

Mirābāī and Her Contributions to the Bhakti Movement

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MĪRĀBĀĪ AND HER
CONTRIBUTIONS
TO THE BHAKTI
MOVEMENT

The bhakti, or devotional, movement which swept across northern India in the medieval period gave birth to numerous saints and poets. In the Hindi region, Kabīr, Mīrābāī, Tulsīdās, Sūrdās, and many Muslim mystics such as Dāūd, Kutuban, Jāyasī, and Manjhan produced an enormous literature in the vernacular for the benefit of the masses. They did not write in Sanskrit because they probably felt that compositions in the language of the literati would neither reach nor help the common man in search of God. Kabīr expressed this idea clearly when he said, “Sanskrit hai kūp jal, bhāsā bahatā nīr” (“Sanskrit is the water of a well and the vernacular is the flowing water of a river”).¹ Even Tulsīdās gave a long explanation of his poetry and declared that true poetry is that which, like the waters of the Gangā river, is useful to all.²

I am very grateful to Professor Edward C. Dimock, of the South Asia Language and Area Center of the University of Chicago, who has read the final version of this paper and has offered many helpful comments and suggestions. My thanks also go to Norman Zide and Charles White for their useful comments on the preliminary version of the paper. Some of the translations from Mīrābāī are from a mimeographed anthology prepared by Norman Zide and me and distributed by the South Asia Language and Area Center, University of Chicago.

¹ Hajārī Prāsād Dvivedī, *Hindī Sāhitya Kī Bhūmikā* (Bombay, 1959), p. 106.

² *Kīratī bhanīti bhūti bhālī soi, sūrsari kanha sabkar hit hoī* (*Ramcaritamanas*,

MĪRĀBĀĪ—A LIFE SKETCH

Mirābāī, the famous woman saint of the fifteenth century, composed her poems in the Rājasthānī dialect of Hindi. She is known throughout India, at least among the bhajan (“devotional songs”) singers. Her songs about Kṛṣṇa are rich in devotional feelings and are markedly different from the songs of Sūrdās and Tulsidās in several ways—for Mirābāī was a woman poet, who accepted Lord Kṛṣṇa as her husband and true lover. As is the case with many other saints of the Middle Ages, we know very little of her life and literary works. All the questions regarding her life—when she was born, who her husband was, who her spiritual teacher was, and when she died—remain unanswered. There are many legends current around her name, but they help us little in reconstructing an authentic biography.

It is said that Mirābāī was the granddaughter of Rāo Dūdājī,³ who is known in the history of Mewār (Rājasthān) as the founder of Mērtā city. Mirābāī was probably born in a village named Kudakī about A.D. 1498. Her father, Ratan Singh, was in charge of a small territory consisting of twelve villages given to him by his father. Mirābāī is said to have been an only child.

Mirābāī displayed religious leanings from her childhood; love for Kṛṣṇa grew in her when she was still a young girl. When she was four or five, her mother died, and she was raised in the Vaiṣṇavite family of Rājā Dūdā, where she found the proper environment for the growth of her religious sentiments.

MĪRĀBĀĪ'S HUSBAND

There is much controversy regarding Mirābāī's husband. The most important view, which has been held by many scholars in the past, is that of Tod, who maintains that Mirābāī was married to Rāṇā Kumbhā. Tod asserts:

Kumbhā married a daughter of the Rāthor of Mērtā the first of the clans of Mārwar. Mirābāī was the most celebrated princess of her time for beauty and romantic piety. Her compositions were numerous, though better known to the worshippers of the Hindu Apollo than to the ribald bards. Some of her odes and hymns to the deity are preserved and admired. Whether she imbibed her poetic piety from her husband or whether from her he caught the sympathy which produced the

1–13–5). “Only that renown or poetry or power is of value which like the Gangā brings benefit to all” (*The Holy Lake of the Acts of Rāma*, trans. W. D. P. Hill [London, 1952], p. 11).

³ Rām Kumār Varmā, *Hindī Sāhitya Kā Alocanātnak Itihās* (Allahabad, 1958), p. 576.

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sequel to Songs of Govinda, we cannot determine. Her history is a romance and her excess of devotion at every shrine of the favourite deity . . . from Yamunā to Dwārikā gave rise to many tales of scandal.⁴

The view that Mīrābāī was married to Rāṇā Kumbhā does not find much support today. A Rājput historian, Harivilas Sāradā, has questioned the validity of this statement:

Col. Tod has stated that Mīrābāī was the queen of Kumbhā. This is an error. Kumbhā was killed in S. 1524 (1467 A.D.) while Mīrābāī's grandfather, Dūdā, became Rājā of Mērtā after that year. Mīrābāī's father, Ratan Singh, was killed in the battle of Khānvā, 59 years after Kumbhā's death. Mīrābāī was married to Prince Bhoj Rāj in S. 1573 (1516 A.D.). Mīrābāī was born in S. 1555 (1474 A.D.) and died in S. 1603 (1556 A.D.), at Dwārkā (Kathiāwār) at which place she had been residing for several years.⁵

Another historian, Gaurīśankar Hīrācandra Ojhā, has also criticized Tod's view. Colonel Tod's conclusions are based on the fact that the so-called temple of Mīrābāī is near the Kumbhā-Śām temple built by Rāṇā Kumbhā in Cittaur Fort. Therefore, Colonel Tod conjectured that the two persons must have been closely related. In fact, Rāṇā Kumbhā died in 1468. By that time, Mīrābāī's grandfather had not yet founded Mērtā. Mīrābāī is called Mērtī (the girl from Mērtā). It is therefore most unlikely that Mīrābāī was married to Kumbhā.⁶

MĪRĀBĀĪ'S FAMILY LIFE

Rām Candra Śukla says that Mīrābāī's family life was not very happy.⁷ Shortly after her marriage, her husband died. Later in a battle with Bābar, the Mughal king, her father, Ratan Singh, was also killed. Thus Mīrābāī was left alone in the world to suffer at the hands of the conservative members of her family, who probably did not like the young girl's association with men, even though they were religious devotees. Her family may have been against her for another reason, too: She did not commit *satī*,⁸ a ritual followed by the Rājput widows of that time, after the death of her husband. In one of her poems, we get some clue to her behavior: "satī na hosyān girdhar gānsyān mhārā man moho ghanāṇāmī."⁹ ("I will not be a *satī*. I will sing the songs of Girdhar Kṛṣṇa—the famous one attracts my heart.")

