing the various streams within the tradition through both history and geography.

The well-springs of Indian civilisation are in its oral traditions and this is true of its philosophic discourse as it is equally of its romantic creations. The beginnings of the romantic emotion must be searched in poetry. There are at least three major streams in the Indian river of the poetic celebration of love that we must recognise, each contributing its own unique flavour and enriching the vast literary treasure of love poetry. There is the ancient Prakrit stream, understood variously as autochthonous or earthy or folk, which expresses best the romantic side of love. Then there is the equally ancient Tamil stream which shares many features with Prakrit literature but stands self-assuredly alone and is a tribute to the creative genius of the Tamil psyche. And, finally, there is the Sanskrit stream, sometimes also called the courtly or the classical, which is the repository of mature court poetry and portrays best the settled and conjugal love between man and woman set in the framework of *dharma*. The three streams arise from different sources, follow different paths, course through different terrains and therefore must be studied separately, but since they ultimately mingle in the same river of love they must be considered parts of the same whole. The Prakrit, the Tamil and the Sanskrit streams of the Indian tradition constitute the *purnatva*, the wholeness of the aesthetics of the emotion of love for us in India.

The Indian romantic tradition is largely, though not totally Hindu, as within the tradition there are the many hues of Islam, especially Sufi, as well as the variegated colors of Jain and Buddhist thought. Each of the other religions has contributed its own unique facet of the understanding of love

and has expressed it variously but the overall ethos of the aesthetics of love in India remains Hindu. It is not accidental that the Sanskrit word *shringara* has within it the nuances of not only the connotation of romantic love but also that of *shangar* or adornment and equally that of *bhakti* or religious devotion. For the Hindu mind the three are a continuum, one merges imperceptibly into another, defying distinctions such as profane and sacred, denying any hierarchy, for to adorn is to beautify and prepare with anticipation and excitement for the meeting with the beloved and to love is to elevate the mind to heights of joyous ecstasy so that it reflects the cosmic *lila*, at which point love and devotion become indistinguishable. Understood through the many layers of meanings of *shringara* the three streams of love in the Indian tradition provide the bedrock upon which the magnificent artistic edifice of love in all its diverse manifestations is built.

The Indian tradition, whether religious or artistic, is quintessentially oral and the prototypical artform of this tradition is *kavya* or poetry. Poetry in ancient India was never to be silently read but chanted, sung, performed and celebrated in the company of others. Literary and performing arts were not fragmented, as they seem to be today, and it is not an aberration that the first major work on Indian aesthetics, compiled in the first century BC, was Bharata's *Natyashastra*. *Natya* combined equally dance, poetry and music, an early reminder that the various arts in India were integrally and organically related. There were no silent spectators in our artistic activity but enlightened and sensitive participants, not just an inner, solitary and exclusive enjoyment of art, but a festive and public celebration, whether it was in a *haveli* or a court or a temple. A high level of aesthetic sensitivity prevailed at that time, a sensitivity that was charged with imagination and sensuality, a world view in which life was a celebration, an outlook where sensual indulgence was a merit, when emotional gratification was raised to a fine art form, where a relationship between a man and a woman was treated with artistic finesse and every nuance of the romantic emotion was tastefully expressed and gracefully experienced. The many and diverse artistic expressions of the romantic emotion attest to this ethos of the Indian tradition, an ambience that led not only to the creation of art objects of unsurpassed excellence and beauty, but equally its enjoyment by refined connoisseurs. Ancient Prakrit poetry was enjoyed not only in *havelis* and homes but equally in village squares where people would gather, at caravan-serais where travellers would meet and caravans would take shelter for the night. Tamil poetry was part of the life-affirming ambience of the Tamil country where the chieftain and noble, poet and aesthete would share the pleasures of the arts, where romantic poetry was matched by the spirit of adventure and the joy of living, a sense of good cheer with admiration for the heroic virtues of generosity and valour. Sanskrit poetry, on the other hand, was a connoisseurship of the sensitive *nagariaka*, the urban elite and that of the cultured nobility and patronising royalty. Conforming to strict rules of grammar and rhetoric, Sanskrit poetry was

created at a time of unhurried delectation of the arts, where every word was savoured not only for its meaning but equally for its sound, where creative imagination was allowed to soar to heights of perfection and each poetic image was relished and in turn led the aesthete to heights of rapture. Sanskrit poetry flourished in an era of urban sophistication, where the cultivation of a refined taste was as important as the trappings of power and prestige, when poetry flowed, conversation was sophisticated, the ambience was aristocratic and the mood was one of exaltation of *kavi* and *rasika*. It was a time when poets vied with each other to present their choicest offerings and this they did with the utmost deference and respect to their audience. There was in that era a special bond between the artist and the art lover, that of the creator and the *sahradaya*.

While scholars debate whether Prakrit borrowed from Tamil or the other way around, none would disagree that both of these ancient poetic traditions were later appropriated by Sanskrit. There always was a certain inhibition and distancing by the classical Aryans from the pre-Aryan indigenous tradition whether it was in philosophic thought or artistic creations. While, for example, the pre-Aryans were indulgent image makers the Aryans were aniconic, while the pre-Aryans celebrated the *saguna brahman*, ultimate reality rich with ratiocinative and emotional concepts, the Aryans affirmed the beauty of the *nirguna brahman*, ultimate reality devoid of thought constructs. The world of romantic poetry was no different. The Prakrit and the Tamil poets were prolific in their romantic creations while early Sanskrit poets felt that their language, *devbhasha*, which was the language of the gods, should be reserved only for philosophic discourse and religious ritual and not be used on romantic literature. The pejorative view that Sanskritists had for Prakrit is seen best in Sanskrit drama where Prakrit is spoken by women and people of a lower social order and Sanskrit uttered by men and the nobility. However, Sanskrit poets could not resist the flood of Prakrit and Tamil poetry and eventually gave in and started creating Sanskrit romantic poetry in their fashion. While Ashvaghosha who wrote the *Buddhacharita* is credited with being the first classical Sanskrit poet, Kalidasa, Bharatrhari and Amaru are three early Sanskrit poets who composed romantic poetry. The process of Sanskritisation involved a rich and free transfer of the idioms and metaphors of Prakrit and Tamil poetry into Sanskrit. The ancient poetic motifs and situations were stylised and refined and rendered in Sanskrit. What poetry in Sanskrit gained in refinement it lost in spontaneity, its excellence in style through grammar and diction meant the loss of the earthiness and a certain freshness of Prakrit. Sanskrit poets could never shake off a certain restraint in their language, there was a definite constraint in their imagery lest they give into hedonism and vulgarity, romance in their hands unfolded within a certain structure of *dharma*. While Prakrit and Tamil poetry excelled in depicting a free, sensually charged and heart-throbbing romance, Sanskrit poetry captured the settled, demure and dignified grace of courtly romance and conjugal love.

Early love poetry in all three languages took the form of short or miniature lyrics that captured in a few lines the idyllic world of romance and love, the joys of togetherness and the pain of separation, of the truant lover who is abroad on account of commerce or duty to his family or clan, of romantic trysts in the forest or by the village well, of bangles that slip from the hands of a lovelorn *nayika* suggesting the emaciation of the lonely heroine, of rain clouds that excite passion and peacocks that comfort the lover, of the traveller who knocks on the door and is met by the coy maiden and as she serves him water their gazes meet, of love messengers that arrange clandestine meetings or are a vital part of a joyous rendezvous, of parrots who give away secrets or *chakravaka* birds that cry for their mates on the banks of the Ganga, and many other romantic situations and motifs. This they achieved not only through apt and pithy metaphors but equally through the use of *dhvani* or extended metaphors which aroused suggested meanings in the minds of the prepared aesthetes. In this way these miniature poems could express more than what they said on the surface, they conveyed so much more in suggested meanings than in their surface meanings, meanings that resonated in the charmed spaces where sensitive *rasikas* would gather.

Our knowledge of the social and literary traditions of the ancient Tamil country is derived from a large corpus of literature called the Sangam literature. Dated variously, a conservative estimate places the period of Sangam literature at about 800 years from the 3rd century BC to the 5th century AD. It must be noted that anthologising of Sangam poetry was late and took place in the first few centuries of the first millennium, but despite this it would be fair to say that this genre of romantic literature takes pride of place as being the oldest in the Indian tradition. A good number of Sangam poems are contemporaneous with the Maurya period and many belong to the Buddhist missionary period of the 1st century BC to the 1st century AD. Considered the high point of Tamil literature, the predominant Sangam poetry, consisting of about 3500 poems, was romantic in nature, called *aham* or *ahattinai* meaning inner or household, but it also contained heroic poetry called *puram* or *attrupadai* meaning outer or public. *Aham* poetry resembled the miniature Prakrit verses in format and imagery and had two important features: it was spoken in the first person by the beloved, the friend or the mother and thereby created an ambience where the poetic persona was given a clear voice without any inhibition, meant to be heard not only by us the audience but also by the other characters in the romantic situation, akin to the speech in a play. Secondly, *aham* poetry was always depersonalised and therefore became universalised as no names were mentioned. The landscapes in which the romance was set were of generic types rather than particular places and were strictly codified. The land was divided into five types—*kurinji* (hill), *mullai* (forest), *marudham* (pastoral), *neithal* (coast) and *palai* (desert)—and each area was associated with a specific deity, a particular flower and a certain mood of love. The landscape in Tamil poetry is thus both a place and a mood, and

speaking of one evokes the other. The poetic conventions extended to other aspects of the landscape as well, such as flowers, rivers and clouds. Thus lovers' union is associated with *kurinji*, separation with *palai*, patient waiting with *mullai*, anxious waiting with *neithal* and infidelity with *marudham*. The words and images of *aham* poetry create a certain movement from the outer world of romantic dalliance to the inner space of romantic emotion, and the poetic moment mostly unfolds at the threshold of the two, for it is here that outer realities meet the inner sensibilities. In keeping both dramatis personae and the landscape generic rather than specific the *aham* poems become archetypal rather than historical. An interesting and apocryphal story is told of the origin of love poetry in the Tamil country. When the Pandyan kingdom was devastated by famine for 12 years the king asked his men to disperse from the kingdom and return only when the famine ended. When the drought was over and men returned the king was disappointed to find that there were only grammarians in his kingdom for he felt that the real relish of language came from poetry. Shiva responded to the king's lamentation and wrote 60 love *sutras* on copper-plates and concealed them in the sanctum of the temple at Madurai, and only a five year old mute boy who could interpret these *sutras* to the King. *Aham* poetry celebrates love in all its aspects—clandestine, forbidden, permissive, formal and domestic—and within this poetic ambience, the four principal characters, namely the romantic hero, the romantic heroine, the courtesan and the love messenger emerge, a foursome that defined the entire romantic genre in the literary and the visual arts for many centuries to come.

The romantic hero of *aham* poetry is one who comes from a high stratum of society and is possessed of good masculine looks enhanced by appropriate ornaments such as necklaces, flowers in his hair or garlands around his neck. A picture of a handsome, well groomed youth of the *aham* poetry emerges in this poem in *Kurincipattu*:

A youth appeared
His curly hair was well oiled
and smeared with the cool scented paste
of sandalwood
He drew his fingers through his hair
to help it dry sooner
In his hair, made fragrant
with the smoke of black aloewood
dark and glossy like sapphires
and attracting beautiful, striped bees
he wore a cool fragrant chaplet of various hues
strung from choice blossoms.
Behind one ear he tucked
the pretty shoots of the acoku
that blooms bright red like fire.
On his high and broad chest

*smeared with sandal paste
 and where strength resides
 he wore a fragrant garland
 In his long arms with well built wrists
 he held a painted, well strung bow
 with chosen arrows.
 He wore an ornate belt round his waist.
 When he moved
 his bright golden anklets
 tinkled around his faultless legs.*

This unnamed handsome hero of *aham* poetry is as strong as he is heroic, well-versed in the arts and possessed of compassion and generosity and is often compared to Murugan and is therefore praised and venerated in his community. *Aham* poets maintain a strongly secular and an amoral ethos and therefore do not speak of the hero's religious feelings and beliefs and neither do they refer to his caste.

The romantic heroine of *aham* poetry, like the hero, is also young and beautiful and from the upper stratum of society. She is well-versed in the arts, especially singing. In one poem the heroine sings a tune so sweetly that the elephant in the field is overcome by the melody. Another heroine guarding a millet field sings, while she keeps a watch, for the song is useful in keeping the parrots away. And there are songs sung by the heroine which are meant to be heard by the hero who may be in a far off place so that he may return soon. An important attribute of the heroine is her chastity which is seen as fit to be revered and extolled like the northern star or the jasmine flower which she wears. The Tamil heroine is modest; her desires are seen only in her gestures, they are not spoken explicitly and her maidenly inhibition is dearer than life itself. Such a woman who worships not god but her husband and lover, possesses extraordinary powers such that she can bring down the rains at her wish. The ancient Tamils believed that failure to observe chastity could bring harm not only to the family but also to the village. *Aham* poetry speaks of elopement particularly when there is a strict mother who might thwart a marriage. The beauty of the Tamil heroine is described by a third person, usually the hero and not the poet, and rather than a detailed description, an account of her beauty is restricted to some parts of the body, leaving the rest to be inferred. Another way of describing the beauty of the heroine is by comparing her to birds and flowers as in:

*The dancing peacock was like you
 The guileless deer looked like you
 The jasmine bloom smelt of you
 Thus it was I came rushing here my dear
 Faster than the cloud with rain.*

Tamil poets also celebrate the courtesan although her position is distinctly secondary to that of the wife. The wife is the primary woman, the mother and the mistress of the house although the courtesan does influence the hero in many different ways. She stands at the entrance to her home or visits festivals where she can display her attractiveness. The wife's reaction to her husband's infidelity is obviously one of hurt and jealousy as is seen in:

*Let him come here.
I shall seize his garland and his upper garment
and tie him down to me
with my long tresses.*

Infidelity leaves its tell-tale marks on the hero and creates its own romantic dynamics both for him and the women in his life. Courtesans are as various as the heroines. There are courtesans who are abandoned and those who are sheltered and protected, those who ignore the hero's family and those who treat the hero's children as their own and give them ornaments. Often they are compared to birds that go in search of trees laden with fruits or bees that suck honey from fresh flowers while discarding the old ones.

While *aham* poets in the Tamil country set the standard in romantic literature and were to influence the entire romantic genre for centuries to come, the court of King Hala of the Shatvahana dynasty was humming with poetic activity. The Shatvahanas were leaders of caravan traders and their capital was Pratisthana or Paithan in present-day Maharashtra. Pratisthana was on an important north south trade route, and the Shatvahanas held sway over a large area of the Andhra empire from Ujjain in the north to Cuddalore in the south. The 17th leader of this dynasty was King Hala who was an accomplished poet and who during his short reign of four years from AD 20 to 24 gathered around him in his court other poets who excelled in celebrating the romantic emotion through miniature poems called *gathas*, seven hundred of which were gathered, out of several thousand, in an anthology called the *Gathasaptasati*. While recognising the primacy of the Tamil poets *Gathasaptasati* also occupies a uniquely important place in the history of Indian romantic literature. Not only is it the first extant collection of Prakrit poetry but through its miniature and lyrical compositions it exudes a sensuous charm and a pulsating earthiness, covers every aspect of romantic love, captures the many and varied delicate nuances of romance, and evokes a certain aesthetic sensibility which lingers and is copied even today.

