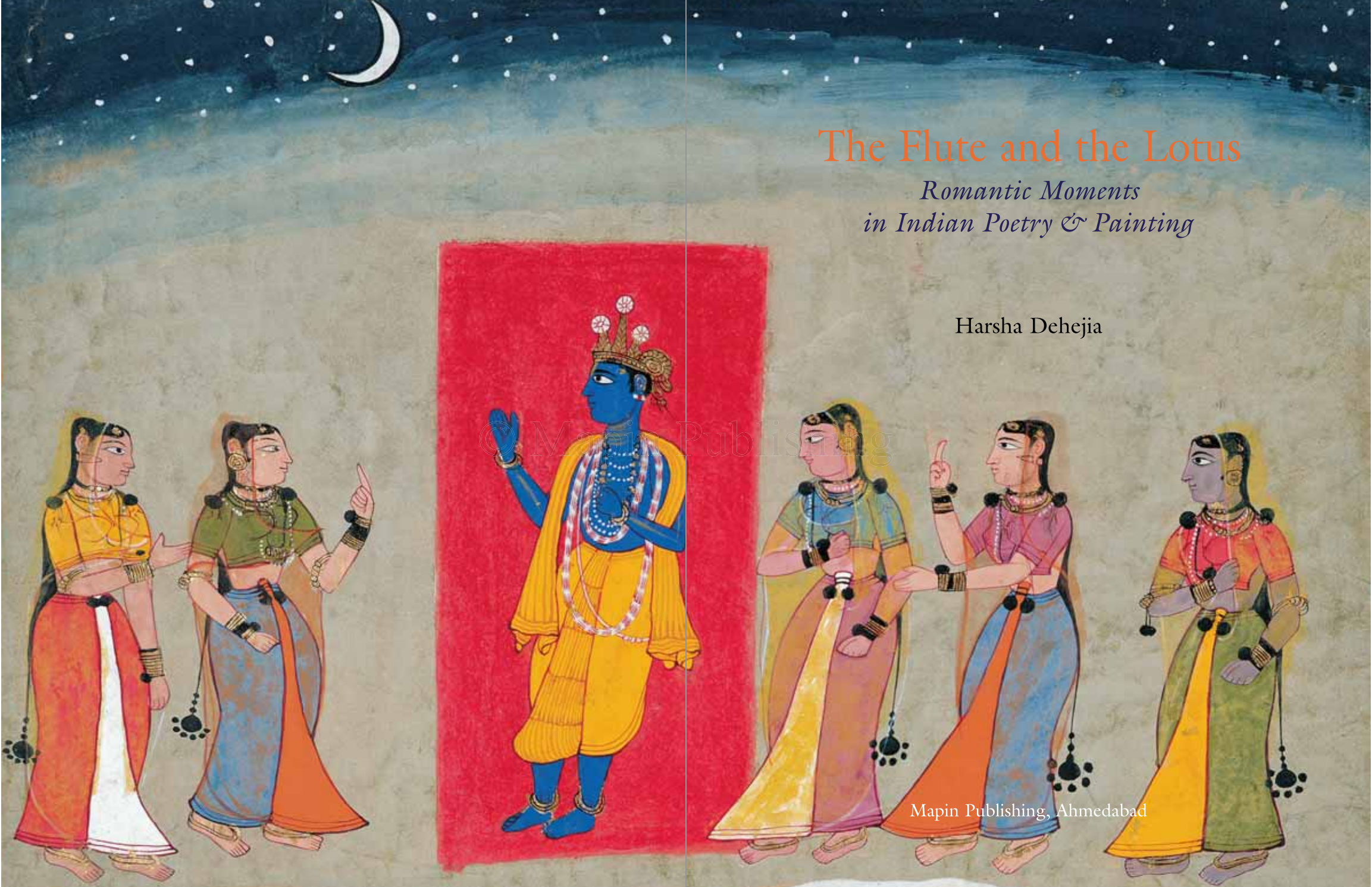


The Flute and the Lotus

*Romantic Moments
in Indian Poetry & Painting*

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Detail, Radha and Krishna
in a grove
see page 118

Anuraga: The First Glance

This is a book about romantic moments, heart-throbbing moments, soul-stirring moments, enchanted moments that have inspired our poets and have been celebrated by our artists, patronised by the *raja* and indulged in by the *praja*, moments that have enlivened courts and enriched *havelis*, moments alive with passion and radiant with emotion, sensual moments that were born with the first glance and grew with the first touch, nurtured by the first embrace, moments of amorous pleasure and of heart-rending pathos. Such moments are a very special part of romantic love between a man and a woman. But then, what exactly is romance? While no simple definition of this beautiful state exists, even attempting to define romance would be to destroy the many hues and nuances of this exalted part of love. Would you tear a flower apart to see from where its fragrance came? Could you capture the colours of a rainbow or the song of a bird in your hands? For romance is the pleasure of belonging and the pathos of longing, the thrill of a touch, the excitement of exchanging glances, it is the celebration of a specially charmed moment and the remembrance of such moments long after they have passed, it is the messages of love written in the sky and feelings that lie so deep that they can only be expressed by petals and not by words, it is an attitude that can convert a moment into eternity and the ability to live that eternity within that beautiful moment. Romance is all this but much more. It is the flute of Krishna and the footsteps of the *gopis*, it is the blossoms of the enchanted Vrindavana and the counting of lotus petals by the *ragini* who waits for the beloved, it is the courage of the *abhisarika nayika* and the pangs of a *manini nayika*. But this is not all. Romance is at once sensual and spiritual, playful and sombre, erotic and serene, coy and demanding. And yet there is more. In the midst of uncertainties romance is the certitude of love, in a world of commercial relationships bound by ethical and social norms romance is that silken thread that binds two people together. To one heart questing for love of the other romance is an assurance that this feeling will defy circumstance and surpass rationality and in so doing become a rich and beautiful state of living and being. Romance defines love but yet goes beyond it, romance is the joyousness of love but even more it is the chastening of the heart, romance is the fire of love but even more the light of the mind that glows at the mere thought of one's beloved. Having said all this, romance is ultimately the joyous dance of *purusha* with *prakriti*, of primal subject with primordial matter.