⁴ W. Crooke (ed.), *Tod's Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, I (London, 1920), 337–38.

⁵ Harivilas Sāradā, *Mahārāṇā Sāngā* (Ajmer, 1918), pp. 95–96.

⁶ Gaurīśankar Hīrācandra Ojhā, *Rājputāne kā itihās*, II (Udaipur, 1930), 670.

⁷ Rām Candra Śukla, *Hindī Sāhitya Kā itihās* (Banaras, 1958), p. 170.

⁸ *Satī*: the ceremony of a widow burning herself on her husband's funeral pyre.

⁹ Bāleśwar Prasād (ed.), *Mīrābāī kī śabdāvalī* (Allahabad, 1927), p. 61.

There are many poems in which Mīrābāī's miserable dilemma finds clear expression. Many times she says, "I would go with saints, no matter what the people say."

rānājī mhāne yā badanāmi lāge mīthī.
koi nindo koi vindo main calungī cāl apūthī.
sankarī seryān ab miliyā kyūn kari phirun apūthī.
satsangati ya jhāna sunechi durjan logān ne dīthī.
mīrān re prabhū girdhar nāgar durjan jalo jā angīthī.¹⁰

Rānā, to me this slander is sweet.
Some praise me, some blame me, I go the other way.
On the narrow path, I found God's people.
For what should I turn back?
I am learning wisdom among the wise, the wicked
look at me with malice.
Mīrā's lord is Girdhar Nāgar: let the wicked burn
in a furnace.

Mīrābāī complained constantly of a certain Rānā, who was probably the younger brother of her late husband and one who used to give her all kinds of trouble. Mīrābāī in many of her poems says, "Rānā, nobody can prevent me from going to the saints. Your world is full of filthy people. I left your palace and I left your city. I don't care what the people say." Mīrābāī's feeling toward Rānā and the people who slandered her was strong:

I don't like your strange world, Rānā.
A world where there are no holy men and all
the people are trash.
I have given up ornaments and given up braiding
my hair; and I have given up putting on Kājāl.
Mīrā's lord is Girdhar Nāgar, I've found a perfect
husband.¹¹

MĪRĀBĀĪ'S GURU

The identity of Mīrābāī's guru is also a controversial question. In a few poems, Mīrābāī refers respectfully to a Raidās. At one place she says, "I met my Guru Raidās. He gave me the real knowledge."

My heart is with God, now nobody can stop me
on the way [to God].
I met the teacher Raidās, he gave me the essence
of knowledge.¹²

¹⁰ Paraśurām Caturvedī (ed.), *Mīrānbāī kī padāvalī* (11th ed.; Allahabad: Śaka, 1884), p. 112.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

¹² Candrabālī Pāndey, *Vicār Vimarśa* (Allahabad, 1941), p. 70.

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But there is no evidence to substantiate the assertion that the Raidās mentioned here is the famous Raidās of the saint tradition, known as one of the disciples of Rāmānand. The Raidās of the saint tradition was probably not a contemporary of Mīrābāī and probably died many years before she was born. If this is so, the problem arises as to who the Raidās alluded to in Mīrābāī's poems might be. Paraśurām Caturvedī says that, although the Raidās of the saint tradition may not have been the direct guru of Mīrābāī, there is a possibility that Raidās' influence was exerted on Mīrābāī through his works and that the line *Guru milīā Raidās* ("I met the Guru Raidās") may not be literal but allegorical as are stories of Carandās' meeting with Sukadev (a mythological figure) and Garībādās' (seventeenth century) with Kabīr.¹³

The scholar Candrabali Pāndey believes that the Raidās cited in the poems of Mīrābāī is yet another Raidās, but one who belonged to the same tradition. Some poems of Mīrābāī are, of course, much nearer to the saint tradition in their spirit than to the Kṛṣṇaite tradition, but a more thorough investigation is necessary before we can prove that Mīrābāī was in any way influenced by the saint Raidās or by his tradition.

MĪRĀBĀĪ AND THE CAITANYA SECT

In the *Bhaktamāl*, an anthology of accounts of the medieval saints, it has been mentioned that Mīrābāī met the great Vaiṣṇava theologian Jīva-Goswāmī in Vrindāvan and that, in the beginning, Jīva-Goswāmī was not willing to see her. Later, when he discovered that Mīrābāī was a great devotee of Kṛṣṇa, he did meet her and was overwhelmed with an experience of the love of God.¹⁴ Some scholars believe that Mīrābāī met Caitanya also,¹⁵ but we do not have any concrete proof to substantiate this view.

MĪRĀBĀĪ AND THE VALLABHA SECT

It is suggested by the *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan Kī Vārtā*, *Bhaktamāl*, and *Do Sau Vaiṣṇavan Kī Vārtā* that relations between Mīrābāī and the Vallabha sect¹⁶ were not very good. From the *Do Sau*

¹³ Caturvedī, *op. cit.*, p. 226.

¹⁴ Harirāi, *Bhaktamāl Haribhakti Prakāsikā* (Bombay, 1938), p. 531.

¹⁵ C. Pāndey, *op. cit.*, pp. 59-60.

¹⁶ Vallabha sect: A Kṛṣṇaite sect which was very popular in northern India in the medieval period. Vallabhācārya was the founder of this sect. Sūrdās, Nandadās, and many other famous Hindi Kṛṣṇaite poets belonged to it. Most of the followers of this sect were householders. Even today, Vallabhis are found in Gujarat and other parts of India.