The *gathas* were sung, perhaps even performed, and the full delight of these beautiful miniature compositions came through as much in the suggested meanings of their metaphors as in their sounds that were heard in the aesthetically charged ambience of the court in which they were sung. There is in these *gathas* a disarming openness and a passionate sensuality, a robust earthiness and a vibrant spontaneity, the many hues of romance and the

variegated textures of love as they celebrate love and romance in a variety of situations. Stridently secular and amoral, Hala and his poets delight in sensitively presenting every colour and emotion, every gesture and mood of romantic love. The music and meanings inherent in the language of Prakrit are used to their fullest in these *gathas*. Hala had a penchant for Prakrit and since it was the language of the people the romantic *gathas* centered around common people like the farmer and the hunter, the traveller and the merchant. There is none of the courtly elegance or regal splendour in these *gathas* but the thrill and excitement of lovers' glances and hints of amorous adventures, the pangs of separation and the pathos of longing, the humming of bees and the chatter at village wells.

Clandestine meetings at a lonely spot are suggested thus:

*look, the heron sits
on a lotus leaf, still
and motionless
it shines like a conch
on an emerald plate.*

Or a meeting at sunset is spoken thus:

*when can we meet alone? (he asked)
She couldn't answer
with so many around
but looked at him and
closed the petals of the lotus in her hand.*

Intimate moments are presented thus:

*with some effort
he was able to release himself from my arms
which firmly held him
and I gently drew my breasts away
so deeply dug into his chest.*

And the naughty parrot is tricked thus:

*what the couple spoke at night
the parrot heard and the next day
began to say it all aloud
in the presence of elders
the bride blushing in shame
put into the parrot's beak
a ruby out of her earring
as if it were a pomegranate seed
hoping to silence it.*

When a weary traveller knocks at the door and asks for water:

*eyes aloft, the traveller
drinks the water, letting it spill
through his fingers wide, to tarry long
the girl at the door alike
makes the flow thinner and thinner.*

Through 700 and more verses we are led into an enchanted world of romance and love, where neither affairs of the home nor of the court intrude into the sheer pleasure of the creation and enjoyment of romantic poetry, where there are no priests or kings to stand in judgement on affairs of the heart, where the commerce of the world can stand still while lovers exchange glances, where the pathos of longing is more important than the suffering of mankind, where there is no guilt and no penance, where the humming of bees takes pride of place rather than the chanting of scriptures, for here love rules supreme. Simple but not banal, it is a tribute to the creative genius of the poet and the beauty of Prakrit that these little gems were brought into the elegance and grace of the court of Hala. Little did they know that these *gathas* would be read and enjoyed almost 2000 years later and that they would become the aesthetic prototypes of the romantic emotion, not only in literature, but in the visual and performing arts as well. Remaining close to the soil from where it emerged the stream of Prakrit poetry remained vibrant and undiminished, even though it was to be dominated by Sanskrit for centuries. It made a second major reappearance in the post-Jayadeva outpouring of poets such as Vidyapati and Keshavdas who chose the *bhashas* once again to express a warm and pulsating romantic sentiment.

To understand the tenor and the mood of classical Sanskrit love poetry one should start with the *Vedas* where one finds hints of later classical thought and art. The *Vedas* are the seminal repository of much of the classical or the *nigamic* stream and there is in the Vedic ambience an unmistakable sacerdotal and hierarchical stamp. The *Vedas* recognise *kama*, understood as desire, to be the first seed of the mind and therefore its main driving force. It is this *kama* that leads to an awakening and an initial feeling of isolation, which gives rise to a desire to know the other which in turn leads to the awareness of *amo 'ham asmi sa tvam*, I am he, you are she. In this assertion of gender identity there is a hint of romance. However, the mind for the Vedic *rishis* is a god-searching, truth questing mind and *kama* for this radiant mind is the desire for the realisation of ultimate reality which transcends the gratification of the romantic emotion. The desire to know the other is not a mere emotional experience but has to be consummated in a conjugal relationship so that *dharma* or the moral order of the universe is safeguarded and enhanced. What is immediate for the *Vedas* is not unimportant but what is ultimate is fundamental. In this spirit Vedic *kama* does not exclude romantic love but neither does it dwell on it or emphasise it. The microcosm in the *Vedas* is a replica of the macrocosm, every action a re-

creation of the primal act of creation, every movement a step in the cosmic dance of the universe. The broad and catholic vision of the *Vedas* envisages humankind as a part of the *brhat rta* or the vast cosmic order of which we are a part and which we must subserve. The Vedic, and later *Upanishadic*, *rishis* are preoccupied with moving away from the immediate to the ultimate, from appearances to reality and from death to immortality, and this thereby creates an epistemic duality between the here and the beyond, between life affirmation and ultimate realisation, a duality that persists right through the classical tradition. The romantic emotion for the *Vedas* is to be a prelude to conjugal love and the sacred bond between a man and a woman was to be a noble sacrament in the cosmic harmony. The Vedic *rishi* states that the goddess of speech reveals the inner beauty and deeper meaning of words only to the learned, like a wife who reveals all her bodily charms only to her husband. The Vedic ideal for humankind was the *yajamana*, the one who performs at a Vedic sacrifice, surrounded by the elders and his family, presided over by priests and in the company of the community and to whose welfare the *yajna* was dedicated. When the Vedic *yajna* was replaced by the *Upanishadic tapas*, the ideal person in ancient brahminical thought was the philosopher king, like Janaka, who was steeped in philosophic discourse even while presiding over the affairs of the state. A spiritual realisation of one's ultimate self is the preoccupation of the Upanishads, for the *Brahadaranyaka Upanishada* clearly states, *atmanastu kamaya sarva priyam bhavati*, it is love for one self that is exhibited as love for others. While elevating love to a noblesse oblige the *Vedas* and *Vedanta* have little or no room for extolling the romantic or dwelling on the erotic, they do not explore the many nuances and shades of the romantic emotion of which the human mind is capable, and do not celebrate the many pleasures of sheer sensuality. Sensuality in early classical thought was to be questioned, rejected or subordinated to religious rituals and spiritual endeavours. There was thus for the Vedic Indian a deliberate and definite distancing from the autochthonous *agamic* stream of Indian civilisation. For the *agamic* world-view the immediate, the sensual and the romantic were not to be negated or overlooked but to be joyously affirmed and enjoyed even while striving for a higher state of being. This fundamental difference between the two streams of Indian thought and art, the *agamic* or the autochthonous and the *nigamic* or the classical, can be seen even today, millenia later.

The strongly contemplative and discursive ambience of classical Indian thought was further enhanced by the linguistics of Sanskrit. Sanskrit was a language of the courts and of priests, of the nobility and the cultured but not of the common person, of the peasant or the potter. Sanskrit was *devbhasha*, the language of the gods, and in maintaining its aloofness from matters plebeian and issues pedestrian it was to distance itself from matters of the heart for almost 2000 years. Even Ashvaghosa's *Buddhacharita*, the first poem in classical Sanskrit, written in the 1st century BC, while describing the sensuous charm of women, denies the pleasures of sensual indulgence. For the

son of Shakyas, not yet the Buddha, when exhorted by his friend Udayin to submit to the charms of women, tells his friend “even though the beauty of women were to remain perpetual, still delight in the pleasure of desires would not be worthy of the wise man.” (4.87) Perhaps contemporaneous with Ashvaghosha was Bharata whose *Natyashastra* was to become the foundational work for the performing arts. Bharata in his taxonomy of emotions recognises *shringara* as a primary emotion and goes on to offer a very detailed classification of the various stages and types of romantic love and lovers and their depiction on the stage through *natya*. It would be a safe assumption that the many autochthonous streams and folk nuances of romantic love were well known to Bharata and it was left to him to appropriate and assimilate, codify and classify the romantic emotion for its expression on the stage through *natya*. However, Bharata wrote a *shastra*—a treatise and a compendium—not a *kavya* or poem, and in this lies the strength and the weakness of the *Natyashastra*. The fact that the *Natyashastra* was elevated to the status of the fifth *Veda* is a testament to the authority it wielded not only in the performing arts of its day but equally, through its ethos of elegant and stylised emotions, in the lives and minds of the cultivated aesthete, and continues to do so even today, two millennia later. However, Bharata in enclosing the romantic emotion within the exalted but rigid space of a *shastra* and giving it an ordered and structured *vyakarana*, grammar, deprived the artistic expression of the romantic emotion of its spontaneity and uninhibited expression. In giving the romantic emotion a structure the *Natyashastra* took away its freedom, in raising it to a classical art form it confined it to a certain prescribed structure. Like the four *Vedas* that preceded it, the *Natyashastra* left its stamp on all classical art and thought and remains even today a foundational treatise, but like the *Vedas*, it placed certain constraints, regulated the expression and articulation of the romantic emotion and therefore it could not prevent a protest through an evolution of the concepts and expressions of the romantic emotion. The *Natyashastra* did to classical Sanskrit what the *Tolkapiyam* did to ancient Tamil, namely, it became a banyan tree which covered and protected creativity, and thereby gave it sanctity, but under which new and renegade growth was discouraged. Within 500 years of the first millennium, both in the north and south, there was both an artistic and a political exhaustion; romantic idioms were becoming stale and worn out and the political and cultural will to conquer and assimilate the entire country was equally weak. Creativity in the two classical languages was at a low ebb, the ritualistic Vedic literature was overpowering, the Puranas entrenched in myth, Buddhism and Jainism too austere and ascetic. This was to lead to the emergence of a cult of sensuality and pleasure seeking in the north and it was this that contributed to the emergence of romantic literature in Sanskrit. In the Tamil country, similar conditions led to the transformation of the romantic idioms of *aham* poetry to those of *bhakti* and the development of the *shringara bhakti* cult in the south. Both these movements were of singular importance to the evolution of the

romantic emotion in the Indian tradition as they took the romantic idiom in two different directions, and were responsible for a significant growth in romantic art, both visual and oral. Before we look at these two movements it is important to take stock of what was happening in the early classical period of Sanskrit literature in the north.

Despite the hierarchical attitude of Sanskrit and everything it espoused, the constraining effects of the *Vedas* and the *Natyashastra* which went beyond just the performing arts, and the ascetic ambience of Buddhism and Jainism, Sanskrit literature could not remain untouched by the effervescent and vibrant romantic ethos of Prakrit and Tamil romantic poetry and so embraced sensuality and romanticism, albeit in a subdued fashion. The Gupta period and the next several centuries, described as the golden period for the arts, saw the emergence of romantic *mahakavya* (epic court poetry), *natya* (drama), *muktaka* (miniature poetry) and *khandakavya* (lyrical poetry). The names of Kalidasa, Bharatrhari and Amaru, among many others, are written in letters of gold in the genre of romantic literature of early classical Sanskrit. The canvas of epic court poetry was so large that romantic love was only one out of a multitude of human emotions and endeavours that concerned the poet. The depiction of romance in classical Sanskrit was as elegant as it was graceful, courtly and dignified, never far removed from mythology and *dharma*, with ornamented descriptions and well structured plots. The general ethos of early classical Sanskrit literature and art was to integrate sensual delight with spiritual realisation, the joy of the material with the serenity of the metaphysical, beauty with introspection, the *sundari* with the *yogi*. One has only to turn to Kalidasa, the celebrated poet of this period to be reminded that sensuality must be tempered with spirituality when he says: *rupam papavrittaye na*, beauty is never intended for sin (*Kumarasambhava*, v.36) and *priyesu saubhagya phala hi charuta*, the charm of beauty is intended for the delight of the husband (*Kumarasambhava*, v.1). Another feature of early classical Sanskrit poetry, like other classical arts of that period, was that it was intricately linked with the politics and patronage of royalty and nobility, and it arose from and in turn supported a certain elite class structure. This was its strength and its weakness. Sanskrit romantic poetry lacked the earthiness and effervescence of Prakrit and Tamil poetry and therefore did not reach or reflect the ethos of the proletariat. Romance in the hands of these Sanskrit poets was never an end in itself, in its expressions it was subdued, in its gestures restrained, in its ends it remained subordinated to *dharma*, understood both as religion and metaphysics.

The *Shataktrayi*, the anthology of 300 verses of Bharatrhari, is one of the earliest contributions of early classical Sanskrit to romantic literature. Although the anthology was compiled around the 4th century AD Bharatrhari probably lived in an earlier century of the Christian era, which was also the time frame of Bharata of the *Natyashastra*. Bharatrhari in his poetic creations gives equal space to ethics, romance and renunciation. *Shringarashataka*, which

is part of the *Shataktrayi*, the 100 romantic verses, bear some resemblance to *Gathasaptasati* and does raise the obvious question of how much Bharatrhari was influenced by the idioms and metaphors of Prakrit love poetry. Notice how he talks about the joy of being with one's *priyatama* or beloved, lines which are reminiscent of the *Gathasaptasati*:

*white jasmine about to bloom in her hair
sandal paste mixed with saffron on her body
my beloved languorous in her intoxicating youth
resting on my chest
this is nothing but heaven paying me a visit.*

Bharatrhari's *shringara* has an unmistakable undercurrent of *vairagya* or renunciation and this becomes the hallmark of *shringara rasa kavya* in early classical Sanskrit. Even when Bharatrhari speaks of the pleasures of the moon and the beloved's face he says *sarvam ramyam anityam upagate citte ne kinchit punah*, once the mind has sensed impermanence nothing at all is the same. In another *muktaka* he reminds his listeners that if one is surrounded by songs, accomplished poets and the sound of jingling bracelets of fanning maids one may as well enjoy the delights of the world, but if this is not the case then one must plunge at once into a state of meditation. Bharatrhari is never far even in his romantic verses from the dialectic of *shringara* and *vairagya*, romantic rejoicing and ascetic renunciation. At one moment Bharatrhari is rapturous about the exalted state of a loving couple when he compares perfect love to the *ardhanari* where there is no duality and no space between the lover and the loved; at the very next moment he cautions us that if such is not the case then one must be an ascetic like Shiva. In another verse the choice for a man is to rest between the breasts of a maid whose necklace snares the mind or on the shores of Ganga whose waters ward off sin. Bharatrhari's romance is always tempered with a caveat and this in many ways is the tenor and mood of early romantic Sanskrit poetry. He maintains a tension between sensuality and spirituality, between joyously embracing this world and renouncing it. It was not until the Tamil poets created the idioms of *bhakti shringara* that this tension was to be resolved. However, before we examine their contributions we must take stock of at least two other major romantic Sanskrit poets, namely Amaru and Kalidasa both of whom contributed significantly to early classical romantic poetry.

