

Growse's comment that when, in the 1840s, the government tore down a number of their newly built houses in order to build new roads through Mathurā, the Seths declined to receive any compensation.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 159.

<sup>31</sup> Growse, *Bulandshahr*, p. 56.

<sup>32</sup> Growse, *Mathurā*, pp. 289-90.

<sup>33</sup> Appendix B, *ibid.*, lists all the donors to the church building fund.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 161.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 247. A small grant for this purpose had been obtained previously from the Mahārāj of Jaipur, but before Strachey, the Indian Government had not been willing to pay anything. Ibid., pp. 245-46. On Govindadeva temple, see Margaret H. Case, ed., *Govindadeva: A Dialogue in Stone* (New Delhi: IGNCA, 1995).

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 163.

<sup>37</sup> F. S. Growse, "Mathurā Inscriptions," article dated February 2, 1877, in *Indian Antiquary* 6 (August 1877), 216n.

**BHAKTI VERSUS RITI?  
THE SATSAI OF BIHĀRILĀL**

Rupert Snell

अपने अपने मत लगे बाद मचावत सोर ।  
ज्यों त्यों सबकों सेइबौ एकै नंद किसोर ॥<sup>1</sup>

All argue with a vehemence  
for views so firmly held;  
Many are their ways of praise,  
yet one is Nanda's child.

In typically laconic style, the seventeenth-century Braj poet Bihārīlāl demolishes with this brief couplet the carefully maintained theological distinctiveness of the various *bhakti* traditions, and re-asserts the unity of Kṛṣṇa as the single object of everyone's worship. As a poet writing in the language of Braj, home of so many of the Vaiṣṇava *sampradāyas*, Bihārīlāl must have had ample opportunity to hear the vociferous wrangling which has long flourished in Kṛṣṇa's land; for the theology of devotional love generates, through some paradox, the intense heat of a sectarian rivalry whose psychology is alien to the sublime tenderness of *bhakti* itself. But where the theologian must examine with scholarly meticulousness every religious debate, the poet enjoys a freedom to wander more freely among the delicious ambiguities of *bhakti*, whose imagery is so tantalisingly multi-valent in terms of meaning. Thus Bihārīlāl, free of the agendas of those sectarian writers whose function is the elucidation of belief and doctrine,

has the simpler task of revelling in the wonders of creation, be they manifested in the enchantment of Kṛṣṇa's *līlās* in his earthly home of Braj, or in the diversity of the human spirit, or in the way a curl of hair falls upon a heroine's brow.

Historians of Hindi literature, whose fondness for neatly prescribed categories rivals that of the theologians themselves, like to place Bihārīlāl in the classification known as *Rīti* or 'mannerist' verse. This categorization would seem to separate Bihārīlāl from the brotherhood of so-called *bhakti* poets who have drawn so much inspiration from the land and landscape of Braj. Yet much of Bihārīlāl's poetry speaks directly or indirectly of Kṛṣṇa and of his earthly *līlās*, and his superior poetic gifts allow him to encapsulate as much devotional sentiment within a single couplet as may be found in many a longer poem elsewhere. For that matter, Bihārī fulfills in his poetry the sublime but accommodating definition of devotion offered by his contemporary, John Donne: 'Let man's Soule be a Spheare, and then, in this, /The intelligence that moves, devotion is'<sup>2</sup>. Few poets have so guilelessly or effectively—or with such 'intelligence'—described Kṛṣṇa as has Bihārīlāl in a *dohā* which refers to Kṛṣṇa by an epithet shared by the poet himself:

सीस मुकट कटि काँछनी कर मुरली उर माल ।  
इहि बानिक मो मन बसौ सदा बिहारीलाल ॥३

With crownèd head and girdled waist  
flute in hand, garland on your heart:  
in such a guise as this  
dwell ever in my mind, Bihārīlāl.

Translation sacrifices the musicality of Bihārī's original Braj poem; but the example shows how the poet takes up a conventional image and lends it new life through his craft of words. The three centuries which separate us from Bihārīlāl himself make it hard to assess the precise motivations underlying his various thematic preoccupations; but a close reading of his *Satsaī*, the seven hundred or so couplets that make up his entire output, suggests that expressions of devotional faith meant as much to him as the more numerous verses treating of the beauties of the female form. Despite the very specific nature of some of Bihārī's allusions to the Kṛṣṇa narrative, the imagery of his poetry still manages

to speak directly to us across the years. Bihārī is the representation for his age of the traditions of love poetry inherited from Sanskrit and Prakrit, and the *Satsaī* embodies many conceits and situations taken from those more ancient traditions, dressed for a more modern age in the vernacular language of the seventeenth century; but that poetic inheritance includes also a distinct rhetorical conventionality, in which the individuality of emotion is subordinated to a systematized representation of emotional or narrative categories. As John Brough comments in his discussion of classical Sanskrit love poetry, 'it can be said that Sanskrit love-verses are verses about love, not the verses of a lover'<sup>4</sup>. Bihārī's poems on devotional themes, by contrast, reflect very directly both an inner harmony and a deeply felt personal faith from which that harmony derives. Put another way, while Bihārī's experience of love seems vicarious, his experience of religion speaks from the heart.

