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Mirabai Comes to America: The Translation and Transformation of a Saint

Nancy M. Martin
Chapman University, nmartin@chapman.edu

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The sixteenth-century Hindu saint Mirabai is both a quintessential artist herself—poet, singer, and dancer—and lives on in a full range of artistic forms, her story told and retold in hagiography and history, drama and epic song, fiction and film, and her poetry not only performed in every conceivable musical style but also continuing to generate new poems and songs composed in her name. Something about this irrepressible woman has caught people's imaginations, people who have found in her inspiration and hope but also multiple points of identification—women struggling to overcome social and familial expectations; low-caste communities facing oppression and degradation; nationalists seeking independence from colonial domination; star-crossed human lovers and would-be lovers of God; spiritual men and women trying to live against the grain of worldly notions of power, wealth, and success; and others seeking to be true to their hearts and to follow their passions. And this appeal has reached across time and culture, to touch the lives and hearts of people far from India and far from the bhakti world of medieval India in which she lived.

In India Mirabai's stories and songs have moved readily across linguistic, regional and religious boundaries, her popularity seemingly increasing rather than decreasing with the passing years. The multitude of contemporary recordings and performances of her songs and life story; paintings, images, and posters depicting her; festivals and parks devoted to her in Rajasthan; and the 1997 weekly television serial on Durdarshan confirm this. In Udaipur, small girls continue to dance her life to the delight of parents and wider audiences, and young women who exhibit exceptional talent in music, dance, or literature or who are unusually spiritual are said to be her

incarnation or are called by her name, usually with great affection but sometimes with derision or even anger at a perceived insolence or rebellion.

There is a generative quality to her character and the traditions which surround her, that seemingly invites participation in the lila of her life and the creative process itself and leads to the creation of hundreds, even thousands, of songs attributed to her and a wide array of sometimes vastly different narratives told about her across the centuries. Indian nationalists and Rajput historians recognized in her a strength and power and claimed her as family, recounting her life in the narrative pattern of the stories of other Indian heroines. In so doing, they also "rajputized" her, excusing her extraordinary behavior by claiming the early death of her mother and her education by her grandfather and making her nonetheless a good wife whose devotion was radicalized only after her husband's death, with the miracles that surrounded her life rationalized and her motivation in leaving Chittor politicized as her patriotic duty to ensure that indeed the sadhus with whom she consorted were not spying on the kingdom as her in-laws charged.[1]

Their story of Mira has been widely disseminated and perpetuated as "historical truth," even though historical sources are largely silent regarding her life and this telling must rely almost entirely on hagiography and legend, structured by the narrative conventions of *virangana* tales and the assumptions these Rajput men make about how a good woman of her caste and status would act. Though they may have tried to achieve a hegemonic status for their telling, they have not been able to supplant other far different stories of Mirabai—stories such as those told by the Rajput women Lindsay Harlan interviewed, of a wife who decidedly rejected her Rajput *stridharm*, a breach mitigated only by the fact that she claimed to have been truly married to Krishna.[2] Or those sung by low-caste singers, like *Mira Janma Patri* (Mira's Horoscope or

Birth Song) where Mira must negotiate multiple levels of coercion, is suspected of being a sorceress because of her spiritual practice, and is cast out by her husband because of her low-caste guru.[3] Or film versions of her life like Ellis Duncan's 1945 classic film starring M. S. Subbhalaxshmi as Mira or S. S. Gulzar's 1979 "Meera" that serve as touchstones for the "truth about Mira" for many and where Mira appears primarily as an otherworldly mystic, even as she does in the widely disseminated 1972 *Amar Chitra Katha* comic book version of her life.[4]

Fundamental to Mira's story is her going against the grain of society in some way and suffering because of this but also surviving and thriving. There is thus always a latent potential for resistance and challenge to the status quo in the telling of her tale, a potential that can readily be developed by an alternate community as people identify with her character and plight in different ways and imagine her life differently. Seemingly there can be no silencing of this narrative abundance with its potential challenge to the authorities that be, even as the irrepressible saint is not killed by her would-be assassins, no matter what they try, nor are they able ultimately to confine her or silence her. Perhaps in part because of this, she was never formally embraced by any panth or sampraday, though she has been loved by followers of many and included in their spiritual families, her songs sung not only by Hindus but also by Muslims, Sikhs and Christians. Clearly her story and songs attributed to her express fundamental Hindu but also Indian experiences and values, hopes and aspirations, that speak to and for people in wide ranging cultural, religious and social locations.

Mirabai's story and songs have also been carried by South Asian people as they have migrated to other regions of the world, so we find her in the Caribbean and the South Pacific, in Europe and Africa, and in North America. In the United States Mira's life story has become a popular subject for South Asian cultural performances, with children acting out the story, both

creating and reinforcing Indian-American cultural and religious identities. In one such performance I witnessed in the early 1990s in San Jose, California, Mira sang a beautiful duet with Tulsidas in praise of Ram, stood for Hindu-Muslim unity with Akbar, and was the embodiment of virtuous stridharm, her devotion and her suffering carefully separated from her marriage by her husband's overwhelming respect for her until his untimely death. (There was no mention of the lustful sadhu found in Priyadas's 1712 hagiographic account—an episode no doubt deemed too racey for these young performers and the primetime audience.) Indeed Mira's story is often one of the first narratives chosen for such performances, a testament to her continuing relevance as the embodiment of shakti (strength) and bhakti (devotion), of the triumph of the human spirit over adversity, and of the best, in some sense, of what it means to be Hindu, Indian, and human. And her life story seemingly more than almost any other provides a crucial meeting point where past and present, India and America, Hindu and non-Hindu can come together.

South Asian writers, writing within India but also in the United States, have also invoked Mira, particularly in fiction addressing the awakening of women. In an often quoted early reference, Rabindranath Tagore's heroine in the short story "Letter from a Wife" tells her husband that she has left him for good with these words:

> Do not fear that I will kill myself. I am not going to play that old joke on you. Meerabai too was a woman like me, and her chains were by no means light, but she did not seek death in order to live. In her joyful rebellious songs, she said, "Meera is going to stick by you, my lord, even if she is rejected by her father, mother, by everybody else, no matter what their rejections may bring upon her." To stick to one's truth is to live. I am going to live. I have just started living.[5]

This woman who would leave her husband to choose life, finds in Mira the hope and will to live—an inspiration from the past that can affirm both her independence and her identity as a good Indian woman. In Tagore's novella *Yogayog* Mirabai plays a somewhat similar role, her

lifestory, character and songs serving as an inner reference point for his heroine Kumudini as she struggles to find dignity and meaning within a more than difficult marital relationship.[6]

But by the 1990s we also find Indian novelists incorporating characters called "Mira" who, though their lives may mirror aspects of the saint, are contemporary women, bridging between these worlds. Shashi Deshpande in her 1992 English novel *The Binding Vine* writes of the awakening of Urmila, an awakening that is facilitated by a woman in the background called Mira—the mother of her husband who died in giving birth to him at 22 but whose writings and poetry break through the silence of her life and the intervening years and speak directly to Urmila—a woman who wrote in spite of others, who articulated her experiences of isolation, injustice, oppression and suppression, even of marital rape, with deep emotion and clarity and who, in the course of the novel, inspires Urmila in her own battle against similar injustice.[7] This character is at once both the saint Mirabai and not Mirabai, joining past and present in a place of shared experience and shared determination to live fully, to speak the truth, and to triumph over adversity.

