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MEERABAI AND HER UNPARALLELED DEVOTION TO LORD KRISHNA AS STUDIED IN
A FEW OF HER POEMS

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ABSTRACT

The present study is about the devotion that is overtly expressed in a variety of verses composed by the poet Saint Meerabai who lived in the 16th century and was contemporaneous to many Saints of the Bhakti Movement including the cobbler Saint Ravidas whom Meera considered her spiritual guide. The study brings out the idea expressed in the title that Meera's devotion to Lord Krishna expressed in her verses finds no parallel in any of the compositions of other Saints of the Bhakti Movement. The study finally establishes Meera as a devotee of Krishna for whom the Lord is the ultimate refuge and that the giving up of worldly ties is the only key to the emancipation of the individual soul or atma.

Keywords: Meerabai , Rana , Devotion , Krishna , Poison, Merta , Mirabai , Vrindavan, Mathura, Rajput

Meerabai was born into a Royal Rajput family in Kudki, Pali district, Rajasthan. She spent her childhood in Merta and became one of the greatest poet saints and devotees of Lord Krishna of all times. Her deep seated devotion to Lord Krishna has its roots in her childhood, when as a child of 5 or 6 years of age, on observing a wedding procession, asked her mother who would be her groom ? To which her mother jestingly remarked that Lord Krishna would be her groom. Since then, Meera, with her utter innocence, cherished the image of Krishna taking Him to be her husband in a literal sense.

Since Meera had given away her heart to Krishna, she was unwilling to marry any mortal. But as is the custom among traditional Indian families, she was compelled to marry Prince Bhojraj, the crown Prince of Mewar in 1516. Even then, her mind was solely given to the constant remembrance of Krishna whom she considered her Lord for all lives. Once while she was busy composing some verses and singing them, King Bhojraj, her husband asked her what she was singing. She replied, smiling, राणाजी, महे तो गोविन्द का गुण गास्यां। O King ! I sing the praises of Govind (Lord Krishna). Mira then continued to compose poems and sing them praising the Lord despite the unhappiness it might have caused the Rana.

Renunciation came to Meera gradually as she lost interest in the palace and the people inhabiting it. For her Lord Krishna was now the only reality and the world around her failed to interest her with all its allurements. Her heart was full of the sadness of separation from her Beloved Lord Krishna. She sang her heart out, calling out to her Shyam to listen to her pleadings. This is what she sang :

करुणा सुनो श्याम मेरी मैं तो होई रही चेरी तेरी ।। दर्शन कारण भाई बावरी विरह विथा तन घेरी ।
 तेरे कारण जोगन हूंगी दूंगी नगर विच फेरी ।। कुंज सब हेरी हेरी ।।१।।
 अंग भभूत गले मृगछाला यों तन भसम करूं री । अजहु ना मिल्या राम अबिनासी बन बन बीच फिरूं री ।।
 रोऊं नित टेरी टेरी ।।२।।

जन मीरा कू गिरिधर मिलया दुःख मेटन सुख भेरी ।

रूम रूम साता भई उर में मिट गई फेरा फेरी ।। रहूं चरननी तर चेरी ।।३।। (Anand 200)

The song above means the following:

O Shyam ! Listen to my piteous cry since I have become your slave. Having become mad for thy vision, the agony of separation sears my limbs. Having become a renunciate on your account, I shall sing your glory throughout the town, crying out your name in every corner. Having smeared my limbs with the holy ash and having a deerskin for my clothing, I am reducing my body to a naught. Even today I roam the dense forests looking for my eternal companion weeping before every creeper. O people, I ultimately found my Giridhar who will assuage my sorrows and give profound joy. Now every pore of my being is suffused with His presence and the heart has lost the restlessness. I am ever the slave of thy feet.

Sri Bankey Behari, in his preface to the book *The Story of Mira Bai* has the following lines to offer in the praise of Meera, "To me Mira is the moth that burnt itself in the candle of love for Giridhar and for all times filled the temple of devotion with fragrance. Undaunted by fire or frown, unperturbed by persecutions, this devotee of Sri Krsna sang her songs of princely renunciation and self surrender that shall infuse courage in the aspirant on the path of Love." (Behari Preface)

Meerabai was a renunciate for the rest of her life and this is what Swami Nilotpal proclaims in his book, "वास्तव में देखा जाए तो मीरा का जीवन एक चिर विरहिनी का जीवन है ।" (Nilotpal 19)

