Hit Harivāṃś lived from *circa* 1502 to 1552 AD. Sectarian hagiographers maintain that he was born in Deoband, near Saharanpur, and that instructions given to him by Rādhā in a dream (a device often favoured in hagiology) led him to Vrindaban, where he was to discover a lost image of Krishna as Rādhāvallabh or ‘lover of Rādhā’ and establish it for worship in a shrine. This image, together with the poetry composed by Hit Harivāṃś, became the focus for a new devotional tradition, which came to be known as the Rādhāvallabh Sampradāy.

The distinctive qualities that separate this tradition from such neighbours as the Gauḍīya or ‘Caitanya’ Sampradāy may seem minor when viewed from an external perspective; but the autonomy of the Rādhāvallabhīs is maintained through discrete textual traditions, theological distinctions, particularities of temple worship, and hereditary authority through the blood-line of Hit Harivāṃś. His poetic works are both the theological authority of the sampradāy and the stylistic model for many generations of later poets, most of whom are little known outside the sect’s Braj-based sphere of activity. His descendants, who bear the title or surname ‘Gosvāmī’ indicating their priesthood status, maintain the tradition to this day, and the poetry of Hit Harivāṃś is still sung as the central component of liturgical worship in the temple of Rādhāvallabh and in some smaller satellite shrines. The musical tradition, called *samāj gāyan*, has been studied in detail by musicologist Guy Beck (2011).

Hit Harivāṃś is associated with two like-minded contemporaries – the prolific poet Harirām Vyās, and Haridās, musical guru of Akbar’s court musician Tānsen and allegedly an early practitioner of the musical genre of *dhrupad*. All three poets celebrated the *rasa* of the Rādhā-Krishna theme, eschewing the broader frame of the *Bhāgavata*-derived narratives that featured Krishna’s childhood, his miraculous defeat of demons, his shaming of Indra through the Govardhan-lifting episode, and the like; that is to say, they favoured *nikuṇja līlā*, or ‘bower sport’ of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, over the general *Braj līlā*. Given this shared predilection, Harivaṃś, Haridās and Harirām are characterized as the prime movers in a so-called ‘rasika’ movement; and Braj scholarship, always alert to serendipitous verbal connectivities, dubs this loose affiliation of poets the ‘Hari-trayī’, a trio of Haris.
A Sanskrit praise-poem to Rādhā entitled Rādhāsudhānidhi is ascribed to Hit Harivaṃś, though it is also claimed by the Gauṛīya tradition. His Braj compositions are all in pada metres and constitute two discrete collections: a compilation of 84 verses known originally by the simple descriptive label Caurāsi pad and later by the more formalised title Hit Caurāsi, and a smaller collection of verses called Sphuṭ bānti, ‘miscellanea’. Though the Caurāsi pad quickly became enshrined as a canonical sectarian text (and the subject of several verse and prose commentaries), its textual history does have certain complications: six of the 84 verses appear in modern editions of the Sūraṅga, and two others bear the chap or signature of a poet named ‘Narvāhan’, a disciple of Hit Harivaṃś. The 84 padas are arranged under rāgas whose ‘time’ associations steer the text through the 24-hour period; but the stanzas themselves are not in any clear thematic sequence.

The Caurāsi pad describes the līlā of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, often from the perspective of the sakhī, who both fosters and observes (but refrains from participating in) the love-play of the divine couple. The conceit that Hit Harivaṃś himself presents a sakhī’s viewpoint is elaborated by the commentaries. A favourite narrative device is that in which a sakhī acts as go-between for the two lovers when they are estranged: the sakhī takes descriptions of the pining Kṛṣṇa to the pouting Rādhā, who has rejected him in a fit of jealous anger (mān), and this narrative supplies the logical context in which Kṛṣṇa’s wretchedness and dependance can be lingered over, while Rādhā’s grace is sought simultaneously; both aspects emphasise a key element in Rādhāvallabhī theology — the supremacy of Rādhā. Other poems describe the rāśīlā, following the Bhāgavata Purāṇa version (X.29) in which Kṛṣṇa is accompanied by hosts of gopīs; this earlier version of the narrative, in its failure to reflect the preferred Rādhāvallabhī focus on Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa alone, finds little favour with the sectarian commentators, who downplay it and again assert the primacy of Rādhā in their (often contrived) interpretations of Hit Harivaṃś’s poems.

