

Religious Reform Movement (Meerabai)

Dr. Abhilasha Jaiman

Assistant Professor in History, Government Girls College, Chomu, Rajasthan, India

ABSTRACT: Meera, better known as Mirabai^[2] and venerated as [Sant Meerabai](#), was a 16th-century [Hindu mystic](#) poet and devotee of [Krishna](#). She is a celebrated [Bhakti](#) saint, particularly in the North Indian Hindu tradition.^{[3][4]}

Mirabai was born into a [Rathore Rajput](#) royal family in [Kudki](#) (modern-day [Pali district](#) of [Rajasthan](#)) and spent her childhood in [Merta](#). She is mentioned in [Bhaktamal](#), confirming that she was widely known and a cherished figure in the Bhakti movement culture by about 1600 CE.^{[5][6]}

Most legends about Mirabai mention her fearless disregard for social and family conventions, her devotion to Krishna, her treating Krishna as her husband and being persecuted by her [in-laws](#) for her religious devotion.^{[1][5]} She has been the subject of numerous folk tales and [hagiographic](#) legends, which are inconsistent or widely different in details.^{[1][7]}

Millions of devotional hymns in passionate praise of Krishna are attributed to Meerabai in the Indian tradition, but just a few hundred are believed to be authentic by scholars, and the earliest written records suggest that except for two hymns, most were written down only in the 18th century.^[8] Many poems attributed to Meera were likely composed later by others who admired Meera. These hymns are a type of [bhajan](#), and are very famous across India.^[9]

Hindu temples, such as in Chittorgarh fort, are dedicated to Mirabai's memory.^[1] Legends about Mirabai's life, of contested authenticity, have been the subject of movies, films, comic strips and other popular literature in modern times.^[10]

KEYWORDS: Meerabai, Bhati, Saint, Krishna, Hindu, Rhymes, Bhajan, Chittorgarh, Devotional, Authentic

I. INTRODUCTION

Authentic records about Meera are not available and scholars have attempted to establish Meera's biography from secondary literature that mentions her and wherein dates and other moments. Meera unwillingly married [Bhoj Raj](#), the crown prince of [Mewar](#), in 1516.^{[11][12]} Her husband was wounded in one of the ongoing wars with the [Delhi Sultanate](#) in 1518, and he died of battle wounds in 1521. Both her father and father-in-law ([Rana Sanga](#)) died a few days after their defeat in the [Battle of Khanwa](#) against first [Mughal Emperor Babur](#).

After the death of her father-in-law Rana Sanga, Vikram Singh became the ruler of Mewar. According to a popular legend, her in-laws tried many times to assassinate her, such as sending Meera a glass of poison and telling her it was nectar or sending her a basket with a snake instead of flowers.^{[2][11]} According to the hagiographic legends, she was not harmed in either case, with the snake miraculously becoming a Krishna idol (or a garland of flowers depending on the version).^{[7][11]} In another version of these legends, she is asked by Vikram Singh to go drown herself, which she tries but she finds herself floating on water.^[13] Yet another legend states that the third Mughal emperor [Akbar](#) came with [Tansen](#) to visit Meera and presented a pearl necklace, but scholars doubt this ever happened because Tansen joined Akbar's court in 1562, 15 years after she died.^[13] Similarly, some stories state that [Guru Ravidas](#) was her guru (teacher), but there is no corroborating historical evidence for this. Some versions suggest this could likely have happened. Others disagree.^[13]

The three different oldest records are known as of 1614 that mention Meera,^[14] all from the 17th century and written within 150 years of Meera's death, neither mention anything about her childhood or circumstances of her marriage to Bhojraj nor do they mention that the people who persecuted her were her in-laws or from some Rajput royal family.^[15] Nancy Martin-Kershaw states that to the extent that Meera was challenged and persecuted, religious or social conventions were unlikely to have been the cause, rather the likely cause was political chaos and military conflicts between the Rajput kingdom and the Mughal Empire.

