

ASIAN ART COLLECTION

India, Rajasthan, Mewar

Multiscene Painting of Radha and Krishna

1719–1720

Gouache and gold on paper

10 1/8 × 8 5/8 in. (25.7 × 21.9 cm)

Gift of George P. Bickford

PA-75-71

“When Krishna’s indolent joy-filled eyes smile—somewhere in the luxuriant night a soul burns.” This phrase interprets the Hindi text inscribed in black ink upon the mustard yellow top register of the folio page. The painting comes from an illustrated manuscript based on the celebrated poem Satsaiya by Bihari Lal Chaube (1595–1663), a work of seven hundred distichs or couplets. The Satsaiya deals with the amorous love between Radha, a milkmaid, and Krishna, the eighth avatar of Vishnu, whose name may be translated literally as “the dark colored one,” and with the rich commentaries of the runners who travel between the lovers delivering passionate utterances.

The beauty of the text is enhanced by the ability of the couplets to stand both alone and within a larger group. In Bihari’s rich pairing of the lines, the lovers’ sentiments are conveyed to readers so powerfully that commentaries have been written about the poem, and illustrated folios produced, since the seventeenth century.

Below the inscribed couplet panel, the painting is divided into four additional panels depicting sequential scenes related to Radha and Krishna. The painting can be read as a compressed visualization of the inscribed Hindi poem. The lower right depicts Radha hurriedly entering through a flowering garden. The lower left shares the interior scene where Radha sits with three women to describe her unbounded love for Krishna. Directly above on the left, Krishna patiently awaits his lover with flowers and other appointments strewn across the floor. Finally, the culmination of the scenes has Krishna’s chamber lit by a single flame from an oil lamp with the moon above while the lovers intimately embrace.