Hit Harivaṃś has an individual poetic style, very much closer to the Gitagovinda model than are most of his vernacular contemporaries; anyone familiar with that 12th-century Sanskrit poem will recognise echoes of its lyrical wording in Harivaṃś’s fine and very musical verses. His Braj compositions are often, therefore, heavily Sanskritic, and his verses also preserve certain archaic metrical types (indicated in the notes below) whose old syllabic patterns would gradually give way to simpler mātrik structures in the works of his later contemporaries. These formal aspects of the verses, together with the focus on the nikuñj-līlā or ‘bower sport’ of Radha and Kṛṣṇa as their preferred subject, bring a particular interest to the poetry of Hit Harivaṃś.

The whole text is infused with an intense sensuality that grows organically out of the nikuñja setting. The grove or arbour is a place apart, remote from social or familial concerns, and lush with all the exquisite and verdant grace of the natural world. Vines and creepers entwine the flowering trees like languid limbs; sap and honey oozes and drips sweetly in an eternal springtime, while gentle breezes bring coolness and fragrance, and the whole scene is alive with the humming of bees and
the soft cooing of birds. The lush verdure is not just a backdrop for the trysts of the young lovers but also a canopy to veil their love-making in secrecy; and the very plants themselves know their own special role, shading the lovers from prying eyes (except those of the sakhsīs, who have unique access to the sight) but drawing back to make room when Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa choose to roam the lanes. Though the text was much condemned by 19th-century Orientalists for its eroticism, the alleged salaciousness is actually kept at bay by the literary refinement of its composition. A highly Sanskritic tone contrasts with the vernacular of the Braj Bhāṣā base to achieve a balance of the lofty and the homely that is a special feature of the text, achievable neither within the individual contexts of Sanskrit or Braj alone.

FURTHER READING


चौरासी पद

प्रात समे दोऊ रस लंपट
सुरत जुदा जै जुत अति फूल ।

श्रम बारिज घन बिंदु बदन पर
भूषन अंगहि अंग विकृत ॥

कछु रहैौ तिलक सिधशल अलकावलि
बदन कमल मानी अलि भूल ।

हित हरिवंश मदन रूँ पूरी रहे
नैन नैन कटि सिधल दुकृत ॥ ३ ॥ १ ॥

आजु जुवति तेरो बदन आनेद भयों
पिय संगम सूचत सुख चैन ।

आलस बलित बोल सुरंग रूँग कपोल
बिधकित अरुन उनीदे दोढ नैन ॥

हंचिर तिलक लेस किरत कुमुम केस
सिर सीमाँं भूषित मनु तैं न ।

कलाकर उदार साखत कछु न सार
दसन बसन लागत जब देन ॥

काहे कों दुरत भीर पलटे प्रीतम चीर
बस किये स्याम सिखे सत मैन ।

गलित उसि माल सिधल किकिनि जाल
हित हरिवंश लता प्रह सैन ॥ ४ ॥ २ ॥
1 At dawn the two are yet greedy for love,
    rejoicing greatly, triumphant in passion’s fray;
heavy drops of perspiration are on their faces,
    adornments awry on their various limbs.
Little remains of their tilaks; curly locks
    lie loose on lotus faces like wayward bees;
Hit Harivaṃś, steeped in love’s colour
    are their eyes, their words, loose vestments at their waists.

2 Today, young girl, your face filled with bliss
    shows the your joy and ease in union with your lover;
wrapped in lethargy are your words,
    red-tinged your cheeks, languid, reddened and sleepy your two eyes.
Your lovely tilak is but a trace, scattered are the flowers in your hair,
    your hair-parting as though you had not adorned it at all;
Bountiful mine of compassion, you withhold no essence
    when you begin to offer your lips.
Why conceal yourself timidly? You have exchanged clothes with your lover
    and subjugated Śyām, instructing a hundred love-gods;
Wilted is the garland on your chest, loose is your girdle of bells,
    Hit Harivaṃś, in the bed of this house of creepers!

