

## ***Dear Friends, Scholars and Critics***

*This is a soft copy of my doctoral dissertation written during the final five years of the previous millennium .Apart from a fairly large theoretical component dealing with translation theory, practice of translation and translation studies, it consists of around ninety compositions of Narsinh Mehta (c. 15<sup>th</sup> century AD), one of the greatest poets of Gujarat translated by me into English. Besides a critical appreciation of his works, the translations are framed with chapters discussing his life, works and the cultural context in which they were composed. I have been working on the translations and they have metamorphosed into a very different avatar today. However, those presented here are the ones I submitted for the degree. There are some slight changes in this copy owing to my ignorance of formatting methods. The bibliography which appears at the end of the thesis comes before the `notes and references of the soft copy. The notes and references for the individual chapters now appear at the end of the thesis. The `Table of Contents' is merely a showpiece- it doesn't indicate the specified pages in this copy. I don't intend to publish this thesis in the present form and it has appeared in parts in many places.*

*The work which I started with my doctoral research is actually a work in `progress' and I find it interesting to look back where I was some eight years ago. I would be honoured to hear your critical comments and reactions to my work.*

***Sachin Ketkar***

***Baroda, 27 December 2007***

**TRANSLATION OF**  
**NARSINH MEHTA'S POEMS**  
**INTO ENGLISH:**  
**WITH A CRITICAL INTRODUCTION**

*Thesis Submitted*  
*For The Degree Of*

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**SURAT**

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*March 2001*

***DEDICATED TO***

***GUJARATI LANGUAGE***

***WITH LOVE, ADMIRATION***

***AND GRATITUDE***

## **DECLARATION**

I, Sachin Chandrakant Ketkar hereby declare that this thesis Translation of Narsinh Mehta's Poems into English: With a Critical Introduction submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Faculty of Arts, South Gujarat University, Surat is my original work. No part of this thesis has been previously submitted for any other degree or diploma.

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## CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that this doctoral thesis, *Translation Of Narsinh Mehta's Poems into English: With a Critical Introduction*, is submitted by Sachin Chandrakant Ketkar for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Arts, South Gujarat University, Surat. No part of this thesis has been previously submitted for any other degree or diploma.

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**Sachin Ketkar**

Research Candidate

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b><u>Contents</u></b>	<b><u>Page Number</u></b>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	i
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	01
Chapter 2: Translation Studies: Theoretical Perspectives.....	10
2.1    Historical Development.....	11
2.2    Areas of Emphasis.....	18
2.2.1    Translation and Language Sciences.....	18
2.2.2    Translation, Literary Studies and the Study of Culture.....	28
2.2.3    History of Translation Activity.....	51
2.2.4    Translation and Philosophy.....	76
2.3    Conclusion.....	88
Chapter 3: Background to the Poetry of Narsinh Mehta.....	97
3.1    Introduction to the Bhakti Movement.....	98
3.1.1    Poetics of Bhakti Literature.....	109
3.2    Gujarati Society, Language and Literature at the Time of Narsinh.....	115
3.2.1    Social and Historical Background.....	115
3.2.2    Gujarati Language.....	121
3.2.3    Literary Background.....	123
3.3    Life and Works of Narsinh Mehta.....	129
3.3.1    Life of Narsinh Mehta.....	129
3.3.2    The Works of Narsinh Mehta.....	137
Chapter 4: Critical Introduction to the Poetry of Narsinh.....	145
4.1    The Adi Kavi.....	146
4.2    Narsinh the Poet.....	148
4.3    The Legend of Radha and Krishna.....	158



4.4	Philosophical and Didactic Poems of Narsinh.....	163
4.5	Conclusion.....	181

Chapter 5: Translations of Narsinh's Poems .....185

5.1	Songs of <i>Sringar</i> .....	186
5.1.1	As if it was rapture of rains of milk.....	186
5.1.2	At what auspicious hour did you stick to me like a <i>bindi</i> .....	187
5.1.3	Be still, be still, O moon, do not make the dawn yet.....	188
5.1.4	Cherish red, love, for the beautiful season is tinged with red!...	189
5.1.5	Cold, cold is my bed in winter!.....	190
5.1.6	Cover me with a blanket O Kanha.....	191
5.1.7	Don't untie the threads of my <i>choli</i> , my love.....	192
5.1.8	Don't wake me up vigorously, O Madhukar!.....	193
5.1.9	Embrace me with such a passion.....	194
5.1.10	Enjoy this girl and celebrate the night!.....	195
5.1.11	Fair one, in the middle of the night.....	196
5.1.12	Has your heart turned to stone, love?.....	198
5.1.13	Her eyes twinkle in the veil like the light of dawn!.....	199
5.1.14	Hold your immaculate flame O lamp.....	200
5.1.15	I went to fetch water from the lake.....	201
5.1.16	I woke up all of a sudden from my sleep.....	202
5.1.17	I won't let you embrace!.....	203
5.1.18	I'll tie you to my bed with garland of flowers.....	204
5.1.18.2	"Listen, my beautiful one ", says Shri Hari.....	205
5.1.19	It's my beloved over there at midnight.....	206
5.1.20	Kanji is drenched in saffron.....	207
5.1.21	Last night my lord went away seeing me asleep.....	208
5.1.22	Let's go and play dear friend.....	209
5.1.23	Lift your veil, mischievous girl.....	210
5.1.24	Ma! The dark cobra with pearl.....	211
5.1.25	My fruit-like breasts are your possessions.....	212
5.1.26	My lord, embrace me deeply, and soothe my heart.....	213
5.1.27	No one understands my state.....	214
5.1.28	Play <i>raas</i> with us love.....	215
5.1.29	Ravishing is her youth dear.....	217
5.1.30	She plays with the dark one, her sweet anklets chime.....	218