In the United States also physician, social activist, and writer Tanmeet Sethi has chosen to write of Mirabai as the subject of her first novel *Blue Tryst*.[8] She is compelled to write, she says, as a way of understanding and creating her identity, for she is too Indian for her US friends and too American for her Indian friends when she goes home.[9] In some ways Mirabai is quintessentially Indian and yet there is also something very universal and contemporary about her character that speaks to and for those who find themselves in the liminal spaces between cultures and times and in places of change and transformation.

That Mirabai might offer such a bridge between worlds seems tenable—she is after all in some sense a woman ahead of her time. But can such a seemingly quintessentially Hindu and

Indian saint truly cross the boundaries of cultures as different as those of India and wider contemporary American society with its European and Christian roots to speak directly to non-South Asian audiences? Can a sixteenth-century Rajput woman who sings using such classical Indian poetic images of her love of Krishna, with his peacock feather crown and yellow dhoti, the cowherding fluteplayer who steals the hearts of the gopis, really move beyond her roots to touch the hearts of those who know little or nothing of India or Hinduism?

A quick perusal of Google and *Amazon.com* makes it clear that she already has. Such a search brings up English translations of her songs by Robert Bly, Jane Hirschfield, Andrew Schelling, and others; and a multitude of citations in books, both fiction and nonfiction, the latter on an intriguing array of subjects from global spirituality to self-actualization, grief management, feminist philosophy of religion, and deep ecology. There are websites associated with a host of "Mirabais" who are spiritual teachers, authors, and translators, fitness pros and psychologists, life coaches, singers, even belly dancers—Mirabai Bush, Mirabai Starr, Mirabai Devi, Mirabai Holland, Mirabai Ceiba, Mirabai Galashan, and many more. Interspersed with these are references not only to Mira Nair's "Mirabai Films" but to productions such as the 2008 Bollywood films "Mirabai not Out," where the heroine called Mirabai is obsessed not with Krishna but with cricket, and "Rockin' Meera" , with its soundtrack blending hip hop, Carlos Santana, and more traditional Indian filmi music in a storyline, according to reviews somewhere between "Mississippi Masala" and "Romancing the Stone," as hero Rock must go from L.A. to India to rescue his would-be bride Meera after she is kidnapped by her brother and taken back to India to prevent the wedding.[10] And there are ads for Mirabai Restaurant in Oxford, England, Mirabai Perfume by Chopard, and Mirabai Books in Woodstock, NY, its banner reading "A Resource for Conscious Living." This store, founded in 1987, is the proud owner of the web

address *mirabai.com*. There is no question that Mirabai has come to America, but how has this happened? How have American English-speaking non-Indian audiences come to know her, and who is the Mira to whom people offer such praise and admiration?

Growing Interest in Mirabai in the West

Already in the early nineteenth century, Mirabai had caught the imagination of British colonial admirers of Indian culture and religion--Price writing in 1827 and H.H. Wilson in 1828, and Col. James Todd in *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* (1829-1832). Their reports reflect the romantic quality of her story and a simultaneous recognition of both vulnerability and strength in her character, drawing primarily on devotional and legendary material. By the last decades of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth-century, aspects Mira's story and character and isolated songs attributed to her appear in a number of English works of Indian architecture, literature and religion such as James Fergusson's *A History of Indian and Eastern Architecture* (third edition 1876), G. A. Grierson, The *Medieval Vernacular Literature of Hindustan* (1888), William Crooke, *North Indian Notes and Queries* (1891), G. M. Tripathi's *Classical Poets of Gujarat and Their Influence on Society and Morals* (1892), Manmatha Nath Dutt's *Gleanings from Indian Classics*, volume 2 (1893); Jogendra Nath Bhattacharya's *Hindu Castes and Sects* (1896), and F. E. Keay's *A History of Hindi Literature* and John Campbell Oman's *The Mystics, Ascetics and Saints of India*, both published in 1905. M. A. Macauliffe wrote a more detailed account of her life in "The Legend of Mirabai" published in 1903; and the Theosophists too were aware of her, with Annie Besant including Mira's story in her 1906 *Children of the Motherland*. Fellow theosophist James Cousins wrote a play based on her life in 1919 called "The King's Wife," focusing on her encounter with Akbar and Tansen and stressing her embrace of a universal love of God that recognized no distinctions between Hindu and

Muslim and certainly claimed no religious exclusivity.[11] And Indian historian and archeologist Hermann Goetz would play a key role in giving final shape to her alleged historical biography in 1966, his admiration for her running so deep that the only person he saw worthy of comparison to her was Jesus.

Works in English on Mirabai were also being published in India by Indian authors. Retired advocate and devotee Bankey Behari published a full length work on Mirabai's life, *The Story of Mirabai*, in 1935, republished in many subsequent editions and illustrated in the 1972 Amar Chitra Katha comic book. A number of translations of songs attributed to Mirabai into English were also made, including R.C. Tandon's *Songs of Mirabai* and Anath Nath Basu's *Mirabai, Saint and Singer of India: Her Life and Writings* both published in 1934; and translations by Pandey and Zide (1964), Usha Nilsson (1969) and Shreeprakash Kurl (1973). Even so, Mirabai's story remained largely unknown in the United States outside of immigrant communities, academic departments of South Asian Studies or Oriental Languages and Literature, and isolated pockets of Indiophiles and disciples of Hindu gurus.

Finally in 1980 A. J. Alston, following the fifteenth edition of the very popular Hindi collection of Parashuram Chaturvedi, provided the first extensive academic translation of more than two hundred Mira poems into English.[12] He sought to follow the original texts as closely as possible and provided an extended introduction to Mirabai's life story, following the nationalist and Rajput telling. Yet even his English translations, like those before him, were not yet what I would call "cultural translations." Indeed when I first encountered them before I began my own work on the saint, I found them somewhat stilted and uncompelling, particularly when compared to the extraordinary translations of Mahadeviyakka (1973) and Nammalvar (1981) by A.K.