Amaru, also called Amaruka, is believed to have lived in the 7th century, and wrote a number of *muktakas* or miniature romantic verses which were later compiled under the title *Amarushataka* or the centenary of Amaru. Biographical details of Amaru are sketchy and one legend equates him with the spirit of Adi Shankara who, to win a debate with the noted philosopher Mandanamishra, animated the body of king Amaru of Kashmir and experienced love with hundred women of his harem, and returned to win the debate. As with other ancient anthologies there are many recessions and

interpolations of the *Shataka*, as well as many commentaries, and the number of verses seem to vary from 96 to 115. Of the many commentaries two are especially to be noted namely, the *Shringara Dipika* of Vema Bhupala and the *Rasika Sanjivini* of Arjunavarmadeva. The benedictory verse of *Amarushataka* captures the essence and ethos of Amaru's centenary, for it invokes the blessings of Ambika whose sidelong glances are as beautiful as the bees that hover over the blossoming twigs that adorn her ear and resplendent as the nails of her hand held in the *khatakamukha* gesture. Amaru prepares for us a feast both for the eyes and the ears, for the *muktakas* create an emotionally charged world where every nuance of romantic love is explored, where the pangs and pleasures, pathos and poignancy of amorous dalliances are sensitively portrayed, where neither the restraint of *dharma* nor the restriction of society is allowed to interfere with a glorious celebration of love, for he clearly says:

*May the face of the fair lady, her languid eyes, the slightly fluttering hairlocks,
the moving earrings and her tilaka partially effaced by
tiny drops of perspiration protect you.
Gods like Shiva and Skanda serve no purpose.*

In Amaru's gems, and incidentally some have suggested that Amaru was a goldsmith by profession, love is not measured but experienced, it is not evaluated but felt in the deepest recesses of the mind and heart. Unlike Bharatrhari, Amaru is committed to the primacy of love. He paints the varied moods and nuances of love with words that evoke vivid colours and lines that are sonorous with music.

*Give up your sulking for your beloved waits outside drawing lines on the ground,
your friends who weep ceaselessly have swollen eyes and have gone without food, the
parrots in their cages laugh or speak no more.*

Amarushataka basks in a sunlit space, fragrant with the aroma of love, brilliant with the hues of a throbbing heart and within the minute compass of a verse we are privy to a universe of romance. Amaru's lovers are driven by desire, devoid of guilt, finding their fulfillment in a passionate embrace or a loving gaze. Amaru taps into traditional Prakrit romantic idioms of the anguish of separated lovers such as the rumbling of rain clouds, the fragrance of blooming jasmine flowers, bangles that slip from an emaciated arm and bodies weakened by the anxiety of long separation.

Amaru's *nayikas* have languid eyes, fluttering hair, moving earrings, eyes that betray longing and tear-filled eyes that speak of the pangs of separation. In his verses we are privy to passionate embraces and coquetry that undermines the desire for an embrace. Amaru's world of romance is inhabited by mischievous parrots that threaten to reveal intimate conversations and lamps that are extinguished by flower garlands to create spaces of intimacy, of mango blossoms and summer winds, of jingling anklets that destroy the

secrecy of clandestine meetings. In his imitable style Amaru laments the gods who churned the oceans to obtain the ambrosia of immortality when, he says, a passionate kiss would have yielded sweeter nectar.

We are not sure about the audience that Amaru's sparkling gems would have had in his day, but it is fair to assume that it was made up of cultivated aesthetes and poets. Like other ancient poetry it was probably recited and sung and even performed and not read inwardly and silently. We are not aware of any depictions of Amaru's verses in painting in his own time, but within a few centuries his verses were sculpted, making the *Amarushataka* the first romantic poetry to be represented three dimensionally. An illustration of one of Amaru's verses is found on the frieze of the stupa at Nagarjunakonda.

Khandakavya or romantic lyrical love poetry in classical Sanskrit comes into its own with Kalidasa and of these the two most important by him are *Ritusamharam* and *Meghadutam* and these set the tone for those that are to follow in the tradition. Kalidasa's evocation of the romantic emotion through his well-chosen words depict a graceful sensuality and restrained passion. The colours and the music of romantic love between man and woman resonate with the world of blossoms and birds, the moods of his *nayaka* and *nayika* are shared by the trees and the sky. It is a world where trees long for the touch of a woman as much as a man longs for her embrace, in the hushed silence of the forest there is an unspoken understanding between the song of the peacock and the lament of the separated lover, messages are conveyed through clouds and the changing seasons are understood as the changing colours of love. Kalidasa's *nayika* turns to the *kalpavriksha* or the wish-fulfilling tree to adorn herself, for it is from the tree that she gets her garments, from its sap she obtains wine that facilitate graceful movements of her eyes, its blossoms and sprouts become her ornaments and the red dye from it decorates her lotus-like feet (*Ritusamharam* 2.12). In choosing to adorn herself with various flowers, a *padma* in her hands, *kunda* blossoms in her hair, the pollen of *lodhra* flowers on her face, the fresh *kurbaka* flowers in her braid, the lovely *sirisha* flowers on her ears and the *nipa* flowers that bloom in the parting of her hair as she approaches the plant, Kalidasa is not describing just beauty but is suggesting a vital link between a woman's sensuality and the living sap of nature (2.2). The nocturnal path of the lovelorn *abhisarika nayika* is revealed in Kalidasa's words at dawn by the *mandara* flowers that have fallen from her hair and the golden lotuses that have slipped off her ears (2.11). Kalidasa's depictions are not merely adorned words but metaphors of shared sensuality between a woman and a tree, for a passionate woman for Kalidasa is not a mere mortal but a *yakshi*, the very life and spirit of a tree, and by the same token the tree is the mirror of her exuberant and overflowing passion. Although this homology between humans and nature in the expressions and reflections of romantic love was not unknown to the Tamil poets, classical Sanskrit poetry raises and refines this to a fine art form, and in so doing asserts the Upanishadic dictum *raso vai sah*, he is *rasa*, in its own unique way, which is poetic rather than metaphysical. The sap

that informs and energises the plants and the trees, that makes it blossom and grow, is no different from the *rasa* of *shringara* that throbs and pulsates through the romantic pleasures and pangs of the lover and the beloved. Kalidasa continues the Prakrit and Tamil traditions of impersonality of romantic characters thereby creating a universal ambience rather than a historical setting.

Kalidasa's *virahini*, a *nayika* separated from her lover, who dominates the *Meghadutam* is a chaste, lovelorn woman, who lives in a home shorn of its beauty, like a lotus deprived of the sun (*Meghadutam* 2.20), like a solitary *Chakravaka* bird isolated from her mate, looking like a lotus withered by winter (2.23), sitting with her head resting in her hands, her hair covering her face as clouds cover the moon (2.24), painting the likeness of her beloved and talking to the *Sarika* bird (2.25), singing a song that contains his name (2.26), counting the days of her separation by placing flowers on the threshold (2.27), lying alone on her side in her bed (2.29) and with ornaments cast off (2.33). There is dignity in her poignancy, a certain grace in her sorrow, the colours of her pathos are borrowed from the wilted flower and her movements, whether of her eyes or limbs, speak of her pain even when words do not.

If the *Meghadutam* is the epitome of the *virahini* in early Sanskrit poetry Kalidasa's *Ritusamharam* is poetic testimony of how intimately the moods of the human mind are tied up with the colours and sounds of the seasons in classical Sanskrit thought and art. Of all the seasons *vasanta* or spring is specially important to those in love, for the blossoms of spring are like the arrows of Kama. Red is the colour of the spring season everywhere and it is when:

The mango tree bent with clusters of red sprouts kindle ardent desire in women's hearts

The ashoka tree that bears blossoms red like coral makes the hearts of women sorrowful

The atimukta creepers whose blossoms are sucked by intoxicated bees excite the minds of lovers

The kurbaka tree whose blossoms are lovely as the faces of women pain the hearts of sensitive men

The kimsuka grove bent with blossoms, waved by winds, appears like a bride with red garments.

Ritusamharam (15–20)

Vasanta is also the season when cuckoos sing in indistinct notes and bees hum intoxicating sweet sounds and travellers separated from their lovers lament. Spring, according to Kalidasa, is the perfect companion to Kama the god of love and the two together wage a war, as it were, on those in love. Kama fashions his arrow from the mango blossom, his bow from the *kimsuka* flower, the bowstring from a row of bees, his parasol is the moon, he wafts the gentle breeze from the Malaya mountain whose bards are the cuckoos (*Ritusamharam* 28).

While not much is known about Prakrit love poetry after the *Gathasaptasati* there is hardly any doubt that love poetry in this genre must have flourished orally, in homes and village squares if not in courts and theatres. Prakrit was the natural language, the language at the ground level, and despite the elevated status of Sanskrit poetry and everything it stood for, Prakrit continued to be the heart throb of the people. Sanskritists on the other hand continued to enrich the treasure house of romantic poetry through their poetic creations both in *kavya* and *natya*. This poetic activity was mainly in the north although Sanskrit had come to occupy an important place in the Tamil country as well. Romantic idioms were well established and Sanskrit poets used them with a flourish.

Bana describes *anuraga* or the blossoming of love:

*His gesture of cupped hands is from afar
and not for drinking water;
he shakes his head at wonder at her beauty
not from satisfying his thirst;
the bristling of his flesh derives from pleasure
not from water's coolness.
The traveller takes to strange behavior
when he sees the girl who tends the well.*

Sonnoka relates the plight of offended lovers:

*The youthful lovers play no sportive game
A secret grievance lies in either heart,
with both too proud for armistice.
Each looks to other for the first apology
and while the symptoms of their love foretell
forgiveness at the end, they meanwhile waste the night.*

Rajashekhara depicts the separated lover thus:

*If the moon by melting might become a pool of nectar
and its mark might be therein a pool of waterlilies
by bathing there I might so cool my limbs
as to escape the torture of these flames of love.*

Dimboka portrays a *sakhi* or a love messenger who says to a *nayaka*:

*To dispel her pain of fever
your mistress painted you upon her canvas
although with lines that shook from trembling of her hands
Then to deceive her friends who saw her tears
she offered mango sprays and bowed her head
implying that the portrait was of the god love.*

Sanskrit romantic poetry, despite a tentative start flourished in the ambience of courtly culture and within the framework of *dharma*. It established itself and was responsible for making *shringara rasa* the dominant emotion of the various arts. The romantic emotion in this classical period is expressed mainly in the literary and the performing arts, namely *kavya* and *natya*, not so much in the visual arts. The idiom of the visual arts in this period was sculpture which flourished in temples. While temple sculpture featured *mithuna* or loving couples and even erotic and copulating couples, Indian *shilpa* or sculpture laid more emphasis on fertility and sensuality rather than exploring the tender nuances of the romantic emotion. A woman was closely associated with the *yakshi*, the tree spirit, who was the source and spirit of fecundity. As the clinging *salabhanjika* on the *toranas* of the stupa at Sanchi she is the life of the mango tree, as a *yakshi* on a railing pillar at Bharhut she is sensuous and enticing, as an *apsara* she is a celestial nymph that allures even the gods, as a *surasundari* wringing her hair after her bath with a *hamsa* at her feet she invites our sensual adoration, and as a *madanika* looking at herself in a mirror she is the epitome of self-assured beauty. Fertility was important to the ancient Indians, as to other ancient civilisations, for obvious social and economic reasons. However, the importance of sons, who could not only inherit the family property and lineage, but also ensure through the correct performance of ancestral rituals the after-life of their ancestors, was a unique feature of and integral to the Hindu religious traditions. It was not until the advent of miniature paintings that the delicate and graceful expression of the romantic emotion was to find expression in the visual arts. Miniature paintings were to become visual poetry but the tradition had to wait several centuries for this to happen.

While Sanskrit poetry with the strong undercurrent of Prakrit poetry ensured the prominence of the romantic idiom in the arts in the north of the country, momentous changes were taking place in the Tamil country, changes that were to further enhance the artistic expression of the romantic emotion and take it in a different direction altogether¹. By about the 6th century AD *Aham* poetry had reached its zenith and Tamil creativity had plateaued. Added to this there was a certain political exhaustion in the Tamil country as a result of the failure of imperial conquests to unify India. This along with the Kalabra conquest of the Tamil country and the austere asceticism that was fostered by the Jain rulers went counter to the Tamil ideas of joyous celebration and life-affirmation. The stage was set for a new ecstatic way of life that could only come from an outpouring of love towards an intimate and a personal god. Tamil singer-saints transmuted the romantic idioms of *Aham* poetry into *bhakti* songs and went from temple to temple singing these songs. So strong was the impact of these Tamil *bhakti* saints, the Alvars and the Nayanmars, that there

1. I am indebted to Prof. V. Subramanian of Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada for leading me through the nuances of *bhakti shringara*.

was a mass *bhakti* movement in the Tamil country which touched prince and peasant alike. These *bhakti* poets freely used romantic idioms and conventions from the *Aham* genre to convey their love of their chosen god. The Tamil poet assumed the persona of the heroine and addressed God as she would a lover.

Notice how Andal sings of her love for Krishna as Venkateshvara:

*My complexion, my bangles, my mind and my sleep
They have all life been with me, me poor and alone
I sing of him Govinda, of the cool waterfalls of Venkatam
And I wait and wait, O clouds rich with water.*

*O clouds bearing lightning within your heart
Tell him who bears the goddess of wealth on His chest
How my young breasts yearn deeply everyday
To clasp his golden chest in tight embrace.*

Clouds, peacock, rain and lightning which were the standard idioms of *Aham* poetry are richly transmuted into *bhakti* poetry. The major *Aham* convention of speaking in the first person singular about one's feelings is strictly followed by the Tamil *bhakti* poets and all the subsidiary rules about the appropriate landscape and flowers to harmonise with the mood are also meticulously observed. The one convention that is of course deliberately violated is mentioning the name of the lover, who for the Alvars is Krishna. Another Alvar poet Kulashekhara writes as a jilted *gopi* when he addresses Krishna:

*You asked me to come
To the bower of jasmine
And you slept with another there
And seeing me, you became apologetic
Pretended to be scared, and you slipped away
Holding your golden cloth by your hand
But if you do come within my reach, someday
I shall settle my scores with you, O Lord.*

Thus it was that *Aham* romanticism was used to express a passionate love for God and this was a turning point in the course of romantic poetry in the Indian tradition, for not only did it create a higher level of *bhakti* than mere prayer and praise, but equally it took the romantic emotion to greater heights. This was particularly true of Krishna *bhakti*. The Alvars in their devotional songs were responsible for making Krishna the prototypical romantic hero. Romantic poetry from now on would never be the same for *shringara* and *bhakti* were fused into one as Krishna became the divine lover. *Bhaktishringara* arose in the Tamil country from a bed rock of romantic poetry on the one hand and a joyous life-affirming view on the other, and when this confronted Aryan sacerdotalism and ritualism along with the strong northern

Puranic tradition, it led to the creation of the *Bhagavata Purana*. There is enough evidence to state that the *Bhagavata Purana* was composed in Tamil country perhaps in Pandya country, and that it attained the status of a major *Purana* very quickly. The popularity of this *Purana* not only in the south but all across the continent is due in no small measure to the richly romantic ambience that pervades it, especially the 10th chapter. Once the *Bhagavata Purana* was exported to the east and the north of India, the *bhakti* movement changed substantially, and in different ways in the north and the south, leading to very different developments in the two parts of India. However, we must return to our central concern which is the romantic emotion.