Her renunciation now reached a climax when her husband, king Bhojraj, would invariably find fault with her for her devotion to Krishna and her services to sadhus who came to the palace for alms. Matters reached a breaking point when it was reported to the king that Meera has a lover whom she meets in secrecy. The incident relates to Lord Krishna's physical appearance in front of Meera one evening when she sang her heart out resulting in her swooning away in ecstasy. It is reported that Krishna appeared to her and comforted her; Meera fell at His feet crying out to him with all her heart and soul. It appears that guards reported this to the king who, from then onwards, was bent on punishing her for encouraging a secret paramour who came to meet her. It appears the king now wanted to get rid of her before her affairs came to light among the common people. Bhojraj consulted with the closest of his ministers who suggested several clever ways of getting rid of her. The following verses clearly describe the different ways in which the killing of Meera was planned :

मीरा मगन भई हरिके गुणगाय । सांप पिटारा राणा भेज्या, मीरा हाथ दियो जाय ।

न्हाय धोए जब देखन लागी, सालिगराम गई पाय ।। 1।। जहर का प्याला राणा भेज्या, अमृत दीनह बनाय ।

न्हाय धोय जब पीवन लागी, हो गई अमर पचाय ।। 2 ।। (Brahmachari 103,104)

Meera was ever immersed in singing the glory of Lord Krishna. In the meanwhile, the King sent a basket enclosing a venomous snake to Meera which she took in her hands and when , after her bath , as she opened it before her worship she found in the basket the sacred Salagrama stone (which is used for worship of Vishnu). This trick of killing her having failed, another day, the king sent her a cup of poison which the Lord turned into ambrosia. After bath when Meera drank it, it assimilated into her and made her immortal.

Ultimately Meera was tired of being harassed by the King and therefore she decided to abandon Chittor and go to a place where she could peacefully carry on her personal austerity and the service of the holy and the

poor. Having decided to leave Chittor, Meera had made her aims, objectives and advice very clear and these she beautifully enshrined in the following verses :

अब नहि बिसारूं , म्हारे हिरदे लिख्यो हरि नाम । म्हारे सतगुरु दियो बताए , अब नहि बिसारु रे !!
मीरा बैठी महल में रे, उठत बैठत राम । सेवा करस्यां साधकी, म्हारे और न दूजो काम ।।1।।
रणों जी बतलाइया, कई देनो जवाब । पण लागो हरि नामसू, म्हारे दिन दिन दूने लाभ ।। 2 ।।
सीप भयो पानी पिबेरे, टोक भरयो अन्न खाय । बतलाया बोली नहीं रे, रणोजी गया रिसाय ।।3।।
विष का प्याला राणाजी भेज्या, दीयो मेड़तनी के हाथ । कर चरणामृत पी गई, म्हारा सबल घणी का साथ ।।4।।
विषको प्यालो पी गई, भजन करे उस ठौर । थारी मारी न मरूं, म्हारो राखानहारो और ।।5।।
रणोजी मोपर कोप्यो रे ,मारुं एकन मेल । मरया परीक्षित लागसी ,म्हाँ ने दीज्यो पीहर मेल ।। 6 ।।
रणोजी मोपर कोप्यो रे , रती न राख्यो मोद । ले जाती वैकुण्ठ में, यों तो समझ्यो नहीं सिसोद ।। 7 ।।
छापा तिलक बनाई या, तजिया सब सिंगार । मैं तो सरने राम के, भल निंदो संसार ।। 8 ।।
माला म्हारे देबड़े, सील बरत सिंगार । अब के किरपा कीजियो, हू तो फिर बाँधू तलवार ।।9।।
रथा बैल जुताय के, ऊंटां कसियो भार । कैसे तोड़ूं रामसू, म्हारो भरो भरतार ।। 10 ।।
रणो साण्डो मोकल्यो ,जाज्यो एकै दौड । कुल की तारन अस्तरी या यो मुरड चली राठोर ।। 11।।
सांडो पाछो फेर्यो रे, परत न देस्या पाव । कर सूर पण नीसरी म्हारे, कुण राणे कुण राव ।। 12 ।।
संसारी निन्दा करे रे, दुखिया सब परिवार । कुल सारो ही लजासी, मीरा थें जो भयाजी ख्वार ।। 13 ।।
राती माती प्रेम की, विष भगत को मोड़ । राम अमल माती रहे, धन मीरा राठौर ।।14 ।। (107,108)