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1 The *pada* describes a ‘morning-after’ scene of *suraṭānt chāvi*, ‘post-coital splendour’.
Metre: 16+15 nāṭrās.
1.1 *jaijuta* – for Sanskrit *jaya-yukta*, ‘possessed of victory’.
1.2 *aṅgahi aṅga* – the repeat suggests a topsy-turvy disarray of limbs and adornments.
1.4 *hita haribāṃśa* – in manuscripts, this *chāp* is regularly preceded by a devout (but unmetrical) *jai śrī*.
1.4 *rāgā rāgī* – the use of *anunāśīka* (vowel nasality rather than a homorganic nasal, ं rather than ़) preserves a short vowel.
2 Metre: 10+10+15 nāṭrās.
2.6 *sikhai* – a contraction of *sikhāi* ‘having instructed’. Rādhā instructs Kāmdev, the god of love, in his own arts.
आजु बन राजत जुगल किशोर ।
नंदनन्दन वृषभाननंदनं उठे उनीदे भोर ॥
डगमगात पण घर टिथिल गति फरसल नष ससि छोर ।
दसन बसन खंडित मखि मंडित गंड तिलक कछु थोर ॥
दूर न कुच करजन के रोके अरुन अलि चोर ।
हित हरिवंश संभार न तन मन सुरत समुद्र झकोर ॥ ३३ ॥ ३ ॥

चलिलि किन मानिनि कुंज कुंदीर ।
तो बिनु कुंवारी कोटि बनिता जुत मधत मदन की पीर ॥
गदाद सुर बिरहाकुल पुलिकि सवत बिलोचन नीर ।
क्वासिस क्वासिस वृषभानुनंदनं बिलपत बिपिन अधीर ॥
बंशी बिसिष व्याल मालाबलि पंचाननन पिक कीर ।
मलयज गरल हुतासन दारुत सापामृग रिपु चोर ॥
हित हरिवंश परसं कोरल चिट चपल चलि पिय तीर ।
सुनि भयभीथ बन मूर सुर सुर सबीर ॥ ३७ ॥ ४ ॥
Today the youthful couple is resplendent in the forest;
Nanda’s son and Vṛṣabhānu’s daughter have risen sleepless at dawn.
Their feet fall faltering with languid gait,
the tips of their moon-shaped nails brushing the ground;
Their lips are torn, their cheeks tinged with kohl,
just a trace of their tilaks remains.
Her locks will not be restrained though her fingers try to hold them –
they are thieving bees for red [lotus-] eyes;
Hit Harivāṃś, neither body nor mind can be held in check
in the squalls of the oceans of passion.

Why not go to the grove-arbour, proud lady?
Without you, maiden, though [he is] joined by myriads of women,
the agony of love assails him.
His voice is choked, his body trembles in the distress of separation,
his eyes run with tears;
“Where are thou? Where art thou, daughter of Vṛṣabhānu?”
laments the unsteady one in the forest.
His flute [seems] an arrow, his garland-strands snakes,
and as lions are cuckoo and parrot;
sandalwood is venom, like fire is the breeze,
like thorny leaves his clothing.
Hit Harivāṃś: the most tender-hearted one went quickly to her lover;
and hearing this he became afraid – he of adamantine body, passion’s hero!
प्रीति की रीति रंगोंतोहे जाने।
जगपि सकल लोक चूडामणि दीन अपनपौ माने॥
जमुना पुलिन निकुंज भवन में मान मानिनी ठाने।
निकट नवीन कोटि कामिनि कूल धीरज मनहि न आने॥
नस्वर नेह चपल मधुकर ज्यों आन आन सौं बाने।
हित हरिवंश चतुर सोइ लालहि छाडि मेड पहचाने॥ ४१ ॥ ५ ॥

आवति श्री वृषभानु दुलारी।
रूप रासि अति चतुर सिरोभनि अंग अंग सुकुमारी॥
प्रथम उबटि मजिन कार सजि नील बदन तन सारी।
गृंधित अलक तिलक कूल सुंदर संदर माण संवारी॥
मृगज समान नैन अंजनजुतु रूचि रेख अनुसारी।
जति लज्ज ललित नसा पर दसनावलि कृत कारी॥
श्रीफल उरज कुरुमी केंदुकी कसि उपर हार छवि न्यारी।
कृष कंटि उदर गैंहर नामिनुज जपन नितंवनि भारी॥
मनो मुनाल भूषण भूषित भुज स्याम अंस पर डारी।
हित हरिवंश जुगल करनी गज विहरत बन पिय प्यारी॥ ४५ ॥ ६ ॥
None but the voluptuary may know the course of love:
though he is the crest-jewel of all the world, he deems himself wretched.
In the bower-house on Yamunā’s bank the haughty one is intent on jealous anger;
groups of countless young women nearby bring no courage to [Kṛṣṇa’s] heart.
Ephemeral is love like the fickle bee’s, given to all and sundry;
Hit Harivaṁś: that person alone is wise, who abandons all bounds and discerns Lāl.

