

Separation and Longing in *Viraha Barahmasa*

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ABSTRACT

It is true that migration, geographic dislocation and in some cases spiritual-separation experience, differently impact the lives of women and men. In this paper my propositions furrow through the general landscape of the genre of *Barahmasa* (song of twelve months), a tradition of poetry writing that intersects the socio-cultural and religious traditions of North India, ancient and modern. The paper uses the ethos of longing of the *Barahmasa* alongside John Hawley's concept of 'Viyoga' as a frame to posit the changing patterns of this evolutionary genre. (1981) In a way the paper attempts to present a kaleidoscope, rather a mosaic of recast registers, transformed texts and translated ideas with only one family foci: yearning. The paper concludes with the breakdown and deconstruction of conventional gender stereotypes in its description of the devotional *Barahmasa* of the *sants* (saints) specially the Radhasoami tradition.

Keywords: Barahmasa, Viraha, Virahini, Viyoga, Radhasoami, Sants

1. INTRODUCTION

It is true that *Barahmasa* literature has always been a noteworthy resident in Indo-Aryan literatures. *Viraha Barahmasa*, (poems/song of twelve months of longing) which, revolves around the theme of painful separation of the beloved from her lover is at the centre of the ever-growing repertoire of *Barahmasa* literature. With the critical positioning of 'feminine longing' at the center, the poetic form has been primarily written by male poets capturing the agonies and pangs of separation of women. On the same register, 'Religious' *Barahmasas*, popular from the medieval Indian times, have symbolised the acute pangs of the human soul for divine spiritual love, and have been extensively used by the Indian Sufis and *Sants*. The persistent motif is the separation and the longing of the human soul for God. In all, taking into account the multiple and changing manifestations of religion in diverse social and cultural contexts, the

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paper analyses and reflects critically on *Barahmasa* in general and *Barahmasa* from *Sarbachan*² by Shiv Dayal Singh (Soamiji Maharaj) the founder of one of the modern, 'New' religious movements of India, the Radhasoamis, in particular, as an unconventional indulgence of neutralization of gender roles.

The study of mythology and early religion in relation to women became a significant growth area in women's studies toward the end of the last century, feeding from and into other disciplines such as history, anthropology, theology, and literature. (King 2011, 52) In fact, they have spilled over from the shelves of theology and entered critical spaces problematised by women scholars. For French feminist critics like Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray, the role of the literature, religious traditions and mythology is central to an understanding of women's position in earlier societies and even today.

2. THE ETYMOLOGY OF BARAHMASA

Barahmasa literally means twelve (*Barah*) months (*Masa*). It is a poetical form evolved round twelve months of the year. The female voice, her pining for and loyalty to her absent lover and the calendrical cycle are the core elements of a matrix that poets from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds took up and modulated according to their specific taste and inclination. In *barahmasa*, the woman called *Virahini* (literally a woman bitten by the pangs of separation: *Viraha*) pines for her absent lover or husband and describes her pitiful state, month after month, against the backdrop of seasonal changes and ritual events. Sensitivity to nature and its changing moods go back to the very beginnings of Indian Literature, the *Rigveda*. Even the *Taittiriya Samhita* has names for the twelve months beginning with the two months of the spring season: *Madhu*, *Madhava*, *Shukra*, *Shuchi*, *Nabha*, *Nabhasya*, *Isha*, *Urja*, *Saha*, *Sahasya*, *Tapa*, and *Tapasya* that are now all but forgotten, even lost³. Francesca Orsini (2010) uses the term 'abandoned'⁴ for the pining woman, but in the Indian context it has to be understood a little differently and a lot more contextually. It is true that often, Indian men, in search of livelihood or otherwise would travel to distant lands leaving behind the women and family. As an example, even today, in the upper Himalayan region of North India, from Chamba and Bharmour, Himachal Pradesh, the tribal Gaddi men would travel with their cattle

² Composed in 1880s in Hindi and Urdu (1st edn. 1938, 8th edn. 1982) Radhasoami Satsang Sabha, Dayalbagh, Agra.

³ B N Goswamy, "Seasons of Longing" Sunday, December 7, 2003 Spectrum, *The Tribune*. Accessed on 11 01 2011 <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2003/20031207/spectrum/art.htm>.