Detail, Radha pines for Krishna
see page 110

After the fashion of the oft-repeated dialogue between a king and a *rishi* we could conceive of a similar dialogue between a would be *rasika* and a *rishi*.

A *rasika* desirous of learning what is romance approached a *rishi* and asked

Rasika: Sir, pray teach me what is romance.

Rishi: To learn about romance first read *Amarushataka* and Bharatrhari's *Shataktrayi*.

The *rasika* read these ancient poetic works and returned in a year.

Rasika: Sir, I have read Amaru and Bharatrhari, now pray teach me what is romance.

Rishi: Very well, but you cannot know what is romance until you have read Tamil *aham* poetry. Read these and come back.

The *rasika* obeyed his instructions and returned.

Rasika: Sir I have read Tamil poetry, pray teach me what is romance.

Rishi: You are not yet ready son. You must read the *dashama skanda* of the *Bhagavata Purana* and then Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda*.

The *rasika* read these two texts and returned in a year.

Rasika: I have read the *Bhagavata* and the *Gita Govinda*, now am I ready to learn what is romance?

Rishi: Not yet my son. Read Vidyapati, Keshavdas, Bihari, Bhanudatta, Ghanananda and Chandidas and then come back.

The *rasika* read all this love poetry in the *bhashas* and returned.

Rasika: Sir I have done as you asked. Now can you teach me all about romance?

Rishi: Not so soon. Have you read all the Sufi romances? Go to a *madarsa* and learn about Sufi stories of love.

The *rasika* did as he was told and returned.

Rasika: Sir I have read *Laur Chanda*, *Mrigavat*, *Padmavat* and *Raj Kumar*. Please teach me about romance.

Rishi: You are not yet ready. Study all the Rajput miniature paintings and once you have done that we can study romance.

The *rasika* saw and studied the miniature paintings from Rajasthan and the hill states of Punjab and returned to the *rishi*.

Rishi: Now that you have studied everything I have asked you to, do you now understand the mind of Radha?

Rasika: Yes sir, I do understand the beautiful mind of Radha.

Rishi: Once you have known Radha's mind you have understood what is romance.

If the secret of coming to an understanding of what is romance lies in probing the mind of Radha, the meaning of love is in the flute of Krishna. Radha and Krishna are one, yet different, *bheda abheda*. In the mellifluous

sounds of Krishna's flute is the breath of love, for love is a beautiful feeling that is beyond words, and in its sweet melody is a call to eternity, for Krishna's love is timeless. As Chandidas says:

*How can I describe his relentless flute
which pulls virtuous women from their homes
and drags them by their hair to Shyam
as thirst and hunger pull the doe to the snare?
Chaste ladies forget their lords
wise men forget their wisdom
and clinging vines shake loose from their trees
hearing that music.
Then how shall a simple dairymaid withstand its call?*

It is for this reason that in the *shringara* traditions of India, whether it be *rasa* or *bhakti*, that Krishna is so central. Krishna is at once divine and human, child-like in his pranks and sophisticated in his love games, worldly in his demands and yet hinting that to be with him one has to transcend the bonds of *samsara* and the limitations of one's *ahamkara*, boldly sensuous and ultimately spiritual, *saulabhya* or easily available and yet hidden, everpresent in our minds but yet driving us to seek him in Vrindavana so that we who love him are driven to ask, in Vidyapati's words

*as a mirror to my hand
so you to me
tell me
Madhava beloved
who are you
who are you really?*

Krishna dominates not only love poetry but equally miniature painting and when Krishna is the subject of artistic creation it is difficult to say where art ends and spirituality begins. When one is rapt in his amorous sports, at one moment one is a *rasika* and at another moment a *bhakta*, and when one is engrossed in worshipping him our prayers become love songs and our rituals are transformed into love sport. Such is the beauty of Krishna and the enchantment of his love.

In the countless taxonomies of love that are created by our poets a fundamental division is that of *svakiya* and *parakiya*. Understood rather naively as love of one's own wife and the love of another's wife, or love that is sanctioned by society and adulterous love, the true meaning of *svakiya* and *parakiya* is much more profound. *Svakiya* love is played out within the rules and dictates, norms and sanctions of society, determined by social and political factors. Governed by *dharma* and underpinned by *karma*, it has rights and responsibilities and is subordinated to the larger aims and goals of life. In many ways *svakiya* love is narcissistic, it is in the end love of one's own self and