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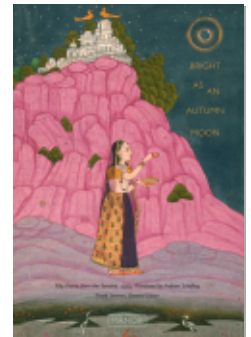
Clouds Thicken the Sky

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मेघैर्मेदुरमम्बरं वनभुवः श्यामास्तमालद्रुमैर्
नक्तं भीरुरयं त्वमेव तदिमं राधे गुहं प्रापय ।
इत्थं नन्दनिदेशितश्चलितयोः प्रत्यध्वकुञ्जद्रुमं
राधामाधवयोर्ययन्ति यमुनाकूले रहःकेलयः ॥

[GG 1.1]

meghair meduram ambaram vanabhuvah śyāmāstamāladrumair
naktaṁ bhīrur ayaṁ tvam eva tad imaṁ radhe grhaṁ prāpaya
itthaṁ nandanideśitaś calitayoḥ pratyadhva kuñjadrumaṁ
rādhāmādhavayor jayanti yamunākūle rahaḥ kelayaḥ

meghaiḥ. with clouds
meduram. darkened
ambaram. sky
vanabhuvah. forest groves
śyāmās. dark
tamāla. an evergreen
drumaiḥ. trees
naktaṁ. night
bhiruḥ. scared
ayaṁ. he
tvam. you
eva. indeed
tad. that
imaṁ. him
radhe. (voc.) O Radha
grhaṁ. home
prāpaya. take

itthaṁ. thus
nanda. Krishna's foster father
nideśitaḥ. directive
calitayoḥ. wandering (Krishna and
Radha)
pratyadhva. past
kuñja. groves
drumaṁ. tree
rādhā. Radha, cowherd girl, beloved
of Krishna
mādhava. Krishna
jayanti. conquer, overcome
yamunā. the Yamunā (Jumna) River
kūle. on the shore
rahaḥ. secret
kelayaḥ. desires, passions

Clouds Thicken the Sky

“Clouds thicken the sky,
the forests are
dark with tamāla trees.
He is afraid of night, Radha,
take him home.”
They depart at Nanda’s directive
passing on the way
thickets of trees.
But reaching Yamunā River, secret desires
overtake Radha and Krishna.



These final dozen lyrics come from what is considered the last great poem in the Sanskrit tradition, Jayadeva’s twelfth-century *Gīta-Govinda*. The title means song (*gīta*) of Krishna. Govinda is one of the common epithets or affectionate names for Krishna, and refers to his upbringing among cowherds. However, poets and singers can use it without reference to the tales of Krishna’s childhood in a small riverside village of cowherds.

If my intuition is correct—that the origin of Sanskrit’s incessant cloud-and-rain imagery lies in evocations of the spirits of nature—then Jayadeva begins with elements picked up from archaic shamanism or animist traditions. This stanza has received a huge amount of attention, almost since Jayadeva’s own era, because of its ambiguity. Who is the speaker? *Nanda-nideśita* may mean that the opening, quoted voice (*ittham* is an alternate for *iti*, quotation marks) is the “directive” of Nanda, Krishna’s foster father. But it could also mean the “joyous directive,” a reasonable statement for a poem meant to lead to salvation. But that leaves obscure who the speaker might be. Why would Krishna, no longer a child, be afraid of the night? (He himself is the Dark One.) If the boy is frightened or the forest perilous, why would his father ask a cowherd girl of the same age to take the boy home through the dark, as though she would be untouched by fear? Whose home should she lead him to: her own or his? Or does *grham* (home), have an allegorical meaning? Jayadeva’s poem never shows Krishna returning to the cottage of his foster parents.

On the banks of the Jumna River (*yamunākūle*), in a thicket of the white-blossoming dark-barked evergreens called *tamāla* (*Cinnamomum tamala*), the two young people are overpowered by *rahaḥ-kelayaḥ* (secret desires or passions). This sets the tone for what will follow: darkness, secrecy, anxiety; a fragrant springtime waking of passion; a mysterious, edgy uncertainty.