⁴ F Orsini (Ed.) *Before the Divide: Hindi and Urdu Literary Culture*. Orient Blackswan, New Delhi 2010, 121-142.

and sheep to the upper regions of Lahaul and Spiti of the Himalayas during the summers. They would return back after many months. Several songs and folk legends abound narrating the separation of the men from their women. (*Sunni Bhoonku* folktale and song is one such example) Today, *barahmasas* are perceived as both, a kind of folk song as well as a religious song of separation of the spirit and the soul (as in the religion of Saints), but a significant literary tradition attests to the attractiveness of this template for poets in all the literary languages of north India for centuries. The 12 months of the Hindu calendar under discussion in *barahmasa* tentatively correspond to the English calendar in the following way, *Ashadh*: June; *Sawan*: July; *Bhadon*: August; *Kwar*: September; *Kartik*: October; *Aghan*: November; *Poos*: December; *Magh*: January; *Phagun*: February; *Chet*: March; *Vaisakh*: April; *Jaith*: May. The *Barahmasa* like the *Chaumasa*, 'Song of the four months' (of the rainy season) is also an ancient folk form, still alive in rural India.⁵ Both essentially belong to oral literature, and were originally centred around village women. When written or documented beginning from medieval times, most of the authors of these feminine narratives were men.

3. BARAHMASA: DEFINING ITS GENRE

Barahmasas are found at the beginning of literary writing in several neo-Indo Aryan languages and the genre is characterised by remarkable ubiquity and flexibility.⁶ Orsini calls it an 'Intermediary genre' that falls in between the high literary tradition of Hindi, *riti* poetry in Braj Bhasha, and the high literary tradition of Urdu, centred mainly on the *ghazal*⁷. As such, *barahmasas* represent a kind of 'open' or 'dialogic' genre.⁸ Their worth merits an understanding of spaces that fall between and beyond the canon. This is amply clear by looking at compositions by Sants in Nagari Rekhta and Sufi poets mingling of Hindavi with Persian.⁹ Whatever their specific motivations, there was enough awareness of multiple literary models

⁵ Hawley writes that, very little has been written on the *caumasa*, similar genre, and few examples have been presented in print. See, e.g., Vidya Cauhan, *Lokgito ki Sanskritik Prstibhami* (Agra Pragati Prakasan 1972) 239. On women's songs generally, see also Winifred Bryce, ed., *Women's Folk-Songs of Rajputana* (New Delhi: Government of India, 1964); Ramnares Tripathi, ed., *Gram-Sahitya* (Sultanpur: Hindi Mandir, 1951) 1. 257-372.

⁶ For a full study of early *barahmasas*, see Charlotte Vaudeville's *Barahmasa in Indian Literatures*, Orient Book Distributors, Delhi, 1986.

⁷ Riti Poetry was written from 1600 AD to 1850 AD: the scholastic Riti period (*Kal*) of Indian poetry. Poets employed Braj Bhasha, an unofficial dialect of Hindi spoken colloquially by natives of the region of Braj Bhoomi. Ghazal, having its origins in 6th century Arabia, may be understood as a poetic expression of both the pain of loss or separation and the beauty of love in spite of that pain. Ghazal spread in India around the 12th century with the arrival of the Moghuls.

⁸ T D Bruijn's essay "Dialogism in a medieval Genre: The case of the Avadhi Poets" focuses heavily on the dialogic and conversational elements in Orsini Francesca (Ed.) *Before the Divide: Hindi and Urdu Literary Culture*. Orient Blackswan, New Delhi 2010, 121- 142.