Vaiṣṇavan Kī Vārtā, it appears that Mīrābāī met Gusāin Viṭhal-nāth, Vallabha's son, when he was visiting Mewār. This in itself is not unlikely. But the point of the story is that Mīrābāī was not in any way impressed by him. A friend of Mīrābāī's, Ajaya Kunwari, who was then living with Mīrābāī, accepted Gusāin Jī as her guru; but later, when Mīrābāī herself was asked to become a disciple of Gusāin Jī, she declined.¹⁷ From another sectarian work, *Caurāṣī Vaiṣṇavan Kī Vārtā*, one gets the impression that Mīrābāī was not only ignored by the followers of the Vallabha sect, but that she was even sometimes insulted by them:

Rāmdās went to Mīrābāī one day. He sang his songs of worship dedicated to Vallabhācārya before Mīrābāī's deity. Then Mīrābāī said, "Sing some *Viṣṇupadas* for my deity." At this Rāmdās became angry and said, "Foolish wretch! Are these songs for your *khasam* [enemy, husband]? Go, I won't see your face again." He left that village together with his family. Mīrābāī entreated him to stay. She tried to give him gifts but he declined them and went to another village . . . Rāmdās had so much love for his Prabhu that he did not see the face of Mīrābāī again.¹⁸

Mīrābāī is said to have met Tulsidās, the poet-saint, Akbar, the great Mughal king, and Tānsen, the latter's famous musician. But there is no truth in these traditions, since Mīrābāī lived earlier than these people.

LAST DAYS OF MĪRĀBĀĪ

Mīrābāī left Mewār and lived for a long time in Vrindāvan, the land of Lord Kṛṣṇa himself. Mewār was not a congenial place for her, the people being most critical of her religious practices. But she did not stay in Vrindāvan long either. Whatever her reasons, when her death was drawing near she left Vrindāvan and went to Dwārikā in central India. She spent her last days there and passed away probably in 1546.

THE PADA IN HINDI LITERATURE AND THE PADAS OF MĪRĀBĀĪ

The literal meaning of *pada* in Sanskrit is "step," "mark," "trace," or "position."¹⁹ It appears that among the musicians of the Middle Ages this word was also used to mean "a description of the qualities

¹⁷ Harirāi, *Caurāṣī Vaiṣṇavan Kī Vārtā*, ed. Dwārikādās Parikh (Kāṅkaraulī, 1960).

¹⁸ Harirāi, *Do Sau Bāvan Vaiṣṇavan Kī Vārtā*, ed. Dwārikādās Parikh, II (Kāṅkaraulī, 1960), 79, 82.

¹⁹ See Sir M. Monier Williams, *Sanskrit English Dictionary* (London, 1960).

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of a hero (*nāyak*).”²⁰ Another meaning for the term is “word” or language itself.²¹ The name *pada* was also given, for unknown reasons, to a musical form of short lyric poetry. This *pada* form was the most popular style for the singing of devotional songs in the medieval period. Almost all the famous saints in the Hindi-speaking area in medieval times composed *padas*, although long before *padas* became current in Hindi, Tamil saints of South India had composed devotional songs that they called *padam*. It is not unlikely that the *padam* style of composition was the inspiration for the saints of northern India.

The poems of the later Mahāyāna Buddhist *siddhas* including the *caryāpadas* show some similarities with the *padas* of the medieval Hindi poets. Both are meant to be sung, and the indication of various *rāgas*²² at the beginning of the poems clearly shows that music was an essential feature in both styles. It is not easy to prove that the *rāgas* mentioned with them are as old as the poems themselves, but it is certain that there were musical qualities in the poems which would have classified them into various *rāgas*. The several meters of these poems, namely *padākulika*, *pañjhatikā*, *rolā*, *sorathā*, *padharī*, and *caupai*, were also taken over by the composers of *padas* in almost the same form or with some modifications.

In addition to the works of the *siddhas*, we find numerous other *padas* composed by Nāth Panthī yogīs.²³ More than sixty *padas* attributed to Gorakhnāth, the famous yogī and mystic of the eleventh or twelfth century, have been compiled in the Gorakhbānī.²⁴ But whether or not they are the works of Gorakhnāth is difficult to determine. The language of these *padas* seems to be late, but they have a puritanic tone and they are Gorakhnāthian in their spirit—there is criticism of all rituals and external formalism in them, although, unlike those of the *siddhas*, these *padas* are critical of any kind of relationship with women. In one of the *padas* it is said: “To sleep with a woman is to be devoured by death; one would not even drink water with her.”²⁵

The Marāthī saints Cakradhar (A.D. 1194–1276), Mahādāyisā, and Jñāneswar (A.D. 1275–96) are said to have composed poems in

²⁰ Lakshmi Nārāin Garg *et al.* (eds.), *Saṅgīt* (Hāthras, January–February 1964).

²¹ Rāmcandra Varmā (ed.), *Saṅkṣipta Hīndī Śābdasāgar* (Banaras, 1958).

²² *Rāgas*: the melody types which are the basis of Indian musical compositions.

²³ Nāth Panthī yogīs: a group of ascetics and householders who were followers of Gorakhnāth. A popular non-Brahminic movement, it greatly influenced Hindi literature of the medieval period.

²⁴ Pītāmbhar Dutt Barthawāl (ed.), *Gorakhbānī* (Allahabad, S. 2017).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

Hindi also.²⁶ The most famous among the Marāthī saints who composed *padas* in Hindi was Nāmadev (A.D. 1270–1350). It seems that this saint, who belonged to the *vārkarī* order, was quite popular among the Hindi saints. Kabīr, Rāidās, Dādū, Rajjab, Sundardās, and Bakhanā all have referred to him in their poems.

Nāmadev, Kabīr, Trilocan, Sadhanā, Sainu, all
were redeemed.

Rāidās says, O saints, listen to me, God can
bestow upon you everything.²⁷

Mīrābāī also alludes to Nāmadev in one of her poems: “O Śyām, remain before my eyes. You brought an ox [loaded with grain] to Kabīr’s house and you repaired the hut of Nāmadev.”²⁸

The other saints who composed *padas* in Hindi and who lived before Mīrābāī are Jayadev, Sadhanā, Venī, Trilocan, Rāmānand, Sen, Kabīr, Pipā, and Raidās. They followed the traditions of the *siddhas* and *nāthpanthīs* to a great extent. Not only did they borrow technical vocabulary from them, such as *sahaj*, *sūnya*, *gagan*, but in spirit and expression also they were in many ways similar to each other.