5.1.31	Someone silence that bird; he doesn't leave me alone.....	219
5.1.32	Sweet flute, tell us what austerities have you performed?.....	220
5.1.33	Tell me truly, my dark beloved.....	221
5.1.34	The arrow of desire has pierced my heart!.....	222
5.1.35	The dark one came stealthily last night.....	223
5.1.36	The dark one turned to gaze the moonlike face.....	224
5.1.37	The flute resonates today! The flute resonates today!.....	225
5.1.38	The sea of ecstasy has ebbed and gone, dear friend.....	226
5.1.39	This is how I bewitched him, friend.....	228
5.1.40	Today Kanuda my darling has deserted me!.....	229
5.1.41	Today my left eyelid twitches, O I will meet my love today!..	230
5.1.42	What is it about your eyes, love?.....	231
5.1.43	Who is it singing the <i>panchama</i> raga at my doors?.....	232
5.2	Devotional, Philosophical, and Didactic Poems.....	233
5.2.1	<i>Ananta</i> is the name of my infallible medicine.....	233
5.2.2	By the grace of the holy ones, all things turn out well.....	235
5.2.3	Come friend! Let's go and behold the mango tree.....	236
5.2.4	Dark clouds thunder and Madhava dances!.....	237
5.2.5	Dearer than life is the Vaishnava to me.....	238
5.2.6	Essence of essence is the birth of the weaker sex.....	240
5.2.7	Girls merrily watch the procession.....	242
5.2.8	Great is the wealth of <i>bhakti</i> found only on the earth.....	244
5.2.9	How will I worship you, Krishna.....	246
5.2.10	In the middle of the night, my dear.....	248
5.2.11	In this entire universe, you alone exist, Shri Hari.....	249
5.2.12	It's you, it's you, you are looking for, just think .....	251
5.2.13	Let us not mind the happiness and the grief.....	252
5.2.14	Listen my friend! In my rapt ecstasy.....	254
5.2.15	Look, who is roving in the sky!.....	256
5.2.16	Meditate! Meditate on Hari, O dimwitted sloth.....	258
5.2.17	Meditate, meditate, the lord is in your eye.....	260
5.2.18	My beautiful dark one, I 'd sacrifice everything.....	261
5.2.19	O Mind, acquire the greatest treasure.....	262
5.2.20	O today it's Diwali! O it's the Festival of Lights for me!.....	263
5.2.21	O torchbearer is Narsaiyyo!.....	264
5.2.22	One who feels others grief as his own.....	265
5.2.23	Only a few truly know, dear, the nectar of Hari.....	267

5.2.24	Only because <i>I</i> truly exist, <i>you</i> exist!.....	268
5.2.25	Passing for the wise and faking wisdom.....	269
5.2.26	Pointless it is to lament.....	270
5.2.27	Recite O parrot King Rama's name.....	271
5.2.28	Saints, we are the traders of Rama's name!.....	272
5.2.29	Serve me the draught of love's ambrosia.....	273
5.2.30	The bliss of my lord's closeness lasted as long as the night.....	275
5.2.31	The naive milkmaid goes around selling Hari!.....	276
5.2.32	The sap of the earth has spread through the branches.....	277
5.2.33	This dark night- my enemy, has flowed away.....	278
5.2.34	This is not the way to find the essence of truth, O Pundits!.....	279
5.2.35	True fulfillment of my birth .....	281
5.2.36	Unless and until you have grasped the essence of the Self.....	282
5.2.37	Wayward progeny of a lewd whore, what teaching.....	284
5.2.38	We will simply forsake anything that stops us.....	285
5.2.39	When I wake up, the world recedes from my sight.....	286
5.2.40	Who has sent the old age? I thought youth was here to stay!...287	
5.2.41	With absolute joy, I sing the <i>brahman</i> !.....	289
5.2.42	You alone are the beginning, the middle, and the end!.....	290
5.2.43	You may have obtained <i>nama</i> , but without Rama.....	292
5.3	Miscellaneous Compositions.....	294
5.3.1	Always up to some prank, this mischievous little Govindji.....	294
5.3.2	Awake O Jadava, O Krishna the cowherd!.....	295
5.3.3	`Gimme that moon to play with, Ma! Gimme those stars!.....	296
5.3.4.1	In Damodar lake, near Girnar hill.....	297
5.3.4.2	We are like that-yes we are like what you say.....	299
5.3.5	Kaanji, Kaanji is what everyone calls you.....	300
5.3.6	Leave this river full of lotuses, child.....	301
5.3.7	Let go your embrace for a while and send my lord!.....	304
5.3.8	Little Hari, my cute one, don't you know the secret?.....	305
5.3.9	This cute little Gokul.....	306