⁹ Orsini questions, Why did a *Sant* write in Nagari Rekhta? Why did a Persian poet or an Avadhi Sufi mix Hindavi and Persian? Why did a sophisticated Rekhta poet like Uzlat write a *barahmasa*?

and a keenness to experiment with other literary or oral traditions. A rough typology of Hindi and Urdu *Barahmasas* is enough to show the multiple positions they came to occupy in the literary field.¹⁰

Though, the well-known *Barahmasas* are said to be the ones in Hindi and Urdu, there is a significant body of *Barahmasa* in other Indian languages too. In Sindhi *Barahmasa* is called *Barahamhina* originating in Sanskrit literature. An interesting thing about the Sindhi *Barahamhina* is that there is a changing mood and facet of human love according to the Seven days a week. Among the modern poets, Amrita Pritam of Punjab has written an artistic *Barahmasa*. Its subject matter is revolutionary and different from that of others of this category. Mulla Daud in 14th century was the first poet who wrote two *Barahmasas* in his great narrative poem *Chandayan*¹¹ (Datta, 2006: 381). *Barahmasa* in Hindi are mostly separation songs. Written for several purposes, they express the miseries and pangs of the beloved. They commence variously from different months: from *Ashad*, from *Savan* and the like. Most importantly, though they strike a poignant note of sorrow at the beginning, most of them end at a note of happiness upon the return of the husband/beloved. Stepping back from the above discussion for just a while, it would be interesting to get a glimpse of this genre's brief excursus in the field of painting.

4. BARAHMASA: A SOURCE OF INSPIRATION IN PAINTING

*Glancing at the amaranth's blossoming sprays
Glowing in exquisite loveliness just-revealed
Loveliness that rightly belongs to the beloved's face^[SEP]
How can a responsive heart not flutter in pain
Stung by proud Love's flying arrows, my love?*

-*Ritusamharam*, Kalidasa¹²

The above verse is just one example of the inspiration that led many artists to create finely crafted miniature paintings, made in Rajasthan or the Hilly (*Pahari*) areas of India,

¹⁰ Orsini provides this list: Religious poems (Jain *barahmasas*, Mirabai, Guru Nanak, Guru Arjan, Soamiji Maharaj); Part of longer narratives (Padmavat, Bisaldev rasau); Braj Bhasha riti poems (Keshavdas, Lakhansen), sometimes to accompany miniature albums and palace wall paintings; Urdu (Rekhta: fusion of Hindi and Persian) poems both before and after 1700 (Uzlat, Afzal). And, printed in the nineteenth century: poems by popular urban Urdu poets (Maqsud, the anonymous author of Sundarkali and Ranj); songs printed singly and in collections in both Nagari and Urdu script (Khairashah, Harnam, etc.); short religious songs (Benimadho, etc.)

¹¹ A Datta. *The Encyclopedia Of Indian Literature, Volume One (A to DEVO)*, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi 2006, pp.381

¹² Said to be a classical Sanskrit poet who lived around 1 BC, Kalidasa's *Ritusamharam* is an epic poem in Sanskrit that revolves around the six seasons. The ever changing landscape of the changing seasons are depicted against the thematic backdrop of the reactions of two lovers.

centuries later - all on the theme of *Barahmasa*! The setting is always intimate, romantic: lovers seated in a balcony or on a marble terrace, gazing into each other's eyes while the beauties of the seasons spread out all around them like a tapestry. The context almost always is that of the impending departure of the lover for some distant land, and the beloved, the heroine (*nayika*), pleads with him not to leave that month, for are not the lovely sights and sounds of the month things they should share, in togetherness? But, assuming for a moment, that the lover does agree, and does not leave, much the same happens the next month, for nature reveals more, or different, beauties, and the beloved takes the same plea again.

Today, interest in *Barahmasa* painting and poetry is being revived. Some works of Kripal Singh Shekhawat, the distinguished traditional artist from Jaipur and a book of poems *Yashodhara: Six Seasons Without You* by Subhash Jaireth (an Indian settled in Australia) are a few examples of the impact of *Barahmasa* literature. Jaireth narrativises, in a contemporary voice, the life of the Buddha who, as young prince Siddhartha, renounced the world, leaving his young wife, Yashodhara, and their son, Rahul. But woven into the Buddha story, and running parallel to it, is the voice of young Yashodhara, the abandoned wife, whose thoughts constantly turn towards him, even as the seasons keep changing. Some of it is quite moving. In "Winter 5", for instance, Yashodhara says: "*Do you remember the kachnar/ that grew near the pond in our garden?/ The one that used to shed/ its leaves in winter but always hesitated to blossom? Suddenly this winter/ as if touched by the gracious hand of the blessed one/ it has finally/ resolved to splash all its colours./ What a wondrous opulence of mauve,/magenta and pink! (But) I scold the tree, why this season,/ when it seems the world inside me has turned so blank and cold?*"¹³