Nānak, Dādū, Rajjab, all the saints in Hindi, express again and again the feeling against all ceremonial rites and formal kinds of worship. In fact, it was a theme common to most of the religions of India when the vernaculars had just begun to develop about the tenth century. Even Jain poets, such as Muniram Singh in his *Pāhuḍ Dohā*, are critical of Brahmanas and their scriptures, authorities and way of worship. In Bengali this spirit was followed by Candidās and other Sahajiyā Vaiṣṇavas and later by Bauls. In Hindi, the tradition continued in the writings of the previously mentioned poet-saints.

There are a few other poets who composed *padas* on the life of Kṛṣṇa and his consort Rādhā. Of these, Vidyāpatī is the most remarkable, and his poems are singularly attractive for their intrinsic music and for the exquisite love episodes depicting Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Vidyāpatī has drawn tremendously on folk imagery. His Kṛṣṇa does not rise above the typical hero of Indian literature who, in loving a woman, makes every attempt to satisfy her carnal desires. Vidyāpatī rarely gives a picture of Kṛṣṇa as a supreme

²⁶ A detailed study of the works of all the Marāthī saints who composed *padas* in Hindi has been presented by Vinay Mohan Sharmā in his *Hindī ko Marāthī Santon kī Den* (Patna, 1957).

²⁷ Sharmā, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

²⁸ Paraśurām Caturvedī (ed.), *Mīrānbāī kī padāvalī* (Allahabad: Śaka, 1884), p. 139.

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being as do Sūrdās and the other religious poets. His Rādhā is also like a common *nāyikā* ("heroine") who enjoys her love deeply and suffers the pain of separation in the same manner. Jayadev, the author of the *Gītagovinda*, exercised great influence on Vidyāpati, but Vidyāpati never claimed that his poems could also satisfy the bhaktas as Jayadev himself claimed.²⁹

Among the other *pada* writers who flourished before Mīrābāī were Śrī Bhatta (A.D. 1290), Harivyās Dev (A.D. 1263), Paraśurām (A.D. 1393), and Viṣṇudās (A.D. 1445). The first three are believed to have belonged to the Nimbark sect of Kṛṣṇaites.³⁰ Not many of their *padas* are available to us, and it is difficult to give a definite opinion about the thoughts expressed in them. The poetic imagery used is very simple, and the beauty of Kṛṣṇa is described in some of them. These poets are much inferior to other Kṛṣṇaite poets of Hindi, but their *padas* are significant simply because they probably served as models for Sūrdās and other poets.

Kumbhandās (A.D. 1468–1583) and Sūrdās (A.D. 1478–1585) seem to be later contemporaries of Mīrābāī. The other poets of the Aṣṭachāp group—Parmānandadās (A.D. 1493–1584), Kṛṣṇadas (A.D. 1496–1579), Govindaswāmī (A.D. 1505–95), Chītiswāmī (A.D. 1515–85), Caturbhujadās (A.D. 1530–85), and Nandadās (A.D. 1533–83) were still quite young when Mīrābāī had reached her old age. All of them composed *padas*. Sūrdās alone composed more than four thousand poems. Kumbhandās, who was a little older than Sūrdās, composed about four hundred poems. Each of them in his poems described Kṛṣṇa's childhood, adolescence, and play with the cowherd girls. Sūrdās imitated the Bhāgavata Purāṇa more closely than did Kumbhandās. Sūrdās displayed more skill, however, in the description of the child Kṛṣṇa; his various activities, portrayed in the *padas*, were lively and picturesque. Sūrdās exercised a great influence on his contemporaries and on later poets. He used a variety of *rāgas* for the singing of his *padas*, and he used different meters, such as *sorathā*, *harigītikā*, *pāda-kulika*, and *ullālā*.³¹

In addition to the Kṛṣṇaite poets, a few poet-musicians made contributions to the *pada* literature. At least three great musicians, Amīr Khusarau, Gopāl Nāyak, and Baijūbābarā, composed nu-

²⁹ Nagarjuna (ed.), *Jayadeva Kṛit Gīta-Govinda* (Allahabad, 1955), p. 2.

³⁰ V. S. Agrawala (ed.), *Poddār Abhinandan Granth* (Mathura, 1953), p. 84.

³¹ For a detailed study of Sūrdās' life and works in English, consult S. M. Pandey and Norman H. Zide, "The Poems of Sūrdās" (Mimeographed anthology available from the South Asia Language and Area Center, University of Chicago, 1963).

merous *padas* before Mīrābāī. The few *padas* of theirs that survive today are enough to show the poetic talents of their composers. Amīr Khusarau (A.D. 1253–1325) was a famous Persian poet who is believed to have composed poems in Hindi.³² Gopāl Nāyak came to Delhi from the South during Alāuddīn Khiljī's time in 1310.³³ Baijūbābarā's date is difficult to determine. He probably lived in the fifteenth century. In his *Sangīt Kaviyon kī Hindī Racanāyen* N. Caturvedi has collected quite a number of *padas* by Baijū. Later, Tānsen, the famous musician of Akbar's court, also composed *padas*.

Thus it seems that the *pada* form had developed extensively before Mīrābāī began composing her poems. A number of poets had already used the form for religious as well as secular love songs, and Mīrābāī's legacy was rich.

PADAS OF MĪRĀBĀĪ

It is difficult to determine how many *padas* Mīrābāī herself composed, as the number varies in the published texts. The first published text of the *padas* that appeared was the *Rāga Kalpadrum*, edited by Kṛṣṇānandadevavyas of Bengal. Published about 1920, it included forty-five *padas*. In 1927 the Naval Kishore Press (Lucknow) published a collection of Mīrābāī's poems. About the same time, *Brihatakāvya Dohan*, a Gujarātī edition of Mīrābāī containing two hundred *padas*, was published. Soon after this, the Belvedere Press in Allahabad published *Mīrābāī kī Śabdāvalī* which included only 168 *padas*.

