

The Teachings of Bhagat Raidas

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Part III@

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[Emphasis added]

4.1 The Guru

In Raidas, as in other Sants, the role of the guru is vital to the spiritual development of the devotee. In what was essentially an oral tradition it was through the guru that traditional teachings were handed down and the devotee was allowed access to any hidden teachings known only to the initiated¹. The guru is often referred to in Sant literature as the Satguru, the True Guru. However, Raidas makes little use of this term, preferring generally to refer to the guru simply as guru². When he speaks of the guru, he is not referring to a human being, but to the divine guru. For him the guru is God and the inner manifestation of God as guide: "I followed a guru, I need not follow him again" (62.1). Two main conceptions of the guru, as God and guide, are well illustrated by two references to the Satguru.

Madhav is the Satguru,

all the people of the world are his disciples.

Now we are separated and reunion is hard to attain. (80.2)

Through the wisdom of the Satguru

The Sants know the God of the gods. (96.1)

In relation to the world, the macrocosm, god is conceived of as the Satguru, the True Preceptor of all the world. In the microcosm of man, the Guru is conceived of as the inner guide, the expression of God in man. In Kabir and Nanak the notion of the *sabda*, the word of God, is seen as the revelation of God within the soul, through which the truth is known and liberation attained³. For Raidas it is however the *vacan*, the 'speech, utterance, or promise' of the guru which is invested with the quality of absolute truth, and through which the soul gains release from *sasar*:

Raidas says, the *vacans* of the guru cut the snare of birth. (67.3, variant in Ms A)

Raidas says, Raghunath, listen to my petition:

Through the grace of the guru have mercy on me. (86.2)

The guru is thus of paramount importance to Raidas⁴. He believes that the experience of meeting the guru is greater than *jap*, chanting, or *tap*, austerities. It is essential to have the guru as guide in order to attain liberation. Only the guru can give the philosopher's stone, which is the experience of union with God:

Raidas, the *udas* servant. True experience

lies not in chanting or austerities,

but in the guru's wisdom.

The devotees' liberator from fear

the supreme treasure. (44.4)

Without the guru as the helmsman,

one drifts and does not reach the shore. (83.3)

The supreme philosopher's stone is given by the guru. (6.6 AG)

4.2 Devotion

Devotion, *bhagati* or *bhakti*, is a fundamental element in the teachings of Raidas, and he often dwells on the need for the devotee to discern what true devotion really is. For him true devotion is not the outward practices which typify the behaviour of seekers of God, but an inner relationship with God. Four *pads* (15-18) take as their theme the clarification of the

nature of true devotion. In *pad* 18 Raidas's view on the nature of devotion is clearly depicted.

(refrain) This is devotion, brothers:

When devotion comes, pride departs.

1 What is the point of singing and dancing,
of performing austerities,
of washing feet,

if one has not recognised the supreme reality?

2 What is the point of shaving one's head,
or performing many vows and pilgrimages,
if the master, slave, devotee and servant
have not recognised the supreme reality?

3 Raidas says, devotion to You is hard to find,
only he whose fortune is great finds it.

Renouncing pride, effacing the sense of self and other,
becoming as an ant, he picks and eats.

The devotional relationship that exists between the soul and God is for Raidas characterised by love. It is the mutual love of the devotee for God and God for the devotee. He openly speaks of his desire for such a mutual love to exist between himself and God:

If You see me and I see You,
there is mutual love.

If You see me and I do not see You,
all awareness is lost. (12.1)

Prem bhagati ('loving devotion', or, 'the devotion of love'; 32.7, 67.1) between the soul and God is as much a tie that binds the beloved to the lover, God to the soul, as it ties the lover to the beloved.

You bound me in the snare of delusion,

I bound You with the rope of love.

You may try to free Yourself,

I have freed myself through worshipping You. (51.2)

The main environment in which devotional religion was practised seems to have been the gathering of devotees sometimes referred to as *satsagas*, the assemblies of the pure. A vivid description of such an as-sembly is given in *pad* 73:

(refrain) On this day I offer myself to You,
to my home came the beloved of Ram.