5. BARAHMASA: CHIEF CHARACTERISTICS

At the centre in all narratives of *Barahmasa*, are the following three characteristics: the woman's voice; the pain of separation from the beloved (*viraha*); and the catalogue of nature symbolism and images pertaining to the seasons. Most of the *barahmasas* were in the *feminine voice* of a woman pining for her absent beloved. It is true to say, however, that the 'feminine voice' was not a stable signified. It could be pathetic, when the voice returned relentlessly to the heroine's mental and bodily suffering; could be sensuous, when the lament drew attention to the woman's 'wasted youth' or when it became an excuse to evoke the pleasures that the seasonal festivals offered to the women whose husbands were not away; and finally, it could

¹³ B N Goswamy, "Seasons of Longing" Sunday, December 7, 2003 Spectrum, *The Tribune*. Accessed on 11 01 2011 <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2003/20031207/spectrum/art.htm>.

evoke a homely world of seasonal tasks, consultations about omens with religious specialists and the nice things to be had and enjoyed at different times of the year.

The theme of the 'six seasons' (*sadrta*) or four months (*Caumasa*) was a great favourite and indeed a set-piece for many aspiring poets. Interestingly, poetry about the seasons is also found in Sanskrit medical texts. Underlying both poetry and medicine, was a common perception of the qualities of each season and the activities, food, dress and behaviour appropriate to each of them. Thus medical texts grouped the six seasons in two sets of three. The first set - *sisir*, *vasanta* and *grisma* (late winter, spring and summer) was qualitatively hot and dry. *Varsd*, *sarad* and *hemanta* (the rainy season, autumn and early winter), the second set, was characterised as cold and wet. The 'hot and dry' months were deemed debilitating for the human body, while the 'cold and wet' months were said to be invigorating. The 'description of the seasons' (*rituvarnana*) was rich in metaphoric connections and expressed time as a cycle, 'constantly on the fulcrum between memory and expectation'. However much they shared in terms of the stock of images and of the underlying moods and imagery connected to the seasons, *barahmasas* seem to have been in origin a purely popular genre, distinct from classical court poetry. That 'six seasons' and 'twelve months' were perceived as separate set pieces expressing different moods is well brought out by the sixteenth-century Sufi poet Malik Muhammad Jayasi in his *Padmavat*.¹⁴

As a necessary excursus, it would be pertinent to bring forth Orsini's argument that *Barahmasas* were perhaps the first substantial genre in the boom in commercial publishing in north India of the 1860s.¹⁵ Unlike qissas, they first appeared in Devanagari and then gradually in Urdu as well. Broadly speaking, two kinds of *barahmasas* dominated the market. First, short religious songs. Second, especially after 1870, longer songs like *Barahmasa Khairasah* which combined a folk-song template with popular Urdu verse. This is an example from the *Barahmasa Benimadho or Surdas*; in an interplay of Braj Bhasha and Urdu, the core theme of yearning and longing is once again struck:

Katik kalol kare sab sakhiya, Radha bicar kar man me ri,

Madho piya ko an milao, nahi pran bace chan me ri.

Refrain:

¹⁴ Jayasi is said to have lived between 1477 to 1542 in Uttar Pradesh, India. His fame rests on *Padmavat* (1540) a long poem about the beautiful queen Rani Padmini of Chittor, which led the historic siege of Chittor by Alauddin Khilji in AD 1303.

¹⁵ For a fuller account, see the chapter on *barahmasas* in *Print and Pleasure: Popular Literature and Entertaining Fictions in Colonial North India*, by Orsini, Permanent Black 2009.

*Hamkau char cale Benimadho, Radha sog kare man me ri,
Agahan gend bandy savare, jay khele tat Jamna ke ri,
Khelat gend giri jamna me, kali nag nathnu chan me ri.*

Katik- all girlfriends make merry, but Radha is deep in thought:

Make me meet with Madho my love, or my life will leave me any moment now.

Refrain:

Benimadho has left me and gone, Radha grieves in her heart. Agahan, the Dark One has made a ball and plays on the banks of the Jamuna.