Various other editions have included different numbers of poems: *Mīrā Jīvanī aur Kāvya* (ed. Mahāvīr Singh Gahalaut), 108 *padas*; *Mīrā kī Prem Sāadhanā* (ed. Bhuvanesvar Miśra Madhau), 216 *padas*; *Mīrā Smṛiti Granth* (ed. Padmāvati Sab-anam), 103 *padas*; *Mīrābāī kī Padāvalī* (ed. Paraśurām Caturvedī), 202 *padas*; *Mīrā brihat Pada Sangrah* (ed. Padmāvati Śabanam), 590 *padas*.

Mīrā brihat Pada Sangrah, which has the largest number of *padas*, is based on a manuscript from Dakor (Rājasthān). Pandit Paraśurām Caturvedī informs us that in Śīvarājpur, in the Fatehpur district of Uttar Pradesh, another manuscript of the

³² A collection of Amīr Khusarau's Hindi works has been published by Brajaratnādās from Kāshī Nāgarī Prāchariṇi Sabhā (Banaras).

³³ Some of Gopāl Nāyak's *padas* have been published by Narmadeshwar Caturvedī in the *Sangīt Kaviyon Kī Hindī Racanāyen* (Allahabad, 1955).

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poems of Mīrābāī has been found which contains nine hundred poems, but Caturvedī could not use it.³⁴

Unfortunately, we do not have a critical edition of the *padas* of Mīrābāī. Not only are the manuscripts that exist scattered all over Rājasthān and other parts of northern India, but quite a few poems attributed to Mīrābāī are also found in the oral tradition. The texts of the *padas* are varied, and it seems that many of the poems in the existing manuscripts are not genuinely those of Mīrābāī.

Mīrābāī's poems can be classified roughly into the following categories: (1) poems of salutation; (2) poems of love for Kṛṣṇa; (3) poems of dissatisfaction with the world and a certain Rānā; (4) poems of separation. There are also some poems on Braj, on Kṛṣṇa's childhood and his flute, and on stealing the garments of the milkmaids, but they do not represent Mīrābāī's finest poetic realization. Mīrā's most powerful poems are those in which she accepts Kṛṣṇa as her husband and describes her loving devotion to him. In these she shows the full depths of her heart and her singleness of mind. Her separation poems are very touching and extraordinarily tender. They are among the finest lyrics in Hindi literature. Mīrā does not cover a wide range of subject matter. Her central theme is love for the Lord Kṛṣṇa. Therefore, we come across the same ideas in the poems again and again. Although its expression is repetitious at times, the boldness of her love and her deep personal devotion for Kṛṣṇa and the holy men, even in the face of adverse criticism, come in all her poems with extreme gentleness and simplicity.

Music is one of the main characteristics of the *pada* literature in Hindi. The poems of Mīrābāī are also musically rich and, as with other *padas*, melodies (*rāgas*) to which they could be sung are given with the poems. Among the many *rāgas* cited are Tilang, Hamīr, Multānī, Mālkos, Pīlū, Khamāch, Jaunpurī, Malhār, Todī, and Asāwarī. The songs of Mīrābāī became famous in the late Middle Ages among the musicians of India. Bhakta Dhruvādās (seventeenth century) recalls her in the following words:

Having forgotten her shyness, she worshipped
Girdhar (Kṛṣṇa).
She no longer cared for her family honor.
She was Mīrā, known throughout the world; she was
a treasure of devotions.

³⁴ P. Caturvedī, *op. cit.* (1884), "Introduction," p. 8.

She sang in sweet voice and loved him deeply,
 In bliss she visited beautiful Vṛindāvan.
 She danced with anklebells on her feet and with
 castanets in her hands.
 In the purity of her heart, she met the devotees of
 God, and realized the pettiness of the world.
 With evil in their hearts, her relatives gave poison
 to her.
 But the poison turned into nectar and they repented.³⁵

The music of Mīrābāī is an interesting subject for investigation. The scope of this paper does not allow us to pursue it in detail, though a study of Mīrābāī cannot be considered complete unless the musical qualities of her poems are examined.

Among the important meters used by Mīrābāī are *sār*, *sarsī*, *viṣṇupad*, *dohā*, *upmān*, *savaiyā*, *śobham*, *tātank*, *kundal*. Mīrābāī used mostly the *mātric* ("syllabic") poetic line.³⁶ She also occasionally used types of *vārṇika* meter, such as *manahar* and *kavitta*. Since the poems of Mīrābāī were meant to be sung, she often twisted and changed words in order to make them fit into the rhyme schemes and melodies of the poems. It happens, therefore, that the syllables of the meters are not always accurate; sometimes they are more, sometimes less than the number required by the formalities of the meter she is using.

BHAKTI IN THE WORKS OF MĪRĀBĀĪ

The devotion to God that formed the basis of the religious literature of the medieval period in Hindi has deep roots in the ancient history of India. At the time of the composition of the Bhagavad Gītā in about the fourth century B.C., bhakti had taken a definite shape and in the medieval period of Hindi literature this love of God was expressed in various ways. The Kṛṣṇaite poets of Hindi give a different picture of love from that of the poet saints and the Islamic poets. Mīrābāī's poetry lies between the Kṛṣṇaite poets who explicitly depict the sexual union of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa and the poet saints who believed in a formless, transcendental God. Mīrābāī's God is Kṛṣṇa, whom she loves as her husband. Feeling separated from him, she longs for reunion. A deep intensity of the pain of separation (*virah*) persists all through her poems.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 236-37.

³⁶ Cf. S. H. Kellogg, "Prosody," *Grammar of the Hindi Language* (London, 1955), chap. xiii.