Chapter 6:	Translating Narsinh Mehta's Poems: Challenges and Strategies.....	307
------------	---	-----

6.1	`eyr ybroken'.....	309
6.2	Translating Culture.....	316

6.3	Linguistics and Semantics of Translation.....	321
6.4	Conclusion.....	328
Chapter 7: On 'Shutting' of the Thesis.....		332
Appendix: Glossary of Indian Terms.....		341
Bibliography.....		352

**CHAPTER 1**  
**INTRODUCTION**

Narsinh Mehta's poetry is one of the invaluable treasures of Gujarati language. His lyrics have swayed the hearts of millions of Gujarati people from scholars to illiterate poor for over five centuries. The compositions attributed to Narsinh are inseparable from Gujarati ethos and identity. Not much is known about these magnificent songs outside Gujarat apart from the famous '*Vaishnava jana to tene kahiye..*' which was included in the daily ashram prayers by Mahatma Gandhi and thus received international fame. Not many people are aware of the wide range of poetic themes Narsinh handled, like dramatic narratives, autobiographical compositions, love songs, philosophical poems of unsurpassable grandeur, poems expressing honest moral concerns and the poems on Krishna's childhood.

The greatness of Narsinh lies not only in the fact that he wrote some of the most wonderful songs ever written in this country, but also in the fact that he was among the earliest poets to democratize the language of spirituality. He had a sure knack of expressing very complex metaphysical ideas in a language that was seductively beautiful, yet extremely simple, and accessible. No wonder Narsinh Mehta is so famous and his songs are sung across the geographical and social space of Gujarat. The main intention in translating his poetry was to bring non-Gujarati readers a step closer to the beauty of the poems by providing readable and reasonably accurate renderings of some of his best poems into English. The serious study of the activity of translation and the questions it raised went a long way in enhancing my understanding of this complex and fascinating cultural practice of considerable significance which unfortunately even today is a rather neglected area. Besides, translation of the works of a poet of the stature of Narsinh was in itself a personally enriching encounter as it provided something more than merely aesthetic experience. It provided insights into relationship of an extraordinary poet with culture, history, and society. Personally, translation is simply a way of sharing one's experiences with others. At its base is the very human desire to communicate.

This research project provided an opportunity to have a firmer grasp on the theoretical issues as well as the practical considerations of translation. While it demanded critical and analytical thinking like any other research activity, it also provided significant space for the exercise of creative abilities.

The thesis has been divided into seven chapters. The second chapter is a brief introduction to the discipline of translation studies and the various theoretical perspectives. The four-fold division of the discipline provided by Susan Bassnett has been altered.<sup>1</sup> Here the discipline is divided into four broad areas of emphasis: Translation and Language Sciences, Translation, Literary Studies and the study of cultures, History of Translation activity and theory and Translation and philosophy. The divisions are by no means mutually exclusive, they often overlap, and the divisions are merely for sake of convenience in classifying a broad range of theoretical writings. The first category includes all the approaches that take the scientific study of language as their theoretical matrix. These approaches take their theoretical tools from language sciences like linguistics, semantics, and pragmatics. The works of major theorists like Catford, Nida, Roger Bell, and Roman Jakobson are taken into consideration among many other important theorists. This category can even accommodate machine translation and artificial intelligence, but this area of serious and important research is not discussed here, as the focus of the research is literary translation.

The second category is that of translation, literary studies, and study of culture. It considers more conventional and essentialist approaches to the study of literary translation as well as the approaches that consider literature as a discourse and study its complex relationship to its context. It discusses various interdisciplinary approaches like the 'systems' approach as advanced by well-known theorists like Lefevere, Toury, and Theo Hermans, and major current critical perspectives like feminism, postcolonial studies, and cultural studies. The influential theorists like Gayatri Chakravarti Spivak, Harish Trivedi, St.Pierre are discussed. The third category, the history of translation is as discussed by Susan Bassnett, but here it is considered with reference to India. A brief historical sketch of translation activity in India is provided as the research deals with translation from Indian point of view. Significant theoretical statements from critics like G.N.Devy, Harish Trivedi, Dr. Tiwari, and St.Pierre are employed in the discussion.

The third chapter provides a background to Narsinh's poetry to non-Gujarati readers. It begins with a general discussion about the *bhakti* movement in medieval India. The main ideas associated with this movement are presented with a historical and sociological viewpoint in this chapter. It also gives a confabulation about the poetics of *bhakti*, especially its oral performative context and its attempt to bridge the local literary traditions with pan-Indian Sanskrit literary and philosophical tradition. The chapter contains an account of the Gujarati literature and society at the time of Narsinh. It also gives a brief sketch of the life and works attributed to Narsinh. This deliberation and information will hopefully help the reader not acquainted with Gujarati literature and culture in having a better understanding of the poetry of Narsinh presented in translation. Though some discussion about the controversy over the date of Narsinh's birth and the authenticity of some of his compositions is presented here, no attempt is made to offer solutions to these controversies. In the

case of Narsinh, as in the case of most of the major Indian writers of ancient and medieval times, hardly any definitive information is available and most of the 'facts' are merely theoretical conjectures, opinions, and beliefs. The character of Narsinh Mehta is central to innumerable fictitious, semi-fictitious narratives, seemingly autobiographical compositions and legends which may or may not be 'true' in the historical sense but are definitely true in the sense that they reveal how the persona of a medieval saint-singer is usually perceived and constructed in India.