Poetic conceits in the *Satsaī* are often based on the literal significance of Vaiṣṇava names: the epithet deconstructed. As elsewhere in the traditions of Braj poetry, the blue-coloured cowherd god, lover of Rādhā and the gopīs, is hardly ever referred to by the name 'Kṛṣṇa', whose rather blunt or harsh quality of sound and image is rejected in favour of a softer synonym such as 'Śyām', or an endearing name such as 'Lāl'; but the numerous Viṣṇu/Kṛṣṇa epithets inherited from the *Purāṇas*, from Jayadeva and from sixteenth-century *bhakti* poets provide an inexhaustible supply of lexical *līlās*, and Bihārīlāl is quick to exploit such opportunities. A typical example is a play on *śyāma*, standing both as epithet of 'dark Kṛṣṇa' and independently as the adjective 'dark':

या अनुरागी चित्त की गति समुझै नहि कोइ ।  
ज्यों ज्यों बूडै स्याम रँग त्यों त्यों उज्जल होइ ॥५

None can understand at all  
this love-lorn mind's sweet plight;  
The more it's steeped in Śyām's dark hue,  
the brighter shines its light.

The translation of this colourful and brilliant couplet is necessarily monochromatic and dull, because the lexical choices available to the Braj poet include sophistications unattainable in English. The noun *gati* indicates a

psychological 'state' of mind, but also alludes to the mind's fickle and unstable quality—the motion of emotion—implicitly contrasted with that mature stillness which understanding, or absorption in God, can bring; meanwhile other senses of *gati* such as 'salvation, *mokṣa*' tug at the coat-tails of the primary meaning. The noun *rāga* (i.e. *raṅga* with *anusvāra* reduced to *anunāsika* for metre in a favourite piece of poetic licence) is famously multivalent, extending beyond the basic meaning of 'colour' to include such senses as joy, play, warmth, love—and is anticipated in this last sense by the adjective *anurāgi* in the first line. The other critical adjective, *ujjala*, is an essential *Satsai* item; it belongs (at least in its *tatsama* form, *ujjala*) to the lexicon of devotional theology, where it indicates the intensity of devotional sentiment attainable through the romantic/erotic mode; by extension, in company with a wide range of nouns and adjectives denoting light and lustre, it is an ingredient in the description of more earthbound physical beauty.

Other *Satsai* verses exploit semantics rather than literal punning. In a couplet which urges the devotee to make connections with Kṛṣṇa at every possible level, the comprehensiveness of the connection is reflected in expressions which lock into Kṛṣṇa's epithets as 'mind's charmer' (Man-mohan), 'Cloud-dark' (Ghaṇśyām), 'Grove-roamer' (Kuñjbiḥārī) and 'Mountain-holder' (Giridhārī) respectively.

मनमोहन सौं मोह करि तू घनस्याम सँभारि ।  
कुंजबिहारी सौं बिहरि गिरिधारी उर धारि ॥६

Be charmed by the Charmer of minds,  
sustain yourself on the Cloud-dark one;  
roam with the Roamer of the groves,  
hold the Mountain-holder in your heart.

This allusion to the holder of Govardhan hill is a reference to one of the most ancient and abiding parts of the Kṛṣṇa narrative. It is one which holds a particular appeal for Bihārīlāl, who frequently chooses this epithet as a descriptive label. One couplet gives a straightforward account of the mountain-lifting episode, stressing the shaming of Indra and thereby proclaiming the superior power of Kṛṣṇa:

प्रलय करन बरखन लगे जु रि जलधर इक साथ ।  
सुरपति गर्ब हरचौ हरखि गिरिधर गिरि धरि हाथ ॥

The clouds as one began to pour  
a rain to dissolve the world;  
the Mountain-holder held the mountain in his hand  
with joy removing Indra's pride.

Only the skillful construction of the verse, with its understated alliteration and economy of word-use, distinguishes this couplet from a hundred such versions of the Govardhan theme. But elsewhere, Bihārīlāl's boisterous imagination cannot resist playing with the idea of the mountain-holder, conflating this ancient puranic narrative with that most archetypal of all *post-puranic* motifs, the beauty of Rādhā, whose appearance nearly causes him to drop the mountain on the very Braj folk whom it was supposed to protect:

डिगत पानि डिगलात गिरि लखि सब ब्रज बेहाल ।  
कंप किसोरी दरस कै खरे लजाने लाल ॥८

His shaking hand the mountain shakes—  
the sight makes Braj afraid;  
Young Lāl's abashed at trembling so  
on seeing that sweet maid!