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The poet Rajjab says about love:

Pyār, Priti, Hit, Neh, Muhabbat are the five names
of Prem (“love”).
Purity of heart and words in love brings two souls
together.³⁷

According to him, *pyār*, *priti*, *hit*, *neh*, *muhabbat* and *prem* are the same, but that *prem* which is the basis of bhakti has no quality of *kāma*³⁸ in the works of the saints as it has in the works of Kṛṣṇaite poets. The saints express the *virah* (“pain of separation”) aspect of love rather than *sanyog* (“union”), although they believe in a final absorption of the soul into the Ultimate Being. Kabīr says: “O friend, by searching for him constantly, Kabīr himself was lost. The drop of water [soul] entered the ocean [Brahman]. How can you find it?”³⁹ Although Mīrābāi expresses her pain of separation as intensely as the saints, she never suggests in her poems that the soul is absorbed in the Supreme Being.

Mīrābāi loves Kṛṣṇa, who is in the fullness of youth and wears a peacock crown, earrings in his ears, a garland of jasmine flowers around his neck, a yellow garment on his body, and has a flute at his lips.

Live in my eyes, Nandalāl.
Your peacock crown and fish-shaped earrings
and the red tilak on your forehead are beautiful.
Your figure is charming, your face is dark and
your eyes are large.
At your nectar lips there is a flute, and a garland
of jasmine adorns your chest.
Mīrābāi says, the Lord is a giver of joy to the
pious and the protector of the poor.⁴⁰

Mīrā's description of Kṛṣṇa reminds us of the youthful Kṛṣṇa of Jayadeva's *Gīta Govinda*:

Sandal and garment of yellow and lotus garlands upon his body of blue. In his dance the jewels of his ears, in movement dangling over his smiling cheeks.⁴¹

³⁷ Brajlāl Varmā (ed.), *Rajjab Vānī* (Kānpur, 1963), p. 152.

³⁸ *Kāma* has several meanings in Sanskrit literature. It stands for love, affection, desire, etc. But its other meanings are pleasure, enjoyment, love—especially sexual love or sensuality. See *The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, by V. S. Apte, and Monier Williams' *A Sanskrit English Dictionary*. In the present article, *kāma* has been used to mean sensuality or sensual enjoyments (see Kath. Up. 1, 25; AV. IX, 12; RV. X, 129, 4).

³⁹ P. N. Tewari (ed.), *Kabir Granthāvalī* (Allahabad, 1961), p. 165.

⁴⁰ Paraśurām Caturvedī (ed.), *Mīrābāi kī padāvalī* (Allahabad, 1962), *pada* 3. All quotations from Mīrābāi's poems are from this edition, unless otherwise stated.

⁴¹ Nāgārjuna (ed.), *Jayadeva Kṛit Gīta Govinda* (Allahabad, 1955), p. 16.

The crescent of the peacock crown adorns his beautiful hair. It seems as if Indra's rainbow were smiling through a cloud.⁴²

In other places, Jayadeva also describes the flute and earrings (*kundal*) of Kṛṣṇa, but Jayadeva's main interest is in describing the amorous sports of Kṛṣṇa with Rādhā and other milkmaids, whereas Mīrābāī does not give any description of Kṛṣṇa in the act of love.

Mīrābāī's Kṛṣṇa is an incarnation of God, who saved his bhaktas and set them free from the bondage of the world. Her Kṛṣṇa saved Prahlāda and Dhruva and lifted up the mountain Govardhan (*Pada* 1). He saved the honor of Draupadī (*Pada* 137), and he gave redemption to Ajāmil and Kubjā (*Pada* 134). Mīrābāī calls him *natavar* ("great dancer"), *mohan* ("attractive"), *girdhar* ("he who lifted the mountain"), and, for reasons not wholly clear, *yogī*. But in spite of the fact that Mīrābāī describes Kṛṣṇa in human form, she never loses sight of the fact that he is eternal. In many places she calls him *avināsi*, "eternal one" (*Padas* 5, 58, 65, 82, 98, 183, 188, 194). He dwells in everyone's heart: "O antaryāmī, come to me soon, I cannot live without you" (*Pada* 85). And again:

The pain of my love cannot be cured unless
the real physician comes.
The physician lives in my heart and only he
knows the cure [*Pada* 73].

The personal Kṛṣṇa has become impersonal here. Mīrā also identifies him with Rāma. She says:

Without Ramaiyā (Rām) I cannot sleep. Sleep
does not come and the fire of separation consumes me [*Pada* 74].

Ramaiyā, I love you. Don't break off my love.
Please love me more and more [*Pada* 59].

Rām, I am dedicated to you. Please pass by my street.
I am restless when I don't see you [*Pada* 113].

O heart! drink the delights of Rām, drink the
delights of Rām.
Shun evil and sit in the presence of the holy men,
listening to the tales of Hari.
Put lust, anger, arrogance, greed and selfishness
out of your thoughts.
Mīrā's Lord is Girdhar. She is drenched with
his color [*Pada* 129].

⁴² *A Treasury of Asian Literature*, trans. George Keyt (New York, 1961), p. 24.

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Mīrā thus evokes Rām in the same way as she does Kṛṣṇa. Rām has in fact all the qualities of Kṛṣṇa. Elsewhere she says, “O transcendental omnipresent Rām, you will remember me some day.”

This identification of Rām and Kṛṣṇa was not uncommon in the medieval period of Hindi literature.⁴³ Nandadās in two of his poems prays to Rāma and Kṛṣṇa together.

Upon awakening in the morning, repeat [the names]
of Rām and Kṛṣṇa.

One is the king of Avadh and holds the bow in his
hand.

The other steals butter among the people of Braj.

One [Rām] carries the *chatra* [the royal umbrella],
canvara [the oxtail fly-whisk] and sits upon the
throne.

Bharat, Lakshman, and Satrugan are his strength.

The other, the son of Nanda, has a staff, peacock
crown, and a yellow garment and stays always with
the cows.

One make stones float in the ocean and the other
held up a mountain on his fingers.

Nandadās says give up everything else and worship
the Lord with the devotion of a *cakora* bird gazing
at the moon.⁴⁴

But Mīrābāī's Rām does not seem to be Daśarath's son, of whom Tulsīdās speaks as the Supreme Being in human form performing *līlā* (“divine play”). Mīrābāī's Rām is one who dwells in people's hearts and yet is transcendent (*atīl*). In other words, Rām is just a name for ultimate reality and probably cannot be identified with the Rām who is the husband of Sītā, son of King Daśarath of Ayodhyā, brother of Lakṣman and Bharat, etc. Here Mīrābāī differs also from Sūrdās and Nandadās, for whom Rām is not merely a name of divinity but a name of divinity in the form of Daśarath's son and Sītā's husband.