Vṛṣabhānu’s daughter approaches –
a mass of beauty, crest-jewel of the most adept, delicate in every limb.
Firstly she is anointed and bathed, her body adorned with indigo and a sari;
her locks are braided, her tilak sweetly made, her hair-parting decorated with vermilion.
Her dear-like eyes are traced with kohl, following a lovely line;
a jewelled nose-pin is on her lovely nose, her teeth are black-outlined.
Bound in a saffron bodice are her wood-apple breasts,
and on it a necklace of rare splendour;
her waist is slender, deep the navel in her belly, and full are this beauty’s thighs.
As lotus-stems are her ornamented arms, thrown round Śyām’s shoulders;
Hit Harivaṁś: like a pair of elephant and mate, the lover and beloved dally in the wood.

Metre: 16+12 mātrās.
The line does double duty, inviting both Rādhā and the devotee to attend to Kṛṣṇa.

The stanza begins with a narrative verb, āvati, but then withdraws into eulogy until the end. In
its initial position, the foregrounded āvati bears grace and fanfare at Rādhā’s arrival.
śrī – this may refer to the name ‘Vṛṣabhānu’ (Rādhā’s father) or to the patronymic ‘Vṛṣabhana-
nandini’ (Rādhā herself).
prathama – as elsewhere in the text, this word initiates a solah-śūngār – a conventional listing of
a variable sequence of 16 ‘adornments’ of the heroine. The 16 ‘items’ are shown in bold type in
the translation.
नवल नागरि नवल नागर किशोर मिलि
कुंज कोमल कमल दलनि सज्जा रची।

गौर स्यामल अंग सुचिर तापर मिले
सरस मनोलीन मनो मुदल कंचन खची॥

सुरत नींवे निर्वाण हेत पिय माणिनी
प्रिया की भुजनि में कलह मोहन मची।

सुभाग श्रीफल उजव पानि परसत रोष
हुंकार गर्व ह्रण भंग भामिनी लची॥

कोक कोटिक रभस हरिबंश हित
विविध बल मधुरी किमपि नाहिन बची।

प्रणालय रसका ललितादि लोचन चषक
पियत मकरंद सुशि अंतर सची॥ ५०॥ ७॥

देशी माई सुंदरता की सीवाँ।
ब्रज नय तरहि कढंब नागरी निराणि करत अभ्यारेत।
जो कोउ कोटि कलप लगि जीवे रसना कोटिक पावे।
तऊ सुचिर बन्धनारंभ की सोभा कहत न आवे॥

देवलीक भूलोक स्यामल सुनि कवि कुल मति डरिवे।
रहज मधुरी अंग अंग की कहि कासों पटतरिवे॥
हित हरिबंश प्रताप रघु गुरु बय बल स्याम उजागर।
जाकी भूम बिलास बस पशुरिव दिन विरोधकदि रस सागर॥ ५२॥ ८॥
The young skilful lady and the adroit youth together
have fashioned a couch, in the grove, of tender lotus leaves;
Fair and dark, lovely limbs unite thereon,
like bright sapphires set in tender gold.
In the beloved’s arms a charming dispute comes
between lover and proud lady, over the bond of passion’s drawstring;
He touches her gorgeous wood-apple breasts with his hand; an angry
moan, a haughty glare – and the loving lady yields.
With myriad pleasures of impetuous delight, Hit Harivamś,
nothing’s omitted in that sweet loveliness of many kinds;
Lalitā and the others – the loving admirers – through the chalices of their eyes
imbibe that nectar, storing a hoard of delight in their hearts.

See, my friend, the very bounds of beauty!
The band of young Braj damsels bow their heads on seeing the courtly lady.
If someone lived for ten million ages and found ten million tongues,
even then the lustre of that lovely lotus-face could not be expressed.
Hearing of it, poet lineages from heaven, earth and the netherworld fear in their minds;
[for] say, with what is the innate sweetness of her every limb to be compared?
Hit Harivamś: in glory, beauty, attributes, youth and power, Śyām is celebrated:
[yet even that] ocean of joy is ever stilled by her whose eyebrow-play overpowers
him like a [hunted] animal!
देषो माई अबला के बल रासि।
अति गजमत निरंकुश मोहन निरंपि बंधे लट पासि॥
अब ही पंगु भई मन की गति बिनु उद्यम अनायास।
तब के कहा कहिं जब पिय प्रति चाहत भृकृति बलास॥
कच संज्ञन व्याज भुज दरसत मुक्ति बदन बिकास।
हा हरिभंश अनीति रीति हित कत डारा तन त्रास॥ ५३॥ ९॥