The meaning of the foregoing verses goes as follows:

The name of the Lord is etched in my heart and now I cannot forget it. My true preceptor has told me this and hence I cannot forget it. Meera resides in the palace and sitting or standing she keeps reciting the name of the Lord and keeps serving the sadhus who arrive at the palace. Apart from this, there is no other work for Meera. Ranaji asked, "What does she keep doing? She replied that she had played the gamble of the Lord's name and her profit kept doubling day after day. On account of my detachment I drink only a shell full of water and eat only for four months. This implies that my food consumption has come down greatly. Ranaji asked me many questions, but I only heard and never replied to his queries. At this he got angry and sent me a cup of poison, telling the bearer, "Give this cup of poison into the hands of Meera who is of the lineage of the Medatiyas." I drank the cup of poison taking it to be ambrosia, and nothing happened to me since Lord Giridhar is ever protecting me. After having drunk the cup of poison, I started to do bhajans at the same place. I told him, "You cannot kill me since there is someone else who is my life giver" At this the Rana was infuriated with me and proclaimed, "I shall strike you dead with a sword." I replied, "Killing of a woman will beget you sin, and therefore you could send me away to my parents at Merta." Rana was angry with me for nothing. He did not have even a bit of love in his heart. Rana never understood the power of uttering the name of God, otherwise I would have taken him to heaven along with me. I have stopped wearing ornaments and have started adorning my forehead with the sacred tilak. I am in the refuge of my Lord. If the world is bent on criticising me, let it do so. The Lord's name itself is my rosary and my character itself is my adornment. O my Lord ! Shower thy grace on me. I shall again wear the sword. Bullocks were yoked to the cart, all her luggage was loaded onto the camel's back, and thus she started her journey towards Merta. Just think, how could I break away all connections with my Lord, who has been my husband for so many lives. When I had left the house, Rana sent a messenger on a bull's back telling him to persuade me to return since Rana had realised that I was the one who could salvage the family of the Sisodias. It had appeared to everybody that Rathore's daughter Meera was leaving on account of annoyance. I told the messenger mounted on the bull, "You better turn back your bull since I will never set

foot in Chittor again. I have left home with a valourous resolve and hence for me there is hardly a difference between a Rana or a Rao. The rider of the bull said, " All the worldly people will criticise, all the people of the family will feel crestfallen, this will be utterly shameful for the entire clan that your mind became sad and you got annoyed and left the family." Meera said, " I am lost in love. The price of this devotee is poison. I ever lose myself in the chanting of the name of the Lord and thus the daughter of Rathore is blessed forever." Thus Meera left Mewar and started to stay at her home in Merta. But things were not smooth politically. Merta was being made weak by various attacks from Islamic rulers. Political unrest was brewing in and around Merta. Soon Merta became a vassal to the kingdom of Jodhpur and so Meera decided to leave Merta. She had lost interest in worldly people and all their affairs. Leaving Merta she travelled towards Vrindavan. As she reached Vrindavan, she observed the Yamuna, the ever beloved of Lord Krishna, and seeing this dark river flow slowly she started to cry Krishna Krishna. The dust of Braj that she had become crazy singing about, now she started to fall and bathe in the same dust of Braj so Dear to Krishna. Observing the shady Kadamba trees on the banks of the Yamuna and the lush green creepers surrounding them, the mind of Meera started to dance. Just like a fish that has been thrown out of water wriggles to go back to its source, is alive because it is coated with wet mud, and ultimately when it rains, it is thrown back into water and finds heaven. In the same fashion Meera felt at home in finding herself in Vrindavan the abode of her beloved Lord Krishna. As Meera started to glance at Vanshivat (The tree in the shade of which Krishna played the flute) she immediately swooned on account of ecstasy. When she came to herself again she shouted, "O Shyam ! Let me listen to your divine flute once again! " Meera stood there thirsting to hear the flute of the Lord. At that instant she saw her Lord, her Bankey Bihari in his pristine glory. She fell at His feet and started to sing this song:

हमारो प्रणाम बांके बिहारी को । मोर मुकुट माथे तिलक विराजे, कुंडल अलकारी को ॥

अधर मधुर पर बंसी बजावे, रीझ रिझावै राधा प्यारी को । यह छवि देख मगन भई मीरा, मोहन गिरिवरधारी को ॥ (115)

It means as follows: My salutations to Lord Bankey Bihari who wears the peacock plume, whose forehead is adorned with a tilak and who wears long earrings. He plays the flute on his sweet lips and he is the ever beloved of Radhaji. Seeing such an image of Mohan Giridhari Meera was lost in ecstasy.