Ramanujan; of Kabir by Linda Hess and Sukhdev Singh (1983); and of Surdas by Kenneth Bryant (1978) and John Stratton Hawley (1984) available at that time.[13]

In the latter decades of the twentieth-century, however, we begin to see a deeper entry of Mira into the imaginations and writings of people in the USA. The 1960s brought a much greater awareness and attraction to all things Indian in the United States, from material culture to music and religion, but the rise of Mirabai's popularity begins to accelerate in the 1980s, and we begin to see appropriations of her songs and stories in ways that distinctly parallel the growth of Indian traditions around the saint.[14] With respect to her poetry, we find the inclusion of poems attributed to her in anthologies in much the same way they were in early manuscripts, reflecting those known to and/or most dear to compilers as well as some more clearly composed in Mira's name by another poet or more about Mira than by her. In these collections Mira's poems appear with those of others, reflecting a spiritual family that is far more interreligious and global than the bhaktas with whom she keeps company in seventeenth-century manuscripts but that is being asserted in a way much like Nabhadas and lesser known anthologers of the past had done. There are also larger sets of translated songs devoted only to Mira that come to serve as sources for subsequent anthologers and writers, though here too the authors are making choices in the selection and translation process.

We begin to find a multitude of other references to Mira as well, where she is invoked as part of a larger and varying spiritual family and also as a support for many different aspects of the journey to wholeness and healing, sometimes in a *katha* style of invoking an event in her life and/or presenting a song attributed to her together with a commentary, in much the way she is invoked by spiritual teachers, nationalists, and others in India. But what is it about Mira that

appeals to them? How do these authors come to know her and how do they understand her? And what happens to the saint in this process of cultural transformation and appropriation?

Translation and Cultural Transformation of Mira

The first time Mirabai's songs were truly translated into American English and cultural idioms was by Robert Bly, with his first publication of five poems in "Mirabai Versions" also appearing in 1980. His translations are as much Bly as they are Mirabai, but as I have suggested elsewhere about Mahipati's seventeenth-century Marathi telling of Mirabai's life which sets her rebellion in the context of her parental home with her father as her poisoner, sometimes it is necessary to tell a different story in order to tell the same story in a different cultural and religious context.[15] In the logic of Varkari devotion, where the relationship between devotee and God is that of parent and child, the contrast between that divine-human relationship and Mira's coercive relationship with the rana or ruler requires that that latter relationship be between father and daughter, rather than the erotic/marital relationship of Priyadas's tale that mirrors Krishna's adolescent love for the gopis so central to the Gaudiya Vaishnava devotion which he practiced. Similarly, to truly bring Mirabai into the American context may take a transformation of the imagery of classical Indian love lyrics into the more direct and erotic language of contemporary American poetry.

Bly's Mira is heroic and outrageous. He writes of her, "With enormous elegance and grace, [Mira] moves to abandon her upper class family, all the social roles for a married woman of her time, the conservative Hindu religious establishment, and anyone left over who believes in the middle road"—an admirable embodiment of values many in the U.S. hold dear.[16]

In his 1990 work *Iron John: A Book about Men,* he writes further,

> It is the lover in a man or woman who loves the one precious thing and tells him [or her] what it is, but it is the warrior in Rembrandt or Mirabai who agrees to endure the suffering the choice entails.[17]

She is a warrior and an outspoken and ecstatic lover. Her traditional epithet for Krishna as Girdhar Nagar under Bly's pen becomes "Mountain energy" or "the energy that holds up mountains," wording which moves far beyond the traditional image of the young boy Krishna holding up Mt. Govardhan with his little finger, sheltering the entire cowherding community beneath it, or even from Nammalvar's ninth-century description of cows tumbling and water pouring out of mountain pools in cascading waterfalls as the mountain is raised.[18] Yet John Stratton Hawley notes, in his afterward to a new edition of Bly translations together with those of Jane Hirschfield, that this choice "is not without a deep intriguing logic." He concludes, "Bly must have felt that the whole motif of a divine adolescent lifting a mountain ought to suggest the displacement of matter into its dynamic counterpart: $E=mc^2$."[19] And it is Bly's Mira songs more than any others that continue to be a point of reference for American writers who follow.

His poem entitled "Why Mira Can't Come Back to Her own House" is the most often cited:

> The colors of the Dark One have penetrated Mira's body;
> All the other colors washed out.
> Making love with the Dark One and eating little,
> Those are my pearls and my carnelians.
> Meditation beads and the forehead streak,
> Those my scarves and my rings.
> Approve me or disapprove me.
> My teacher taught me this.
> I take the path that ecstatic human beings have taken
> for centuries.
> I don't steal money, I don't hit anyone. What will you
> Charge me with?
> I have felt the swaying of the elephant's shoulders;
> And now you want me to climb on a jackass?
> Try to be serious.[20]

This woman who takes her own path, immersed in meditation and reveling in love, caring nothing for material treasures or the approval or disapproval of the world, resonates with

American audiences of a certain ilk, and Bly's titling of the poem in the way he does strikes an even deeper chord.

The contrast with Alston's translation of the same poem is dramatic:

> Mira is dyed deep in the love of Hari
> And all else is blocked out.
> I wear only the bangles, tilak and beads:
> Beyond this, my only further ornament is my virtuous life.
> No other embellishments please me,
> Such was the wisdom
> I received from my Teacher.
> Some may revile me, others may praise me.
> But I will only sing of the glories of Govind.
> Wheresoever Krishna leads, Thither will I follow.
> I will not steal,
> I will harm no one,
> How can anyone touch me?
> I will not descend
> From the back of an elephant
> To ride upon an ass.[21]

Though Alston's translation follows the text closely and accurately conveys the images and sense of the original, Bly's, by comparison, seems to jump off the page, and the reader can almost see the sparkle of the gems and the flash in Mira's eyes and feel the elephant's swaying body. This Bly/Mirabai poem is invoked repeatedly by later authors, from Jungian psychologist Linda Schierse Leonard in her 1982 book *The Wounded Woman* to novelist Sue Monk Kidd in her spiritual autobiography *The Dance of a Dissident Daughter: A Woman's Journey from Christian Tradition to the Sacred Feminine* (1996). Leonard cites Mira and Bly's poem as having played a vital role for one patient for whom the saint's poetry "expressed the ecstatic experience of a woman who feels her own feminine centeredness and spirit and tries to express anew what it means to be a woman," while Kidd, in her chapter entitled "Empowerment," suggests that the reader think of the final lines of this poem, "when someone tries to put you

back into a box from which you've already escaped."[22] We begin to see something of Mira's appeal.

Awareness of and interest in Mira was fueled by the search for global religious models and for specifically feminine spiritual voices, as well as for personal spiritual and psychological healing and wholeness, and for authenticity. Americans, both men and women, were looking for figures in "other" religions or representatives of many religions for inspiration and canonization within an emerging non-institutionalized global spirituality, and women around the world were mining the past to find their spiritual foremothers. And if they were looking for a Hindu and especially for a Hindu woman, Mirabai would be the first to come to mind, even with the limited material available.