While the *Bhagavata Purana* portrays the entire story of Krishna, as a *Purana* was enjoined to do, the central event in the *Purana* of significance to the study of the romantic emotion, is the *raas lila* of Krishna and the *gopis* in the 10th chapter, a poetic creation which was to change the aesthetics of not only the romantic emotion but equally of the dynamics and epistemology of *bhakti*:

The young *gopis* who had fallen in love with Krishna beseeched the goddess Katyayani with a prayer to make Krishna their husband. On a full moon night in autumn when the earth was bathed in serene moonlight and the trees had blossomed Krishna began to play on his flute. Enraptured by its beautiful sounds the *gopis* left their homes to find their beloved Krishna in the enchanted forest of Vrindavana. Those who could not get away made love to Krishna through devoted contemplation. Krishna admonished those *gopis* who came but when they pleaded with him not to send them back, Krishna relented and sported and dallied with them on the idyllic banks of the Yamuna, where black bees swarmed in the gentle breeze charged with the fragrance of jasmine and *Mandara* flowers. Krishna multiplied himself and stood between every two women and by embracing, touching, casting loving glances, making amorous gestures and laughing heartily sported with the *gopis*. Finding that the *gopis* were conceited Krishna abandoned them and left Vrindavana never to return.

The enchanted forest of Vrindavana is where the love of Radha and the *gopis* unfolds, it is under the *kadamba* tree that Krishna waits, it is in the waters of the Yamuna that the *gopis* sport, it is here that his flute is heard, the birds sing, the peacock dances and trees blossom, in this lyrical space the *gopis* carry pots of milk and Krishna waits to extract his toll, it is in this sensuous space that amorous glances are exchanged and passionate embraces take place, it is here that their beautiful love comes alive. Vrindavana is not only sensually charged but aesthetically nuanced and religiously meaningful.

It is in this charmed space that the *raas lila* takes place. This is the essence of the *raas lila* of the *Bhagavata Purana*, a poetic creation and a mythic

event that was to change both *shringara rasa* and Krishna *bhakti* for ever in the Indian tradition. Krishna from now on became the prototypical romantic hero of all love poetry, whether or not he was mentioned by name, and a whole new genre of romantic poetry was to emerge from this. For several centuries after the *Bhagavata Purana*, for *kavis* and *rasikas* alike, Krishna was *raseshvara*, the embodiment and fulfillment of *shringara rasa*. The *Bhagavata Purana* makes it clear that the *gopis* were ignorant of Krishna's divinity, for them Krishna was only a lover and not god, they were unaware that Krishna had descended from the mythic *goloka* to the material *gokul* entirely for their sake, and their only desire was to love Krishna passionately. However, both for the *kavi* and the *rasika*, for whom Krishna lived in artistic creations and aesthetic re-creations, Krishna was both god and lover at once, and this ambiguity between the two personae of Krishna, contributed to a heightened tension within the framework of the aesthetics of the romantic emotion. The ethical ambiguity of Krishna having an adulterous relationship with the *gopis* in the enchanted forest of Vrindavana, for the *gopis* were after all *parakiya* or married women, led to a variety of explanations being offered, the chief of which was that the dalliance of Krishna and the *gopis* was to be understood as an allegory of the relationship of *jivatman* with *parmatman*, the human soul with the divine, the microcosm with the macrocosm. It was further argued that Krishna created the entire *lila* out of his *maya*. To the ethically minded this may provide a solution to the puzzle of the sport of Krishna with the *gopis* in the *Bhagavata*, but to the aesthetically inclined there need not be any ethical considerations within a *rasa* experience. Krishna as *raseshvara* should be celebrated solely for the beauty and the charm of the *shringara rasa* that he engages in. The *rasa* doctrine of Bharata which is reaffirmed through the amorous sports of Krishna in the *Bhagavata* can stand on its own aesthetic merit without recourse to the *dharmashastras*, and *rasananda* or the bliss in the fruition of aesthetic experience can be derived purely from the aesthetic and not the ethical attributes of the work of art. Vallabhacharya in his *Subodhini* establishes the primacy of *kama* or desire, which according to him, comes first and later follows *samkalpa* or intention in matters of love, and rightly does he call that primal desire *kamapitamaha*, the grandfather of love. Ecstatic desire from which arises passionate longing for Krishna is affirmed, not rejected, by the *Bhagavata* and becomes seminal in the epistemology of the *Bhagavata*, in sharp contrast to the *bhakti* epistemology of the Gita and the *jnana* epistemology of the *Upanishadas*. The *Bhagavata* establishes the primacy of emotion in *bhakti* epistemology. The *Vedas* and *Vedanta* and the heterodox philosophies of Buddhism and Jainism that followed did not give pride of place to the recognition and celebration of emotion. The *Bhagavata* marks a turning point in making *ananda* or bliss dependent upon exultation of human emotion. *Ananda* in the *Bhagavata* is not just an exalted state of being, nor is it the serene and inward termination of *yoga*, but is emotion transformed into the rejoicing and ecstasy of bliss. In the dynamics of romantic emotion the *Bhagavata Purana* exalts the *virahini nayika*,

the lovelorn heroine, and builds the entire edifice of romantic love on the foundation of passionate longing rather than the ecstatic fulfillment of love. The credo of the *Bhagavata* is that while to be able to see the beloved creates devotion, and union with the beloved leads to a higher realisation, but the anxiety of being separated after being united fosters the highest devotion. It is the same passionate longing for the presence, not just the vision of, a sensual Krishna, that defines the metaphysics of Krishna *bhakti* of the *Bhagavata Purana* and from which was to arise *madhurya bhakti* or loving devotion to Krishna and which took the form of *bhakti shringara* of Chaitanya in Orissa and Bengal and *bhakti shangar* of Vallabhacharya in Gujarat and Rajasthan. While *viraha* is the basis of *bhakti*, what separates the *bhakti* of the *Bhagavata* from that of the *bhakti yoga* of the Gita is not only the passion in the longing of the devotee but equally the sensuality of the beloved who is longed for. If the lover is amorous the beloved is equally passionate, if the devotee is given to ecstatic longing the deity who is longed for is no less sensual. The *gopis* long for Krishna and Krishna in turn longs for the *gopis*. Krishna is the paragon of sensuality and a repository of joy, and to love him is to indulge in him with all one's senses and partake of his joy. Romantic love in the *Bhagavata* rests on the foundation of the beauty and primacy of sensuality and the richness and grandeur of emotional gratification of the lover and the beloved. To love Krishna is to energise all one's senses. The *Bhagavata's* concept of *navadha bhakti* arises from the homology of *bhakti* and *shringara* in the persona of Krishna. To be devoted to Krishna is to love him as a romantic lover would love her beloved. The Tamil convention of the *bhakti* poet assuming a female persona is given a doctrinal basis in the *Bhagavata* when it says that the joy of worshipping Krishna through love becomes established perfectly in women, for women alone can taste this joy and only then can a man taste it in women.

While the *Bhagavata Purana* is a compendium of Krishna's *lilas* and a source of romantic delight it is in the *gopi geet*, the songs of the *gopis*, that we find the essence of *shringara bhakti*. In their songs, at the end of the *raas lila* when their separation from Krishna is unbearable, the *gopis* address Krishna thus:

*your love sports and captivating smile was a source of delight
and even the contemplation of that is so auspicious
for it so touched our hearts that remembering those moments
disturbs our minds.
we were drawn to you and away from our families
by the sound of your flute and captivating songs,
is it not treachery on your part
to leave us all alone in the night?
those moments spent with you in solitude
under the tree where even Lakshmi resides
touched our lives and made them blossom
our minds are drawn towards you.*

The innocent and total surrender of the *gopis* in the *Bhagavata* becomes the hallmark of *bhakti shringara*. From these simple beginnings it was to evolve both aesthetically and theologically, resound in courts and temples, inspire poets and painters alike, and wherever Krishna was celebrated with love and devotion the songs of the *gopis* were never forgotten.

The *Bhagavata Purana* remains a corpus of seminal importance in the romantic tradition and especially in the establishment of *shringar bhakti*, or ecstatic devotion through the idioms and metaphors of romantic love. However, in the *Bhagavata*, even in the 10th chapter, Radha makes only a tentative appearance and attention is focused entirely on Krishna, while in the post-*Bhagavata* period of Indian literature Radha comes to occupy centre-stage. For about a thousand years after the *Bhagavata* the Indian artistic mind explored and indulged in the many nuances of Radha both as a romantic heroine and as a goddess. There developed both a theology as well as an aesthetic doctrine around the persona of Radha. It was a period when the Indian mind perceived both beauty and divinity in Radha—she was both *kamini* and *devi*—it was a period in our history when socio-historic conditions could sustain and promote the sensuality and sacredness of Radha's amorous dalliance with Krishna. As we shall note later, in the 19th century the primacy of woman as *nayika* was to be replaced by the concept of woman as *nari* and the overt sensuality of Radha was to be questioned. A pertinent observation that can be made at this point is that conditions in the second millennium of the Indian civilisation were conducive to the artistic celebration of romantic love through the persona of Radha, conditions that were to change as the millennium started drawing to a close. These conditions were economic prosperity and stability, a certain political malaise and indifference towards political conquests and the growing presence of Islam in the country, each of which was to contribute to an ambience where the love of Radha and Krishna could be celebrated in its manifold artistic expressions. However, it must be said that while social conditions may facilitate and promote a certain ethos and foster a certain artistic mood, the ultimate epistemological commitment must come from the sensual mind in accepting, understanding and internalising a specific aesthetic sensibility. The sensuous and delicate love of Radha for Krishna was not just a cultural refuge or sensual titillation but, more importantly, a recognition of the primacy of emotion and especially that of romantic love, as a supreme state of the human condition.

It is important to stress that the romantic relationship between Krishna and the *gopis* established in the *Bhagavata Purana* which has produced the finest romantic poetry and idyllic paintings should not be considered a mere love story or a romantic drama, neither is it just a product of poetic fantasy or creative imagination. Krishna's dalliance is not just a romantic adventure but the expression and enactment of the most sublime and sensitive state of the human persona. Krishna's love is a *lila*, a divine sport, which gives primacy and transcendence to the emotion of romantic love. To love and be

loved, the poignancy of longing and the pleasure of fulfillment, the anticipation and the excitement and the many other facets of romantic love in the *Bhagavata* are nothing short of theophany.

Reminding us that the romantic emotion could not be contained in any particular genre, and that it was neither the preserve of the gods nor of kings, is the refreshingly sensual and secular 11th century work *Chaurapanchashika*. Attributed to the Kashmiri poet Bilhana, the work attained wide popularity especially in northern and western India, was translated into regional languages and was illustrated as well. The *Chaura* is a collection of 50 verses held together by the haunting refrain *adyapi*, even now, which resonates from one verse to another holding them together, and creates an ambience of passionate love. The intensive particle *api*, best translated as 'even' frees Bilhana's pulsating love from the constraints of time, makes his nostalgic ruminations come alive and the beloved almost palpable. The recurring *adyapi* ensures that the poet is not describing romantic love of a distant past but a love that is felt even now, not only for Bilhana but equally for us, as we celebrate his poetry and are captivated by his amorous remembrance. Using *bahuvrihi* compounds Bilhana packs the romantic and remembered moments spent with his beloved into a charged verse full of sensuously descriptive and sonorous words. Bilhana uses images of sounds and odours, tastes and textures, and brings to life the movements of her limbs and flickering of her eyes. The opening verse of *Chaura* prepares us for the flood of sensual images that are to follow:

*Even now
I regret her
gleaming in garlands of gold champak flowers
her lotus face blossoming
the line of down delicate at her waist
her body trembling and eager for love
when she wakes from sleep
magic I lost somehow in recklessness.*

Bilhana's lyrics exude the fragrances of musk and sandalwood oil, body rubbed with saffron paste, mouth savouring of camphor and betel nut, flower-heavy plaited hair, the nectar of night-blossoming jasmine and love's sanctum fragrant with lotus pollen. If these fragrances are richly evocative, Bilhana presents the touch and the texture of romantic moments with equal sensuality, for these moments include soft arms clinging like vines on the neck, a lotus bed of passion, her beloved locked tight in his limbs, wine-smearing lips, lush breasts, heavy hips and bodies burning with fires of parted love. Bilhana's passionate moments have every colour of love, hot red blood from tooth marks on lips, languid body rising to a golden glow, face gleaming white like a clear autumn moon, *kohl*-blackened eyes, black bees wild in their desire, streaks of light from jeweled lamps, arms bound by golden bracelets, vermilion lips,

hands painted red like young leaves of *ashoka* and body rubbed golden.

With sensually charged images such as these Bilhana's beloved comes alive and is almost palpable, as we share his richly nostalgic moments, *adyapi*, even now.

The next important development after the *Bhagavata* was the *Gita Govinda* a short song that was to have a mammoth and indelible impact both in the fields of *shringara rasa* and *bhakti shringara*.² The *Gita Govinda* has rightly been called the supreme example of romantic poetry in the Indian tradition and the culmination of the Sanskrit poetic tradition. Written in perfect classical and lyrical Sanskrit by Jayadeva in the 12th century, the *Gita Govinda* is a romantic work of unsurpassed beauty and unmatched elegance that is chanted, sung, painted, commented upon and performed even today eight centuries after it was composed. Legends abound about Jayadeva and his romantic relationship with his wife Padmavati, and such was the impact of his creation, that even within his lifetime he was regarded as a saint by the Vaishnavas and soon afterwards the *Gita Govinda* was to acquire doctrinal status for the Bengal Vaishnavites. Treatises have been written about this work and there have been innumerable exegeses but our interest is mainly in its impact primarily on *shringara rasa* and secondarily on *bhakti shringara*. Among the many cardinal features of the *Gita Govinda* the three of utmost importance in the dynamics of *shringara rasa* are the humanisation of Krishna, the emergence and dominance of Radha as a *nayika* and the role played by the *sakhi* or the love messenger.