The fourth chapter is a critical appreciation of Narsinh's genius as reflected in his poems and it also acts as a critical introduction to his literary art. It analyses Narsinh's language in terms of its various stylistic features, figurative play, the aspects of symbolism and the use of myth. It considers the various symbols, themes and phonetic properties tightly interlaced in the poetic expression. It also focuses on the thematic and ideological component of his poems concentrating especially on the theme of love, eroticism, devotion, autobiographical elements, use of narratives, and the didactic and moral concerns. It seeks to understand the erotic allegory of Radha and Krishna and the deep influence of the Vedantic philosophy as revealed in his poetry. This chapter also seriously views the importance of Narsinh Mehta the musician *par excellence* in relation to his poetic art. In addition, it also looks at Narsinh in the light of the medieval Indian poetics as discussed in the chapter on the poetics of *bhakti*. This chapter is written in the hope that it will help the reader to enjoy the nuances of Narsinh's poetry.

The fifth chapter comprises of the translations of Narsinh Mehta's poetry. The translations are divided thematically into poems of love, the poems of devotion, the philosophical and didactic poems, and miscellaneous compositions like autobiographical narratives and the poems on Krishna's childhood. A K Ramanujan, who was not merely a brilliant translator, erudite scholar and an outstanding poet, but also a source of inspiration for many, has noted, consciously alluding to Valery, that translations, especially of poems, being poems themselves are never completed but are abandoned.<sup>ii</sup> Translations can never replace the originals for those who are fortunate enough to have access to the originals without translations but they are the originals for those who are not so fortunate. The translations of Narsinh's poems have been done with this awareness of inadequacy and responsibility to the source language texts as well as the readers of the translations. As pure synonymy does not exist even within a language believing that it will be possible between two languages is asking for too much, but this fact does not rule out the possibility of coming closer to the source language text in another language. These translations, I hope will make the non-Gujarati readers intimate with Narsinh's beautiful poems.

The sixth chapter discusses the process of translating Narsinh Mehta into English and the challenges encountered during the activity. It also discusses the strategies employed during the process. The

chapter is more empirical than theoretical in its orientation and becomes almost an autobiographical narrative relating the intimate affair with Narsinh's poetry. The strategies reflect the intention behind translations as discussed above. The major challenge was to translate the poems that are actually songs. The inevitable choice of either sacrificing most of the heavenly word music or sacrificing the profound and equally beautiful semantic content stared in face and the former alternative seemed more feasible as in translation one has to abandon the phonetic texture of the source language text and replace it with the phonetic texture of the receptor language. Yet, an attempt is made to reproduce some of the word music of the original without compromising on the sense. Poetic quality, hopefully, is reproduced to a certain extent. The issues relating to the translation of culture specific items like kinship network, various cultural semiotic systems, and metaphysics are also discussed with reference to Narsinh's poems. Further, the problems arising from the linguistic difference in terms of syntax and lexis are touched upon. There is a discussion on semantic ambiguity in the source language texts and strategies used in dealing with it.

The seventh chapter is an attempt to provide a conclusion of sorts in research such as this. While it attempts to sum up the important discoveries I made during the research it also points out the various questions it has raised which will become basis of future research enterprise. The conclusion then will not merely be 'the end' of critical inquiry into translation but also a beginning of sorts.

The thesis will have a glossary of Indian terms and words used.

As can be seen from the above account, the research of this type comprises of both critical and creative efforts. The research has also instilled a sense of discipline and enhanced my critical and analytical skills. The creative faculty is more prominent in re-encoding the critically decoded text. Such a kind of effort involving the creative abilities provides insights into the complex process of production of literary texts by bringing new literary texts into existence, in this case the translations of Narsinh Mehta into English. It also increases ones understanding of the 'pre-life' and the 'after-life' of a literary text in the form of translations and the later critical responses.



## **TRANSLATION STUDIES: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES.**

One has only to imagine the world without translation. Languages then would be formidable walls from which no other world except the one allowed by one's own language could be seen, for all interlingual and intercultural communication is translation of a kind. Everyone would live in such restricted and mutually incomprehensible worlds. But the fact that other societies, cultures and languages *can* be understood to varying extent proves that translations *are* possible and that there *is* something at the deep structures of languages and other systems of signification which allows something to be carried across in spite of the formal differences in linguistic and cultural structures. The human structures of signification are not always completely specific and inseparable from the system that makes them possible. An act of abstraction is possible which prevents these systems from being opaque. The act of translation then raises questions for disciplines as diverse as language sciences, cultural and political studies, literary studies, and metaphysics. Translation Studies is thus an interdisciplinary approach to various questions raised by the act of translation.

As this research involves actual practice of literary translation, a review and a discussion of major theoretical issues related to translation as process and product is necessary to provide a proper perspective to the work. The awareness of these issues and perspectives is essential not only for a practicing translator but also for the student investigating into various aspects of translation. At the beginning of the present chapter, a brief historical development of thinking about translation in the West up to the first half of twentieth century is provided. The discussion about the various areas of emphasis in the discipline of Translation Studies and the development of translation theory in the later half of twentieth century forms the later sections of the chapter.

