



Love and The Turning Seasons: India's Poetry of Spiritual I& Erotic Longing

Andrew Schelling

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For thousands of years, India has excelled at erotic love poetry, and the genius of its devotional poetry often harnesses great energy and mystical insight. It is in fact often hard to tell whether the poets are offering poems of spiritual longing using the garment of love poetry, or writing erotic poems in the guise of devotion. Perhaps, in a country where erotic sculpture routinely ornaments its many temples and the gods are known for their explosive sexuality, this question has little meaning to these remarkable writers. In their devotional traditions, eroticism and mysticism seem inseparable.

This wonderful selection spans 2,500 years, and includes work originally sung or recited by their well-known bards: Kabir, Mirabai, Lal Ded, Vidyapati and Tagore. There are also poems from the Upanishad, from ancient Sanskrit poetry and Punjab folk lyrics. The poets have largely emerged from the ranks of the dispossessed: leather workers, refuse collectors, maidservants, women, & orphans. Their vision is of a democratic society in which all voices count, much like American gospel and blues, Shaker songs, or the grand vision of Walt Whitman. Often they faced persecution for speaking candidly, or daring to speak of spiritual matters at all. The notes include profiles of these legendary lives. Several of these poets simply vanished, absorbed into a deity, or disappeared in a flash of purple lightening. A few produced miracles—most of them have clouds of mystery around them.

Andrew Schelling has drawn on the work of 24 other translators, including Ezra Pound, Robert Bly, W. S. Merwin, Jane Hirschfield and Denise Levertov, to build what will be the finest anthology of India's erotic and spiritual poetry for the general read ever assembled.

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