The late 1980s and early 1990s saw the publication of some additional sources of information about Mira—John Stratton Hawley and Mark Juergensmeyer's 1988 *Songs of the Saints of India* (which included 12 poems of Mira), essays on Mira in Madhu Kishwar's journal *Manushi*'s 1989 volume on *Women Bhakta Poets*, Kumkum Sangari's 1990 article in the *Economic and Political Weekly* on "Mirabai and the Spiritual Economy of Bhakti," Lindsay Harlan's chapter on Mira in her 1991 *Religion and Rajput Women*, and an entry in Susie Tharu and K. Lalita's *Women Writing in India*, volume 1 (1991).[23] The latter included two poems translated from Gujarati by Nita Ramaiya, one from Hindi by F. E. Keay and the song about the Bhil woman who offered tasted, and thus tainted, fruit to Ram, translated by Hawley and Juergensmeyer. Parita Mukta also published her ground-breaking study of low-caste oral traditions of Mira, *Upholding the Common Life: The Community of Mirabai*, in 1994, a Marxist analysis of Mira as a figure of resistance that would become very influential for later feminist

writers.[24] However, with the exception of Hawley and Juergensmeyer's work, the impact of these texts has remained largely confined to more academic circles.

Other poet translators would also turn their attention to Mira and provide material for those in search of Mirabai—most notably Andrew Schelling in 1993, Jane Hirschfield in 1994 and Bly and Hirschfield together in 2004. Schelling is himself first and foremost a poet even as Bly is, and for him also this was far more than an exercise in translation. He is clear about his sources—among them the works of Alston, Chaturvedi, Goetz, Amar Chitra Katha, Harlan, Hawley and Juergensmeyer, the Manushi issue, *Women Writing in India*, and a set of then unpublished translations by Louise Landes Levi—but also recordings by Subbulakshmi, Lakshmi Shankar, Kishori Amonkar, and Anuradha Paudwal as well as folk recordings.[25] He worked from Parashuram Chaturvedi's collection even as Alston had but deliberately did not place Mira in the realm of the devotional or mystical but rather claimed:

> Mira was fearless, passionate, defiant, clear-eyed, a rebel… She walks with those poets who, during periods of oppression, war and social unrest, cast everything into the fire, that they may pursue a dignified human life—a life blazing with spirit and intellect.[26]

> Mirabai's songs sound familiar themes: the exclusion of women from politics, education, and the arts; old prejudices of race and caste; religious intolerance. These concerns troubled her world as they do ours. In her world, grim fundamentalist priests and despotic warlords worked age-old tactics on an ill-educated populace, spreading superstition and fear. By contrast, Mira sang of a freedom that seems wild, generous, extravagant—a liberation of the emotional, sexual, and religious sensibilities….Two imperatives alone compelled her: spiritual longing and sexual passion."[27]

Schelling's understanding and presentation of Mira's voice is considerably different from that of Alston as this side by side comparison of the same poem makes clear:

Sister, the Enchanter has stolen my heart. where can I go, what can I do— he took the breath from my lungs.	O my companion, My Mohan has stolen my heart. What shall I do? Where shall I go? My life-breaths are wedded to the Lord In total dedication.

I'd gone to the river
a jug on my head
when a figure rose through the
darkness.

Sister, it cast a sorcerer's noose
and it bound me.
What the world calls virtue suddenly
vanished.

I performed a strange rite.
Mira may be a slave, Sister,
but she herself
chose whom to sleep with.[28]

O my companion,
I was going to fetch water
With my water-pot balanced on my
head.
Suddenly a dark form,
Not yet grown to full manhood,
Appeared before me
And bound me in His spell.
I caste off worldly shame
And thus my cause prospered.
Mira is the slave of Lal Girdhara:
She chose her bridegroom carefully.[29]

In the final pages of his book under references, he cautions the reader that "Mirabai is a woman I myself have met in the twilight of poetic language. She is real. But she differs enormously from the Mirabai others have encountered," being neither a "chaste Hindu saint" nor the woman criticized by feminists like Kumkum Sangari for reinforcing marital relations.[30]

Two other dedicated collections of songs of Mira appear in this time: Shama Futehally's *In the Dark of the Heart: Songs of Meera* (1994) and Louise Landes Levi's *Sweet on my Lips: The Love Poems of Mirabai* (1997).[31] Shama Futehally cites Deshrajsingh Bhati's *Mirabai aur Unki Padavali* as her primary source for the poems she translates, but she also acknowledges her indebtedness to Alston, *Manushi*, and Sangari.[32] In her otherwise scholarly introduction, she speaks of her very personal connection to Mira:

> …as Mira's poems become our own, we cannot help seeing that it is our own experience of being locked with the ego, and…our own joy upon being released, which allow us to recognize the essence of the poems. In my own case, it was a long experience of being locked within the self which allowed me, later, to follow Meera's cries for release as glue follows paper. In a twentieth-century environment very different from hers, I spent many years in the personal hell which comes from needing to be superior to the rest of the world. The walls of such a hell are cold and high; one attempts to comfort oneself by thinking that one's own particular ice-box is better than everyone else's; but the walls only grow higher . And till something melts within, every effort to free oneself is doomed to failure. Till we are touched by grace and help comes, we remain trapped in this tearless misery….[33]

She translates thirty songs, providing the Hindi verse followed by her translation, with the book opening with praise from Subbhalakshmi.

Futehally claims to be trying to stay close to the literal meaning of the poems, though occasionally consciously straying for poetic purposes or intentionally removing references that she felt would be too much like "calendar art" for the English reader (such as the line about the Bhil woman being flown to Vishnu's heaven Vaikunth in his chariot).[34] Yet she is also clearly trying to transform Mira into a poet who can move out of her Indian context, dropping any attempt to maintain Mira's calling Krishna Girdhar Nagar, for example, as she seeks first and foremost to make the feelings or emotions of Mira's poems accessible.

The lines of her translated poems are direct and even austere, terse and visually staggered across the page. At times her word choices are misleading for the person not already familiar with the songs. A line in which Mira identifies herself as Krishna's *dasi* or servant, Futehally translates as "his sweeper girl."[35] One might then conclude that Mira is identifying with a low-caste sweeper, but that is simply not in the original text. Similarly the meaning of the Bhil woman's tasting fruit to select only the sweetest ones to offer her Lord seems lost in the description of juice running down her face and staining her teeth, as she madly "spews" the "oozing" fruit on her Lord.[36] There are also unexplained references to Kashi, Shravan, the Jamuna, the koel, crores, etc., which Futehally retains.

Her interpretations are much like the classical singer's exploration of the emotions and meanings of individual lines of poetry in performance, meant for the connoisseur rather than the uninitiated. There is an "always already" quality to the translations that seems to depend on the reader's familiarity with the images and sentiments of Mira and the facing Hindi texts. Subbhalakshmi's glowing words of appreciation support such a reading, but it is also perhaps

because of this that Futehally's translations have not been picked up and cited by non-Indian authors.