Courtyard, compound and house have become sanctified,
the servants of Hari sit and sing of His fame.

I perform prostrations and wash their feet,
I offer body, mind and fortune to the devotees.

They tell the tales and consider the meaning,
they pass over causing others to pass over too.

Raidas says, through meeting your innate servant⁵,
the bonds of birth after birth are cut. (73)

It would appear that devotional meetings were sometimes held in homes, rather than temples or sacred sites. Three kinds of activities which took place at these meetings are mentioned. First, singing devotional songs, singing the fame of Hari. Second, honouring of the devotees, which is described as performed through prostrations, washing of the feet and the dedication of mind, body and material offerings. Third, recounting tales and considering

their meaning.

'I believed I was in love and knew the joy of love,
I performed the ninefold ways of devotion', (5.4)

The description of devotion which is most typical of Raidas is found in *pad* 86 (PV), found even in the earliest source, the *F* manuscript, thus representing a form of devotion advocated from a very early period in the Raidas tradition.

(refrain) Let my love for Gopal not decrease!
I have paid a high price,
giving my body in exchange.
I remember You in my mind, I see You with my eyes.
I fill my ears with the virtues of the tales of Hari.
I make my mind a bee and hold Your feet in my heart,
I drink with my tongue the nectar of Ram.
Without the company of the pure, love does not arise,
without love how could there be devotion for You?
Raidas says, Raghunath⁶, listen to my petition:
Through the grace of the guru have mercy on me. (86)

With only one reference to the 'ninefold ways of devotion'⁷ Raidas shows that at some time such a schema became accepted in the traditions that transmitted the Raidas *vani*. However, it is questionable whether the earlier levels in the Raidas tradition also accepted this schema.

4.3 The Destruction of Error (*bhram vidhasan*)

Raidas rejects the orthodox Hindu practice of image worship:

They pluck leaves and perform *puja*:
"He crossed over, causing others to cross".
If the supreme God dwells in the *murti*,
it should float on the water! (49.1)

Here he employs the various levels of the meaning of the verb *tiran-*, 'to cross over, or to float across'. Thus, Raidas sings, how can an image, an inanimate *murti*, be the Liberator? If it could cause men to float over the ocean of *sasar* surely it itself should be able to float on water⁸. For Raidas it is also impossible to find anything in the external world fit to be offered to God:

(refrain) How can I offer worship to Ram?
I cannot find perfect fruits or flowers.
Milk is defiled by the calf at the udder,
flowers are polluted by the bee,
water by the fish.

The serpent has coiled around the sandal-wood,
poison and nectar are mixed together. (39.1,2)

For him the only true way to worship God is through internalised devotion, with the mind itself as the offering to God:

Through the mind alone there is worship,
through the mind alone incense is offered.
Through the mind alone
I serve the essence of *sahaj*. (39.3)

4.4 The Contemplation of the Name, *naam sumiran*

The main technique advocated in the *vani* of Raidas in order to attain union with God is *nam sumiran*, 'the contemplation, remembrance, or recollection of the Name'. This practice is

also highly praised by all Sants, Guru Nanak in particular saw it as the only way to attain union with God. Raidas never uses the term *nam sumiran*, itself but on one occasion he refers to *ram sumiran*. This is in an allegory where the de-lusion of *maya* is compared to the bite of a venomous serpent. Raidas says that *ram sumiran* awakens the soul, just as *nagadamani*, a Himalayan herb, lifts the fever from a snake bite: "Remembering Ram is the true *nagadamani* medicine". (23.4)

He more often refers to *ram japan* the 'chanting or repetition of [the Name] Ram', asserting that the power of chanting Ram is such that it frees the soul from the cycle of transmigration. The fact that the Sants have been liberated through this practice is testimony to its efficacy (76.2). In two instances it is clear that when he refers to 'chanting Ram', he refers to the voiced utterance of the name Ram: "My tongue, chant Ram"⁹! Despite the importance of the *ajapa jap*, 'the unuttered chant', in Sant literature this phrase never occurs in any of the *pads* in this collection, not even in the yogic context of *pad* 62.