It has already been pointed out that Mīrābāī loved Kṛṣṇa as her husband. Her bhakti is thus called *dāmpatya* (“conjugal love”). She calls it the path of loving devotion (*prem bhagatī*).

Yogī, don't go, don't go.

I touch your feet, I am your servant.

The path of loving devotion [*prem bhagatī*] is
unparalleled, show me that path [*Pada* 46].

Mohan, I knew your love, I knew your love.

My way is the way of loving devotion,

I don't know anything else [*Pada* 56].

⁴³ Pandey and Zide, *op. cit.*, pp. 8–9.

⁴⁴ Braj Ratna Das (ed.), *Nandadās Granthāvalī* (Banaras, 1957), p. 279.

She refers to Kṛṣṇa as *prītam*, *pīyā*, *dūlhā*, *sājan*, *sainyān*, *bālam*, *kant*, etc., all of which mean “husband”. Mīrābāī also uses the traditional imagery of moon and *cakora* bird, lamp and moth, water and fish (see *Padas* 174, 191) to express her love for Kṛṣṇa. The moon, the lamp, and the water are supposed to be the lovers, and the *cakora*, the moth, and water are described as loved ones in Indian literature. Mīrābāī also says that the love between Kṛṣṇa and herself was not new but existed from time immemorial. She says that it is an eternal love which goes on between them and that even in their previous lives they loved each other. Mīrābāī says continually that she is the servant of Kṛṣṇa’s lotus feet. This is the kind of bhakti which was preached in the Nārādashakti Sūtra, a work of unknown date but definitely earlier than Kabīr or Mīrābāī. Kabīr refers to Nārādashakti in one of his poems:

You have not accomplished anything, O my heart!
 You did not worship the lord of *Raghus*.
 Nārādashakti did not grow in you. You destroyed
 yourself.⁴⁵

Nārādashakti says, “Love and love alone such as that of a devoted servant or a wife which transcends the three forms (*sattva*, *rajas*, *tamas*) should be practised.”⁴⁶ The Nārādashakti Sūtra is much nearer to the tradition of the Bhāgavad Gītā than to the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. In spite of the fact that the author of the Nārādashakti Sūtra advocates a love for God which is of the same kind as that of *gopīs* of Vraja (*yathā braja gopikānām*, Aphorism 21), he does not believe that *kāma* plays any part in bhakti. He says, “Sā na kāmāyamāna nirodha rūpatvat” (“Bhakti is not of the nature of *kāma* because it is renunciation”) [Sūtra 7]. Mīrābāī’s works also reflect this; although she sometimes considers herself an ideal milkmaid, we do not see any more profound influence of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa on her. In the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, in the *rāsilā* (“circular dance”), Kṛṣṇa plays with the *gopīs* and, during the play, he embraces them with his arms and enters into the act of physical love. Of course, this act has a symbolic meaning, and the author of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa suggests this when he describes the sport of Kṛṣṇa: “Thus by embracing, by pressing their hands, by looking affectionately toward them, by unrestrained dalliances, and by laughing loudly, the lord of the goddess of

⁴⁵ Pārasnāth Tewārī (ed.), *Kabīr Granthāvalī* (Allahabad, 1961), p. 50.

⁴⁶ *Nārādashakti Sūtras*, ed. and trans. Swāmī Tyāgīsānanda (Madras, 1955), Sūtra 66.

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prosperity sported in the company of the beautiful damsels of Braj, just as a child sports with his image reflected in a mirror.”⁴⁷

Elsewhere in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa it has been said that faith changes into passionate love (*rati*) and this love into bhakti (3, 25, 25). And according to the bhakti *Rasāmṛita Sindhu* of Rūp Goswāmī, there is no difference between the *kāma* and *prem* (“love”) of the milkmaids. *Kāma* has not been denounced in Hinduism when it is in a religious context. Even in the Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad the sexual act has been described at some length.

Her lower part is the [sacrificial] altar; her hair the sacrificial grass, her skin the *soma* press. The two labia of the vulva are the fire in the middle. Verily, as great as is the world of him who performs the Vājapeya sacrifice [so great is the world of him] who, knowing this, practises sexual intercourse; he turns the good deeds of the woman to himself but he, who without knowing this, practises sexual intercourse, his good deeds women turn into themselves.⁴⁸

In the Chāndogya Upaniṣad, too, sexual imagery has been used:

Woman verily, O Gautama, is the [sacrificial] fire; of this the sexual organ is the fuel, what invites is the smoke; the vulva is the flame, what is done inside is the coals, the pleasures the sparks.

In this fire the gods offer [the libation of] semen; from this offering arises the foetus. For this [reason] indeed, in the fifth oblation water comes to be called man. This foetus enclosed in the membrane, having lain inside for ten or nine months or more or less, then comes to be born.⁴⁹

Also in secular Sanskrit and Prākṛit literature *kāma* is described as essential for true love. Rājaśekhara (A.D. 900) in his Prākṛit play *Karpūra Mañjarī* says:

Love is that in which the feeling within the heart attains to sincerity and is devoid of the blemishes of suspicious behaviour and so forth; in which there is an overflowing stream of longing of each for other; whose very essence is imparted by cupid and enhanced by amorous play.⁵⁰

Even Śrīharṣa in the Naiṣadhacarita (twelfth century) says that where there is love there is always *kāma*.

The power of discrimination nor the other virtues could restrain

⁴⁷ *Srīmad bhāgavatam*, trans. J. M. Sanyal (Calcutta, [n.d.]), chap. xxxiii, p. 166.

⁴⁸ *The Principal Upaniṣads*, trans. S. Radhakrishnan (London, 1953), p. 321.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 430–31.