हीं बलि जाऊँ नागार स्याम।
ऐसे ही रंग करी निसि बासर बुंदाबिनिन कुटी अभिराम॥
हास बिलास सुरत रस सीवन पशुपति दथ जिवावत काम।
हित हरिभंश लोल लोचन अलि करहु न सफल सुकल सुष धाम॥ ५६॥ १०॥
See, my friend – the mass of strength of this weak woman! 
Mohan, an unrestrained elephant quite wild with desire, 
is ensnared by the noose of her curls when he sees her. 
Already the movement of his mind is lamed, 
without endeavour or effort [from her]; 
What shall I say of the time when she looks toward her lover 
with playfulness in her eyebrow? 
On the pretext of tying up her hair she shows off her arms, 
a smile radiating on her face; 
Ah Harivaṃś! Why does she cast his body into such dread 
in the iniquitous ways of love?

I devote myself to Śyām and the accomplished lady; 
may they revel thus night and day in the lovely hut in the vṛndā forest. 
With a dousing in the essence of amorous joy, 
their mirth and merriment revivifies Kāma, burned by Śiva; 
Hit Harivaṃś, will you not consummate the greedy bees of your eyes 
on this abode of all joys?

Metre: 16+11 mātras.

abalā – ‘powerless one’, ‘a member of the weaker sex’, used ironically here.

Notice the ‘now-and-later’ pairing of the line openings, aba hi…taba ki; Krṣṇa’s plight, already one of extreme dependance on Rādhā, is set to worsen!

paśupati dagdha jivatā kāma – the reference is to Paśupati/Śiva’s burning of Kāmdev when the love-god disturbed his meditation.

nikunja aina – ‘the grove place’: aina (< Sanskrit ayana, ‘path’, as in Rāmāyaṇa) is used pleonastically.
नागरी निकुंज ऐन किशलय दलर रचित सैन
कोक कला कुशल कुवारि अति उदार री।
सुरत रंग अंग अंग हाव भाव भूकुटि भंग
माधुरी तरंग मथत कोटि मार री॥
पुषर मुरनि सुभाव किंकिनी बिचित्र राव
बिरमि बिरमि नाथ वदत वर बिहार री।
लाडिली किशोर राजहंस इंसिनी समाज
सौंचत हरिबंश नैन सुर सार री॥ ७६॥ ११॥

रहसि रहसि मोहन पिय के सँग
लड़ती अति यस लटकति।
सरस सुधंग अंग में नागरि
थेि थेि कहति अवि पद लटकति॥
कोक कला कुल जानि सिरोमि
अभिनय कुटिल भूकुटियनि मटकति।
बिबस भये प्रीतम अति लंपट
निरषि करज नासापुट चटकति॥
गुन गन रसिक्राई चूढामनि
रिझवत पदिक हार पत झटकति।
हित हरिबंश निकट दासी जन
लोचन चषक ससाय गटकति॥ ७९॥ २२॥
11 A bed of the leaves of young shoots is made by the skilful lady in the bower –
the damsel skilled in love’s arts, most liberal;
The joy of love-making in every limb, alluring gestures and crooked eyebrow,
waves of sweetness – [all] stir up a million love-gods.
Amidst the tinkling of sweet anklets and the wondrous sound of waist-bells
“Cease! Cease, my Lord!” she cries in exalted sport.
The darling and the youth are a coupling of royal swan and mate;
Harivaṃśa dampens his eyes with this joyful essence.

12 In secret solitude with her enchanting lover
the darling sways in deep joy;
in the movements of a sweet sudhanga dance the skilful lady
calls “thei! thei!” slapping her feet on the ground.
Recognising a paragon in the clan of love’s arts,
she gestures coquetishly in an act of crooked eyebrows;
seeing her lover become helpless as a greedy bee,
she snaps her fingers under his nose.
[He,] the diadem of royal lovers and a mass of qualities,
delightedly tugs at her gems, garland, clothing;
Hit Harivaṃśa, the nearby servant girls
quaff this spiritous essence through the chalice of their eyes.

11 Metre: 7 x ( / ~ ~ ~ / ) + / − /.
12 Metre: 16+16 mātras.
12.2 sudhanga – ‘a kind of dance’ – the vagueness of commentators and lexicographers
alike shows that the precise meaning of this dance term has been lost. The features
described in poetry suggest a similarity to Kathak, though that specific genre had not
yet emerged in the 16th century.
12.3 jāni – the object of this could be Rādhā herself, or her dance gestures…or Krishna!