Another epithet to be taken at its face value is 'Tribhaṅgīlāl', the name which refers to 'thrice-bent' Kṛṣṇa's jaunty pose as flute-player with crooked knee, supply bent waist and angled neck. The conceit here is an extension of character into physical form: the idea is that a rakish character such as Kṛṣṇa's could not be accommodated in a *sarala hiya*, a 'straightforward' heart, and the verse praises the *bāḱāpan* or arch rakishness of Kṛṣṇa while simultaneously confessing the deviousness of the devotee.

करी कुबत जग कुटिलता तजौं न दीनदयाल ।  
दुखी होहुगे सरल हिय बसत त्रिभंगी लाल ॥ ६६३ ॥९

Though the world reprove, Dīndayāl,  
I'll not forsake my devious ways;  
you'd suffer, dwelling in a straightened heart,  
O Lord of the Three Curves.

Bihārīlāl's poetic skills are put to good use in a large number of descriptive poems, conventional in theme but characterised by that vital spark of originality which sets his verse apart from his contemporaries and imitators. In a culture where individual artistry is often said to be subordinate to the service of tradition, there is a tendency to play down the very particular nature of personal artistic accomplishment; but the *Satsai* poems have a highly distinctive quality which makes them the model for later generations of imitators. The most satisfying aspect of Bihārī's craft is his ability to integrate sense, image and sound in perfect harmony. His use of alliteration is not random but forms part of the structural mechanics of the verse, phonetic connections underpinning semantic logic; in the following example the /t/ and /ati/ alliteration running through the four quarters of the *dohā* supports the stated message of Kṛṣṇa's universality:

मोहन मूरति स्याम की अति अद्भुत गति जोइ ।  
बसत सुचित अंतर तऊ प्रतिबिंबित जग होइ ॥<sup>1</sup> 0

See the wondrous way of Śyām's enchanting image:  
It dwells within the heart, yet shines throughout the world.

The imagery of light, reflected through the word *pratibimbita*, runs throughout the *Satsai* as expressive of the effulgence of divinity in creation, as noted earlier in the *ujjala* example; significantly, it reflects not only the otherwise ineffable quality of God, but also the sublime beauty of the *nāyikā*—or indeed of Kṛṣṇa—with little distinction being made between contexts which a crude taxonomy might designate as 'sacred' and 'profane' respectively. We are again led to feel that Bihārīlāl has an integrity of vision in which these two apparent opposites are both accommodated and in which any contextual conflict is resolved. Bihārīlāl is no philosopher, and is surely concerned more with the exigencies of poetic form than with questions of theology or ontology; yet many a couplet shows a harmony of vision which allows him to commute comfortably between devotional and worldly contexts. The idea that the phenomenal world is nothing more (or less?) than a reflection of a higher divine reality is itself intimated by the following *sorṭhā*:

में समझ्यौ निरधार यह जग काचौ काच सौ ।  
एकै रूप अपार प्रतिबिंबित लखियत जहाँ ॥<sup>1</sup> 1

I've found for sure,  
this world is void like glass;  
One boundless form  
is seen reflected there.

The idea of the reflection (or refraction) of ultimate reality through the illusory world is hardly original to Bihārīlāl; but this *sorṭhā*, with the curious but striking collocation of *kāca* with *kācau* (Hindi: *kāc*, *kaccā* respectively) is very much his own creation. Its mood of confident piety communicates a very endearing aspect of Bihārīlāl's poetic nature: for if it is possible to perceive something of the character of a person who lived three centuries ago and of whom virtually no biographical details are known, one might hazard that Bihārīlāl himself felt a strong sense of *bhakti* and of the living reality of God. Despite the restless agility of his poetic imagination, Bihārīlāl seems to have had within him a certain stillness, a firm grounding in a faith which went beyond the external observances of ritualistic religion. His piety is the more affective for being understated, and the more aesthetically productive for being free of any ambition to instruct, sermonise, or convert to a particular point of view. He is nonetheless capable of urging his fellow man (or his own errant soul) to beware the limitations of external religious practice, echoing Kabir:

जपमाला छापे तिलक सरै न एकौ काम ।  
मन काचै नाचै बृथा साँचै राचै राम ॥<sup>1</sup> 2

Through rosaries and pious show  
is nothing gained;  
In vain the mean heart dances—  
In truth the Lord delights.

