

The Teachings of Bhagat Raidas

W. M. Callewaert & P.G. Friedlander*

Part II@

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[Emphasis added]

For Raidas, man, the individual, or *jiv* in its sense of a 'living being' is composed of a three main elements: the material body (*tan*), the mind (*man*) and the 'soul', which is also generally referred to as the *jiv*. The person as a whole is three times referred to with the phrase *tan man*, 'body and *man*' (9.3, 16.0, 73.2). While the phrase 'soul, body and *man*' (9.3) is often employed to signify the whole of the person, the phrase 'body, *man* and *atma*' is also found (93.3). This indicates that the notion of *jiv*, 'soul' may be regarded as functionally synonymous with *atma*, '*spirit*'.

2.1 The *jiv* and God

The concept of the *jiv* as the soul is similar to, but not identical with, the Judeo-Christian concept of the soul. Barthwal identified three schools of 'Sant' thought on the relationship between the soul and God, which he characterised in Vedantic terms. The first school, represented by Kabir, Dadu, Sundardas and others had views similar to those found in Advaita, in which the *jiv*, or *jivatma*, is believed to be identical with Brahma or *paramatma*. The second school, represented by Nanak and his followers, had beliefs similar to those found in the 'Bhedabheda' doctrine, which holds that the *jiv* is only a portion (*am'sa*) of the totality of God. The third school, the Visistadvaita, represented by Sants such as Shivdayal, held that even in union with God some sense of the separate existence of the soul remained¹. However, Barthwal's approach is inappropriate in the case of Raidas: he accepts a distinction, on a phenomenal level, between the soul and God, akin to the doctrine of Bhedabheda. At an absolute level he describes the identity of soul and God in terms consistent with those of the Advaita school.

The relationship of the soul to God in the *vani* of Raidas is depicted in two distinct ways. In the *vinay*, *virah*, and *cetavani pads* the soul is spoken of as separate from God, whilst in other *pads* it is spoken of as in union with God. The most clear depiction of the first position, the separateness of the soul and God is found in the *pad* in the *vani* of Raidas where the word *am'sa* is found. This is the term used by followers of the Bhedabheda school to describe the *jiv* as a portion, (*am'sa*) of God:

Without eyes they are walking in single file,
Let Your are be given to those souls (*asa*).
Raidas says, without discernment of the truth,
they must all drown together. (74.2)

The *vinay* context provides the rationale for the usage of the term *am'sa*, because *vinays* are entreaties addressed to an externalized transcendent God. It is therefore inherent in the rhetoric of the *vinay pad* that a distinction must be drawn between the soul and God, for otherwise who is there to whom the soul can address its entreaty? **This implied logic of the genre itself also underlies the notion of the soul and God in the *virah pads* of Raidas. In them the longing of the soul to meet with god again demands that the soul and God be regarded as distinct from each other.** The longing of the *jiv* for union with God is said to make it "restless for Your vision" (65.0) and the *jiv* "begins to yearn" (21.0). Clearly the *jiv* is regarded as feeling emotions, just as the individual mind does. It is this

identification of the *jiv* with the individual mind and the sense of 'I', which causes it to perceive itself as separate from God.

How can there be a difference,
Between 'You' and 'I', 'I' and 'You'
Gold and bracelet, water and wave? (34.1)

In this verse Raidas employs two classical similes (*nyayas*) to explain his teaching on the nature of the difference between the *jiv* and God. The similes he uses can be interpreted from an Advaita viewpoint as showing that the *jiv* and God share the same basic nature. The significance of such pairs as 'gold and bracelet' is, according to the ***Chandogya Upanishad*** as follows:

By one nugget of gold all that is made of gold becomes known,
the modification being only a name arising from speech,
while the truth is that it is just gold².

Interpreted in this way the difference between the *jiv* and God, 'You' and 'me' would be a matter only of the modification of the underlying element, just as it is in the case of 'gold' and 'bracelets', for both share the same basic nature. The significance of the second simile, that of 'water and wave' is clarified by another reference to it made by Raidas when he poses the question:

When water's waves are absorbed into the water,
tell me what name shall they be given? (27.4)

The answer, interpreted in the terms of the ***Chandogya Upanishad***, is that the wave has no reality separate from its nature as water. Therefore, there is nothing in reality to which a separate name can be given. Raidas then tells us through this he knows that 'You' and 'I', the *paramatma* and the *jivatma*, have the same nature: "You and I have the same nature" (27.4). In one case in the *vani* of Raidas similes are specifically used to illustrate the nature of the duality of the *jiv* and Brahma:

As with gold and bracelets, thread yarns and cloth,
the delusion of the elephant, rope and snake,
with water and wave, stone and statue –
so is the duality of the soul (*jiv*) and Brahma. (58.1)

There are two types of simile here. The first (gold, yarn) demonstrates that one element manifests in *sâsâr* in diverse forms. The object is a manifestation of an element. This type of simile demonstrates that everything in the phenomenal world is a limited manifestation of God which is the element from which all phenomena manifest. It is a type of simile which is best understood as representing the Bhedabheda viewpoint: there is both identity and difference present in the relationship of the soul to God.

The second category of simile (the elephant, the rope, and the snake) is that in which one real object is mistaken for more than one thing, due to lack of discernment. A traditional explanation of the similar rope and snake simile is 'Even as in a rope, there is the false conception of a snake, so also should the false nature of the *jiv* be understood'³. **The implication of this category of simile is therefore that the lack of discernment causes the delusion that one thing, God, is two things, the soul and God.** This type of simile is advaitic and not reconcilable, at a philosophical level, with the first category of simile given in this verse.

When I exist, You do not,
only You exist and I do not.

A river flows into the waves of the ocean,

only water in water. (57.2)

In this simile the rivers, which are like the *jivs*, are seen by Raidas as phenomenally real, until the mind is freed from its sense of 'I'. It attains the realisation that rivers are only a form of water which in the end merge into another form of water, the ocean. Raidas's view on the nature of the relationship between the soul and god is not the same as that found in Advaita. From an Advaita viewpoint, ornaments and waves have no real existence other than as forms of gold and water, because they are impermanent and parts of illusory *sâsâr*. For Raidas, ornaments and waves are as real, in a phenomenal sense, as the elements from which they are constituted.

Raidas seems to agree with the advaitic view that the soul and God are identical, but his view is closer to that of the Bhedabheda school: the water and the wave are the same in essence but different in manifestation. Raidas also believes that there is total identity of the soul and God, which conflicts with the notion of the soul as only a part of God. In Raidas's case, then, Barthwal's categorization of the Sants into followers of the Advaita or Bhedabheda schools cannot really apply. Raidas's view on the relationship between the soul and God does not fit clearly into the doctrines of any one philosophical school.

2.2 The *man*: (*mn*)

Although the word *man* is often translated as 'mind', the sense of the word *man* is not the same as the western concept of the mind. McLeod has suggested that *man* corresponds in some instances to 'mind', in some to 'heart' and in some to 'soul', but observes that "perhaps the closest we can get is the word 'psyche', but this too is inadequate and liable to mislead"⁴. According to Samkhya philosophy, the *antahkaran*, the inner mental organ, consists of the *buddhi*, intellect, *ahamkar*, ego, and the *manas*, the inner sense. The *manas* is then the sixth internal sense while the five senses, sight, sound, touch, smell and taste are the external senses⁵. Likewise in Vedanta the *antahkaran* is thought to be composed of the *buddhi*, intellect, the *ahamkar*, ego, the *citta*, memory and the *manas*, attention⁶. **The notion of the *manas* is therefore connected with attention and perception. This suggests that the *man* could be regarded as in some senses analogous to consciousness itself, the self reflective sense that allows awareness of our existence.** Two aspects of the *man* are apparent in the usages of *man* in Nanak. McLeod says "the *man* (*mn*) of unregenerate man is erratic and leads him into worldly attachment", but at the same time the "*man* is something priceless, the treasury which contains all treasures, the abode of God Himself if man will but recognise it"⁷. Moreover, the final aim of Nanak's teachings is "release from Transmigration through the blending of the *man* in a union with God, a union which transcends all human expression"⁸.

The senses in which Raidas uses *man* can be seen in the following examples, which make it evident that the twofold nature of *man*, described by McLeod, is also apparent in the teachings of

Raidas. **It is both that part of the personality which becomes ensnared in the world and which, when directed towards the divine, facilitates union with God.** Raidas regards the *man* in the person who is under the sway of *maya*, as corrupted by its contact with the five senses and its sensuality:

The five senses have ruined my mind (*man*) –
every moment they separated me from Hari. (88.2, SGGS)
My *man* is greedy for craving and anger. (89.1)

Raidas also views the *man* of the person engrossed in *sâsâr* as that of the seat of duality, and the very existence of the *man* itself is dependent on its desire to maintain its

association with the body: “A sage consumes the duality of the *man*” (1.2, SGGS)

The *man* has its positive side too: through spiritual awakening the *man* can be transformed into a way of devotion to God. According to Raidas the *man* can become both the worship of God itself and the temple within which God is worshipped:

In the temple of the *man*, let incense burnt.