As he plays, the ball falls into the river, where the black snake is.

The popularity in print of this kind of *barahmasas* shows that a genre which had known until then a multiple and layered history in women's songs, courtly poetic exercises, experiments by Perso-Urdu literati and urban popular poets, acquired a new function of entertainment for the Hindi-Urdu reading public, to which it offered an attractive image of a woman who was flatteringly dependant on men for her fulfillment. Whether it was the *birahini* drawing attention to her youthful body or the beautiful *suhagins* who enjoy sexual pleasures in harmony with the seasons, the message was a simple one: a happy woman is not just a married woman (for the *birahini* is also married after all) but, also a wanted one! After months of complaints and lamentations addressed to the husband who deserted her and sent no news of himself nor asked any other, the heroine is usually overjoyed to welcome him again at the end of the poem, her position as a *suhagin* and her sensual appearance immediately reinstated - with no admonitory lesson for the male audience.

In the devotional tradition, this relationship has played out on recast registers enabling 'new' texts to be written, transcending to other realms!

6. DEVOTIONAL BARAHMASAS

Devotional *barahmasas* were poems of only a few, rather elementary verses, often attributed to the great saint poets of the Northern Hindu tradition, Surdas or Tulsidas, and appear to be of a kind of compositions meant for group singing: *Krsna hi Krsna ratal narnaari* (men and women repeat the name of Krishna) is the refrain of one of them, while another has on the cover a woodblock image that depicts a Sant (Surdas) sitting in front of a group of

women, all singing a bhajan, with a temple in the background.¹⁶ The template of twelve months was used to evoke in the two, short lines of each stanza incidents or *lilas* connected to the deity, while the refrain brought the mood back to devotional fervour or *viraha*. Thus in the *barahmasa* attributed to Surdas, also published as *Barahmasa Benimadho* each stanza contained one single detail from Krishna's exploits, while the name of the month at the beginning sets the beat along the calendrical cycle; *Ramachandra ka barahmasa* evokes moments of Ram's quest, and *Dropadiji* quickly retells the events related to the game of chess in the *Mahabharata*.

7. HAWLEY'S VIYOGINIS

Hawley in his essay¹⁷ takes the tradition of the pining women, the *virahinis/viyoginis* to another level. Hawley translates *viraha* as 'yearning' and '[scorched with] separation', a more common term than *viyoga* and slightly different in its connotation. Whereas *viyoga* indicates the fact of separation, *viraha* connotes its experience. The two are closely related, however: the women who experience this separation can be called *viyogini* and *virahini* almost interchangeably.

Though Hawley opens the argument by referring to the tension that exists in all religions primarily, 'between those who hold that true worship is a single, simple thing and those who feel that in a world as complicated as the one in which humanity finds itself, religion too must necessarily be something complex and manifold' (1981: 1), he quickly establishes a link with the binaries that relate to men and women. He says, 'Not far away is the debate about whether faith is something childlike or mature, something easy or difficult. And.... a certain tendency to identify one side of all these oppositions with the nature of women and the other with the nature of men.'(2)

Attempting to alter the rarefaction of Hinduism as a complex and difficult religion, Hawley uses the conflict between 'Yoga' and 'Viyoga' to prove that 'the religion of simplicity emerges as nothing less than the true form of yoga.'(2) As an example he uses the pericope of Krishna Bhakti of the milkmaids or cowherd women (Gopis) alongside the trope of separation, quite similar to the ones found in all *Barahmasas*: poetic/literary and devotional. Using Surdas's works, *Sur Sagar* and *Brahmargit*, Hawley writes

Sur brings to focus in his *bhramargit* poems a tradition of women's songs that

¹⁶ The first is *Dropadiji ki barahmasi*; printed (in Delhi) at Matba Dilkusha, 16mo, 16pp. (IOL 14158.C.6); another edition was printed in Delhi at the Matba Jvalaprakash in the 1870s (14158.C.3); the second is *Barahmasa Surdas*, printed in Urdu characters in Agra by the Matba Rada (14109.a.10).