A Kabirean tone is again heard in a couplet which admonishes the soul distracted by worldliness; but here the playful juxtapositioning of two distinct senses of the verb stem *bhaj-* bears Bihārī's unmistakable stamp, demonstrating his ability to use in a pious setting the fine edge of a literary rhetoric that has been honed on descriptions of hard-breasted heroines:

भजन कहुँ तातें भजौ भजौ न एकै बार ।  
दूर भजन जातें कहुँ सो तें भजौ गँवार ॥<sup>1</sup> 3

That which was to be abjured  
 you, foolish mind, adored;  
 not once did you adore that one  
 from which you fled, abhorred.

The medium is inseparable from the message here, and consequently the word-play resists translation. Similar problems arise in other such couplets, as where Bihārīlāl speaks of the divine gift of grace being like the winding of a string around a wooden spinning-top, investing an inanimate object with life (*dohā* 675): here the poetic exploitation of the word *guna* (*guṇa*) as meaning both 'string' and 'quality' locks into semantic realms quite inaccessible through English. Implicit in literary sophistications such as these is an intimation of the interconnectedness of things in the world: the fact that a pair of syllables can encompass senses from both mundane and metaphysical contexts again hints at that sense of integrity and unity referred to earlier. It would be going to far to describe Bihārīlāl as a metaphysical poet, for his prime concern remains the manipulation of literary and linguistic effects in the service of poetry: but bearing in mind the Indian harnessing of aesthetics in the service of the spiritual and religious, it is important not to overlook this orientation within Bihārīlāl's verses.

One particular religious-cum-devotional context which Bihārīlāl likes to develop as a literary conceit is that of the challenge to Kṛṣṇa/Viṣṇu's reputation as saviour. The idea is well-known, having been adopted by earlier poets such as Sūr and Tulsī—one thinks in particular of examples from *Vinaya-patrikā*; but the combination of an underlying piety with an impertinent, almost mocking tone is particularly well matched to Bihārīlāl's gift for poetic narrative. The starting-point for this conceit is the straightforward recognition of Kṛṣṇa as saviour:

कोऊ कोटिक संग्रही कोऊ लाख हजार ।  
 मो संपति जदुपति सदा बिपति-बिदारनहार ॥<sup>1</sup> 4

Some may amass a million, some many thousands gain;  
 My wealth's my lord the Yādav king, who e'er removes all pain.

The next logical stage in the progression of the poet's attitude towards God is that request, made by so many poets, for the boon of closeness to their Lord. Given Bihārīlāl's position as a poet of the court of Mirza Raja

Jaisingh (who ruled the Kachhava kingdom at Amber from 1621-1667) it is unsurprising to find him turning to a courtly metaphor here; perhaps when this couplet was first composed it bore some now-lost relevance to Bihārīlāl's own position in the employment of his royal patron. Whatever may be the case, *darabāra* chimes neatly enough with *hajāra*, a favourite rhyme-word seen in the previous couplet and now reoccurring here (and five times in this line-end position elsewhere in the text<sup>15</sup>).

हरि कीजति तुम सों यहै बिनती बार हजार ।  
 जिहिं तिहिं भौंति डरचौ रहौ परचौ रहौ दरबार ॥<sup>1</sup> 6

A thousand times, Hari, I make this supplication:  
 however it may be, let me languish in your court.

A conventional submissiveness is on this occasion interpreted by such commentators as Ratnākar as expressing the devotee's preference for a sharing of Kṛṣṇa's presence over the more abstract rewards of the emancipation of the soul, in which *bhakti* itself becomes dissolved with the loss of personality<sup>17</sup>. Bihārīlāl gives little hint of such a specific reading, preferring always to maintain the open-endedness of his allusions (and hence, incidentally, to stay beyond the reach of the commentator's somewhat philistine insistence on distinct and separate interpretations of his poetry). Elsewhere in a rightly famous *sorṭhā*, Bihārīlāl goes out of his way to stress his willing acceptance of either fate: on the one hand the lofty reward of salvation, on the other the remaining close to Kṛṣṇa—actually literally *bound* to him, as expressed in another play on the two senses of *guna* (*guṇa*) as both 'string' and 'quality'.

मोहू दीजै मोख ज्याँ अनेक अधमनि दियौ ।  
 जौ बाँधे ही तोख तौ बाँधौ अपने गुननि ॥<sup>1</sup> 8

Grant me salvation, as you have to many a wretch;  
 or if only binding appeals, bind me in the strands of your qualities.