Offer up to Ram the garland of love and affection. (93.1)

Through the *man* alone there is worship,
through the *man* alone incense is offered,
through the *man* alone,

I serve the quintessence of *sahaj* (*sahajasvarup*, 39.3).

For Raidas, the ultimate aim is not just the redirection of the mind towards the divine, but its **transformation** into the divine. This is attained by the stilling of the *man*: it becomes like still water and attains unity with the supreme spirit, the ocean out of which the individual manifests.

When then *man* is stilled why do you not realise:
the knower knows? (10.3)

When the mind has attained quiescence, then, like a river flowing into the ocean the individual *man* attains absorption into the universal *man*: “When the *man* has merged into the ocean of Ram, the cries disappear” (3.2)

A yogic aspect to Raidas’s thoughts on the *man* is also apparent when he says: “He who knows the *man* becomes the seed (*bindu*)”. (1.4) here the transformation of the *man* into the *bindu*, the infinitesimal seed essence, is a yogic simile for union with the divine. *Unman* is a key yogic term, frequently found in the works of the Naths and Kabir, for describing the transformation of the mind into ‘para-mind’. There is only one instance of this term in Raidas, in a context where it refers to the yogic notion of union with the divine, when the individual mind passes through the tenth door of the body, the diamond door, and attains union with the divine.

In the *unman* state mind transforms mind,

The adamantine doors are opened. (32.6 SGGS)

3 Raidas’s view on the nature of the world: Sants depict the world as a bewildering place in which the soul is entranced by *maya* and drawn to an untimely death before it has had a chance to realise its true nature. Their interest in depicting the world was to show how liberation from the world might be attained, rather than in depicting the world in itself.

3.1 The phenomenal world, *sāsâr* (*sMswr*): In the *vani* of Raidas the phenomenal world, *sasar*, is depicted as inherently transient in nature. This characteristic of *sasar* is illustrated by contrasting it with the permanence of God in a simile based upon the fugitive dye of the safflower and the permanent dye of madder:

This world (*sasar*) is just as impermanent as saffron dye.

My Ram’s colour is permanent madder-dye. (78.4)

It is evident that Raidas considers it to be the fate of all souls to be reborn in the world as long as they have not attained liberation. He says that life is only transitory and leads inevitably to destruction: “Each and everyone is destroyed”. (32.6) The fate of the soul that fails to awaken during its life is to be again born into the world:

Once more one will be reborn in this dark age,

Whether you win or lose. (77.2)

Raidas describes *sasar* as the ‘ocean’ of the world in which the soul is helplessly drifting. “You are bewildered in the poisonous waves of the ocean of *sasar*” (23.2). Hence one of the

most fundamental questions Raidas poses is “How will I cross the threefold [ocean of *sasar*?” (49.2), which is an expression synonymous with ‘attaining liberation’:

I dwell in diverse births in dreadful fear of death,
wandering, I have roamed around without praising You.
Drunk on the wines of selfishness, pride and sensuality –
Amidst these pleasures I never crossed the uncrossable. (8.1)

Raidas stresses the difficulty of crossing over the ocean of *sasar* by suggesting that even the notion of *sasar* having a shore is unreal:

Every one wants to pass over the ocean of *sasar*
there is no far, no near shore of that ocean. (48.0)

He also believes in the universal Indian view that suffering is inherent in existence in *sasar*, which he describes as “a limitless sickness” (22.0). For him “frightened devotees sinking in the world ocean” can be liberated from suffering in *sasar* by God’s intervention and he pleads: “grant the support of Your hand”. (19.4)

The only remedy for the suffering of the soul in *sasar* is contemplation of God, abandoning “worldly matters, self and other” (8.2). In one instance Raidas says that he is “Distressed in the delusion (*prapanca*) of *sasar*, O Supreme Bliss!” (75.1). The senses of the word *prapanca* include both the notions of the phenomenal world as a manifestation of the five elements and the three *guns*, and the notion of deception or delusion.

3.2 The concept of *maya*

False *maya* led the world astray,
fever burns in the body.