4.5 The Yoga of Contemplation of the Word, *surati-sabda-yog*

This *sadhana* involves the subtle channels, *nadis*, conceived of in yogic teachings as existing within the subtle body. Through this practice the *sadhak* attains a state of absorption within which the unstruck sound, the *anahad nad*, is experienced and the union with God is attained within the sphere of the void, the *sunya mandal*. It is a practice which is closely identified with the Naths and is often described in their *vani*s as well as in Rajasthani and Eastern Sant *vani*s. *Pad* 62 in the *vani* of Raidas, contains a complete description of this form of *sadhana*:

(refrain) I meditate upon Banvari,
fixing my mind and breath in the *susumna nadi*.
I chant this chant,
so that I shall need no more to chant again.
I practise this austerity,
so that I shall need no more to practise austerity.
I follow this guru,
so that I shall need no more to follow a guru again.
I die like this,
so that I shall need no more to die again.
I invert the flow of the Ganges,
I make it flow into the Jamuna.
Without water I take my ritual bath,
my eyes are watching the sun.
I meditate on the light,
I reflect on nothing else.
After the soul has left the body,
it enters that abode,
where it is immersed in the unstruck sound,
the transcendent word.
He upon whom He is merciful, really knows.
How can the dumb describe sugar?
My dwelling is in the Sphere of the Void,
that is why, my soul, I remain *udas*.
Raidas says, I meditate on the Stainless --
entering this abode, I need not return again.

The theme of this *pad* is how to meditate upon Banvari. The epithet *banvari*, 'one wearing a

garland of forest-flowers', is normally applied to Krishna and refers to him in his form as the flute playing cowherd of the forests of Braj. The yogic context of the *pad* is firmly established in the refrain where it is said that one should meditate with the mind and breath fixed in the *susumna nadi*, the central subtle vein of the body. The role of the subtle channels in the *sadhana* is explicit in *antara* 2: "I invert the flow of the Ganges, I make it flow into the Jamuna, without water I come and practise meditation (*sayam*)". Here the Ganges is a synonym for the *ida*, and the Jamuna for the *pingala nadi*. The term *sayam* is a yogic term which refers to the last three stages in meditation: *dharana*, fixed concentration, *dhyana*, absorption and *samadhi*, deep trance. The *sadhak* is enjoined to gaze upon the *bib*, the disc of the sun or moon and, by listening to the unstruck sound, attain the state which is described as attaining a dwelling in the *sunya mandal* 'the sphere of emptiness', which is itself a synonym for *samadhi*.

The presence of this *pad* and others containing references to yogic practices¹⁰, in the Rajasthani corpus of the Raidas *vani* raises the important question of why such references to *surati-sabda-yoga* are found in the Rajasthani *vani* of Raidas, but not in the Punjabi tradition of Raidas's *vani*? The answer to this appears to relate to the differing attitudes towards the Naths of Dadu and his followers, and of Nanak and the Sikhs.

5 The Experience

In a number of *pads* Raidas describes the experience of union with God as an antithesis to the state of duality, *dubidhya*, in which the soul usually exists. In the experience of union with God duality is totally dispelled and the devotee and God become one.

5.1 The vision, *darsan*

In the teachings of Raidas *darsan* is seen as one of the goals of devotion, as a confirmation of God's love for the devotee. In *virah pad* 66.3, Raidas speaks in the voice of a *gopi* who is telling of her desire to behold her beloved, from whom she is separated. Raidas stresses how life is unbearable without a vision of God (66.3). In *pad* 35.3 Raidas appeals for a vision of God using the word *didar*, which is a synonym of *darsan*. It is through vision that Raidas believes the illusion of duality can be dispelled:

Madhav! Why does delusion not disappear?