The passive voice of *kījati tuma saṭi yahai binati* in the previous couplet reflects a deferential and circumspect attitude, appropriate to a humble demonstration of *vinaya*; a similarly humble approach is seen in this second couplet, where the poet bows in acceptance of Kṛṣṇa's will. No sar-

donic tone disturbs the still waters of these sincere expressions of faith. But quickly enough the celebration of trust in God's ability and willingness to protect his devotee is turned into a more questioning attitude; it is not difficult to imagine that adverse circumstances of the real world might have prompted the poet to inject a cynical note into his supplications. The attitude is a challenging one: the poet presents himself as too deeply sinful to be saved, implying that if God were to succeed in bestowing salvation in such a difficult case as that provided by this sinner's catalogue of dark deeds, then his reputation would be assured.

ज्यों हूँहीं त्यों होंहूँगी हों हरि अपनी चाल ।  
हठ न करौ अति कठिन है मो तारिबौ गोपाल ॥ ६६२ ॥<sup>1 9</sup>

I shall be as I will be, Hari,  
following my own path;  
Gopāl, do not persist,  
for saving *me* is the hardest task.

As if stressing the hopelessness of the case, Bihārī substitutes the initial epithet 'Hari'—emphasising the universal form of Viṣṇu, who has an impressive track-record of bestowing salvation—with a familiar, almost patronising vocative reference to 'Gopāl', an aspect of Kṛṣṇa associated more with the bucolic pleasures of Braj than with the salvation department. (The inexorable, self-willed determination of the narrative voice to pursue its own course is stressed by Bihārī's use of two distinct future tense forms in *jaū hvaihaū tyāū haūhugau*—dimly to be reflected by a shift between English auxiliaries in 'I shall be as I will be'.) But if Kṛṣṇa-Viṣṇu has a reputation to uphold as saviour, then the received traditions of this particular conceit require the poet to stress equally the credentials of his own decadent status quo:

मोहि तुम्हें बाढी बहस को जीतै जदुराज ।  
अपने अपने बिरद की दुहूँ निबाहनि लाज ॥<sup>2 0</sup>

The quarrel's on between us,  
O king, who'll win the game?  
Each has his honour to preserve,  
so who'll protect his name?

The final stage in the progressive conceit based on the salvific power of the deity is an outright accusation to God that he has simply abandoned his reputation as saviour. In an increasingly wry tone, the poet accuses his deity of neglecting the aspirant devotee, and of resting on the laurels of a few miscellaneous acts of salvation carried out in the puranic times of long ago:

नीकी दई अनाकनी फीकी परी गुहारि ।  
मनौ तज्यौ तारन बिरद बारिक बारन तारि ॥<sup>2 1</sup>

My cry for help rang hollow—  
you turned away your face!  
You saved a single elephant  
then *saved* your 'saving' grace.

The puranic elephant is one of a handful of characters or cyphers, mostly of indifferent morality, on whose salvation rests Viṣṇu's reputation as saviour; it was on the basis of these acts of grace that Kṛṣṇa-Viṣṇu earned such epithets as *Dinabandhu* 'friend of the poor', *Tāraka* 'saviour'; but these epithets are themselves challenged by Bihārīlāl in a disparaging tone surprising even in the context of a challenge to God's reputation as saviour:

बंधु भये का दीन के, को तार्यौ रघुराय ।  
तूठे तूठे फिरत ही झूठे बिरद कहाय ॥<sup>2 2</sup>

Which pauper did you befriend, whom did you save, Raghu lord?  
You stroll around self-satisfied, boasting of unearned glory.

The renouncing by God of his habit of grace can even be attributed to a cause beyond even his control, namely the malign effect of the Kaliyuga in which we now live. Or at least, the imputation of such reasons can be used as a way of shaming him into action:

समै-पलट पलटै प्रकृति, को न तजै निज चाल ।  
भौ अकरन कश्नाकरौ यह कपूत कलिकाल ॥<sup>2 3</sup>

Natures change with changing times;  
who forfeits not his ways?  
our Gracious lord has lost his grace  
these faithless, evil days.

The application of the adjective *kapūta* brings consternation among the commentators, since its literal sense 'bad son' normally implies a human reference; but here the implication seems to be that the present Kali age, in which prayers for help fall on deaf ears, is an unworthy successor to earlier *yugas* (and in this sense 'faithless') when devotion was rewarded with greater fairness and supplication was a more reliable activity.

Commentators on the text are much given to contextualising each individual, free-standing couplet in terms of who is saying what to whom, as though this were a clearcut matter; but it is in the nature of Bihārīlāl's poetry to defy such simplistic categorisations, and some couplets seem to bear a subtext which may have had a closely contemporary relevance to the poet himself in the circumstances of his own life; it is easy to imagine that the following pair of couplets, for example, with their 'way-of-the-world' allusions, might well have been directed at a forgetful patron or a less-than-generous benefactor:

थोरेई गुन रीझते बिसराई वह बानि ।  
तुमहूँ कान्ह मनौ भये आज काल के दानि ॥२ ४

Once, Kānha, you were appeased with the slightest virtue;  
now, it seems, you've forgotten these old ways—  
you're a giver from *our* mean times.