⁵⁰ *Karpūra Mañjarī*, trans. Konow and Lanman (Cambridge, Mass., 1901), pp. 3, 10.

Nala's disquiet. For where there is love, Cupid produced this disquiet that is never restrained; such is the natural law of the universe.⁵¹

In many schools of bhakti, *kāma* was not forbidden. The true bhakta surrenders everything to God. Sex also becomes meaningful when it is surrendered to Him. Therefore, in the Kṛṣṇaite bhakti tradition, rejection of sex has been preached very little. Instead, its sublimation and elevation have been pleaded. Jayadeva, as has already been indicated, gives in the *Gīta Govinda* a detailed description of the sexual play of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, yet he claims that it is a composition exemplifying bhakti: "If you want to remember and worship Hari with a happy heart, or if you want to enjoy worldly pleasure, listen to these beautiful soft and sweet poems of Jayadeva."⁵²

Many of the later poets of the Kṛṣṇaite tradition in Hindi depicted the physical love of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa and the milkmaids. Kumbhanadās, Sūrdās, Nandadās, Caturbhujadās, and Govinda Swāmī all dealt with the matter, while also writing their poems on the child Kṛṣṇa. Mīrābāī is an exception. She pleads for the rejection of *kāma*, anger, pride, and greed (e.g., *Paḍa* 199). The world, for her, is transitory. She says again and again that all one's associations with family, relations, and friends are unreal. The real association can be only with Girdhar Nāgar.

O friend of all my lives! I cannot forget you
day or night,
When I do not see you I am restless, and my heart
burns.
I mount the high places to watch for your coming
and from sobbing my eyes have become red.
This ocean of life is false and false are the bonds
of the world and family.
Beholding your beauty every moment, I became intoxicated.
Mīrā's lord is Girdhar Nāgar and a love for him has
welled up in her heart [*Paḍa* 106].

MĪRĀ'S MARRIAGE WITH KṚṢṆA

Mīrābāī in a few poems describes her marriage with Kṛṣṇa. The wedding takes place in a dream and is, of course, a spiritual marriage; it is not like the marriage between Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa which Sūrdās describes. To Sūrdās, the marriage of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa does not take place in a dream world but is carried out in this world, and all the formalities of an Indian marriage are

⁵¹ *Naṣadhacarita*, trans. Krishnakant Handiaui (Lahore, 1934), pp. 1, 54.

⁵² Nāgārjuna, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

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observed. Even an auspicious date and time for the marriage is fixed. The marriage poems in the *Sūrsāgar*⁵³ are significant from a theological point of view because Sūr, like all other poets of the Vallabha Sect, probably aimed at devising a consort for Kṛṣṇa who could have the status of the goddesses Lakṣmī, Sītā, or Ūmā. Rādhā, as the beloved favorite of Kṛṣṇa, could easily be given that position. This, of course, was not Sūr's invention; probably he borrowed the idea from his teacher, Vallabhācārya, and the literature of his sect.

Mīrā's marriage with Kṛṣṇa has no theological perspective. It was a spiritual marriage, and it became important for her to accept Kṛṣṇa as her husband in a formal way. She saw her wedding performed in a dream :

Friend, in a dream *dinānāth* married me.
Fifty-six crores of people came [to the wedding],
my bridegroom was lord Brajanath.
In the dream, the doorways were decorated, in the
dream he held my hand.
In the dream he married me and I gained unchanging
good fortune.
Mīrā found Girdhar, it was because of her merit in
her previous life [*Pada* 27].

Kabīr, Dādū, Nānak, Paltū, Bhīkhā, and Gulāl all described the marriage of the soul with God. But a poet who resembles Mīrābāī in many ways is Bāwarī Sāhibā, another woman saint, although her poems are not devoted to Kṛṣṇa but to a transcendent God, they are like Mīrābāī's in that the intensity of the emotion of a woman's heart comes through very clearly.

Mīrābāī's poems on separation (*virah*) are her most outstanding. She feels herself continually forsaken and prays to Kṛṣṇa to come back and meet her. She says that Kṛṣṇa loved her in the beginning but that he did not remain true to her all the time. In most of her *virah* poems she describes the pain of her separation powerfully, drawing upon the traditional imagery of the *virah* theme which was so common in India. The beauties of nature do not give her any pleasure. The birds do not please her; instead they add fuel to the fire of her *virah*. Night and day she pines for Kṛṣṇa and she becomes tired of counting the days until his coming, and yet he never comes. In one poem she describes how all the twelve months of the year inflict sorrow upon her. The *Bārahmāsā* (twelve months) theme was very common in the medieval period for the

⁵³ Nandadulāre Bajpeyī (ed.), *Sūrsāgar* (Banaras, S. 2015), pp. 629–36.

description of *virah*. The Sufi poets as well as the saint poets of Hindi used this theme to give a structure in time to their feeling of intense sorrow at being separated from the Beloved.⁵⁴

We may draw some conclusions from this brief introduction to the *pada* literature of Mīrābāī and her bhakti. Mīrābāī did not compose as great a number of poems as did Sūrdās, Tulsīdās, or Kabīr, but in the art of lyricism she excelled them all, even though she probably never made any conscious efforts toward such artistry. She was a true devotee of Kṛṣṇa, never giving up her love for him in spite of all the adverse criticism. Tulsīdās's Rām was his master. He took delight in serving him as a slave. Sūrdās, a bhakta eager to cultivate the friendship of Kṛṣṇa, describes him superbly. But Mīrābāī is the only poet in Hindi literature who, like the Tamil saint, Andāl, and Mahādevī of Kannada literature, loves the Divinity as her husband and adores him as a true beloved. Her poems are filled with the most intense feelings of love. It is for this reason that her expression of bhakti achieves a sometimes sublime perfection.

⁵⁴ See my *Madhyayugīn Premākhyān* (Allahabad, 1960), p. 61; "Bārahmāsā kī Paramparā aur Padmavat," *Sammelan Patrika* (Allahabad), XLVII, No. 1 (1960); "Vīnaicandra sūri krit Nemīnāth catuṣpadikā," *ibid.*, No. 2.