¹⁷ J S Hawley, "Yoga and Viyoga: Simple Religion in Hinduism" *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 74, No. 1 (Jan., 1981), pp. 1-20.

stretches back beyond the reach of memory, though it has only rarely been committed to writing. Folk culture all across North India is rich in songs of women's lamentations, and one of the most prominent genres of all, the *barahmasa*, records the sufferings and longings of women whose husbands are away.¹⁸

In the poems of the *Sur Sagar* and in other similar poems, as in some of the women's songs themselves, these longings are for the absent husband Krishna. (16-17) Though it appears that for the purposes of my discussion in this paper, restricting my attention to only that section where Hawley refers to *Barahmasa* would be more than appropriate, it will be difficult to elide Hawley's definition of *Viyoga*:

Viyoga in the *Sur Sagar*¹⁹ signifies just the opposite of *Yoga*. The word literally means an unyoking, a disjunction; in *Sur*'s language it refers specifically to the separation of the *gopis* from Krishna. Their physical separation from him, however, does nothing to diminish the totality of their attachment to him; it makes them ache with estrangement all the more.

Furthermore it throws into bold relief the stark simplicity of their position: their love for him is so strong and fundamental that no outward change of circumstance, not even his own departure, can alter it. The *gopis*' devotion to Krishna, in his absence as in his presence, is the total orientation of their life...it is a religion characterized by utter simplicity; and as devotion to the Lord in separation from him, as *viyoga*, it admirably summarizes the various facets...associated with simple religion-as fully as *yoga* epitomizes their opposite.

(6)

Thus, Hawley, neatly frames the tradition of *Viyoga* opposite *Yoga*; between simplicity and complexity; between women and men! Hawley makes it clear that, as *viyoginis* or *virahinis*, women separated from Krishna, are the true yogis of this world, and stand as paradigms of the spiritual life. The states of consciousness to which the best-trained yogis aspire through whole lifetimes of renunciation come with maddening ease to these untutored...female rustics." (8) The attempt to make the *gopis* representative icons of

¹⁸ Hawley lists down more *barahmasa* songs from Charlotte Vaudeville, *Barahmasa* (Pondichery: Institut Francaisd Indologie, 1965); Dusan Zbavitel, "The Development of the Baromasi in the Bengali Literature," *ArOr* 29 (1961) 582-619; and Susan Snow Wadley, "The Rains of Estrangement: Understanding the Hindu Yearly Cycle," unpublished paper delivered to the American Anthropological Association, 1978. He further informs Vaudeville's records and translations of a selection of *barahmasas* of various types: Bhojpuri *barahmasa* found in Krsnadev Upadhyay, ed., *Bhojpuri Lok-Git* (Allahabad: Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, 1954 and 1966) 1. 407-28 and 2. 165-93.

¹⁹ See Hawley, "The Early *Sur Sagar* and the Growth of the *Sur* Tradition," *JAOS* 99 (1979) 64-72.

religiosity, was in many ways an effort to not just pay a tribute to simple religion in general but *distinctively applaud the womanly tradition of religiosity*.

8. RELIGIOUS BARAHMASA

One typical change in function took place at the hand of religious poets, who either interpreted the heroine's *viraha* in spiritual and/or devotional terms - as the pain of the soul's separation from God - or else grafted the template onto a story of spiritual conversion or tagged a didactic message onto every month.²⁰ The earliest known literary example, a short poem in late *Apabhramsha* by the Jain monk Dharam Suri, combined prose and verse on the months of the year with verses of self-praise and fragments of songs on *viraha*.²¹ Charlotte Vaudeville has documented the significant production in old Gujarati of Jain *barahmasas* on the subject of Neminath's desertion of his wife Rajmati on their wedding day to follow a life of renunciation.²² *Barahmasas* were taken up for a religious purpose also by Nath Yogis, Sufis, Sants and Bhaktas. Among the Sufi poets, the *Barahmasa* of Ali Haider and Bulhe Shah are worth mentioning.

Krishna, the absent god-lover par excellence, fitted into the role very well, as the following *barahmasa* attributed to Mirabai shows,

Piya mohim darsan dijai ho.
Ber ber maim terahum ahe kripa Kijai ho. [Refrain]
Jeth mahine jal vind panchi dukh hoi ho.
Mor asarham kuralahe ghan chatrag soi ho.