As she was roaming in the streets of Vrindavan reminiscing the leelas of her Lord, she broke forth into another song that spoke of a cowherd maiden who had originally come to sell yoghurt in the market of Braj. Observing the beautiful form of Krishna she forgot the word curd and remembered only the word Shyam started saying 'O somebody take this Dark Beautiful One'. This is how the song goes:

या ब्रज में कछु देख्यो री टोना । ले मट्ठी की सिर चली गुजरिया, आगे मिले बाबा नंद के छोना ॥

दधी को नाम बिसरी गयो प्यारी, ले लेहू कोई स्याम सलोना । वृंदावन की कुंज गलिन में , आँख लगाई गयो मन मोहना । मीरा के प्रभु गिरिधर नागर, सुंदर शाम सुधर सलोना ॥ (116)

Meera was infused with the intoxication of the beauty of her Shyam who seemed to pervade every atom of Braj. She kept roaming in Vrindavan observing the green plants and creepers and calling out incessantly the name of her Lord like one in deep intoxication. Her only thoughts were that she was His servant and that Shyam was her only Lord.

In those days six of the Goswamis who were the direct disciples of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu had come to reside in Vrindavan. It would be more apt to say that on account of their settling at Vrindavan, the place was now becoming a haunt for intellectuals with refined tastes and many temples were also erected owing to their inspiration and efforts. Sri Roop Goswami had already settled here and subsequently his nephew Sri Jeev Goswami also settled at Vrindavan. The followers of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu hold the belief that all living beings, being a part of nature are feminine, and only Lord Krishna, the Supreme Godhead is masculine. Everything created is for His enjoyment and He is the only one who enjoys. His worship is done with the feeling of Sweetness, just like the women of Braj worship Lord Krishna. Meera's worship of Lord Krishna was a little different since it was without expectations and that was because she considered Lord Krishna as her Beloved.

And therefore Meera's worship was desireless, independent of anything and everlasting. It is said that one day Meera went to have the darshan of Sri Jeeva Goswami. In those days the sacrifice, detachment and scholarship of Sri Jeeva Goswami had reached the corners of this country. Sri Jeeva Goswami, being a renunciate, had the habit of avoiding any kind of a conversation with women. When his followers informed him that Meerabai was anxiously waiting to speak to him, he said, "Tell her to have my darshan and go away since I do not meet women." On hearing this Meera seems to have laughed and left an answer with his disciples which was, "I was under the impression that in the whole of this Universe the only Male is Lord Krishna and all humans are feminine servants of the Lord. I never knew that Sri Krishna had an equal partner in Sri Jeeva Goswami!" Hearing this wisdom from Meera Sri Jeeva Goswami felt ashamed and came running barefoot to the main entrance to meet Meera.

Meera's charisma was such that the heads of one and all bowed before her in humility. Her fame spread throughout Vrindavan. Devotees from distant parts of the land came just to have a glimpse of Meera. When Meera would sing, playing the kartal with one hand, her voice full of emotion, the bhajan, "मेरे तो गिरधर गोपाल दूसरो न कोई" people would become still like a painting and behold the tearful face of Meera singing the glory of her Lord. Even the least of the devoted among people would be moved by her spiritual outburst. All her actions would be centred around the form and acts of Lord Krishna. Her mind would be immersed in totality in the contemplation of the Divine and Magnetic Beauty of the Lord. Every second and with every breath, calling out to her Beloved she would grow restless and start to question the plants and creepers of Vrindavan about the whereabouts of her Lord. The tortuous lanes of Vrindavan, the dense forests, and the pristine waters of the Yamuna would ever keep drawing her towards them. The night round she would keep crying, coaxing her Beloved Lord at times, sometimes complaining to Him about His hard-heartedness, and oftentimes she would keep shedding hot tears of separation from her Lord. Meera would do exactly the things that a normal devoted hindu wife would do for her husband who was away from her. Her time spent in Vrindavan was full of love and ecstasy. Remembering the glory of Vrindavan she sang the following lines:

आली म्हाने लागे वृंदावन नीको । घर-घर तुलसी ठाकुर पूजा , दर्शन गोविंद जी को ॥

निर्मल नीर बहत जमुना में भोजन दूध दही को । रतन सिंहासन आप विराजे मुकुट धरयो तुलसी को ॥