No longer masquerading as a generic *gopi*, Radha in the hands of Jayadeva is the cynosure of our attention as she humanises Krishna from a *devata* to a *nayaka* and in so doing makes the romantic emotion in the *Gita Govinda* at once sensual and spiritual. The amorous dalliance of Krishna by the time of Jayadeva was not only given a *Puranic* status but was also the subject of folk songs and ballads, songs of wandering pilgrims and the *yatras*, particularly in Bengal and Orissa of the 12th century, and there is no doubt that Jayadeva was privy to both the classical and folk sources of Krishna lore. The sensuality and the earthiness of Krishna both in the *Bhagavata Purana*, and even more so in the *Gita Govinda*, was probably a contribution of the folk ethos reminiscent of the Prakrit tradition. In fact the post-*Gita Govinda* romantic literature, as we shall see, championed the folk rather than the classical idiom. Some have even suggested that Jayadeva's lyrics are translations in Sanskrit of songs from *bhashas*. Whether or not this is true, we must in the spirit of the folk tradition, joyously celebrate the *Gita Govinda* as a magnificent romantic poem of the beautiful love of Radha and Krishna and accept human love as a reality in itself, rather than look for metaphorical or allegorical meanings in this love.

2. I am grateful to Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan for initiating me into the layers of meanings of the *Gita Govinda*.

Jayadeva champions the robust and earthy love of Radha and Krishna through words which richly resound with music and evoke beautiful images. The Krishna of the *Puranas* arises from a primeval agricultural psyche and even though Krishna dallies with the *gopis* in Vrindavan his plurality as seen in the *raas lila* leaves no doubt that he is none other than the godhead. Krishna of the *Bhagavata* is the coming together of the form and the formless, the one and the many, clearly establishing himself as a symbol of divinity and not a mere human being. But Jayadeva's Krishna is none of this. He is first and last a human who grows line by line, verse by verse, *prabandha* by *prabandha* throughout the twenty-four cantos. Nowhere is the human passion of Krishna seen better than in the 12th canto when he tells Radha:

Leave lotus footprints on my bed of tender shoots, loving Radha

Let my place be ravaged by your tender feet

Love me Radhika. (12.2)

Consent to my love; let elixir pour from your face. (12.4)

Offer your lips' nectar to revive a dying slave, Radha. (12.6)

Radha, make your jeweled girdle cords echo the tone of your voice. (12.7)

Soothe the long torture my ears have suffered from cuckoo's still cries. (12.7)

Glance at me and end my passion's despair. (12.8)

We realise that even the mighty Krishna is given to *rati khedam*, the despair of love, for he is a mere mortal passionately in love with Radha, unable to accept, *vyathayati vrtha maunam* (10.12), Radha's silence, and to seek his love's fulfillment is his *vidheyi vidheyatam* (10.10), destined rite.

Kapila Vatsyayan aptly describes Radha's unique status in the *Gita Govinda* when she says:

Radha is not the special [*gopi*] with whom Krishna runs away in the *Bhagavata*. Nor do all the references to her ranging from the *Atharvaveda* to Hala's *Gathasaptasati* provide a prototype for the character which Jayadeva creates in the *Gita Govinda*.

Nowhere is she drawn like any of her prototypes. She stands in a one to one relationship with Krishna whether jealous or impetuous, forbidding or captivating, she is the woman in love, separation and union. None of the nascent sketches of (her) character in earlier literature provides us with a predecessor. Jayadeva fills every limb of the character (of Radha) with sap rich and sensuous but human and endearing.

(*Chhavi* 2, 1981: p. 257)

If Radha is the epitome of a *nayika*, graceful in love's fulfillment and dignified in love's separation, richly sensual in her romantic expressions and yet serenely spiritual in the realisation of that love, the *sakhi* or the love messenger in the *Gita Govinda* on the other hand plays a unique and important part as an intermediary in the dynamics of love in Jayadeva's

creation. The *sakhi's* only concern is to see Radha and Krishna united and joyous in love and to this end she not only carries messages but comforts and even admonishes them. While Bharata in the *Natyashastra* and Vatsyayan in the *Kama Sutra* describe the requirements and functions of the *sakhi*, Kalidasa creates the cloud messenger in his *Meghadutam* and the *Bhagavata Purana* is replete with the accounts of the *gopis*, it was left to Jayadeva to create the artful, selfless and compassionate *sakhi*. When Radha cries out poignantly *sakhi he keshi mathanam udaram, ramaya maya saha madana manoratha bhavitaya savikaram* (2.11), O Sakhi make Krishna make love to me, I am engrossed with the desire for love, her call does not fall on deaf ears. The *sakhi* carries her message to Krishna in the fourth *sarga* of the *Gita Govinda* with the words *madhava... sa virahe tava dina*, she is distressed in your absence. Such is her state, the *sakhi* tells Krishna, that she slanders sandal, considers the Malayan wind to be poison, draws a likeness of you with musk, evokes you in deep meditation, laments, laughs, collapses, cries and trembles. Radha and Krishna function in their own aesthetic spaces but it is the *sakhi* who links the two. The *sakhi's* message is not just for Krishna but equally for us, for Jayadeva points out in no uncertain terms that *shrijayadeva bhanitam idam...sakhi vacanam pathaniyam* (4.9), if your heart hopes to dance to the haunting song of Jayadeva study what the *sakhi* said about Radha's suffering, leaving us in no doubt that the *sakhi* is not just a literary device but an indispensable persona in the dynamics of love and in our celebration of that love. We are not to be mere voyeurs in the beautiful romantic relationship of Radha and Krishna, but in identifying with the *sakhi* we raise, for ourselves, the celebration and realisation of *shringara rasa* to lofty aesthetic heights. The unique status of Jayadeva's *sakhi* paved the way for the doctrine of Bengal Vaishnavism and Jayadeva's aesthetics were transformed into Vaishnava theology. This short love lyric suddenly changed from *kavya* to *shastra*, a transformation unique and unmatched in the Indian tradition, leaving no doubt about the exalted status of the *Gita Govinda*. The *Gita Govinda* was created as a love poem with aesthetic foundations and little could Jayadeva have known that it would become a doctrine of *bhakti shringara*. The evocation of *bhakti shringara* in the *Gita Govinda* is a multi-step process. The romantic emotion arises in the *pratibha* of Jayadeva and it is from this creative imagination that the romantic text is created. The second is the evocation of that romantic emotion in the reader from a celebration of the text through dance and music. And in the third and final step, the reader who is chastened by that romantic emotion then transfers that same emotion in an ecstatic and romantic adoration of Krishna. However, we must stress its aesthetic strengths and leave its religious implications for another journey.

The aesthetic strengths of the *Gita Govinda* are numerous; its mellifluous language, sonorous rhythms, rich images and the delicacy of the emotions portrayed place it at the pinnacle of classical Sanskrit poetry. The images of Jayadeva are not only richly nuanced but interlinked. In Jayadeva's hands the love of Radha and Krishna is not merely the throbbing emotions

of the lover and beloved but equally the sap that flows through lotus flowers and mango blossoms; the song of Govinda resonates not only in fragrant bowers but equally in the cry of the cuckoo; the whisper of their joyous dalliance is shared by the bees that swarm the *bakula* trees; when the lovers are overcome by passion they are not alone for the *tamala* tree garlanded with fresh leaves is equally overcome by the passion of musk, and the intoxication of spring through the fragrance of the *madhavika* flowers is not only for Radha and Krishna but produces infatuation even in the minds of sages. It is an enchanted world that Jayadeva creates, for these richly evocative images pulsate in a symphony of colours. From the dark blue of the night when the drama begins we move to the yellow and ochres of the midday sun and we arrive at night again, the dark night of the soul where white garlands on dark skins are the white cranes in cloud-covered skies. The dawn follows with its hues and we return to the golden glow of the morning meeting. Colours in the *Gita Govinda* are not mere poetic hues but evoke states of the mind. The love of Radha and Krishna in the *Gita Govinda* does not remain confined to the passionate emotions of two individuals in love but becomes a sustaining principle of the universe, the domain of their love expands from confined romantic arenas to cosmic spaces, the drama of love unfolds not in profane but in sacred time and thus on purely aesthetic grounds the *Gita Govinda* rises from mere sensuality to an exalted spirituality.

Jayadeva had brought romantic poetry in classical Sanskrit to a climax and none was to rival him in this genre of poetry. However, in the ethos that Jayadeva had created romantic Sanskrit poetry flourished and one poet of the 15th century who made a significant contribution was Bhanudatta. Bhanudatta, who wrote the *Rasamanjari*, continued the tradition of romantic Sanskrit poetry and built on the traditional *nayikabheda* or classification of romantic heroines. He went on to provide an elaborate taxonomy, not only of romantic heroes and heroines, but of the many and varied romantic situations. *Rasamanjari* far from being an arid and prosaic document shows a deep poetic awareness and sensitivity of the many moods and seasons, the changing colours and resonances of the mind of the *nayika* and the *nayaka* which bring into play *sarojasundarachatmakara* (74), the wondrous arts of love. The poetry of the *Rasamanjari* leaves no doubt that romantic activity was no idle pastime or trivial sport but a sincere commitment and a lifelong dedication of the romantic personae, who totally believed in their love and defined their lives in its pursuit and fulfillment. To such a person the celebration of romantic love was the *raison d'être* for life and living. This is the central message one derives from the *Rasamanjari*.

Bhanudatta recognises that romantic exchanges rarely need words but are even more beautifully conveyed by suggestive signs and gestures. The hero desirous of having a romantic rendezvous is asked by the beloved to meet her at sunset:

*When the lover holds in his hand the golden lime fruit
the moon faced nayika puts a dot on the sun that is painted on the wall. (112)*

And when Bhanudatta wishes to caution the *nayika* of the possibility of scandalmongers at a tryst he says:

*My friend you may gladly proceed to the bower to see Krishna
but be careful of the humming bees hovering there during the day
and the chakorās roaming at night with their garrulous beaks*

Bhanudatta uses the facility of Sanskrit in conveying two meanings with one word. For instance in using the word *sneha*, meaning both oil and love:

*God created the moon faced Radha like a flame of light for this earth
As ill luck would have it this flame is dying
O Krishna! Refresh this flame with your oil/love
So that the three worlds are not immersed in darkness. (99)*

Bhanudatta while providing an elaborate taxonomy intersperses his *nayikabheda* with descriptions of beautiful romantic moments, like:

The modest *nayika* is in a dilemma. To fall asleep is to lose sight of the adored one, to remain awake is to risk physical possession (9). The *nayika*, lest the morning should bring the love play to a close hastily covers the lotuses in her ears with the hem of her garment so that their opening may not announce the dawn of day (10). O traveller the sun being piercingly hot today it is proper for you to rest on the bank of the river adorned with rows of jasmine creepers entwining *tamala* trees (23). The sweet eyed *nayika* turned pale like the leaves of a palmyra tree when she learnt that the clove creepers which grew at her trysting place had shed their leaves with the advent of the month of *chaitra* (27). The deer eyed *nayika* adorned herself with flowers and ornaments, scented her curly hair and put betel leaves beside her bed. Her fair body bedecked with gold and *ketaki* flowers lighted up the chamber (66). By sweet trickery she puts her mother-in-law to sleep, covers the flame of the lamp and by producing sounds like the cooing of pet doves makes a sign to her lover to come (68).

The concluding chapter of *Rasamanjari* is called *Darshana* in which Bhanudatta describes the various ways in which the beloved is visualised, in a dream, through a picture or in an actual meeting, but for the avid *rasika* the *Rasamanjari*, in providing a vision of the variegated moods and colours of the mind of one who is in love, and the various arts and rituals it inspires, is indeed a *karna bhushanam*, an ornament for his ears.

In the centuries after Jayadeva there were two major movements in the country: the *bhakti* cult which swept across most of north India and produced its own genre of poetry in the hands of singer saints such as Tulsidas and Mira and in the field of romantic poetry, *ritikavya*. The Radha Krishna

model of romantic love which was rooted in the *Bhagavata Purana* and which was brought to a climax by Jayadeva in classical Sanskrit now moved on to the *bhashas* and was expressed especially in Hindi and its dialects. The aesthetic space of romantic love was already created and *ritikavya* celebrates that love as it moves fluidly between religious devotion and urbane romanticism. The *ritikala* poets embraced the romantic love of Radha and Krishna and north India resonated with their beautiful compositions as the love of Radha and Krishna took on yet another dimension. It is important to recognise two different strands in Radha Krishna poetry of this period. While *ritikavya* celebrated the romantic love of Radha and Krishna in sensuous and worldly terms *bhaktikavya* was entirely devotional in character. While recognising this difference one hastens to point out that *ritikavya* transcends sensuality by tending towards spirituality and *bhaktikavya* in being religious does not negate the earthly and the romantic, and therefore, in a sense, these two distinct poetic expressions must be considered two fibres of the same fabric of Radha Krishna lore or two streams in the river of romantic love. However, it would be fair to say that the audiences for each genre of poetry and of the paintings that they inspired would be different.

Radha in the hands of *ritikala* poets was the perfect *nayika* or romantic heroine of courtly love, she was both *kamini* and *ramani*, a desirable woman, and she was projected in all her amorous manifestations and romantic moods. Schomer is right in saying that “by being so many different women, Radha (in *ritikavya*) becomes depersonalised and universalised, a symbol rather than an individual. She is no woman in particular but stands for every woman in love”³. *Ritikavya* not only expressed the sensuality of romance but also provided a taxonomy of prescribed models of romantic love. *Ritikavya* is built on the well-worn idioms and rhetoric of Sanskrit romantic poetry that preceded it but it went on to create a distinct and striking style of poetry and hence the term *riti*, style or mannered. In enunciating a strongly secular tone and in staying clear of overt devotion, *ritikavya* occupies a unique place in romantic poetry in the Indian tradition. *Ritikavya* was court poetry and flourished under the patronage and in the courtly ambience of the many kingdoms of north India. Its words were sonorous, its lyrics mellifluous, and in the courtly ambience *ritikavya* was not just literature but a performance and in turn provided inspiration to other performing and visual arts such as dance and painting. The romance it portrayed, whether it was of longing or togetherness, was courtly not pedestrian, the ethos it created was one of graceful dignity and refined finesse within the ambience of a court or a *haveli* and not the idyllic environs of Vrindavana, the mood it painted was singularly devoid of banality, the romantic personae it brought to life were idealised and not stereotyped, and love in their depictions was not just sensual but equally spiritual. The *ritikal* poets presented a variety of beautiful romantic moments

3. *The Divine Consort*, John Hawley & Donna Wulff (editors). Beacon Press, Boston, 1982:93.

that defined courtly love; they did not set out to write a love story. The changing social conditions of *ritikal* are evident through the depiction of the love messenger in the poetry of this period. The *sakhis* in *ritikavya* were not *gopis*, playmates of Radha, as they were in earlier poetry, but women of the town, of a lower social order, who were able to move freely from *nayaka* to *nayika* as they fulfilled their role as ideal functionaries of the elite. In many situations they become the point of entry for the audience in both poetry and painting. The change in the social structure of the *sakhi* however did not rule out the possibility that she would also become the object of a male gaze during the transactions of romance, but at all times she remains the poet's voice making accessible to us the world of courtly love. She makes sure that we are not mere voyeurs but participants in the beautiful romantic moments that unfold before us. At one level the romance is secret and clandestine but at another it is the *sakhi* who makes it public for us. This is particularly true in *ritikavya*. So great was the appeal of *ritikal* poetry that it did not remain confined to courts and *havelis* but eventually reached the common people of the Hindi heartland and entered the songs and conversations of the peasant and the potter, the mother and the bride at fairs and festivals. In this sense they even surpassed the appeal of Jayadeva. The lore of Radha and Krishna and their beautiful romantic love through *ritikavya* became the heart-throb of north India and it was as if the poets had recreated the celestial Vrindavana in the *braj* country. Of the many poets in this genre the names that stand out are those of Vidyapati (1352–1448), Keshavdas (1555–1617), Bihari, (16th century) and Ghanananda (1673–1760).