Let the nature of duality be seen. (58.0)

Such a usage is distinct from those in the former *pads* quoted. However, the common element is the notion that it is the vision, of the personified God, or of the true nature of reality, that brings relief from the suffering of life in *sasar*.

5.2 The supreme state, *param-pad*

Param pad (literally: 'The supreme step, footprint, dwelling place, or state'¹¹), is the state in which God dwells. In one instance Raidas describes it as the far shore, the shore that lies beyond the ocean of *sasar*: "Murari is in the supreme state on the far shore, there the self revels in Banvari" (48.2). This supreme state is attained through renouncing both desire and freedom from desire. When this state is attained one realises that there is nothing which exists separate from God:

If you stop yearning after the Supreme State,

Bliss become Reality.

Raidas says, that which you call 'other',

is now the Supreme Reality (*param tat*, 3.4).

5.3 Direct experience, *anubhai*

Anubhai refers to the state in which there is direct experience of union with the supreme spirit, the transpersonal experience¹². Raidas says of this state that it transcends nirvana and the duality of *sasar*: in the *anubhai* state poison and nectar are realised to be the same.

The symbol of 'poison' stands for the sensual pleasures of *sasar*, and the symbol of *amrit* ('the nectar of immortality') stands for the state of nirvana. In the state of *anubhai* he speaks of there being a total union with God in which no perception of the sense of a separate self remains:

Through the grace of the guru experience in the mind,
that poison and nectar shall flow as one.

Raidas says, when you have effaced the sense of self and other,
you shall find that abode. (14.2)

When the state of *anubhai* is attained there is no longer any sense of the separation of anything from God. When the sense of the existence of the self is effaced, then the devotee no longer experiences the phenomenal world but instead has direct experience of oneness with the supreme spirit.

5.4 The concept of *sahaj*

This is the main term which Raidas uses to refer to the supreme state in which duality is dispelled and union with God is attained. In order to understand how Raidas uses this term it is important to see it in its historical context. *Sahaj*, which means literally 'born together', has been an important term since the time of Vajrayana Buddhism towards the end of the first millennium. At that time *sahaj* was envisaged as the state in which all duality had been dispelled. In the *Dohakos* of Saraha *sahaj* is described in this way:

In *sahaj* there is no duality, it is perfect like the sky,
the intuition of this ultimate truth, destroys all
attachment, it shines through the darkness of attachment,
like a full moon in the sky¹³.

The concept of being in the *sahaj* state was also important in the teachings of the Naths. Gorakhnath speaks of meeting God, The Indestructible, through having attained the *sahaj* nature:

God, temple and Kasi are within the fortress of the body,
through the *sahaj* state one meets the Indestructible. (*GB*, p. 116)

Kabir makes numerous references to *sahaj*. For him *sahaj* is the supreme state in *surati-sabda-yog*, in which one attains union with God; it is within the *sahaj* void that one meets the satguru¹⁴ *Sahaj* is difficult to define, for it refers to a state which transcends conventional thought. In his study of the Buddhist Siddhas, Naths and Sants Dasgupta characterises the *sahaj* as the 'non-dual state': "This state of *sahaj* is to be attained through the final arrest of the functions of the mind; this *sahaj* is the state of vacuity and hence is often called the *sunī sahaj*. This *sahaj* is a non-dual state of supreme bliss *sukha* or *mahasukha*"¹⁵. In his study of Guru Nanak McLeod characterises the *sahaj* as "**The ineffable radiance**": "**Of all the terms used by Guru Nanak in his effort to communicate something of the meaning of the experience the most common is *sahaj*, the ineffable radiance beyond the *dasam duar***"¹⁶.

The most succinct modern attempt to characterise the *sahaj* has been made by Guenther in his work on the Buddhist Saint Saraha: "Essentially it refers to the spontaneity and totality of the experience in which the opposites such as transcendence and immanence, subject and object, the noumenal and the phenomenal indivisibly blend"¹⁷.