कब कौ टेरत दीन रट होत न स्याम सहाय ।  
तुमहूँ लागी जगतगुरु जगनायक जग बाय ॥२ ५

So long I've cried my helpless plea, yet Śyām you help me not;  
though Lord and Master of the World, you too are swayed by the  
worlds' winds.

Although this particular conceit of appealing to Kṛṣṇa's conscience appears many times in the text, it would be wrong to give an impression of a negative tone in describing Bihārī's overall treatment of Kṛṣṇa themes. For the most part, the mood is celebratory and eulogistic, and follows various standard themes of the Kṛṣṇa narrative. General admonitions to feel devotion to Kṛṣṇa are paralleled by poetic expressions of the feelings that such devotion inspires, expressed with Bihārī's usual grace:

तौ लगि या मन सदन में हरि आवहिं किहिं बाट ।  
निपटि बिकत जब लगि जुटे खुटहि न कपट कपाट ॥२ ६

How shall Hari gain entry to the dwelling of this heart  
'till the tight-locked door of deceit shall open wide?

Bihārī is sufficiently the master of his language to avoid cumbersome syntax when it contributes little to his cause: so we can be sure in this context that his use of the prolix relative-correlative construction *tau lagi... jaba lagi* is intended deliberately to stress the inexorability of cause and effect—that is, Hari's admission to the human heart is wholly dependent on the gate of falsehood being opened, requiring an appropriate sincerity in the human soul. The idea of this door being a barrier to his admission is stressed twofold by the formal characteristics of the verse: once by alliteration, where the *nature* of the barrier (*kapāṭa*) is defined as falsehood (*kaṭa*); and once by rhyme, where the *effect* of the barrier (*kapāṭa*) is to close the entranceway (*bāṭa*).

An apprehension of distance from Kṛṣṇa, whether or not he is locked out by faults on the part of the devotee, is an experience of pain, and in this suffering lies the seed of *viraha*, the restless lovesickness of the soul. It is only a small step from the almost theological and quite dry imagery of the previous poem to the more fevered manifestation of love for Kṛṣṇa that is found in the next:

सोवत जागत सपन बस रस रिस चैन कुचैन ।  
सुरति स्याम घन की सुरति बिसरेहू बिसरै न ॥२ ७

Sleeping or waking, in dreams, joy, anger, peace and turmoil  
the memory of Śyām's lovemaking can never leave my heart.

The sequential alliteration of this verse embroiders a strand of sibilants with a succession of other musical collocations, and each line ends with its own mirrored form: the first line has *kucaina* abutting its own antonym *caina*<sup>28</sup>, while the second line operates the idiomatic *bisarehū bisarai na* on the basis of an Indo-Aryan rarity, the use of the same verb in both intransitive and transitive applications. There is also, of course, the conventional play on *surati* as a semi-tatsama (deriving from *smṛti*) on the one hand and representing tatsama *su-rati* on the other. These are some of the linguistic devices which help add grace to an otherwise unremarkable lament from the gopī's persona, or from the poet's—or for that matter from yours or mine. The main issue here is the feeling of love for Kṛṣṇa, and the identity of other protagonists is secondary. Occasionally, of course, Rādhā is men-

tioned; but not so regularly that this text could be aligned with the so-called *rasika* tradition wherein Rādhā shares the moonlight with Kṛṣṇa to the exclusion of the gopis, who find themselves correspondingly downgraded into the secondary role of *sakhī*-confidantes.

Rādhā's appearance on the scene usually implies a *nikuñja-vihāra* context, borrowed from the *Gītāgovinda* and its derivative vernacular traditions, which are also the source of such conceits as the lovers' exchange of clothes. In an extreme and somewhat comically decadent variation of this motif, the exchange of clothes—with its implicit union of identity between lover and beloved—is cancelled out by a simultaneous exchange of Rādhā and Hari's roles in the sexual inversion known as *viparīti ratī* (the one context where female superiority is for once assured!): with male-clad (but female) Rādhā in the upper position making love to the female-clad (but male) Hari underneath:

राधा हरि हरि राधिका बनि आये संकेत ।  
दंपति रति बिपरीति सुख सहज सुरतहू लेत ॥२९

She as he and he as she  
were kitted for the tryst;  
Though lying in inverted roles,  
in 'normal' mode they kissed.

A more conventional eulogy describes Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa's eternal union as *yugala kiśora*, the youthful pair, as being too much for a single pair (*yugala*) of eyes to absorb:

नितिप्रति एकत ही रहत बैस बरन मन एक ।  
चहियत युगल किसोर लखि लोचन युगल अनेक ॥३०

Together they remain as one  
in hue, in heart, in age;  
a thousand pairs of eyes this pair  
would endlessly engage.