Vidyapati (1352–1448), who was called the second Jayadeva even in his lifetime, continues the romantic ethos of poetry perfected by Jayadeva, but makes significant innovations. Although Vidyapati was a court poet of Siva Simha of Mithila, he departed from the norm of writing in Sanskrit and chose to write in Maithili instead. This was an important departure for, in getting away from courtly Sanskrit, Vidyapati not only made poetry accessible to the ladies of the court but took poetry to the streets and people of Mithila. Vidyapati's Maithili had a certain sweetness and earthiness that endeared it to the common people of Mithila and spoke to them with a disarming directness. What is more important is that Vidyapati, more than Jayadeva, showed in his poetry a rare, tender and sensitive understanding of the heroine's psyche. While Jayadeva was a Krishna *bhakta* Vidyapati upheld Radha as a perfect *nayika* and through her reached out to every woman of Mithila. Whether he is describing the *nayika's* slowly awakening youth, her sensuous beauty, her coy charm or her naive innocence, her surrender to love and her anguish when neglected, Vidyapati presents it from a woman's point of view. Vidyapati truly had a woman's heart and the beauty of his *nayika* is not only sensual but spiritual, not just physical but also emotional, and while his poetry did not inspire painters it entered the hearts and songs of the people of Mithila. Vidyapati's romantic lyrics are earthy not courtly; in his world birds

and *sakhis* intermingle with the loves and laments of the lovers. Notice how the parrot is part of the lover's world:

*Awake Radha awake
Calls the parrot and its love
For how long must you sleep
Clasped to the heart of your dark stone?
Listen the dawn has come
And the red shafts of the sun
Are making us shudder.*

Vidyapati sings of a fragrant world shared by bees where love is carried not just by words but by the dust of pollen:

*Here is love
And there is fragrance
There the mangoes are in bloom
Here kokilas
Are singing in the pancham
The season is ripe.
Bees float in the air
Inhaling pollen
Sucking honey.
The god of love
Is secretly setting
Flower arrows to his bow.*

Vidyapati describes spring nights of longing that are made up of flowers in groves, humming bees, trumpeting elephants, moonlight, sandal paste and a bed of *kunda* flowers. For him Radha has the fragrance and delicacy of the *malati* flower as is very clear when he says that the forest has burst open with white *kunda* blooms but the bee is enraptured by *malati* and her honey. Vidyapati captures the excitement of spring for Radha with these lines:

*Blue lotuses
Flower everywhere
And black kokilas sing
King of the seasons
Spring has come
And wild with longing
The bee goes to his love.
Birds fight in the air
And cowherd girls
Smile face to face
Krishna has entered
The great forest.*

Whether in longing or rejoicing Vidyapati captures the beauty of the romantic moment for Radha:

*The moon spits fire
Lotuses droop
And loaded with fragrance
Mingle in sad love
Kokila bird of spring
Why do you torture?
Why do you sing
Your love provoking song?
My lover is not here
And yet the god of love
Schemes on and on.*

For Vidyapati there is correspondence between the mind of the *nayika* and the landscape of Mithila for one evokes the other, one is a reflection of the other. Thus it is that when the winds blow through the trees of Mithila even today they seem to whisper one of Vidyapati's heart throbbing songs.

In the genre of romantic poetry the *Vasanta Vilasa* occupies an important place for several reasons. Written in old Gujarati in the 15th century and illuminated by paintings the *Vasanta Vilasa* forms a part of the *phagu* literature and celebrates the longing and joys of a *nayika* in the season of spring. It reflects the romantic and secular ethos of Gujarat of that period. The *Vasanta Vilasa* is also one of the earliest works to be written and illustrated on paper rather than on palm leaves. While it draws upon motifs and metaphors of the tradition it maintains a measure of independence from classical Sanskrit poetry. Without the sophistication and finesse of court poetry the *Vasanta Vilasa* has a certain disarming joy and spontaneity. The poem revolves around the anguish of a *nayika* whose beloved is on a distant journey and opens with one of the finest evocations of spring and its effects on a yearning *nayika*. Spring in the *Vasanta Vilasa* is when:

*bees have been set humming by the honey in flowers,
the mango trees resound with the cuckoo's call,
the fragrance of the lotus is wafted abroad and southern breezes play about,
plantain bowers have been erected,
thresholds adorned with coloured rice and powder,
homes have festoons of leaves,
coloured water sprinkled,
swings with golden chairs have been fastened to champaka trees,
the water is delightful from streams of musk and currents of camphor,
women fill bowls with sandal paste to adorn themselves and
Kama rules as vasanta presides
bees tinged with saffron circle above the bakula buds
the buds of the champaka trees have blossomed with golden colour*

like a stream of flame to light Kama's way.

The splendour of spring is unbearable to a lovelorn *nayika* for whom:

the necklace is a burden, the ornaments are hot coals,
sandal does not remove her care and the moon gives her no pleasure,
clothes do not please her, food is only leavings, water does not taste sweet,
Kama agitates her heart day and night,
the night does not pass at all.

The importance of the *Vasanta Vilasa* lies in its being a mediaeval document of an earthy romantic emotion in a *bhasha*, demonstrating that this genre of poetry while borrowing from classical sources stayed self-assuredly on its own, and played an important part in the lives of the non-Sanskrit speaking people of India, and leaves no doubt that the celebration of the romantic emotion was without any boundaries.

While it was none other than Bharata who in his *Natyashastra* had touched upon the subject of *nayikabheda* and provided a typology of the different types of romantic heroines it was left to *ritikal* poets to give substance to it and enlarge it to a delightful taxonomy. Such a taxonomy was not merely an arid compendium of people and places, or an album of romantic events, it was like a bouquet of flowers from the garden of love. It helped in not only underscoring the many sides of romantic love and highlighting the delicate and tender facets of the mind of the heroine but it also led to a beautiful and deep understanding of the various shades and nuances of the romantic emotion itself. A defining feature of the romantic emotion is that it is uncertain, fleeting and transient, the beauty is in the present moment as there is no promise of the future. It is this uncertainty, as much as the various types of heroes and heroines, that creates the endless situations and moods of romantic love and leads to elaborate taxonomies. The romantic emotion was the living *rasa* of the heroine that animated her like the sap of the tree, and just as a tree responded to the whisper of the winds and the rhythms of the earth, the changing of the seasons and the loving care of the gardener who tended it, the *nayika's* persona was equally alive and sensitive to the smallest change in the ambience, circumstance and moods of love. For, many indeed are the colours of romance, variegated its hues, various its responses, and numerous its manifestations. The poetry of *nayikabheda* takes us inside the mind of the *nayika* and forms an important part of the treasure of *shringara rasa kavya*.

Keshavdas (1555–1617) is the prototypical *riti* poet. He was the court poet of an Orchha prince Indrajit and it was there that he produced his monumental work *Rasikapriya*. *Rasikapriya* is an encyclopedic compendium and taxonomy of *nayakas* and *nayikas*, their moods, meetings and messengers and is considered a *lakshan grantha*, foundational work, in *riti kavya*. While rooted in Sanskrit rhetoric Keshavdas makes a significant contribution to romantic literature in choosing to express himself though *brajhasha*, a

language which is ideally suited to conveying the earthiness and sweetness of romance. Using variable metres and appropriate metaphors, through enunciation of romantic theory and demonstration of how it can be put into practice, Keshavdas makes every nuance of romantic love come alive through melody and meaning in his verse. Keshavdas clearly enters the mind of the *nayaka* and the *nayika* for he expresses the hidden as well as the manifest features of every nuance of love. His is an enchanted world of the joys of dalliance and the pangs of pathos, the muted voices of messengers and the whispers of lovers, the arrogant heroine and the truant hero, of clandestine meetings in groves or in the comfort of a *haveli*, of words on *champa* leaves and the sanctity of *tulsi* groves. In describing the *ashtanayikas*, the eight types of romantic heroines, Keshavdas uses the inflections of *brajhasha* to great advantage. While painting the variegated and tender emotions of the *ashtanayikas* Keshavdas not only shows an understanding of feminine sensitivity, but beautifully connects that pulsating love of the heroine to the world around the *nayika*, for the love that pulsates in his lovers is no different from the sap that enlivens the world around them. Romantic love for Keshavdas is not a trivial or titillating emotion, not just a psychological state but the animating principle of life itself. He offers this taxonomy of the *ashtanayikas*:

The svadhinapatika, who is greatly loved by her beloved gets her soles scrubbed by pumice stone and painted red by her beloved and who is kept in the mirror of his heart as betel leaves in a basket.

The ukta, who is troubled because her lover is absent, worries about his health or the rain in the middle of the night which has kept him from coming.

The vasakasajja who adorns herself and waits expectantly around sandalwood trees entwined by clove creepers and yearns for her beloved with every sound of the breeze and leaves and looks like rati in a tulsi grove.

The abhisandhita, the heroine who is arrogant when approached, does not glance at him even when he falls at her feet but thereafter is sorrowful without him, and finds that even sandalwood, lotus and moon burn her body.

The khandita who reproves her beloved when he misses his rendezvous and arrives only in the morning, and whose eyes reddened by the henna of another raises suspicions of unfaithfulness.

The prositapatika, whose beloved is away on business but who will return, but whose heart is hard like a log of wood which does not burn even with the fire of separation.

The vipralabdha, whose beloved does not come in spite of a tryst arranged by her sakhi, finds her sixteen adornments are like embers and flowers have turned to darts and gardens to fearful forests

And inscribes some words on a champa leaf.

The abhisarika, who sets out to meet her beloved. When driven by love she is premabhisarika, by pride garvabhisarika and by passion kamabhisarika. Adorning herself with sandal paste and a garland of flowers she makes the chakors forget the pain of parting, ignoring snakes entangled around her feet and the thunder of clouds, she is driven to him.

Keshavdas' poetry is never far from *puranic* myth, indicating that for our romantic poets the sacred and the secular were one continuum. Mortals share the same love that move our gods and goddesses. In a speech by a lover who dreams of his beloved he says that his *nayika* is as gentle in her speech as Sarasvati, as loving as Rati and as dedicated as Parvati and more beautiful than Menaka and Urvashi.

The strength of *Rasikapriya* lies in its encyclopedic presentation of lovers, a treasury of their emotional states, a taxonomy of their meetings and messengers, an atlas of their joyous togetherness and their painful separation and a veritable anthology of variegated amorous situations and states. Thus it was that it became so popular with kings and nobility and provided an inspiration for miniature painters who found in it endless themes and countless motifs to depict the many facets of romantic love.

Following in the footsteps of Keshavdas was another notable *ritikal* poet, Matiram who lived in the mid-17th century, was a court poet of Rao Bhav Singh of Bundi and among his works are *Rasaraj*, *Lalit Lalam* and *Alankar Panchashika*. Matiram continues the style and tenor of his predecessor and outlines in a taxonomic fashion the various *nayakas* and *nayikas*. In a beautiful passage he describes the beauty of Radha's face thus:

*it was none other than Brahma who has created the face of Radha
a face so beautiful that it caused the moon to feel jealous
one night the moon spread its rays to steal Radha's beauty
but having been caught committing this theft
was arraigned in Brahma's court
and was punished with black spots on its face.*

Another significant *ritikal* poet whose gem-like verses shine in the repertoire of *riti kavya* was Bihari. Born towards the end of the 16th century in Orcha and having spent his creative life at Agra and Amber, Bihari's couplets it is said may appear insignificant but inflict a deep wound like the arrow of a hunter. For Bihari love was not mere sensual gratification but a spiritual outpouring for as he says: "The spoken words are of no account for they are false. That is why Brahma has made eyes for expressing what lies in the heart". In another *doha* Bihari says:

*I never saw such eyes with glances more piercing
than Kama's arrows;
O Krishna their loveliness indeed surpasses
the eyes of a gazelle.*

And then again:

*Though without collyrium the coquettish eyes of that girl
adept in the art of love making
have put to shame those of the khanjana bird
even the lotus pales before their loveliness.*

Colours were important to Bihari for they conveyed more than words could speak:

*Her pink cheek is so tender and fragrant
that the rose petal that got stuck to it
could not be distinguished.*

Also:

*How perfectly the yellow champa garland blends with your hue dear girl
It can be seen only when its flowers fade.*

And in this invocatory verse Bihari brilliantly uses the language of colours to pay homage to Radha:

*Radha take away the pain of existence, the cycle of the world, from me
you whose golden reflection turns Krishna's blue complexion into a glowing green*

In other *dohas* Bihari uses words as a painter would use colours and says that the radiance of her limbs makes the white *malati* flowers turn golden, the crimson-streaked eyes are like twilight, the river turns a saffron yellow whenever she plunges into it, her limbs glisten like yellow jasmine, her feet are redder than lac dye, her ruby red feet shed dust as a *dhupariya* flower has blossomed at each step and her ravishing eyes are as dark as black bees.

Bihari follows all the usual conventions of *riti kavya* to describe the beauty of a *nayika* but for Bihari sensuality was never far from spirituality as the human body was only a reflection of the world around it:

*Her dazzling splendour shining through her flimsy dress
is breathtaking as a kalpa tree
reflected leaf and branch in the waters of the placid ocean.*

Bihari wrote in *brajbhasha* and he colours his words, ornaments his phrases and imparts a certain fragrance to his verses, and his *dohas*, brief but elegant, are sheer music to our ears as they weave through every situation and mood of romantic love. His *Sat Sai* was a landmark in romantic poetry for not only was it copied, translated and commented upon, it also inspired miniature artists to render it into paintings, and it can be said that if Keshavdas' *Rasikapriya* gave painters endless romantic situations Bihari's *Sat Sai* provided inspiration for lyrical representations of romantic love.