My love, give me the vision of Yourself:
 Again and again I call You, have pity on me, ho! [Refrain]
 In the month of *Jeth*, for want of water the bird is in pain, ho.
 In *Asarh* the peacock throws its cry, the *chataka* bird calls the cloud, ho.²³

²⁰ The *barahmasa* attributed to Guru Arjan in the Guru Granth is purely didactic, whereas the one attributed to Guru Nanak is of a devotional nature. Several poetic *Barahmasas* from Rajasthan and Punjab, including Nagmati's laments have tinges of a spiritual experience (e.g. the 'unfathomable path').

²¹ Found in a late twelfth-century manuscript at Patan; see Vaudeville 1986:18.

²² According to Vaudeville, the *viraha barahmasa* of Rajimati pining for Nemi for twelve months before herself embracing the ascetic life shows that Jain munis were quick to use *viraha-gitas* of the *chaumasa* or *barahmasa* type to disseminate their ascetic teaching, and the change from *viraha* to *vairagya*, i.e. from a lament for solitude to an attitude of contempt for the world and its fleeting joys, occurs as a natural development'. Vaudeville 1986: 27.

²³ See Vaudeville 1986: 53, 56. In several of the printed, manuscript and oral *barahmasas* of the nineteenth century attributed to Surdas or Tulsidas, the template was used to recollect the adventures of Krishna or Rama or the marriage between Krishna and Rukmini. The names Krishna, Murari, Shyam and also Raghubir also crop up regularly in secular *barahmasas*, evidence of the blurred boundary between secular and religious love that poetry in the public domain also display, and of the many and layered resonances that had gathered around the Krishna-

Other Sant poets have used Spiritual *Viraha* as a means of union with God. The recurrent motif is that the Spiritual *Virahini* meets her Divine husband in her own house as she discovers His presence in her own heart. As you see, not all spiritual *Barahmasas* deconstruct the gendered roles.²⁴ The soul is the feminine *virhini* and the Divine almighty is the masculine lord.

Barahmasa is also the most important nature symbolism used by the Sants. The stages and states of the Spirit entity in its passage to its Original Abode are described, likening them to the conditions, a human being undergoes, in the different seasons. The imagery and motif are most aptly and completely described in the *Barahmasa* of the *Sant Mat* and Radhasoami Faith. These *Barahmasas* are allegorical and didactic in nature.

9. BARAHMASA IN RADHASOAMI TRADITION

As stated earlier, *Barahmasas* have been written by many saints of the modern world. An exemplary one has been by the founder of Radhasoami Faith at Dayalbagh, Agra, Soamiji Maharaj, (Shiv Dayal Singh Sahab). His canonical scripture, *Sar Bachan Nazm* (Poetry) in its chapter *Brahamasa*²⁵ unveils an unusual spiritual narrative which traces the lifespan of a Spirit entity (*Jiva* or *Surat*) in this destructible and transient world (*Loka* or *pind desh*) and then its upward journey to higher regions. Towards the end, the seeker and the sought are shorn of their gender identity.

Every month broadly represents and depicts the state and condition of the *Surat* (soul), much like the other *barahmasas*. Every seasonal description has an explanation given in some preliminary lines explicating what shall follow in that particular month's description. All the descriptions are resplendent with the ethos of longing and pain of separation. Interestingly, feminine and masculine constructs no longer exist. According to Professor P.S. Satsangi, in the

gopi motif. See e.g. *Barahmasa Benimadho, Ramachandraji ki barahmasi* by Ganeshdas (Fatehgarh 1868); on the marriage between Krishna and Rukmini, *Barahmasa*, Shambha Ray (Delhi 1875).

²⁴ The oldest *Barahmaha* available was written by Guru Nanak Dev in Raag Tukhari which is both: spiritually mystical as well as a marvelous piece of poetry. The imagery is borrowed from nature and folk-life, which makes the philosophical concepts intelligible. A married woman awaits her husband who has gone abroad. Her mood changes with the change of the season. The romantic rainy season has started, and the separated beloved feels loneliness and pangs of separation. The panoramic vision of nature elevates the *Barahmasa* to new heights in diction, imagery and thought content. Another *Barahmasa* in *Adi Granth* is in Majh Rag written by Guru Arjan Dev. These *Barahmasa* are simple outbursts of innermost and intensive feelings and are very popular in rural areas. Sant Arjan Dev's *Barahmasa* alludes to the pain of separation from the Lord thus: "O Ram! Be merciful: Unite with Thee those who are separated from Thee by their evil words or doings".