Louise Landes Levi similarly expresses a very personal connection to Mira in the introduction to her translation of 25 songs. A Tibetan Buddhist practitioner, she writes of Mirabai, "The Mira poems and her one-pointed passion for realization were very much a basis for this further [spiritual] evolution in my own life."[37] Among the verses she translates are some addressed to Rama and in praise of the guru, and her language is direct and simple, emanating as if from inside the song and filled with the language of Krishna devotion and of the landscape and narrative of Krishna's incarnation. She too offers an interpretation of the emotions of Mira not unlike a classical singer's rendition of a familiar line—beautiful, poignant, unique, but not necessarily readily appreciated by the uninitiated. She is cited but with much less frequency than Bly, Hirschfield and Schelling or Hawley and Juergensmeyer.

As these latter translations become available, we begin to find songs attributed to Mira appearing in collections of poetry for spiritual devotion and empowerment in the American press. Stephen Mitchell includes 3 poems of Mira in his *The Enlightened Heart: An Anthology of Sacred Poetry* (1989), reproducing poems by Bly ("Why Mira Can't Go Back to Her Old House" and "Clouds") and incorporating one by Jane Hirschfield ("O my friend").[38] Within this collection Mira's songs are included with those of a variety of other saints from Rumi, Hildegaard, and Mechthild to Dogen, Kabir, and Shakespeare as well as Herbert, Basho and Blake. She is the representative Hindu woman among them. Jane Hirschfield went on to publish her own anthology in 1994 entitled *Women in Praise of the Sacred: 43 Centuries of Spiritual Poetry by Women*, including 4 of Bly's original 5 Mira songs and 7 of her own translations (seemingly working from Alston), though she mistakenly identifies Mira as a devotee of Shiva in

her introduction to the poems.[39] Selected songs by Schelling, Bly, and Hirschfield then appear in Daniel Halpern's *Holy Fire: Nine Visionary Poets and the Quest for Enlightenment* (1994) together with works of Lalla (the only other woman and Hindu) and Rumi, as well as Arthur Rimbaud, William Blake, W. B. Yeats, R. M. Rilke, Hart Crane, and Allen Ginsberg.[40] Halpern explicitly has chosen poets who to his mind "reimagine the cosmos" and share "a sense that transcendence of the daily is not only possible but necessary to discover the Truth," and Mira is among those he deems worthy of inclusion.[41]

Willis Barnstone works with Usha Nilsson to produce another set of co-translations of Mira that appear in his edited collection *To Touch the Sky: Poems of Mystical, Spiritual and Metaphysical Light* published in 1999.[42] Here Mira is again the only Hindu and only one of two women, together with Sappho. Many of the poems they translate are familiar, though their word choices differ significantly from others, and in one unusual song Krishna comes to wed Mirabai on a horse followed by elephants with a carriage so they can escape.[43] Barnstone classifies Mira's poetry as "mystico-erotic" and describes her as a liberated and independent woman "pursu[ing] an intensely sexual affair with her invisible God Krishna" and "describe[ing] every detail of the ecstatic unions with her lover god." [44] Nilsson and Barnstone translate Mira's songs accordingly, and it is a selection of these translations that are then included by Alika Barnstone in *The Shambala Anthology of Women's Spiritual Poetry* (2002).[45] Robert Bly and Jane Hirschfield then collaborated to produce their joint collection, *Mirabai: Ecstatic Poems*, published in 2004.

Individual Mira songs are picked up from these sources and included in other collections, seemingly in much the same way her songs were in earlier centuries in manuscript collections. Serinity Young includes 3 poems of Mira in her 1993 *An Anthology of Sacred Texts by and about Women*, drawn

from Hawley and Juergensmeyer, and Susan Neuzig Cahill includes one from the same source in *Wise Women: Over Two Thousand Years of Spiritual Writing by Women* (1997), identifying Mira as one of the "neglected" women's voices that she wants to highlight in her anthology.[46] Mary Ford-Grabowsky, too, includes a poem of Mira (seemingly adapted from Schelling though unattributed) in a chapter on "Love" in *WomanPrayers* (2003).[47] For all intents and purposes, the poems included in these anthologies appear to be simply the favorites of those known to the compilers, even as we may posit about the early manuscript collections.

There is one more anthologized set of poetry with a substantial section attributed to Mira that seems to go further afield. Here the ostensible translator Daniel Ladinsky in his *Love Poems from God: Twelve Sacred Voices from the East and West* (2002) takes great liberties with Mira, drawing on Alston, Schelling, and others but creating poems which are not translations of existing poems of Mira but his own creations in Mira's name.[48] He is very clear that he is doing this, stating in his introduction that he has been influenced by other translators but "I have used and mixed whichever of their *colors* I felt were most genuine, the most relevant to the present, and were the most capable of bringing the reader into the extraordinary experience of these great souls."[49]

The poems he creates have no identifiable connection to the story of Mira or to any images specific to poetry attributed to her in Indian sources or the other English translations available. The following poem entitled "The Earth—My Own Body I Explored" is typical:

One night as I walked in the desert
the mountains rode on my
shoulders
and the sky became my heart,
and the earth—my own body, I explored.

Every object began to wink at me, and Mira wisely
calculated the situation, thinking:

My charms must be at
their height—

now would be a good time to rush into His arms,
maybe He won't drop me
So quick.[50]

Though this and other Ladinsky Mira songs are about love and spiritual experience, the language of the poems has been stripped of images and sentiments specific to Mira and of any resonance with Mira's story, reduced instead to a kind of generic erotic mysticism.

Nothing but her name ties these songs to the sixteenth-century Hindu saint or to more contemporary traditions that have formed around her. Yet even such a process of creative innovation is not alien to the creation, reception and transmission of Indian Mirabai traditions. A jogi singer's similarly unique Mira song was recorded in Banswara, Rajasthan in the 1960s, in which Mira sings of the whole earth as her skirt, the sky her head covering, with nine hundred thousand stars adorning her limbs. Sun and moon are her ornaments, the cosmic serpent her braid. In the refrain she sings of playing with the Great King and with her brothers the sadhus while she remains awhile on this earth. Breezes fan her as she walks the mountain paths, protected by the marriage thread, and all the rivers of the earth flow from her eyes as she makes her Beloved pledge his love for her before all the people. Her tears fill the seven seas, and she drinks with cupped hands before coming to him. She decorates her sari with Saturn and wears her heart as a garland. With two hands joined, she tells him, "We will meet in the immortal realm."[51]

In contrast to Ladinsky's songs, the range of images within this poem are directly tied to the bhakti tradition and to the landscape of Rajasthan, yet it expresses a similar experience of oneness with the natural world and is also clearly a creative innovation generated by a deep appreciation for Mira. Beauty and appropriateness may be in the eye of the beholder, and though

I may find the jogi singer's song to be far more compelling and indeed far more in keeping with the "Mira" tradition, Ladinsky's Mira-songs have been picked up by other American writers and have been quoted as works of the Hindu saint. It is not uncommon in India also for poets to draw authority for their own works by attaching the signature line of a great saint, and Ladinsky may be benefiting in a parallel way from such an association.