### **Historical Development**

The activity of translation is extremely ancient. Newmark notes that the first traces of translation known to us are the bilingual inscriptions during the Egyptian Old Kingdom as far back as 3000 BC<sup>iii</sup>. In spite of this the discipline of Translation Studies is very recent. In fact it was in 1978 that Andre Lefevere proposed that the name Translation Studies be adopted for the discipline that concerns itself with 'the problems raised by the production and description of translations.'<sup>iv</sup>

Though the beliefs about translation are as old as the activity itself, the earliest known systematic

exposition and the most enduring theoretical thinking comes from Romans like Cicero (55 AD). Until more recently, thinking about translation has always revolved around the actual praxis. Romans believed that word to word translation was incorrect and resulted in clumsiness and quaintness which would hinder communication. They even thought that translation was an act of appropriation, of looting the treasures of the other cultures showing no concern for the stylistic and formal features of the original text.

The Roman beliefs about translation influenced the Bible translators of the early Christian period such as St. Jerome (400 AD) who like Cicero believed in translating sense for sense rather than word for word. The activity of translating the Gospel into European languages resulted in a great deal of reflection on translation. Indeed the practice of translation was part of the proselytizing mission of Christianity and the development of a systematic study of the translation process and product, which was more or less normative in nature in early history of the Western civilization, is associated with the political agenda of proselytizing. John Wycliffe (1330-84), Martin Luther (1522), and Erasmus (1516) are famous Bible Translators. From earliest times, the act of translation was never considered innocent or harmless. Tyndale's New Testament(1526) was publicly burned and Coverdale's Bible was banned. The act of translating the Bible into the vernaculars during the sixteenth century was associated with the rise of Protestantism and in spite of similar prosecutions, the tide of Bible Translation could not be checked. The French humanist Eitienne Dolet (1509-46) was executed for mistranslating one of Plato's dialogues as to imply disbelief in immortality<sup>v</sup>. Eitienne Dolet also published a short outline of translation principles in 1540. These principles were extremely influential and the great translator of Homer, George Chapman (1559-1634), reiterated Dolet's views.

The activity of translation occupied an important place in the European Renaissance. Wyatt (1503-42) and Surrey's (c.1517-47) translation of Petrarch into English became extremely influential and many literary conventions were introduced into England during the time like the sonnet form or Terza Rima stanza form. According to Friedrich Hugo the dominant characteristic of European translation theory during the time of Renaissance was the approach based on the premise that the `purpose of translation is to go beyond the appropriation of content to a releasing of those linguistic and aesthetic energies that heretofore had existed only as a pure possibility in one's own language and had never been materialized before'<sup>vi</sup> and thus resulting in the enrichment of target language and culture. Translation was a positive force and has played a formative role in one of the most glorified ages in the Western history. An interesting example is that of the French translation of Seneca's Lucilius Letters by Malherbe at the turn of the seventeenth century which completely does away with stylistic features of Seneca and introduces a new and influential prose style in French.<sup>vii</sup> Bassnett-McGuire <sup>viii</sup> draws attention to the fact that translation was, `by no means a secondary

activity, but a primary one, exerting a shaping force on the intellectual life of the age, and at times the figure of the translator appears almost as a revolutionary activist rather than a servant of the original author or text.'

The most important theorist of the post-Renaissance Period was the poet, dramatist, and critic John Dryden (1631-1700). His classification of the activity of translation into 'metaphrase' or word-by-word translation, 'paraphrase' or sense-by-sense translation and 'imitation' or free rendering where the original text can be abandoned, became very influential. His ideal was of course to, 'steer betwixt the two extremes of paraphrase and literal translation; to keep as near my author as I could, without losing all his graces.'<sup>ix</sup> Sir John Denham, the famous translator, focussed on the importance of recreation in translation especially of poetry because he believed that one did not translate language into language but 'Poesie into Poesie; and Poesie is of so subtile a spirit, that in pouring out of one Language into another, it will all evaporate; and if a new spirit is not added in the transfusion, there will remain nothing but *caput mortuum*.'<sup>x</sup> It seems that in post-Renaissance era, the purpose of translation was not appropriation of the content of the original and neglect stylistic features, or that of focusing on appropriation of the stylistic features and taking liberties with the content in order to widen the horizons of the target language, but it was rather a sort of compromise between these two approaches. It was also a compromise between fidelity and creativity, which is seen in Alexander Tytler's *The Principles of Translation* (1791) where he stresses the aspect of fidelity to the form and the content of the original along with the 'ease of the original composition'. The idea of delicate balance between the closeness to the source text and the closeness to the target language became very widespread.