Ghanananda, a later *ritikal* poet, broke away from the rigid conventions of *ritikavya* and brought a certain earthy freshness and bubbling spontaneity to romantic poetry. It is said that he was in love with a courtesan by the name of Sujan and that his poetry was not mere poetic composition but a record of his personal heart-throbbing romantic experiences and in turn he wrote for that specially endowed *rasika*:

*who is forever drenched
in the sweet essence of love
whom meeting vexes
as much as parting
who can master language
yet not be enslaved by convention
such a man alone
can enjoy
Ghanananda's verse.*

Ghanananda's disarming lyrics bring the passion and the power of the romantic gaze:

*My lover's face is like a lotus flower
round which my eyes like black bees
roam longingly
and my eyes gazing on it
are as a lovelorn chakor
gazes on the moon.
Even before we met
my eyes bartered me to my lover
our love is no longer secret
I am defamed everywhere.
Ever since my eyes have seen my lover
though open
they see nothing but him.
He wounds me with his glances
and shows no pity
he remains indifferent
whether I laugh or weep.
Lover when you were with me
my eyes drank your beauty and lived
but now when you are gone
those very eyes burn with anxiety.*

Although romantic moments are fleeting, the lover's dedication and commitment to his beloved in Ghanananda's words are steadfast:

*The playful chatak
loves only the svati rain*

*compared to it
nectar seems like poison to him
so constant is he
to his vow.
The lily clusters bloom when the sun rises
and in its absence
even the light of the moon
seems like darkness to the lilies.*

Many are the hues of Ghanananda's *nayika* and his words are washed by her colours:

*Your lips are ever red
your laughter's brilliance has the splendour of camphor
millions of sweetly scented things
mingle in your perfumed breath
from the loveliness of each of your limbs
Holi's coloured water ever rains.*

Ghanananda's well-sculpted words full of the colours and sounds of romance, the gaze and the touch of love, the longing and loving of throbbing hearts makes those beautiful romantic moments come alive.

A genre of romantic poetry that is unique in its concept and expression alike is the *barahamasa* or seasonal poetry of the twelve months. It is not insignificant that Vedic word *rta* and the Sanskrit *ritu* come from the same etymologic root which denotes cosmic order through movement or growth. If the Indian mind perceives a certain order in the movements of the universe it also feels an attachment with the environment and a living link with the changing seasons. Poets like Kalisada and Harshavardhana have celebrated the seasons in their compositions. The *Ritusamhara* is at once a poem of seasons, as of love, while the *Meghadutam*, is a prime example of *dutakavya*, where there is a beautiful depiction of the cloud acting as a love messenger. The seasons for us have a living presence embodying the mysterious essence of growth and decay and regrowth, tied to the movements of the cosmos and the rhythms of the earth, touching the deepest longings and aspirations, moods and feelings of humans, providing a scenario upon which we celebrate and understand life and love. Of all human emotions, that of romantic love is closely tied to the changing seasons, each month bringing a special message to the beloved, every season a special reminder of the joys of love and longing, the changing seasons reflecting the varying moods of romantic love and the songs of the seasons echoing a melody that resonates through the heart of the lover and the beloved. *Shadrituwarnan* or the description of the six seasons, *vasanta*, *grishma*, *varsha*, *hemanta*, *shravan* and *shisira* is an important part of the *kavya* literature in Sanskrit. However, Sanskrit literature did not have *barahmasa* poetry. It was *apabhramsha* literature,

precursor of Hindi, that developed a rich description of the seasons and tied it to romantic love. In this genre there is *chaumasa*, poetry which had either four or six seasons or *barahmasa* which was a description of the seasons of the twelve months. The oral *barahmasa* of the *bhashas* later becomes an important part of the literary poetic tradition, both secular as well as Hindu, Jain and Sufi religious poetry. While religious *barahmasa* remains didactic in nature and was used to impart religious instruction, the village *chaumasa* and *barahmasa* were romantic and were village women's rain songs, especially in North India from Gujarat to Bengal, where they sang of their isolation from their husbands either in the rainy four months from *ashadha* to *ashvin* or through the twelve months. These rain songs are based on the absent husband who is away from home either on business or duty, and the wife either longs for his return in the rainy season or urges him not to leave at all. Seasonal poetry of this genre also was a feature of folk theatre. There was some variation not only in the number of seasons but in their chronology as well, and one of the poetic conventions was that while Sanskrit *shadritu* poetry described the erotic joys of the lover and the beloved when they are together, the *chaumasa* and *barahmasa* dealt with the *premika's* longing and fear of separation from her beloved. *Viraha barahmasa* or the seasonal poetry of longing remains the most evocative in this genre of romantic poetry and in this group the *barahmasa* compositions of Keshavdas who wrote the *Rasikapriya* stand out among others. *Barahmasa* poetry is not only poignant love poetry on the one hand but shows the close resonance between the psyche of the heroine and the mood of the seasons, each season not only possessing a different colour but a distinct message for those in love. In expressing her lament and relating it to the colours and moods of the seasons the heroine equates the throbbing of her heart with the pulsating sap of the trees, the trembling longing within her to the movement of the clouds and the agony of her forlorn state to the pain of lonely birds. Thus she is not alone in her anguish, her piquant cry is heard by the birds and the blossoms that surround her and who understand and share her pain perhaps more than her beloved. In *barahmasa* poetry we see the strong and sympathetic resonance between the romantic mind of the *nayika* and the natural world around her, it is a world that shares her romantic urges and longings, and she defines her love with the same life and energy that animates the trees and the birds and who stand in mute testimony to her love.

Keshavdas in his *barahmasa* converts the lunar calendar into romantic poetry that vividly celebrates the months as it evokes the pain of the *nayika* at the impending separation from her beloved. Starting with the month of *chaitra* he portrays the heroine urging her beloved not to leave her in that month as every month has something special which would make separation painful and unbearable and as the poet goes through the twelve months the heart-throb of the *nayika* pulsates with the sap and songs of the world around her.

Chaitra: *charming creepers and young trees have blossomed and parrots, sarikas and nightingales make sweet sounds.*

Baisakha: *the earth and the atmosphere are filled with fragrance and all around there is fragrant beauty, but this fragrance is blinding for the bee and painful for the lover who is away from home.*

Jyestha: *the sun is scorching and the rivers have run dry and mighty animals like the elephant and the lion do not stir out.*

Ashadha: *strong winds are blowing, birds do not leave their nest and even the sadhus make only one round.*

Shravana: *rivers run to the sea, creepers have clung to trees, lightning meets the clouds, peacocks make happy sounds announcing the meeting of the earth and the sky.*

Bhadrapad: *dark clouds have gathered, strong winds blow fiercely, there is thunder as rain pours in torrents, tigers and lions roar and elephants break trees.*

Ashvin: *the sky is clear and lotuses are in bloom, nights are brightly illuminated by the moon, people worship Durga and it is time for ancestral worship.*

Kartika: *woods and gardens, the earth and the sky are clear and bright lights illuminate homes, courtyards are full of colourful paintings, and the universe seems to be pervaded by a celestial light.*

Margashirsha: *rivers and ponds are full of flowers and joyous notes of hansas fill the air, this is the month of happiness and salvation of the soul.*

Pausha: *the earth and the sky are cold. It is the season when people prefer oil, cotton, betel, fire and sun shine.*

Magha: *forests and gardens echo with the sweet notes of peacocks, pigeons and koel and bees hum as if they have lost their way, all ten directions are scented with musk, camphor and sandal, sounds of mridanga are heard through the night.*

Phalgun: *the fragrance of scented powders fills the air and young women and men in every home play holi with great abandon.*

The 16th century was important in the history of romantic poetry for it was then that Vallabhacharya founded the *pushtimarga* sect of Vaishnavism and both *shangar* and *shringara*, adornment and romantic love, were legitimised and given pride of place in Krishna *bhakti*. Krishna as Shrinathji was adored and venerated not only through ritual but celebrated through the arts, especially music and painting. The *haveli* at Nathdwara was Krishna's temple and it resounded with songs of his *lila* and was radiant with picturesque *pichwais* and miniature paintings of his many deeds. The *pushtimarga* tradition was to play an important part in the religious and cultural life of western India, but our concern at this stage is with romantic poetry and we come face to face with a poet who was also considered a saint, whose poetry combines the aroma of sensuality with the fragrance of *bhakti*, who re-created the *Bhagavata Purana* through music and verse and whose contribution to the rich treasure of romantic literature is unique. That poet was Surdas. If the *Bhagavata*

established Krishna as the prototypical romantic hero Surdas' *Sursagar* ensured that Krishna *bhakti* would not be devoid of the beauty of *shangar* and the pulsating warmth of *shringara* and would thereby have a certain *madhurya* or sweetness. Surdas' dates are uncertain, 1478–1563 being one suggested life span. However, what is certain is that Surdas through his poetic creations changed the tenor of the *Bhagavata Purana* from that of a sacred text into romantic poetry and in so doing not only enhanced the beauty of romantic poetry but gave *bhakti* a new, more intimate dimension. Surdas while remaining a Krishna devotee did not lose sight of the romantic and human aspects of Krishna's persona. It was none other than Vallabhacharya who recognised his talent and initiated him into the *pushtimarga* tradition and he become one of the first to join the hallowed group of the *ashtachap kavis* of Shrinathji. In weaving *shringara* and *bhakti* together in his lyrical songs Surdas paved the way for the rich and beautiful evolution of the *pushtimarga* tradition. It is only Surdas who can bring out the subtle nuances of philosophy and romance, in the togetherness and separation of the *gopis*, who are at once lovers and devotees at the same time, as is seen in the following lines:

*Gopis: we, whose minds you have stolen
have not kept any distance from you
who are the knower of the Vedas and the Upanishadas.*

*Krishna: I am never away from you
for you have drowned me in your love
I left heaven and took birth
in Braj for your sake
you see difference when there is none
between us; you and I are one
two bodies but one spirit
living in Braj how could I forget
Radha's ancient love for me?
Your minds are my abode
It is you who have imprisoned me there.*

Surdas, (73.1613–17)

Surdas is able to bring out the subtle nuances of the Vaishnava philosophy of *bheda-abheda*, different-and-yet-not-different, of transcendence and immanence, through his well chosen words using the paradigm of romantic love. If the *gopis* are drawn by the flute of Krishna, Krishna in turn is equally attracted by the songs of the *gopis*:

*I reside in the hearts of those
who have abandoned pride and sing my praise
in a voice that is choked with emotion
drowned in love for me.*

Surdas (74.1618)

The poetic world for Surdas is the Vrindavana or the enchanted forest

of the *Bhagavata Purana*, which is a microcosm of the heavenly and eternal Vrindavana, one is not a reflection of the other, for both are real and Surdas being equally a *rasika* and *bhakta* participates in both these worlds. Surdas continues the trend started by Jayadeva that the poet is not only a *rasika* but also a *bhakta* at the same time, the difference being that while Jayadeva was not a part of any established *sampradaya*, Surdas on the other hand was writing from within *pushtimarga* Vaishnavism and therefore sets up a trend that others of the *sampradaya* follow. Surdas, therefore, is able to bring both aesthetic and religious truths together in his compositions. The message in Surdas' songs is not different from the structure and sensuousness of his words. Krishna is both lover and godhead for Surdas and thus it is that he, and the *asthachap kavis* that followed him, were able to weave *shringara* and *bhakti rasa* together in their minds and their songs. There are subtle theological differences between the *pushtimarga* Vaishnavism and Chaitanya's Bengal Vaishnavism, but they need not detain us here. Suffice it to note that both work on a foundation of *shringara rasa*, and turn away from *shanta rasa* in their celebration of Krishna. The convention of *bhanita* or the signature line in Surdas' songs leaves no doubt that he is actively participating in the dramatic action of the poem, as in:

*Sura says that you are the all knower as the Vedas and Upanishadas declare
Sura says that while smiling, Krishna said words he never meant
Sura says return our minds to us so that we can go home with willing steps
Sura says that a home without you is like a dry well in a forest.
Surdas (73.1613–17)*

While Surdas was the brightest star in the poetry of the *asthachapkavis*, that poetry continued to be evocative and romantic as we note in this composition by Chaturbhujdas:

*The son of Nanda plays his flute on
the banks of the Yamuna
And the touch of lips brings forth
melodious notes.
The maidens of Vraja are drawn forward by
its magic, heedless of their appearance.
In their haste, their necklaces of pearls
snap and swing loose on their necks as they run.
Waters ceased to flow, the winds held still
in the groves of Vrindavana
That which was still moved, while
the moving stands still.
Trees bring forth fruits and flowers bloom
Barren trees grew green, love like a
spring ripples down Giriraj.*

This poetry, like many others in its genre, shows how romantic love for the *pushtimargis* was not merely an emotion that was shared by two individuals but was the very animating principle of life itself. For the flute of Krishna which touches the hearts of the *gopis* also quickens the plants and the trees of Vrindavana and caresses the waters of the Yamuna.

Perhaps a contemporary of Surdas, but one who walked in the hallowed dust of Bengal and not Braj, was Chandidas, a poet who sang with moving intensity of the love of Radha and Krishna, whose passionate compositions inspired Chaitanya, and whose songs are sung in *kirtans* even today. Chandidas was a village priest connected romantically to Rami, a washerwoman, and in the spirit of the Sahajiya Vaishnavas of Bengal he raised her to a mother goddess. Chandidas combines sensuality with a special sensitivity as he weaves passion in his poetry:

*I never touch a black flower
In my diffidence.
Sadness grows.
I hear everywhere
Whispers about my dark love.
I never look at a sombre cloud
Fearing Krishna.
I do not wear kajal.
I screen my eyes
while going to the stream.
As I pass by the kadamba shade
I seal my ears
Hearing the flute.*

Chandidas displays a certain fondness and poignancy about the *kadamba* tree for that is the haunt of Krishna and even the whisper of winds through its leaves excites Radha:

*Darkness and clouds
Shroud the frightening night
Alone, I suffer
Under the kadamba tree.
I scan distances in vain,
Krishna is nowhere.
Split the earth open
And I will conceal myself.
My youth runs away,
Yet still my heart suffocates
Waiting for Krishna.*

While romantic poetry in the *bhashas* was resonating in north India there was an equally significant romantic movement that was making its

presence felt in the same region and that was Sufi romantic poetry.⁴ The first poets of these romances, the Chisti Sufis, were important figures in the cultural and religious life of the Delhi Sultanate in the 13th and 14th centuries. Borrowing both from the Persian *masnavis* and the Sanskrit *rasakavyas* the Sufi romantic poets created a new genre in the *bhashas* with its own unique epistemology, poetics and conventions. They wrote in Hindavi and composed in the *chaupai-doha* style borrowing topoi, conventions and aesthetic theories from both Persian and Sanskrit but remaining uniquely distinct. Sufi romantic poetry was essentially court poetry and was to be understood and celebrated in the unique Sufi concept of music and mysticism, where the invisible divinity is to be realised through sensual experiences. In this genre of poetry are Maulana Daud's *Chandayan* (1379) Qutban's *Mrigavati* (1504) and *Raj Kunwar* (1503) Malik Muhammad Jayasi's *Padmavat* (1540) and Manjhan's *Madhumalati* (1545). Hindavi Sufi poetry, grounded as it was in the metaphysics of an Islamic godhead and the political ambience of kingship, created a new romantic narrative structure. This poetry, unlike the Sanskrit and *bhasha rasakavyas*, was created entirely for the noble and the aristocratic literary culture of the Delhi Sultanate and the *shringara rasa* that they celebrated was called *raja rasa* or the *rasa* of kings and for kings. Poetry and *sama* or music were only for the royalty of a sensitive *tabiyat* or temperament and musical gatherings for Sufi poetry was a common practice in the cultivated life of the Delhi Sultanate both in courts and hospices. The performance of Sufi poetry was part of the grand occasions of courtly life and it is fair to assume that this poetry did not reach the common person of the time. The setting for such a performance is described thus:

There should be a large and open roofed space with trees all around it, perfumed with musk, ambergris, camphor and rose. The audience should all sit facing the head of the assembly according to their social rank. The connoisseurs who understand and appreciate music and dance should sit on the left and the performers must be in front of them. The sponsor should be generous, noble, knowledgeable and dress better than everyone else.