Other stories state that Mira Bai left the kingdom of Mewar and went on pilgrimages. In her last years, Meera lived in [Dwarka](#) or [Vrindavan](#), where legends state she miraculously disappeared by merging into an idol of Krishna in 1547.^{[1][2]} While miracles are contested by scholars for the lack of historical evidence, it is widely acknowledged that Meera dedicated her life to Lord Krishna, composing songs of devotion, and was one of the most important poet-saint of the Bhakti movement period.^{[2][13][16]}



A number of compositions by Meera Bai continue to be sung today in India, mostly as devotional songs ([bhajans](#)) though nearly all of them have a philosophical connotation.^[18] One of her most popular compositions remains "Paayoji maine Naam Ratan dhan paayo" (पायो जी मैंने नाम रतन धन पायो।, "I have been given the richness of Lord's name blessing").^{[19][20]} Meera's poems are lyrical padas (metric verses) in [Rajasthani language](#).^[13] While thousands of verses are attributed to her, scholars are divided in their opinion as to how many of them were actually penned by Meera herself.^[21] There are no surviving manuscripts of her poetry from her time and the earliest records with two poems credited to her are from early 18th-century, more than 150 years after she immersed into the statue of Dwarkadhish at Dwarka Temple.^[8]

The largest collection of poems credited to her are in 19th-century manuscripts. Scholars have attempted to establish authenticity based on both the poem and Meera being mentioned in other manuscripts as well as from style, linguistics and form.^{[8][22]} John Stratton Hawley cautions, "When one speaks of the poetry of Mirabai, then, there is always an element of enigma. (...) there must always remain a question about whether there is any real relation between the poems we cite and a historical Mira."^[23]

In her poems, Krishna is a yogi and lover, and she herself is a yogini ready to take her place by his side into a spiritual marital bliss.^[8] Meera's style combines impassioned mood, defiance, longing, anticipation, joy and ecstasy of union, always centred on Krishna.^[22]

My Dark One has gone to an alien land.
He has left me behind, he's never returned, he's never sent me a single word.
So I've stripped off my ornaments, jewels and adornments, cut my hair from my head.
And put on holy garments, all on his account, seeking him in all four directions.
Mira: unless she meets the Dark One, her Lord, she doesn't even want to live.

— Mira Bai, Translated by John Stratton Hawley^[24]

Meera speaks of a personal relationship with Krishna as her lover, lord and mountain lifter. (Sanson Ki Mala Pe Simru Main pi Ka Naam) is written by Meera Bai Shows her dedication towards Krishna. The characteristic of her poetry is complete surrender.

After making me fall for you so hard, where are you going?
Until the day I see you, no repose: my life, like a fish washed on shore, flails in agony.
For your sake I'll make myself a yogini, I'll hurl myself to death on the saw of Kashi.
Mira's Lord is the clever Mountain Lifter, and I am his, a slave to his lotus feet.

— Mira Bai, Translated by John Stratton Hawley^[25]

Meera is often classed with the northern Sant bhaktis who spoke of Lord Sri Krishna.

II. DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

Prem Ambodh Pothi, a text attributed to [Guru Gobind Singh](#) and completed in 1693 CE, includes poetry of Mira Bai as one of sixteen historic bhakti saints important to [Sikhism](#).^[26] Scholars acknowledge that Meera was one of the central poet-saints of the Bhakti movement which was during a difficult period in Indian history filled with religious conflicts. Yet, they simultaneously question the extent to which Meera was a canonical projection of social imagination that followed, where she became a symbol of people's suffering and a desire for an alternative.^[27] Dirk Wiemann, quoting Parita Mukta, states,

If one accepts that someone very akin to the Mira legend [about persecution and her devotion] existed as an actual social being, the power of her convictions broke the brutal feudal relationships that existed at that time. The Mira Bai of the popular imagination, then, is an intensely anachronistic figure by virtue of that anticipatory radical democracy which propels Meera out of the historicity that remains nonetheless ascribed to her. She goes beyond the shadowy realms of the past to inhabit the very core of a future which is embodied within the suffering of a people who seek an alternative.

— Dirk Wiemann / Parita Mukta, On Meera^{[27][28]}

The continued influence of Meera, in part, has been her message of freedom, her resolve and right to pursue her devotion to deity Krishna and her spiritual beliefs as she felt drawn to despite her persecution.^{[27][28]} Her appeal and influence in Indian culture, writes Edwin Bryant, is from her emerging, through her legends and poems, as a person "who stands up for what is right and suffers bitterly for holding fast to her convictions, as other men and women have",



yet she does so with a language of love, with words painting the "full range of emotions that mark love, whether between human beings or between human and divine".^[29] Aliston and Subramanian have published selections with English translation in India.^{[30][31]} Schelling^[32] and Landes-Levi^[33] have offered anthologies in the USA. Snell^[34] has presented parallel translations in his collection *The Hindi Classical Tradition*. Sethi has selected poems which Mira composed presumably after she came in contact with Saint [Ravidas](#).^[35] and Meera Pakeerah.