There are additional phenomena we find in Indian poetic traditions associated with Mirabai and also in the North American receptions—songs which are more about Mirabai than by her, or that invoke her as part of a specific spiritual lineage or in an alternate context. Poet Janine Canan includes translations of two poems of Mirabai first in her *Changing Woman* (2000) and again in slightly revised form in *In the Palace of Creation* (2003) under the titles "Love" (a version of the first one published by Hirschfield in the Mitchell anthology and of Alston #191) and "O Mind, Worship" (a version of Alston #195), but we also find a longer poem called "Mira and Krishna," beautifully interweaving images from a wide range of poems of Mirabai as well as elements of her life story (again drawn from Alston) as the poet describes the love play of Mira and Krishna and the dance of love and separation.[52]

Images from familiar songs like "Jogi, don't go" are woven across multiple verses to create a new and yet familiar description of the saint:

> Mira is a pyre of aloe and sandalwood.
> Krishna heats his long cool limbs
> in her fragrant flames…
>
> Mira burns with fear and shame, doubt, disgust.
> Krishna powders himself
> with her silky ashes.[53]

Canan traces the trajectory of Mira's life away from the home of her grandfather and in-laws into a life of wandering, and though her poem is filled with very specific references to Krishna

devotion and specific popular Mirabai songs, the emotions are raw and universal, her words capturing the overwhelming hunger and explosive emotions that attend impassioned desire:

> Mira tramps across country begging, seeking.
> Krishna plays his lilting flute
> seated on her head….
>
> Mira wide-eyed gnaws on love.
> Krishna is a thorny bush
> in the night never ending.[54]

The poem culminates in their joyous union:

> Mira drenched in love
> cries, *Darling!*
> Krishna returns the love that is everlasting.
>
> Mira takes his hand, and rises out of her body.
> Krishna plays a rapturous melody
> upon it.
>
> Mira's song spreads
> To the farthest corner.
> Krishna dances blissfully on the rim of the dark.[55]

Canan does not tell us what Mira has meant to her personally, but the depth of emotion and breadth of imagery in her presentation of Mira and Krishna's love suggests that she has thoroughly immersed herself in the story and songs and is speaking from inside this experience.

Other poets too invoke Mira within their works. Naomi Ruth Lowinsky quotes Mirabai at the beginning of her first poem in *red clay is talking* (2000), with the lines " life after life/ I stand by the road/ and look for a home," while the rest of the poem describes the time before she embarked on her own love affair with the divine Beloved, whom she addresses as "you to whom Mirabai spoke" in a later poem.[56] Jamaican American poet Lorna Goodison invokes Mira with Rumi, Francis of Assisi, and Rex Nettlefield as righteous ones who wheel and dance, rising above betrayal and broken promises.[57] And Mira appears in a list of other "deadpoets"—along

with Dickenson, Ghalib, and Hayden—in a poem by South Asian American poet Reetika Vazirani, who draws inspiration from her but is not content to speak in Mira's voice and instead must find her own (as she does in the writing of the poem).[58]

Mira as an Exemplar

Drawing on the limited sources available, other contemporary American authors also cite Mira as an exemplar. Often she is simply named in the company of Kabir, Rumi, and Hafiz, for example, as great eastern spiritual writers and sometimes among more contemporary gurus identified as "saints and sages known for their wisdom and compassion …from India."[59] Such listings appear in books like *The Healing Power of Prayer: A Modern Mystic's Guide to Spiritual Power* (1997) and *Tending the Holy: Spiritual Direction Across Traditions* (2003).[60] She is also invoked as a part of a global spiritual family where the names of Dogen, Rilke, Hildegard, Teresa, Rumi, Abulafia, Kabir, John of the Cross, Eckhart, and others are joined to hers, as they are by Beverly Lanzetta in *Emerging Heart: Global Spirituality and the Sacred* (2007)[61]; by Claudia Horwitz in *The Spiritual Activist: Practices to Transform Your Life, Your Work and Your World* (2002)[62]; and by Robert and Jane Alter in *How Long Till my Soul Gets it Right? 100 Doorways on the Journey to Happiness* (2000).[63] In other cases it is specifically women in whose company she is invoked along with figures like Rabi'a of Basra, Hildegard of Bingen, and Teresa of Avila, as she is by Sherry Ruth Anderson and Patricia Hopkins in *The Feminine Face of God: The Unfolding of the Sacred in Women* (1991).[64]

Other authors will refer to Mira in a more developed way incorporating elements of her life story, character and poetry in works on psychology, spirituality, feminism, women's abuse and empowerment, and even philosophy and ecology. In these citation we see some of the vectors of her appeal. For example, G. Kenneth Bradford in an essay entitled "Romantic Love as

Path: Tensions between Erotic Desire and Security Needs" in *The Handbook on Humanistic Psychology*, presents Mira as one who was sufficient unto herself and who loved in spite of and without regard to security concerns, having willingly given up her palace and having a fully sufficient sense of self and her place in the world—the ideal lover as it were.[65] In another, *A Pilgrimage through Grief* (1995, 2003) by James E. Miller, Mira offers an understanding and articulation of grief and longing that can help with the healing process in loss, and in Robert August Master's book on the anatomy and evolution of anger, she provides a model for how to grow comfortable with the mystery that encompasses life, until rather than responding to that mystery with anger as threat, it becomes home.[66]

For others she embodies the person who knows fully what matters and what she is to do in life, and pursues it, in works such as:

- *The Thirst for Wholeness: Attachment, Addiction and the Spiritual Path* (1993) by Christina Grof, where she appears as one who articulates the excruciating pain of our "craving for the divine";[67]

- *The Hunger for Ecstasy: Fulfilling the Soul's Need for Passion and Intimacy* (2001) by Julaja Bonheim, in references to hunger and satisfaction not necessarily being opposites in the spiritual realm, to the ups and downs between ecstasy and despair experienced by the lovers of God, and to the need to banish shame;[68]

- *The Holy Longing: The Hidden Power of Spiritual Yearning* (2003) by Connie Zweig, as one who demonstrates the burning desire for God in her wish to be "turned into a heap of incense, burned to ash, and smeared on Krishna's chest" and as one to whom the author turned to understand her own spiritual longing;[69]

- *Christian Mysticism East and West* (1998) by Maria Jaoudi, for whom Mira is "the embodiment of the mystical lover archetype" who "hears the call of resurrection, the transmutative divine lover";[70]

- *WomanSpirit Oracles: Wisdom of the Ancients, Solutions for Today* (2007) by Gayle Goldwin for whom "Mirabai represents all things spiritual…longing for Oneness and the

deepening of one's relationship with the Soul, Spirit, and Source. Personal freedom and self-expression…Poetry, prayer, music, meditation, dance and singing…";[71]

- *The Call: Discovering Why You are Here* (2003, 2006) by Oriah Mountain Dreamer, as a "God-mad" person who refused to live by her culture's norms, choosing to follow a higher truth and facing ridicule and violence because of it (though, following Hirschfield, Oriah mistakenly identifies Mira as a devotee of Shiva);[72]

