Ways of Presenting Love in Ancient Sanskrit Literature

Fabrizia Baldissera

Abstract

This study traces the appearance and relevance of love motifs in Sanskrit texts. It deals with preclassical, classical and medieval literature, with excerpts from the Vedic scriptures, the epics, the normative texts and the courtly formalized Kāvya. Attention is paid to the change in the status of women, whose position becomes gradually more subordinate over time. Several conventional topoi of Sanskrit erotic literature are examined, such as love enjoyed in the union of the lovers, or suffered in their separation; divine love; the traditional belief that women are more passionate than men; the different religious/philosophical schools’ outlook towards love; love in the dramatic theory of aesthetic experience; the importance of marriage, and marital love as opposed or complementary to illicit love. Finally there is a brief survey of a few scientific disciplines that have something to say about the experience of love, like Āyurveda, astronomy/astrology, and the treatises on Dharma and those on the science of government.

Keywords
Eros; Sanskrit; Literature; Examples

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Classical Sanskrit Literature Sanskrit literature came into being with the making of Vedas and left a rich legacy of literary knowledge for the times to come. However, the language of the Vedas differs from the language used in poetry and drama. Classical Sanskrit epics of India are written in ancient Sanskrit and present the most common ideals of human civilization that seem to have gone down the drain in the modern times. Sanskrit Poets Sanskrit has its roots deeply embedded in our culture. It is further glorified by the famous Sanskrit writers who wrote masterpieces in classical Sanskrit thus giving the language a very prestigious place in the cultural heritage of India.