A definition of *sahaj* directly relevant to Raidas is found in the earliest *tika* on the *Bijak* of Kabir which probably provides the best definition of *sahaj* in the works of the Sants: "Sahaja bliss is freedom from duality, it is untouched by the five senses, in it sensuality and desire are effaced, attributes [*gun*] are destroyed; there is the sense of the One God in the heart: that is what is called *sahaj*"¹⁸.

Raidas refers to *sahaj* on numerous occasions. One term which he utilises is *sahaj sunya*, the *sahaj* 'void'. The term, *sunya*, the 'void' is, like *sahaj*, one which has been important since the time of the Vajrayana Buddhists. It is a symbol for the ultimate reality in both Buddhist and Sant literature.

When Raidas refers to *sahaj sunya*, he refers to a state of mental absorption. He often speaks about this state by using esoteric language which demonstrates the origins of this concept in the yogic traditions:

Its form is like that of a banyan seed,
its expanse spreads throughout the three worlds.
Where it arises, it is absorbed-
it remains hidden in the *sahaj sunya*. (1.3)

Here the reference to being absorbed refers to fixing the attention upon the process of the arising of thoughts in the mind. It is in this process that duality is created and by experiencing how thoughts arise out of nothingness, *sahaj sunya*, the *sadhak* is able to transcend duality. The connection between *sahaj sunya* and the yogic tradition is also suggested by Raidas's reference to the abandonment of the duality of the Hindu God 'Ram' and the Muslim name for God 'Khuda', when in the state of *sahaj sunya*. This indicates that he is aligning himself with the yogic tradition rather than those who call themselves Hindus or Muslims:

First I made a lamp of wisdom,
later I blew out the lamp.

I renounced both in the *sahaj sunya*,
I call on neither Ram nor Khuda. (2.3)

He also speaks of *sahaj sunya* in contexts which are unequivocally yogic and in which *sahaj sunya* is the state attained through *surati-sabda-yog*. In Pad 45 he says that after having gained control over the *idea* and the *pingala*, the sun and the moon, the yogi drinks the nectar of immortality and becomes immortal: -

When sun and moon are face to face,
he who drinks the cup shall never die.
In the *sahaj Sunya* the liquor-still drips,
Raidas drinks the drops falling from the Guru's lips. (45:2,3)

Manuscripts *CJ* substitute for *sahaj Sunya* the phrase *bhavar gupha*, which means 'the cave of the bee' and is a synonym for the sixth *cakra*, the *trikuti sagam*. This suggests that at least in the Nath Siddha tradition, *sahaj sunya* may have been a technical term for both a location in the subtle body and a state attained in *surati-sabda-yog*. With regard to how one should worship God Raidas also mentions *sahaj samadhi*, 'absorption into *saha*' as the *sadhana* through which one can serve God, rather than any form of external ritual worship:

I shall not pluck leaves as offerings to You,
I shall not adore any deity,
In Spontaneous Absorption (*sahaj samadhi*)
I shall just worship Hari. (63.4)

For Raidas the attainment of the state of *sahaj sunya* is to find the true state of being. He equates it with *jivan mukti*, 'liberation while living' a term which refers to the state of attaining enlightenment during life itself (58.4, Ms U)

Another term which Raidas connects with *sahaj* is *sarup* (from Skt. *svarupa*, 'quintessence', or 'inherent form'). The sense of *sahaj sarup*, is something like 'The Quintessence of Spontaneity'; it is both the subject upon which Raidas meditates and that which he worships in his mind:

When the mind is stilled why do you not realise:
the knower knows?
Raidas says, in the bliss of pure discernment,
I contemplate the essence of *sahaj*. (10.3)
Through the mind alone I serve
the essence of *sahaj*. (39.3)