- *Your Heart Knows the Answer: How to Trust Yourself and Make Choices that are Right for You* (2005) by Gail Harris, for whom Mira is the embodiment of the type of person who "uses creativity to understand and express Life's mysteries;"[73]

- *Everything Matters, Nothing Matters: For Women who Dare to Live with Exquisite Calm, Euphoric Creativity and Divine Clarity* by Gina Mazza Hillier (2008) where Mira is a model for integrating bliss and ecstasy;[74]

- *Sacred Longings: The Ecological Spirit and the Global Culture* (2004) by Mary L. Grey, for whom she is emblematic of one who courageously leaves a situation of oppression and who embodies the longing for God and a love for creation, with her delight in the rain taken as a show of ecological spirituality[75]; and

- *Spiritual Liberation: Fulfilling Your Soul's Potential* (2008), by Michael Bernard Beckwith, who advocates the reading of Mira's poetry as a practice to allow us to apprehend the indescribable, experience bliss, and align ourselves with the "Cosmic Creative Principle" even as she did.[76]

As she was by Sue Monk Kidd, Mira is credited with being a companion and inspiration to many women but also men on the spiritual journey and invoked by those who would offer guidance to others along the way, as one who fully embodies and articulates the longing that is a part of the spiritual journey and the courage to step out of expectations. Deepak Chopra's inclusion of Mira in *The Soul of Love: Classic Poems of Ecstasy and Exaltation* (2001), similarly incorporates Mira as a part of his program for well-being, the poems accurately called "versions" rather than new translations, with limited originality.[77]

Increasingly Mira is also invoked in works that encourage creativity and address the transformative and spiritual dimensions of poetry, works such as *Saved by a Poem: The Transformative Power of Words* (2009) by Kim Rosen and *Poetry as Spiritual Practice:*

Reading, Writing and Using Poetry in Your Daily Rituals, Aspirations, and Intentions (2008) by Robert McDowell.[78] In the latter case, the author is clearly drawing on Ladinsky for his sole source though without referencing him, including a supposed Mira chant asserting "the divinity of women" with seemingly no connection to the Indian Mira or any other. (At this point we may begin to question whether we have crossed a line, and this is no longer a legitimate reference to Mira but rather merely to Ladinsky.)

For other writers like political philosopher Fred Dallmayr (2007) Mira speaks the language of hope and of the promise of transformation, "a healing or redemptive message" "hidden or sheltered amidst the horrors of our time."[79] And she has also come to the attention of feminists like Martha Nussbaum and Pamela Sue Anderson. Nussbaum draws on Mira via Tagore's story "A Letter from a Wife" in her essay "Women and Human Development: In Defense of Universal Values" as a part of her counter to arguments from culture that would deny such universality.[80]

In her *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion*, Anderson focuses on the stories of Mira and Antigone as "myths of dissent," drawing wholly on Mukta's work.[81] Mira appears as a woman of both reason and passion who consciously refuses to marry the *rana* and knowingly chooses a devotional community, further marginalizing herself. She freely chooses dissent, but she also represents a "yearning"–here Anderson invokes Bell Hooks—a yearning for a different world, one with a different set of values, a world of justice, etc., and she sets out to live in that world, consciously rejecting the existing order. Again Mira offers a bridge or perhaps more accurately the embodied possibility of holding perceived conflicting values holistically so that reason and passion need not be perceived as opposing forces but come together in wise longing. In her essay "South Asian Feminist Theology and its Significance for Feminist Theology," Gabriele Dietrich

will claim that the alternate values asserted by Mira are very close to those of the Jesus community.[82] Mira's relationship with Lalita and her companionship with women are also invoked is discussions of same sex love.[83]

In the case of these American feminist writers, almost all this work is entirely dependent on Parita Mukta's book—an excellent piece of scholarship but with a very specific take on Mirabai and a single source. What of the other authors cited? Where are these writers finding Mira, and what Mira are they encountering? If Mira's story appears at all, it is most often drawn from the standardized /sanitized forms from the Hindi nationalist/Rajput version reproduced by Alston. For her poetry the writers are drawing primarily on the translations by Bly, Hirschfield and Schelling, with Alston again as a touchstone for some. Hawley and Jeurgensmeyer are also cited, as are Levi and Ladinsky but with much less frequency. And all of these translators to some degree or another are engaged in cultural transformations of Mira.

Is this really Mira? Though we might want to object, we must do so carefully, understanding the nature of the tradition from its beginnings and what we are actually observing. These translators and writers are participating in the lila of the tradition in a very bhakti and Indian way, marked by immersion, engagement and transformation. And they emerge changed even as Mirabai does. Such cultural and religious transformations are not a new phenomenon, but they do become problematic when people might then want to make conclusions about the sixteenth-century Hindu woman saint based on reading them.

And such conclusions are drawn. Bly's lines "Without the energy that lifts the mountains, How am I to live?" allow Bill Devall and George Sessions to portray Mira as an advocate for deep ecology,[84] and she is invoked in *Meditations of John Muir: Nature's Temple* (2001) by editor Chris Highland, her supposed words "The Energy that holds up mountains is the

energy I bow down to" juxtaposed with a passage by Muir about maintaining the clarity and freedom of the natural world when going back into the midst of the human one.[85] Is this Mira or Bly? A Mira poem by Ladinsky is included in an anthology of prayers for animals though again it bears no resemblance to any poem I am familiar with from the Indian corpus of Mirabai poems.[86] And the poem by Schelling above appears on the opening pages of the novel *A Woman Alone at Night*, about an amateur porn star called Mira who enters sex work but eventually is redeemed—a stark reminder of where the Americanization and eroticization of Mirabai's songs can lead.[87] The Mira these authors know and draw on is a far cry from the Mira of Nabhadas or Rajput historians, but also of Gulzar and of the folk epic song *Mira Janma Patri*. But whether we want to admit it or not, is there not a "certain logic" operating here?

Mira *has* captured the imagination of a multitude of people in America, and the ways in which she inspires people and is appropriated and transformed in this process do have distinct parallels with the ways in which popular traditions around her have grown in India across the centuries. Yet we may still ask the question of authenticity: at what point has Mira been so made-over into our own images that she is no longer "Mira," no longer a Hindu devotional saint of the sixteenth century but something quite alien to her origins? The same question, however, is also asked in Indian contexts, in part in recognition that the traditions which surround Mira are irrevocably participatory and creative, requiring people to imaginatively fill in the details and inviting them to join in this performative world.

People recognize themselves, as they are or as they would like to be, in the songs and the lila of her life, bringing their own experiences, hopes, fears and dreams to bear on them and coming to understand themselves via Mira even as they understand Mira via themselves. As a woman who dared to sing and speak her mind in public, she becomes a catalyst for others to find

their own voices, and as one who embodies the authentic human and spiritual life, she calls others to be true to themselves and to be the best they can be, facilitating psychological healing and spiritual transformation. The universal dimensions of her story and the emotions articulated in songs attributed to her allow for many different points of entry and identification, fueling a creative outpouring of narrative and poetic abundance.