कुंजन कुंजन फिरत राधिका सबद सुनत मुरली को । मीरा के प्रभु गिरिधर नागर , भजन बिना नर फीको ॥(118)

The meaning of the foregoing lines is as follows: O friend ! I like Vrindavan so much. Every house has a tulasi plant, all worship the Lord and the darshan of Krishna is a regular affair. The pure waters of Yamuna are ever on the flow and the food of people mainly consists of milk and curds. Lord Krishna ever adorns the gem bedecked throne, wearing the crown of Tulasi. In every lane Radhika roams listening to the sound of the flute. O Lord of Meera Giridhar Nagar, man's life is insipid without the remembrance of the Lord's name.

Meera wishes to serve her Lord with all dedication and devotion and therefore she does not wish to spend any moment of the day away from Him. The best way to get a perpetual proximity with the Lord is by becoming a permanent servitor of the Lord. It is in this context that Meera pleads to her Beloved Lord to appoint her as His servant for all time. This is what she sings and prays for in the following song:

स्याम ! म्हाने चाकर राखो जी , गिरधारीलाल! चाकर राखोजी ॥ ० ॥

चाकर रेहसूं बाग लगासूं, नित उठ दर्शन पासू । वृंदावन की कुंज गलिन में, गोविंद लीला गासूं ॥ १ ॥

चाकरी में दर्शन पाऊं, सुमिरन पाऊं खरची । भाव भगति जागीरी पाऊं, तीनू बातां सरसी ॥ २ ॥

मोर मुगट पीतांबर सोहे गल बैजन्ती माला । वृंदावन में धेनु चरावे, मोहन मुरली वाला ॥ ३ ॥

ऊंचे ऊंचे महल बनाउं, बिच बिच राखूं बारी । सांवरिया के दर्शन पाऊं, पहर कुसुम्मी सारी ॥ ४ ॥

जोगी आया जोग करण कू , तप करने सन्यासी । हरि भजन कू साधु आए वृंदावन के वासी ॥ ५ ॥

मीरा के प्रभु गहिर गंभीरा, हृदय रहो जी धीरा । आधी रात प्रभु दर्शन देहैं, जमुनाजी के तीरा ॥ ६ ॥ (Anand 644,645)

The following is the meaning of the foregoing song:

O Shyam ! Keep me as your servitor ! O Giridhari ! Appoint me as your servant !

Being your servant I will look after your garden, and sing your glory in the lanes of Vrindavan. Serving you, I will receive your darshan, and my expenditure will only be the chanting of your name. Feelings and devotion I will receive as my property, all the three things are full of relish. The peacock plume crown, the yellow coloured Pitambar, and the Vijayanti Mala enhance his beauty; and He grazes his cows in Vrindavan, that attractive player of the Flute. I create high palaces, with windows in between. I get the darshan of the Dark One, wearing a rosy saree. Yogi has come to do yoga and the Sanyasi came to do austerity. The sadhus of Vrindavan came to do the bhajan of Hari. O profound Lord of Meera, stay ever in this heart. The Lord gave me his darshan in the middle of the night on the banks of the Yamuna.

Finally, Meera becomes an incomparable lover of Lord Krishna when she expresses her endless pining for her Beloved Lord in the following song that has become synonymous with Love itself :

हे री मैं तो प्रेम दिवानी मेरो दरद न जाने कोय ॥ ० ॥ सूली ऊपर सेज हमारी सोवन किस विध होय ।

गगन मंडल पर सेज पिया की किस बिध मिलणा होय ॥ १ ॥ घायल की गति घायल जाणै जो कोई घायल होय ।
जौहरी की गति जौहरी जाणै दूजा न जाणै कोय ॥ २ ॥ दरद की मारी बन बन डोलूं बैद मिल्या नहीं कोय ।

मीरा के प्रभु पीर मिटे जद बैद साँवलिया होय ॥ ३ ॥ (185)

O friend ! I am madly in Love and no one knows my pain. I have to recline on a bed of thorns, how do I get any sleep. My Beloved occupies a bed in the celestial regions, how do I meet Him. Only the one who is pierced with the shafts of love knows the pain of the one who is wounded. The jeweller knows the value of a gem and none else. I roam from forest to forest and have failed in finding any physician. O Lord of Meera, my pain will leave me only when the Dark One (Krishna) becomes my Physician.

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