In what is termed as 'Romantic Age', which emphasized the notion of 'organic unity' of a literary work and 'Imagination', there was an ambiguous attitude to translation. Shelley saw translation as 'a way of filling in the gaps between inspirations' giving it a lower status and almost echoed Denham in suggesting that one must be creative in order to be good and said, 'the plant must spring again from its seed, or it will bear no flower-and this is the burthen of the curse of Babel.' On the other hands thinkers like Schlegel (1767-1845) saw translation as a category of thought and hence having universal dimension by which a translator could get in touch with the genius of the original and therefore he could possess a genius of his own.<sup>xi</sup>

Seminal thinkers like Schleiermacher (1768-1834) and Schopenhauer (1788-1860) saw that the horizon of translation was more widespread and closely related to interpretation and hermeneutics. Schleriermacher observed that there are two ways of translating: 'Either the translator leaves the writer alone as much as possible and moves the reader towards the writer or he leaves the reader alone as much as possible and moves the writer towards the reader' and favours the first method

which emphasizes the idea of drawing out the readers from the linguistic world they inhabit.<sup>xii</sup> Another German theorist Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835) also laid great emphasis on fidelity and favoured multiple translations. Friedrich Hugo notes that in the second half of the eighteenth century the translation theory developed which was more tolerant to the cultural differences.<sup>xiii</sup>

Later in the Victorian Age, Matthew Arnold (1822-68) thought that the bi-lingual scholars alone were the true judges of translation. Longfellow (1807-81) again emphasized fidelity and literalness while Fitzgerald (1809-63) expressed an opposite view by saying that a live sparrow was better than a stuffed eagle. There was also a widespread tendency to archaizing the translation in order to convey the remoteness of time and place.<sup>xiv</sup>

Important discussion on the translation theory is to be found in the works of well known writers and translators like Robert Graves, Ezra Pound, Hilaire Belloc in the first half of the twentieth century. Mention must also be made of James McFarlane's article 'Modes of Translation' in 1953.

All the discourse of the translation we have discussed here can be considered as 'pre-linguistics oriented theories' of translation. In spite of a wide range of points raised and some very enduring beliefs expostulated these theories seem to boil down to a few binary conceptual oppositions like free versus literal translation, fidelity versus betrayal as captured in the famous Italian saying *tradduttore traditore*, necessity versus impossibility of translation, secondary or primary status of the translated text, and of course, translatability versus untranslatability. An important feature of these theories of translation is that they are derived from practical experience of translating and with a little armchair speculation. The twentieth century witnesses an immense development in linguistics and other language sciences. The development of these fields also runs parallel to development in other social sciences like anthropology, history, and sociology as well as the disciplines traditionally considered as humanities, which consist of literary studies, and philosophy. Obviously these developments influenced the thinking about the activity of translation. The later half of the twentieth century studied translation very seriously perhaps due to the rapid process of globalization in social and economic sphere. It will be very interesting to make a brief survey of the development of the translation theories and Translation Studies in the later half of the twentieth century.

### **Areas of Emphasis**

In her very comprehensive introduction to Translation Studies in 1980, Susan Bassnett-McGuire divides the wide field into four general areas of interest, which frequently overlap: i) History of Translation, ii) translation and TL culture, iii) translation and Linguistics and iv) Translation and Poetics, the first two being product oriented and the other two being process oriented.<sup>xv</sup> However, it would be more convenient to study the wide-ranging field by dividing the field in four interrelated

areas of emphasis: i) Translation and Language Sciences ii) Translation, Literary Studies and the Study of Culture iii) History of Translation and iv) Translation and Philosophy.

### Translation and Language Sciences

“Translation is an operation performed on languages: a process of substituting a text in one language for a text in another. Clearly, then, any theory of translation must draw upon a theory of language, a general linguistic theory.”<sup>xvi</sup> This is how J.C.Catford begins his famous *A Linguistic Theory of Translation* (1965). Indeed, translation theory began to be grounded on sound scientific base in the form of the linguistics and started to have a rigour, which was absent before. Translation was conceived as primarily a verbal operation and by using the latest knowledge about linguistic behaviour, the theorists sought to describe and explain the phenomenon of translation using linguistic theory. Though other essays with linguistics grounding had appeared earlier like that of Willard V.Quine 's essay 'Meaning and Translation' (1966)<sup>xvii</sup>, Catford's essay to this day remains as one of the most lucid and comprehensive discussions on the subject. He was a pioneer of sorts and showed an exciting and fruitful way to deal with translation.

One of the main concerns of this approach to translation was the definition of translation. Catford defined translation as 'the replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another language (TL).' The use of the term 'textual material' instead of the word 'term' is particularly significant because in 'normal conditions', Catford explains, it is not the entirety of a SL text which is translated, that is, replaced by TL equivalents.<sup>xviii</sup>

More recently, Roger Bell provides a translation of the definition of translation given by Dubois (1973): 'Translation is the expression in another language (or target language) of what has been expressed in another, source language, preserving semantic and stylistic equivalencies.'<sup>xix</sup> Bell quotes another definition given by Hartmann and Stork (1972): 'Translation is the replacement of a representation of a text in one language by a representation of an equivalent text in second language.'<sup>xx</sup>

Nida and Taber define translation in their very handy glossary as 'the reproduction in a receptor language of the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of meaning, and second in terms of style.'<sup>xxi</sup>

The definitions of this type are numerous and typical. The key term of the translation theory seems to be the term 'equivalence', and indeed, Catford in his lucid manner has already made clear that, 'The central problem of translation-practice is that of finding TL translation equivalents. The central task of translation theory is that of defining the nature and conditions of translation

equivalence.<sup>xxiii</sup> He further defines what is meant by equivalence in a very interesting manner, which even to this day might be of use to a translator. He says, 'A textual translation equivalent is thus: that portion of TL text which is changed when and only when a given portion of the SL text is changed,' a textual translation equivalent being any TL form (text or portion of text) which is observed to be equivalent of given SL form (text or portion of text).