Some bhajans of Meera have been rendered into English by [Robert Bly](#) and [Jane Hirshfield](#) as *Mirabai: Ecstatic Poems*.^[36]

Composer [John Harbison](#) adapted Bly's translations for his *Mirabai Songs*. There is a documentary film *A Few Things I Know About Her* by Indian film director Anjali Panjabi.^[37]

Two well-known films of her life have been made in India, [Meera](#) (1945), a [Tamil language](#) film starring [M. S. Subbulakshmi](#), and [Meera](#) a 1979 [Hindi](#) film by [Gulzar](#). Other Indian films about her include: *Meerabai* (1921) by [Kanjiabhai Rathod](#), *Sant Mirabai* (1929) by [Dhundiraj Govind Phalke](#), *Rajrani Meera/Meerabai* (1933) by [Debaki Bose](#), *Meerabai* (1936) by T. C. Vadivelu Naicker and A. Narayanan, *Sadhvi Meerabai* (1937) by [Baburao Painter](#), *Bhakta Meera* (1938) by [Y. V. Rao](#), *Meerabai* (1940) by Narasimha Rao Bhimavarapu, *Meera* (1947) by [Ellis Dungan](#), *Matwali Meera* (1947) by [Baburao Patel](#), *Meerabai* (1947) by [W. Z. Ahmed](#), *Meerabai* (1947) by [Nanabhai Bhatt](#), *Girdhar Gopal Ki Mira* (1949) by Prafulla Roy, *Raj Rani Meera* (1956) by G. P. Pawar, *Meera Shyam* (1976), [Meera Ke Girdhar](#) (1992) by Vijay Deep.^[38]

A 26 episodes popular series starring Mrinal Kulkarni was produced by [UTV](#) in 1997 based on her life called *Mirabai*.^[39]

[Meera](#), a 2009 Indian television series based on her life aired on [NDTV Imagine](#).

The novel *Cuckold* by Kiran Nagarkar features her as one of the central characters.

[Shree Krishna Bhakto Meera](#), a 2016 Indian Bengali mythological television series based on her life is currently airing on [Star Jalsha](#).

Meera Bai's life has been interpreted as a musical story in *Meera—The Lover...*, a music album based on original compositions for some well known Meera bhajans, released 11 October 2009.^[40]

The Meera Mahal in [Merta](#) is a museum dedicated to telling the story of Mirabai through sculptures, paintings, displays and a shaded garden.^[41]

III.CONCLUSIONS

Mira wafted the fragrance of devotion far and wide. Those who came in contact with her were affected by her strong current of Prem. Mira was like Lord Gauranga. She was an embodiment of love and innocence. Her heart was the temple of devotion. Her face was the lotus-flower of Prem. There was kindness in her look, love in her talk, joy in her discourses, power in her speech and fervour in her songs. What a marvellous lady! What a wonderful personality! What a charming figure!³⁹

Mira's mystic songs act as a soothing balm to the wounded hearts and tired nerves of those who toil in this world with the heavy burden of life. The sweet music of her songs exerts a benign influence on the hearers, removes discord and disharmony, and lulls them to sleep. Mira's language of love is so powerful that even a downright atheist will be moved by her devotional songs.⁴⁰

Mira acted her part well on the stage of the world. She taught the world the way to love God. She rowed her boat dexterously in a stormy sea of family troubles and difficulties and reached the other shore of supreme peace and absolute fearlessness—the kingdom of supreme love. She belonged to the gentle fair sex and yet how undaunted in spirit and how courageous she was! Though she was young, she bore the persecutions silently. She endured the piercing taunts and sarcastic criticisms of the world bravely. She has left an indelible impression on the world and her name will be handed down to posterity.

From Brindavan, Mira proceeded to Dwaraka. There she was absorbed in the image of Lord Krishna at the temple of Ranchod.⁴¹



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