It is within this elite and discriminating literary culture that we must begin to seek our theory of reading for Sufi romantic poetry. Sufi romantic poetry, more than poetry in Sanskrit or the *bhashas*, had a nuanced texture and *dhvani* or layers of meanings, available only to the sensitive aesthete. Among the Sufis such a view has Quranic sanction. As Jayasi says, the bee comes from the forest to smell the fragrance of the lotus, but the frogs that live next to the flower will never get it. Sufi poets extol romantic love, but even more, the pain of separation that comes with love. Manjhan puts it eloquently when he writes:

4. I am indebted to Prof. Aditya Behl for leading me through the epistemology of Sufi romantic poetry and letting me quote from his forthcoming book.

*From love all creation sprang
love filled each created form
Only he enjoys life's reward on earth
in whose heart is born love's anguish
Do not think separation is pain,
from it joy comes into the world
Blessed is the man whose sorrow is the sorrow of separation.*

Sufi romantic poetry while celebrating earthly love always has the scent of the invisible world beyond. An important difference between the romantic emotion of Sanskrit and the *bhashas* on the one hand and that of the Sufis on the other is that the Sufi romantic emotion, called *prema rasa*, has an admixture of both romantic emotions and ascetic practices. Further, the Sufi poets stress that it is only the experience of *viraha* or longing that drives the seeker onwards along the Sufi path. The beauty and the strength of romantic literature for them is to realise the epistemic value of longing and it is around this fundamental concept of longing that their romantic narrative is structured. Language, and especially that of romance, becomes the ground for understanding and representing the revelation of divinity to humans through the proper understanding of romantic love. In the hands of the Sufi poets the romantic emotion experienced through literature is merely instrumental in the training of the self towards God. The basic ideology of Sufi romantic love is that each object of desire is loved for the sake of one higher than itself, and through this process of unrequited love, the individual annihilates himself and this leads him all the way up to Allah. This concept of annihilation is brought out in these lines of Jayasi when he describes the *joahar* of Padmavati:

*They prepared the funeral pyre
and gave generously in alms and charity
seven times they circled the pyre
in life, beloved, you embraced us
we will not leave your embrace in death
we and you, lord, will be together in both worlds
they left this world steeped in their love
and heaven glowed ruby red.*

Thus the typical Sufi hero loves two women, one lower and worldly, and the second higher and other worldly, one plain and the other divinely beautiful, and in ascending in his love from one to the other, he has a religious experience of the ultimate. The differences between *prema rasa* of the Sufis and *shringara rasa* of Sanskrit and the *bhashas* are obvious. *Shringara rasa* while elevating *viraha* or longing does not advocate annihilating the self but instead celebrating and ennobling the self.

Poetry and music have a special relationship in the Indian tradition as all poetry is meant to be performed through music, mime, gesture and dance

and never inwardly read. Poetry therefore, has always been a performing art. However, it is in the classical musical form of *khayal* that poetry, and romantic poetry in particular, finds an important place. Called *bandish*, *cheez*, *asthaya* or *rachana* the origin of poetry as a part of classical music is traced to the 13th century Sufi saint Baba Farid. In the Sufi tradition, music and poetry are an indispensable part of their mysticism. Through the centuries *khayal bandish* evolved in the hands of Muslim and Hindu musicians and it was in the 17th century court of Mohamed Shah Rangila that musicians Adarang and Sadarang perfected the present form of *dhrupad* and *khayal bandish*. Created under intense musical states of contemplation by music masters and preserved in their *gharana* by their students, *khayal bandish* has a tough grammar and is composed mostly of vowels with very few consonants. Using Persian, Hindi or Urdu, *khayal bandishes* remain rooted in the people's sensibility. Through brief but well chosen words enshrined in the appropriate *raga*, they convey beautifully both the joy of union and the pathos of longing, and give a new dimension to romantic poetry. It is left to the musician to make the *bandish* come alive through the human voice.

If the minimalist lyrics of a *khayal bandish* convey the romantic emotion through a combination of poetry and music, and the texture and timbre of the human voice, a *thumri bandish* brings a romantic situation alive through the *abhinaya* and movements of a *kathak* dance. Composed generally in the *bhashas* and particularly in *brajbhasha* and *avadh* in Benaras and Avadh, a *thumri bandish* evokes the many nuances of the romantic moods of a *nayika* and suggests the locale where the romantic activity is taking place. A variety of etymologies for the word *thumri* have been offered. One such poetic etymology suggests its evolution from 'thum' or Radha's rhythmic and musical gait and 'ri' or whispered conversations between her and her *sakhis*. The abundant *nayikabheda* literature provided a rich source for musicians and the *ashtanayikas* come vibrantly alive in *thumri bandishes* set in *ragas* such as *Khamaj*, *Pilu*, *Sohani*, and *Bhairavi*. It is left to the musician and the dancer to convey the heart-throb of the romantic heroine through the musical but minimal lyrics of a *thumri*. For instance, a *proshitapatika nayika* sings in *raga Pahadi*:

*my beloved has gone abroad
and has not returned even after promising that he would
and my home seems like that of an ascetic.*

A *svadhinapatika nayika* sings in *raga Purvi*:

*My sweetheart colour my sari red
Colour it the same shade as your turban
I want to be colourful and smart
Get me more saris and colour them red.*

A survey of romantic moments cannot be complete without looking briefly at romantic letters. Even though they may not be in verse they are none the less very beautiful. *Patracarca* or epistolary art has an ancient history that can be traced back to the enigmatic hieroglyphics of the Indus Valley seals. One encounters a variety of letters in Sanskrit and Prakrit, and this includes letters such as *vijnanapatras* or letters by Jain devotees on certain auspicious occasions, *rajapatras* or epistles by kings, *dutakavyas* or an entire poem like Kalidasa's *Meghadutam* in the form of a message, *patrakavyas* or long letters in verse like the *Suhrilekha* written by Nagarjuna to king Udayana extolling the virtues of Buddhism, but our interest here is only in romantic letters. Such romantic letters are associated with Kama and therefore are called *anangalekha*, *madanalekha* or *manmathalekha*. They were written on leaves such as those of the lotus and *tamala*, petals of flowers or *bhurja* bark.

Both Bharata in the *Natyashastra* and Vatsyayana in the *Kamasutra* refer to *patrahariduti* or love messengers and in Sanskrit and Prakrit literature messengers can be friends, servants, traders, birds and even clouds. As early as the *Bhagavata Purana* we encounter the long and moving love letter written by Rukmini to Krishna, asking him to come and rescue her before she is married off to Shisupala. In his *Lalitamadhava* Rupa Gosvamin, the 16th century Bengal Vaishnavite recreates this episode and Rukmini writes a letter that is taken to Krishna by a brahmin:

*O cloud of dark colour, let your sonorous sound deceive the opponent
and deceive the peahen with a downpour of nectar. I am your
expectant, do quench my thirst.*

In the *Padmapurana* we come across this love letter written by Madhava on *mala* flowers to Sulochana whom he wished to marry:

*O damsel I have crossed the sea on my horse... please accept me as
your life partner... no other person other than me can fathom your
excellence, as the beauty of a lotus is only appreciated by a bee but not
by frogs. The planet Gemini and the cloud appear in the sky but the
lily admires only the moon.*

Kalidasa celebrates love letters in his own unique way, when he writes in *Kumarasambhavam* that Vidyadhara maidens are seen to have incised the throbbing of their heart on the bark of *bhurja* trees. In another Kalidasa play Priyamvada asks Shakuntala to engrave a message with her nails on a lotus leaf, charming as a parrot's breast, which she will then carry concealed under flowers to Dushyanta. Not only do nails serve as a stylus but are a suggestion of Shakuntala's longing for her much cherished embrace by her beloved. In that letter she wrote:

*O ruthless one, I know not your heart, but day and night Kama
exceedingly heats my limbs with my yearning for you.*

In Banabhatta's *Kadambari* is found this delightful description of how a love letter is written. Pundarika plucks twigs from a *tamala* tree and pounds these leaves on a stone to extract their juice. He then writes with this juice on his *angavastra* and deposes Taralika to take it to his beloved Mahashveta. In the genre of epistolary creations romantic letters occupy a special place and as Rabindranath once said, "Letters like tiny jasmine flowers appear to be very small in shape but the environment wherein they flourish is as expansive as the creeper of jasmine." For this environment is not only the preparation of the materials on which the letter will be written and the tenderness with which it is inscribed, but equally its imaginative delivery and the thrill of its recipient. Within the few words of that romantic letter is hidden a whole gamut of emotions, an entire universe of excitement and anticipation, a complete alphabet of romance. More than poetry and not in as many words, and even more than what words and gestures can convey, a romantic letter is able to convey a certain urgency and immediacy, sincerity and intimacy of love, and therefore forms an important part of the corpus of romantic literature.

And finally in the genre of romantic poetry we cannot overlook a genre of beautiful poetry that carries the theme of *nayikabheda* and Radha Krishna lore to new dimensions, poetry that bridges literature and painting and enters the sonorous world of music, that evokes not only visual images but leads to soundscapes—*ragamala* poetry. The precursors of *ragamala* poetry were *dhyana mantras*, seed formulae that gave a verbal form to abstract musical concepts and provided poets, and later painters, with poetic images of *ragas*, thereby giving music both a poetic and pictorial dimension. *Ragamala dhyana mantras* gave an anthropomorphic life to *ragas* and through their romantic suggestion and nuance, music was given both an oral and a visual form. The entire tradition of *ragamala* poetry and painting is an affirmation that the various arts in India are inter-related and that richly sensuous romantic poetry can breathe life into music and that music in turn is tied to poetry, and both to painting. Ranade⁵ is right in stating that the *ragamala* tradition is part of a larger Indian ethos of combining music, painting, drama and literature, other examples of which are the *chitrakathis* of Maharashtra, *pabuji-ka-phad* from Rajasthan and the *jadupatuas* of Bengal. A *raga* in the hands of *ragamala* poets and painters is no longer an abstract concept but a person—man, woman or child—who resonates with every shade of the romantic emotion. Even as early as Bharata's *Natyashastra* emotion, colour and a presiding deity were linked. The *Naradiya Shiksha* moves a step forward and equates *swara*, musical note with *varna*, colour. It was the legendary Hanuman, who lived probably in the 7th century, who devised a system of six male *ragas* with five consorts or *raginis* each. Later, sons and daughters, or *ragaputras* and *ragaputris*, were added to the family. Narada's *Raga Sagara* probably of the 8th century is perhaps the earliest document of the *dhyana mantras* where a *raga* is given a deified form

5. I have profited from the many discussions I have had with Dr. Ashok da Ranade

and addressed through these prayer formulae. *Dhyana mantras* invoked the mood and the ambience of the *raga* in words rather than through musical notes. Some others feel that the 14th century work *Sangitopanishadsar* of Sudhakar, a Jain musicologist, is the earliest work to have *dhyana mantras*. Among other texts which were sources of *ragamala* poetry were *Ragamala* of Kshemakarna (1570) and *Sangitadarpana* by Damodara Misra (1625). Thus it was very early in the tradition that music was given a form of a *mantra*, even as a *mantra* already had a musical dimension, attesting to the fact that performance and literature are flowers of the same tree of creativity, or limbs of a larger body of the arts. It was from these *dhyana mantras* that *ragamala* poetry in Sanskrit and later in the *bhashas* arose, and then from this poetry was to come a number of *ragamala* paintings. *Ragamala* poetry not only adds to the rich storehouse of romantic literature but is further evidence of the genius of the Indian mind in giving a *nirvikalpa* concept like music a *savikalpa* form. In the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries a number of *ragamala* texts were developed, mostly in Rajasthan, but also in Malwa and the Deccan, and came to be known generally by the name of the city such as Jaipur, Amber, Sirohi, Chawand and so on, and these were later to provide the basis for *ragamala* paintings. A few examples of *ragamala* poetry should suffice to illustrate its generally formulaic style and its pithy but sensuous visualisation:

Kakhuba Ragini

*Tortured by separation, wearing a yellow garment
gone to the forest carrying flowers
and reciting his beauty
she returns not
her fair body excites everybody's mind.*

Dhanasri Ragini

*Taking a lovely drawing board
she draws his picture in many forms
the great beauty
with the loveliness of the blue lotus.*

Vasanta Raga

*With crest on head and lute in hand
Madana is resplendent
and as he dances enthrals our minds
Mango tendrils flower on all sides
the cuckoo calls, the peacock cries
a girl beats the mridanga and describes his fair body.*

Gauri Ragini

*Sprays of the heavenly wishing tree in hand
adorned with a girdle of sweet toned bells*

*and beauty enhanced by a splendid robe
she, who ever pleasure gives
is declared to be Gauri.*

Thus, romantic poetry in the Indian tradition is a rich storehouse of the heart-throb of the *nayikas* and the *nayakas* and a chronicle of their beautiful moments, be they of longing or living, of ecstasy or anguish. It is a charmed world of the sighs of the lovelorn heroine and the cries of the *chakravaka* bird as it seeks its mate, of the footfalls of the *sakhi* as she carries love messages and the song of the peacock as it heralds the advent of the rain, of the perfume of sandalwood paste and the music of the bangles of the *nayika* as she awaits her beloved. It is poetry that is richly sensuous and equally spiritual, and takes us not only into the charmed spaces of a *haveli* but to the hushed ambience of Vrindavana where Krishna and the *gopis* dally. In its lyrics we see the colours and the seasons of heartfelt emotions, we participate in the games and *lilas* of love, through its words we hear the music of Krishna's flute and the footsteps of romantic dalliance. Romantic poetry leads us into Vaishnava theology and Sufi mysticism, through it we learn of *shringara* and *prema*, and read poetic creations not only in ancient Prakrit and classical Sanskrit but also in the *bhashas*. A survey of romantic poetry is a journey into the minds of our poets from Amaru of the 4th century to Jayadeva of the 13th century and beyond, into the courts of Hala and Bharatrhari, into the kingdoms of Rajasthan and the foothills of the Himalayas. And as the music of romantic poetry resonates we are lifted from the everyday mundane world to the realm of *ananda*, where love is not just passion or superficial excitement but an exalted state of living and being, celebrated for its own sake, we are soaked in its aesthetic creations and we cannot but exclaim *raso vai sah hyevayam labdhva anandi bhavati*, he is *rasa* having obtained which one attains bliss.