If there is such abundance in the land of her origin, in the context of the American reception of Mira, we should not expect the "American Mira" to look exactly like the "Indian Mira," even as Rachel McDermott has suggested about western feminist appropriations of Kali.[88] We are, in fact, no longer talking strictly about a sixteenth-century Hindu woman from Rajasthan but rather about a popular and living tradition. It is important that we recognize this, before making naïve conclusions about Hinduism, women in India, or the like. To address these issues we need to look at the communities and individuals generating specific songs and narrative traditions and other writings on the saint and at the underlying agendas that may inform them. A truly global spirituality will also need to allow for a more careful contextual reading of saints like Mirabai if it is indeed to be truly inclusive of the wealth of diverse global spiritual insights, rather than simply invoking these saints' names to establish an authoritative spiritual lineage.

Those of us who are scholars must admit that we can and often unwittingly do play a part in the globalization and cultural transformation of such Hindu traditions. Do we then have some responsibility to step out to address this popular hunger, to straddle the boundary between scholarship and popular culture, to provide "authentic" material for this appropriation and encounter? I would argue that we do, though Mira, for her part, is not waiting for us. She continues to dance away from the attempts by any group or individual to claim her as their

exclusive property, and to invite transformative participation, heedlessly crossing the boundaries of religion and culture, even as she has done for the past 500 years in India.

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[2] Lindsay Harlan, *Religion and Rajput Women: The Ethic of Protection in Contemporary Narratives (*Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).
[3] Nancy M. Martin, "*Mira Janma Patri* and Other Tales of Resistance and Appropriation," in *Religion, Ritual, and Royalty,* edited by Rajendra Joshi and N. K. Singhi (Jaipur: Rawat Press, 1999), pp. 227-261.
[4] Kamala Chandrakant, "Mirabai," *Amar Chitra Katha*, vol. 535 (Mumbai: India Book House, 1972).
[5]Rabindranath Thakur (Tagore), "Letter from a Wife," translated by Kalpana Bardhan in *Of Women, Outcastes, Peasants, and Rebels: A Selection of Bengali Short Stories* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 190.
[6] Rabindranath Tagore, "Yogayog (Nexus)," translated by Hiten Bhaya in *The Tagore Omnibus,* Vol. 1 (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2005).
[7] Shashi Deshpande, *The Binding Vine* (New York: The Feminist Press, 2001 (1993)). See also Ritu Menon, "Afterword: No Longer Silent," in Shashi Deshpande, *A Matter of Time* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1999), pp. 247-269.
[8] Kate Sykes, ed., *New Voices 9* (New York: iUniverse, Inc., 2006), pp. 69-82.
[9] Tameet Sethi, "Why We Write," in Sykes, ed., *New Voices 9*, p. 72.
[10] For further information on these films, see meerabainotout.com and rockinmeera.com.
[11] James H. Cousins, *The King's Wife* (Madras: Ganesh & Co., 1919).
[12] A. J. Alston, *The Devotional Poems of Mirabai* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1980).
[13] Nammalvar, *Hymns for the Drowning: Poems for Visnu*, trans. A.K. Ramanujan (originally published by Princeton University Press in 1981, republished by Penguin Books, 2005); A. K. Ramanujan, trans., *Speaking of Siva* (New York: Penguin Books, 1973); Linda Hess and Sukhdev Singh, trans., *The Bijak of Kabir* (San Francisco: Northpoint Press, 1983); Kenneth Bryant, *Poems to the Child-God: Structures and Strategies in the Poetry of Surdas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); and John Stratton Hawley, *Surdas: Poet, Singer, Saint* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1984).
[14] A full discussion of these Indian traditions will appear in my full length monograph on the saint, *Mirabai*.
[15] Martin, "*Mira Janma Patri"*, p. .
[16] Robert Bly, "A Few Words about Mirabai," in Bly and Jane Hirschfield, *Mirabai: Ecstatic Poems* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004), p. ix.
[17] Robert Bly, *Iron John: A Book about Men* (Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley, 1990), p. 177.
[18] Nammalvar, *Hymns for the Drowning*, p. 13.
[19] John Stratton Hawley, "Afterword" in Bly and Hirschfield, *Mirabai*, p. 91.
[20] Bly and Hirschfield, *Mirabai*, p. 21.
[21] Alston, *The Devotional Poems of Mirabai*, p. 43 (poem #25).
[22] Linda Schierse Leonard, *The Wounded Woman* (Boston: Shambala, 1982, 2nd edition 1998), pp. 35-36; Sue Monk Kidd, *The Dance of a Dissident Daughter: A Woman's Journey from Christian Tradition to the Sacred Feminine* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996), p. 216.
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[24] Parita Mukta, *Upholding the Common Life: The Community of Mirabai* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994).
[25] Andrew Schelling, trans., *For Love of the Dark One: Songs of Mirabai* (Boston: Shambhala Press, 1993), pp. 147-155.
[26] Ibid., pp. 14-5.
[27] Ibid., pp. 25-6.

[28] Andrew Schelling, reproduced from *For Love of the Dark One: Songs of Mirabai*, revised edition (Prescott, AZ: Hohm Press, 1998), page 73, with permission from Hohm Press. A slightly different form of the poem appears in the earlier edition on page 125.
[29] Alston, *Devotional Poems of Mirabai*, pp. 103-104 (poem 169), reproduced with permission from Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd.
[30] Schelling, *For Love of the Dark One*, pp. 147-148.
[31] Shama Futehally, *In the Dark of the Heart: Songs of Meera* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1994) and Louise Landes Levi, *Sweet on my Lips: The Love Poems of Mirabai* (New York: Cool Grove Press, 1997).
[32] Futehally, *In the Dark of the Heart*, p. xiii.
[33] Ibid., pp .26-7.
[34] Ibid., pp. 36-7.
[35] Ibid., p. 115 (poem 25).
[36] Ibid., p. 125 (poem 29)
[37] Levi, *Sweet on my Lips*, p. 3.
[38] Stephen Mitchell, ed., *The Enlightened Heart: An Anthology of Sacred Poetry* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), pp. 77-79.
[39] Jane Hirschfield, *Women in Praise of the Sacred: 43 Centuries of Spiritual Poetry by Women* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), pp. 131-142.
[40]Daniel Halpern, *Holy Fire: Nine Visionary Poets and the Quest for Enlightenment* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), pp. 58-82.
[41] Ibid., pp. xv, xvi.
[42] Willis Barnstone, trans., *To Touch the Sky: Poems of Mystical, Spiritual and Metaphysical Light* (New York: New Directions, 1999), pp. 149-166.
[43] Ibid., p. 151.
[44] Ibid., pp. ix, 149.
[45] Alika Barnstone, *Shambhala Anthology of Women's Spiritual Poetry* (Boston: Shambhala Press, 1999) pp. 87-91.
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