Raidas says: My tongue, chant *ram*!

Maya never remains anyone’s companion. (49.4)

He also sometimes refers to *sakti* rather than *maya* (15.2)⁹. In Saivite teachings the phenomenal world is viewed as essentially real, as the embodiment of *sakti*, the consort of Shiva, while in Vedanta the phenomenal world is seen as essentially unreal, and *maya* is the cosmic illusion created by Vishnu. The Sants resolved this conflict by viewing the world as real, the manifestation of God. For them *maya* was not just the world itself, but the force of delusion which leads to separation from God. Raidas frequently depicts *maya* as the goddess of delusion who has beguiled the world and led it astray:

O Vitthal stop, stop Your *maya*
devouring the world.

She has such great power, she enslaves all,
she leads gods, men and sages astray’...

Child, old women, very beautiful maiden –
she assumes diverse guises.

Yogis, renunciates, ascetics, sanyasis, wisemen –
none of them survives...

she conquers every realm of all the worlds in the universe,
in this way let her power be known. (38.0, 1,3)

He attributes his own lack of discernment to his having been sold, like a slave, into the hands of the personified *maya*:

God! What do I know? What do I know?

My mind is sold into the hand of *maya*. (88.0)

and he describes the suffering of the soul under the sway of *maya* as so dreadful that

even the body wastes away:

I am just as emaciated,
in the sway of suffering in *maya*,
as one whose father is in a foreign city. (71.2)

Raidas depicts *maya* as a venomous serpent whose bite causes suffering in living beings, just like the fever in the body of a person bitten by a serpent:

O Kesav! Your *maya* is dreadful,
my mind is distressed.
The terrifying serpentess has venomous fangs,
in a lovely guise, she holds me firm in her jaws.
Seeing the honey, one babbles in distress,
greedy one pays no heed to dearth. (37.0,1)

3.3 Death: In Raidas's view 'this world is a transitory abode' (64.3 SGGS) and he frequently warns of the inevitability of death:

The five companions [the senses]
have met together to torment beings.
They cannot go unless renunciation drives them out.
They devour sons, class, family, kinsfolk and wives,
in all ten directions death hangs over their heads. (85.2)
The days which come will pass away again
we must depart, there is no abiding for ever.
Our companions are going, we must go too,
we must travel far, death hangs over our heads. (64.1 SGGS)

He stresses that if the soul does not awaken during life itself it will repent for this later: it will be born again into the sufferings of *sasar*:

Infatuated with joy, one revels like a fool,
in the end the mind shall feel regret. (52.1)
Says Raidas, realise, foolish fellow:

when the life breath has gone, you shall repent. (94.3)

Liberation after death is only a limited form of liberation, an abode in Vaikuntha, the heavenly realm of Vishnu. Liberation while living is total liberation, for to find the fame of Hari is to be totally absorbed into God. For this reason, when Raidas says 'Die in such a way that there is no need to die again' (62.1), he is referring to the notion of dying to the world before the actual physical death of the body. Those who have attained this state are called 'the liberated while living'¹⁰ and Raidas speaks of such devotees as the followers of the highest renunciation:

Raidas says, this is supreme renunciation –
Lucky one, why do you not chant the name of Ram?
The wise churn curds to obtain ghee,
the liberated are in nirvana while living (1.6).

The simile of churning curds for ghee represents the process by which 'the liberated while living' are able to discern in *sasar* the immanence of God and attain nirvana.

4 Pathway to liberation: For Raidas human life is, above all, a unique opportunity to attain liberation from existence in *sasar*, if one accepts the guidance of the Guru and abides in the fellowship of like-minded men.

[End of Part II]

[To be concluded]



References

1. Barthwal: 1978, p.32 *passim*.
2. *Chandogya Upanishad*, VI.1.5; S. Radhakrishnan, *The principal Upanishads*, London, 1953, p.447.
3. *Yogasikhopanisad*, IV. 1-2, T.R. Ayyangar & M. Srinivasa, *The Yoga Upanisads*, Madras, p. 371.
4. GNSR, p. 180.
5. Atreya: 1985, p. 98.
6. *Op.cit.*, p. 134.
7. GNSR, p. 181.
8. *Op. cit.*, p. 208.
9. Cf. Callewaert: 1978, p. 314 for similar usages in Rajab.
10. Cf. ORC, p. 252-5 regarding the concept of *jivanamukti*.