The concomitant of this eternal unity is the experience of separation, or simply the very fear of it, and Bihārī has verses to express these feelings from both Kṛṣṇa's perspective and that of a beloved who may, if one is so inclined, be perceived as Rādhā. Kṛṣṇa's state of mind is easily

demolished by a single look from his beloved, and the 'verbal icon' is described not with its usual iconographic complement of flute, yellow sash, crown, and 'forest garland', but rather *without* them:

कहा लडैते दृग करे परे लाल बेहाल ।  
कहूँ मुरली, कहूँ पीत पट, कहूँ मुकुट बनमाल ॥३१

What fearsome gaze you turn on him!  
Poor Lāl is quite cast down:  
Here lies his flute and garland; there  
his yellow sash and crown.

Kṛṣṇa's state of mind is suggested, through synecdoche, by the physical disarray of his attributes; and Bihārī knows that the most effective way of portraying his dislocated state is to make the second line of the couplet a bare list, verbless and terse (assisted metrically by a convenient flexibility of vowel length: *kahū...kahū...kahū*). Rādhā's state in separation from Kṛṣṇa similarly inspires one of Bihārī's most touching cameos, a frozen moment in time remarkable for the delicacy of its imagery:

स्याम सुरति करि राधिका तकति तरनिजा तीर ।  
अँसुवनि करति तरोस कौ छिनेक खरौँही नीर ॥३२

Remembering Śyām, Rādhikā  
stares at the Yamunā shore;  
and with her tears  
the water at the bank  
turns salty for a moment.

The grace of this poem lies in its simultaneous hyperbole and realistic restraint: for the river to turn salty with tears is as hyperbolic a conceit as one might hope to find, but on the other hand the salification is only at the bank, and is only momentary.<sup>33</sup> Rādhā's memories on the bank of the Yamunā usher in one final element of Bihārī's devotional world, namely the landscape of Braj itself:

नाचि अचानक ही उठे बिन पावस बन मोर ।  
जानति हौं नंदित करी यह दिस नंदकिसोर ॥३४



When a peacock, out of season,  
amidst the woodland danced  
I knew dear Nanda's boy had now  
this neighbourhood entranced.

The effect of Kṛṣṇa's presence is felt by the landscape itself, and by all those in it; and this pastoral world is the setting not only for Kṛṣṇa's *līlās*, but also for the countless contexts of love and longing which constitute the majority themes of this *Satsai*. In many respects Bihārī's is a 'medieval' reflection of such ancient models as the great Prakrit *Satsai*, the so-called *Gāthāsaptasāli* attributed to Hāla and dating from perhaps the second century A.D.<sup>35</sup>; but a novel element introduced by Bihārī is that of the Braj context, so characteristic of the new cultural agenda of northern India in the period following the sixteenth-century 're-establishment' of Braj as a centre of Vaiṣṇava cultic and pilgrimage activity. In terms of Indian aesthetic theory, the *dhvani* of the *Satsai* is a resonance of Kṛṣṇa; and even when he himself is not mentioned, the perception of many *Satsai* readers will be that he is very much present by implication, a kind of divine subtext. Such a traditional reading negates the validity of any distinction between *bhakti* and *riti*; for whatever Bihārī's own intentions and priorities may have been in respect of the themes of his text, he long ago lost control of the interpretation of his own verses.

The fact that Braj has become, over the last half millenium, a microcosm of *bhakti*, owes a great deal to the accessibility of the devotional imagery of the Kṛṣṇa narrative. Categories based on this or that theological distinction may be argued over—if an Anglo-Vaiṣṇava metaphor may be permitted—'till the cows come home'; but no categories can isolate or contain the overflowing spirit of love in *all* its manifestations, including both the sacred and the profane, which run through the *Satsai* of Bihārīlāl, making an unrivalled contribution to the perpetuity of Braj culture.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>*Dohā* 686 from Lallūji Lāl (ed.) *Bihārī-satsai* (Varanasi: 1977), in a new edition edited by Sudhākar Pāṇḍey based on the Lallūji Lāl and G.A. Grierson text *The Satsaiya of Bihari* (Calcutta: 1896), this latter being itself based on Shree Luloo Lal Kuvī, *The Sutsuya of Biharee, with a commentary entitled The Lala Chundrika*, (Calcutta

1819). Some nominal compounds (such as the epithets in *dohā* 678) printed as separate words in Pāṇḍey's edition have been recomposed in the quoted examples given in this paper.

<sup>2</sup>Anthony Low, *Love's architecture: devotional modes in seventeenth-century English poetry* (New York: 1978), p.7.