That the concept of total and pure 'equivalence' is only an ideal was known long time ago and scholars were well aware of the fact that when there hardly exists pure synonyms even in the same language, and asking for synonymy between languages was asking for too much. Yet, the idea of the possibility of inter-lingual synonymy has dominated this type of theory. Anton Popovic in his very well known *Dictionary for the Analysis of Literary Translation* (1976) distinguishes four types of equivalences: a) linguistic equivalence, where there is an equivalence on the formal and linguistic level between SL and TL texts, b) paradigmatic equivalence, is the equivalence between 'the elements of a paradigmatic expressive axis' that is the elements of higher linguistic ranks like sentence, clause etc., c) stylistic equivalence (translational), where there is 'functional equivalence of elements in the original and translation aiming at an expressive identity with an invariant of identical meaning' and d) textual (syntagmatic) equivalence, where there is an equivalence of the syntagmatic structuring of the text, i.e. equivalence of form and shape.<sup>xxiii</sup>

Eugene Nida is a well-known theorist studying translation from the linguistics-oriented perspective. He distinguishes between two types of equivalence between the two languages: formal equivalence or correspondence is that 'quality of a translation in which the features of the form of the source text have been mechanically reproduced in the receptor language. Typically, formal correspondence distorts the grammatical and stylistic patterns of the receptor language, and hence distorts the message, so as to cause the receptor to misunderstand or to labour unduly hard' this is opposed to the dynamic equivalence which is 'a quality of a translation in which the message of the original text has been so transported into the receptor language that the RESPONSE of the RECEPTOR is essentially like that of original receptors. Frequently, the form of the original text is changed; but as long as the change follows the rules of back transformation in the source language, or of contextual consistency in the transfer, and of transformation in the receptor language, the message is preserved and the translation is faithful'.<sup>xxiv</sup> This, says Nida, is based upon the principle of equivalent effect as discussed by Rieu and Phillips (1954).<sup>xxv</sup> Apparently the concept of dynamic equivalence is indeed a useful one for a translator though not very original and it has gained some popularity. In some respects it resembles Dryden's famous classification of translation into metaphrase, paraphrase and imitation, where paraphrase is a compromise between word for word metaphrase and 'free' imitation. Dynamic equivalence aims at complete 'naturalizing' of a message from source language in the receptor language, Nida says, 'a translation of dynamic equivalence aims at complete

naturalness of expression, and tries to relate the receptor to modes of behavior relevant within the context of his own culture; it does not insist that he should understand the cultural patterns of the source-language context in order to comprehend the message.<sup>xxvi</sup> This concept also reminds one of Schleiermacher's descriptions of the two paths for translator. Indeed, dynamic correspondence is leaving the reader alone and moving the writer towards the reader. Thus, the idea of dynamic equivalence seems to be an old one and hardly any progress beyond Dryden and Schleriermacher has been made.

Newmark makes similar distinction between Semantic and Communicative translation. He says, 'communicative translation attempts to produce on its readers an effect as close as possible to that obtained on the readers of the original. Semantic translation attempts to render, as closely as the semantic and syntactic structures of the second language allow, the exact contextual meaning of the original...Semantic translation remains within the original culture and assists the reader only in its connotations if they constitute the essential human (non-ethnic) message of the text. One basic difference between the two methods is that where there is a conflict, the communicative must emphasize the 'force' rather than the content'.<sup>xxvii</sup> All this seems to be proverbial old wine and the new bottle kind of thing. One of the severe limitations of this type of approach was that inspite of the rhetoric of rigour and discipline it did not go much beyond the pre linguistic theories and only managed to provide a long list of specific strategies and manuals for the translators and the approach which began as descriptive ended up being covertly prescriptive and normative as can be seen in the prejudice Nida has against literal correspondence, though there can be equally good reasons in the support of the very literal correspondence .<sup>xxviii</sup>

A classic and much quoted essay is Roman Jakobson's 'On Linguistic Aspects of Translation' in which he distinguishes between three ways of interpreting a verbal sign: Interpretation of verbal sign by means of other signs of the same language or Intralingual translation (rewording), interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language or Interlingual translation (translation proper), and interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems or Intersemiotic translation (transmutation).<sup>xxix</sup> This classification has become extremely popular and is frequently quoted. But the essay is all the more useful for its discussion of the major problems of translations like 'the dogma of untranslatability', especially the kind posed by Sapir-Whorf thesis which says that different languages shape different cognitive 'realities' and that communication between two people who do not share the same native language is impossible because the cognitive function of language is dependent on the specific grammatical patterns of that language. Jakobson says that 'languages differ essentially in what they *must* convey and not what they *may* convey...In its cognitive function, language is minimally dependent on the grammatical patterns because the definition of our experience stands in complementary relation to metalinguistic operation-the cognitive level of

language not only admits but directly requires recoding interpretation i.e, translation. Any assumption of ineffable or untranslatable cognitive data would be a contradiction in terms.' That comprehension itself is impossible without interpretation is a well-known fact and hence the act of translation that is 'interpretation of verbal signs' by means of other verbal signs is inevitable and integral to the use of language. Jakobson then deals with problems like the translation of grammatical categories and of poetry. Jakobson's essay reveals that the approach to translation has to draw on many language sciences like semantics and semiotics. This interdisciplinary perspective has been the characteristic of these language science oriented approaches to translation.