In at least one instance the notion of the saving grace of the Name of God and *sahaj* are also connected. In this context, however, *sahaj* seems to refer to the *sadhana* of *naam sumiran* itself rather than to *surati-sabda-yog*. This suggests that *namsumiran* may be referred to at times as *sahaj*. It is *sahaj* in the sense that it is 'easy, not the result of forced effort', which is another sense in which the word *sahaj* came to be used. In this sense *sahaj* for the practitioners of *naam sumiran* must have had stronger connotations of 'easiness than of 'non-dualness'. However, for those who practiced *surati-sabda-yog*, and knew *sahaj* as a technical term, the sense of 'easy' must have remained subordinated to that of 'non-duality'. Consequently in the following passage *sahaj* could have been understood by some as 'easily' and by other as 'through non-duality':

Countless base souls are saved by the Name's virtue,
the fallen are purified by touching the essence.
Raidas says, singing of the virtue of the sound *ra ra*,
Sants and sadhus easily (*sahaji*) pass over. (47.3)

Raidas also refers to *sahaj* in a *pad* which, through an allegory about Banajaras, speaks of trading in *sahaj* and of the fortune of the Name. This places this *pad* in the context of *naam sumiran* rather than of *surati-sabda-yog*. However, in this instance, the usage of *sahaj* does not suggest simply 'the easy'. Rather, it refers to the *sadhana* of *naam sumiran* itself. Hence *sahaj* can refer both to the particular state of non-duality engendered in *surati-sabda-yog* and to the practice of *naam sumiran*.

Load up the caravan of Hari,
I am a trader of Ram.
I found the fortune of the Name of Ram,
through that I trade in *sahaj*. (78.0)

In this *pad* Raidas speaks of himself as a trader in *sahaj*, demonstrating the importance of the concept of *sahaj* in his teachings. This is because, whether through *naam sumiran* or *surati-sabda-yog*, for Raidas it is by entering into the *sahaj* state that the mind can be conquered and the devotee can attain his goal and finally meet with God:

Going on and on my 'self' tired,
I cannot go on anymore.
I spontaneously met the Master --
He is now before me, says Raidas. (2.7)

[concluded]



References

1. See Vaudeville: 1974. p.136f.
2. Three instances of the use of '*satguru*': 70.3, 80.2, 96.1. The first appears to be in a proverb: 'Whoever arrived riding on two horses at once? The Satguru cries out aloud'.
3. On the concept of *Sabda* see GNSR, p. 191-4.
4. However, the stress placed on the guru is greater in the *AG vani* of Raidas than it is in the *Rajasthani vani*.
5. The term used to denote 'devotee' in *antara* 3 is in Ms *M*: *bhagat*, in Mss *CJIU*: *santa*, and in Ms *H*: *sadha*.

- 6 For the variants readings of *raghunath*, see chapter 6.
- 7 The ninefold ways of devotion are first mentioned in the *Bhagavat Purm*, (7/5/23).
- 8 This *pad* may also be related to the hagiographic episode of the contest of the *salagrams* (see chapter 1, 3.4).
- 9 See 49.4, 67.3 and 76.2 in Ms *U*.
- 10 Cf. 1.4/5, 2.3, 5.3,45, etc.
- 11 The term *param-pad* has been used since Vedic times and is related to the notion of the three steps by which Vishnu creates the universe. Cf. O'Flaherty:1981, p. 226.
- 12 Raidas uses this term comparatively more often than the other Sants mentioned, which suggests it had special significance for him: 8 times in 94 Pads.
In the 94 *pads* of Raidas in the Rajasthani manuscripts it is found in 8 instances. Dadu uses it 17 times in some 2453 *sakhis*, but only once in 443 *pads*; Kabir uses this term three times in all the works attributed to him and Namdev twice (See Callewaert-Op de Beeck:1991).
- 13 ORC, p. 82.
- 14 See Vaudeville:1992, Sakhi 10.7, Pad 13.2.
- 15 ORC, pp. 361-2.
- 16 GNSR, p. 227.
- 17 Guenther: 1973, pp. 9-10.
- 18 Quoted in; Tiwari: 1978, pp. 91-2.