<sup>3</sup>Sudhākar Pāṇḍey (ed.), *op cit.*, *dohā* 2.

<sup>4</sup>John Brough (trans.), *Poems from the Sanskrit* (Harmondsworth 1968), p. 40.

<sup>5</sup>Sudhākar Pāṇḍey (ed.), *op cit.*, *dohā* 665.

<sup>6</sup>*Op cit.*, *dohā* 678.

<sup>7</sup>*Op cit.*, *dohā* 662.

<sup>8</sup>*Op cit.*, *dohā* 661.

<sup>9</sup>*Op cit.*, *dohā* 693.

<sup>10</sup>*Op cit.*, *dohā* 664.

<sup>11</sup>*Op cit.*, *sorṭhā* 666.

<sup>12</sup>*Op cit.*, *dohā* 669.

<sup>13</sup>*Op cit.*, *dohā* 671.

<sup>14</sup>*Op cit.*, *dohā* 667.

<sup>15</sup>Sudhākar Pāṇḍey (ed.), *op cit.*, stanzas 151, 466, 527, 609, 626. It is noteworthy that each of the seven occurrences of *hajāra* is as a rhyme-word.

<sup>16</sup>*Op cit.*, *dohā* 697.

<sup>17</sup>Jagannāthdās 'Ratnākar', *Bihārī-ratnākar*, 5th new edn. (Varanasi 1969), commentary to stanza 241.

<sup>18</sup>Sudhākar Pāṇḍey (ed.), *op cit.*, *sorṭhā* 701.

<sup>19</sup>*Op cit.*, *dohā* 692.

<sup>20</sup>*Op cit.*, *dohā* 694.

<sup>21</sup>*Op cit.*, *dohā* 681.

<sup>22</sup>*Op cit.*, *dohā* 689.

<sup>23</sup>*Op cit.*, *dohā* 695.

<sup>24</sup>*Op cit.*, *dohā* 690.

<sup>25</sup>*Op cit.*, dohā 691.

<sup>26</sup>*Op cit.*, dohā 679.

<sup>27</sup>*Op cit.*, dohā 513.

<sup>28</sup>Note that the etymology of *caina* is sufficiently obscure to support either the Persian suffix *be-* or the Sanskrit suffix *ku-*; the matter appears now to have been resolved by R.S. McGregor, who posits an etymological connection with the Sanskrit verb *cakati* (*The Oxford Hindi-English dictionary* (Oxford 1993), p. 329).

<sup>29</sup>Sudhākar Pāṇḍey (ed.), *op cit.*, dohā 245.

<sup>30</sup>*Op cit.*, dohā 9.

<sup>31</sup>*Op cit.*, dohā 227.

<sup>32</sup>*Op cit.*, dohā 656.

<sup>33</sup>For semi-tatsama *chīneka*, the Ratnakar edition (*op.cit.*, stanza 292) has the alliterative—and metrically preferrable—tadbhava *khinaku*.

<sup>34</sup>Sudhākar Pāṇḍey (ed.), *op cit.*, dohā 407.

<sup>35</sup>Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, *The absent traveller: Prākṛit love poetry from the Gāthāsaptasatī of Śātavāhana Hāla* (Delhi 1991), p.ix.

## ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

**R. S. McGregor** is reader in Hindi and professor in the Oriental Studies Department at the University of Cambridge. A frequent contributor to academic journals, Dr. McGregor writes on various aspects of early and modern Hindi language and literature. His books include *The Round Dance of Krishna, and Uddhav's Message* (London: 1973); *Hindi-English Dictionary* (Oxford: 1993); and *Outline of Hindi Grammar* (3rd ed., Revised and Enlarged, w/cassettes, Oxford: 1995).

**John Stratton Hawley** is Professor and Chair of the Department of Religion at Barnard College, and he is also the Director of the Southern Asian Institute at Columbia University. The author of numerous books, including *At Play with Krishna: Pilgrimage Dramas from Brindavan* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981); *Krishna, the Butter Thief* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983); and *Sūr Dās: Poet, Singer, Saint* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1984), Dr. Hawley is considered an authority on Krishna-worship and Braj culture.

**Peter Manuel**, author of *Thumri in Historical and Stylistic Perspectives* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1990) and *Cassette Culture: Popular Music and Technology in North India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), is Associate Professor at John Jay College and the CUNY Graduate Center. He frequently contributes to academic journals and is considered an expert on various forms of musical expression, particularly those of North India and Cuba.

**Richard Widdess** is Senior Lecturer in Ethnomusicology with reference to South Asia, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. He conducts research into the history and structures of music in South Asia, with special interests in the early history of *rāga*, Indian musical notations, the dhrupad traditions of North Indian classical music, and Newar Buddhist music.