A Philologist’s Love Song

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How I love your Sanskrit eyes
and your chest, heaving
tatsamas and tadbhavas
and your eyelashes, standing guard

over Anandavardhana’s bhavas
and your lips, speaking to me
of rasas uncataloged in the Sṛngara Prakāsha.¹

I love your hair, cascading
like alifs falling asleep,
the way your body curls me tight
like qafs hung upside down
or camels lined up to drink.

You are a folio spread
to be read by my hands alone.
Your palm-leaf body is creased.
I decipher your script with ease.

I am your variorum.
You are my critical edition.
We are authoritative,
though our secrets are unknown.

I spent my youth turning the pages
of my separate life alone
until you appeared at the end
of the Great Hall.

I found you reciting

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² “Light on Love,” a treatise on Sanskrit poetics by Indian king and theoretician Bhoja (d. 1055).
Vyasa’s *Mahabharata*.
You found me stumbling
through Old Kannada.

Your lips whispered to me
the counsel of the gods.
I stood up and saluted you
my friend, my companion

through these calligraphies
of foreign tongues. Let us read
their incantations jointly.
Let us await the dawn.

Our night is young and there are
many scripts left to decipher,
many definitions left to discover,
many scrolls waiting for us to unfold.