²⁵ pp 788 to 838, verse 38.

hymn for the twelfth month of "Jeth" in terms of 70 stanzas²⁶ a subtle deconstruction of gender happens from stanzas 3 through 10 which translates as follows:

Neither was there the Creator, nor Creature, nor Creation,
 Neither was there Doer, nor Cause, nor Act, nor Impediment (3)
 Neither Seer, nor Seen, nor anything was visible;
 Neither was there Unrevealed, nor Revealed,
 Neither Position (Abode), nor Matter (4)
 Neither was there Qualifier, nor Quality, neither Beginning, nor end;
 Neither was there Hidden, nor Exposed, neither Interior, nor Exterior.(5)
 Neither was there Ram, nor Rahim (Merciful),
 neither Karim (Gracious) nor Keshav (Krishna);
 Nothing was there, Nothing, Nothing was there then.(6)
 Neither was there Smriti, nor Shastra, neither Gita, nor Bhagwat;
 Neither was there Katha (Epic), nor Puran, neither Singer, nor Song.(7)
 Neither was there Servant, nor Master, neither Devotee, nor Deity;
 Neither was there Satnam (Refulgent Sat Chit Anand), nor the Nameless One.(8)
 How often must I repeat, Nothing was there;
 The Creation of the Four Worlds had not yet begun. (9)
 What was there, I state now:

I (Supreme Being or Puran Purush) was there in "Unmun" (Absolute self-absorption)
 "Sun-Bisamadhi" (State of Shunya Samadhi" i.e. Zero State of Deep Meditation). (10)

Such a *Barahmasa*²⁷ reveals the secret of the *True Being* and explains the path and the method of proceeding to realize the same. The True Being is one *Who always remains the same* and in *Whom there is no change or alteration* at any time. There are many grades of "true being" in various religions. People call one who stays longer than another as "true being" and also believe so. However, the real *True Being* is *One Who remains the same* at all times in comparison to the entire creation and *Who continued to exist* even when there was no creation and *Who would continue to exist* as before even when there is no creation. It is at this juncture that there is complete dissolution of Gender.

Coming back to Hawley's thesis in *Yoga-Viyoga*, this is how complexities and difficulties in religion are overcome by simple understandings of religion. In Hawley's thesis, woman stood at the centre as the epitome of simplicity. In the present description, the gender role of the subject-position of the *Virahini*/the *Jiva*/ the *Surat* and the sought, husband/beloved

²⁶ Prof. P S Satsangi's discourse in SPIRCON, (12-13 Nov. 2010) an international conference on "Spiritual Consciousness Studies and Radhasoami Faith" held at Dayalbagh Educational Institute, Dayalbagh, Agra, published as Vision Paper, "Cosmology from the Twin Vantage Points of Radhasoami Faith and Systems Science" in *Spiritual Consciousness* (ed. Sriramamurti, Prashant & Mohan) New Delhi: New Age Books, 2013: 21-41.

²⁷ H. Maharaj, *Prem Patra*, Part-III, Discourse 22, Radhasoami Satsang Sabha, Dayalbagh, Agra, 1959, pp.315-321.

or the ultimate divine has almost turned neutral. The *Jiva/Surat* can be pining for one *Who* is just ‘The True Being’; one *Who* remains the same and in *Whom* there is no change or alteration at any time; one *Who continued to exist* even when there was no creation and *Who would continue to exist as before* even when there is no creation. *Barahmasas* indeed stand at the centre of all such narratives. The Krishna of the pining milkmaid women (*gopis*) is ‘the True Being’ bereft of any gender specificity. And the *gopis* are just ‘a spirit entity’ shorn of any femininity! All gender roles crumble at such a point. Somewhere, such a *Barahmasa* not just theorises but also neutralises the gender ‘agency’ of both women and men.

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