Henry Schogt examines the relationship and the scope of using the semantic theory for translation theory and comes to the conclusion 'for texts where cognitive meaning prevails and formal expression of that meaning has no other function than expressing that meaning, the semantic theories are helpful, and are adequate for describing the double process of encoding and decoding.'<sup>xxx</sup> For literary texts, it is precisely the literariness that falls outside the domain of semantics.' Like Jakobson, Schogt also seems to be aware of the inadequacy of the utility of language sciences to the problem of literary translation.

One other interesting preoccupation of theorists of such orientation like Nida and Bell is their concern to formulate a sort of descriptive model of the whole process of translation and integrate various language sciences like linguistics, pragmatics, semantics and even psycholinguistics and neurolinguistics. However, the models inspite of intricacies and complex terminology fail to describe what actually goes on in the 'mind' of the translator when he or she switches over from one language to the other in search of possible equivalents. This becomes a sort of 'black box' .The actual 'event' of 'going across' and beyond the boundaries of languages remains veiled and unarticulated. Many consider the approach to be too sterile and endlessly caught in the inexorable discussions that come with new vocabulary while the concepts, of course are not very new.'<sup>xxxii</sup>

A theorist like Lawrence Venuti points out that such approaches, 'offer truncated view of the empirical data they collect...and remain reluctant to take into account the social values that enter into translating as well as the study of it.'<sup>xxxiii</sup>

A noted critic G.N.Devy has offered an insightful critique of these linguistically oriented theories by pointing out that the Western linguistics is too much obsessed with monolingual situations and is monolingual in its orientation. It refuses to look at the fact that languages are 'open' to each other in socio-linguistic sense; that is, they interact very frequently with one another and have a historical relationship. He believes that if we think of a 'translating consciousness' which exploits the potential openness of language systems and conceptualize a whole community of 'translating consciousness',



taking lead from Phenomenology, it should be possible to develop a theory of inter-lingual synonymy.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

There came into prominence a fresh way of studying translation with the rise of the comparative approach to the study of literature and the growth of culture studies which focussed on the place of a translated text in the target culture and the problem of canon. It lays great emphasis on analyzing how the context of the translator influences the decisions he or she takes while translating and how the translated text is received in the target culture.

#### Translation, Literary Studies and the Study of Culture.

Literary studies are concerned with literary translation. The discipline of literary studies presupposes a certain definition of 'literariness' with which it is able to delimit its domain, specify, and sanction its methodologies and approaches to its subject. The place of literary translation is dependent on the definition of 'literariness'.

The traditional essentialist approach to literature, which Lefevere calls 'the corpus' approach<sup>xxxiv</sup> is based on the Romantic notion of literature which sees the author as a quasi-divine 'creator' possessing 'genius', who is the origin of the Creation which is Original, Unique, once and for all, organic and transcendental and hence Sacred. Translation, then is a mere copy of the unique entity, which by definition is uncopy-able, and as the translator is not the origin of the work of art, he does not possess 'genius'; he is merely a drudge, a proletariat. This traditional approach is due to the Platonic-Christian metaphysical underpinning of the Western Culture and the original versus copy dichotomy is deeply rooted in the Western thought. This is the reason why the West has been traditionally hostile and allergic to the notion of 'translation'. The relationship between translation and metaphysics is discussed in detail in the subsection 'translation and philosophy' in the present chapter.

The traditional discussion of the problems of literary translation considers finding equivalents not just for lexis, syntax or concepts, but also for features like style, genre, figurative language, historical stylistic dimensions, polyvalence, connotations as well as denotations, cultural items and culture-specific concepts and values. The choices made by the translators regarding whether to retain stylistic features of the source language text or whether to retain the historical stylistic dimension of the original; for instance, whether to translate Chaucer into old Marathi or contemporary, become all the more important in the case of literary translation. In the case of translating poetry, it is vital for a translator to decide whether the verse should be translated into verse, or into free verse or into prose. Most of the scholars and translators believe that in the case of

poetry though it is " by definition impossible ...only creative transposition is possible...".<sup>xxxv</sup> It is the creative dimension of translation that comes to fore in the translation of poetry though nobody seems to be sure of what is meant by creativity in the first place. The word is rather charged with theological-Romantic connotations typical of the 'corpus' approach to literature.

The questions around which the deliberations about translation within such a conceptual framework are made are rather stereotyped and limited: as the literary text, especially a poem, is unique, organic whole and original is the translation possible at all? Should translation be 'literal' or 'free'? Should it emphasize the content or the form? Can a faithful translation be beautiful? The answers to the question range from one extreme to the other and usually end in some sort of a compromise. For Dante (1265-1321) all poetry is untranslatable<sup>xxxvi</sup> and for Frost (1974-1963) poetry is 'that which is lost out of both prose and verse in translation',<sup>xxxvii</sup> while Yves Bonnefoy says 'You can translate by simply declaring one poem the translation of another'.<sup>xxxviii</sup> On the other hand theorists like Pound (1929,1950), Fitzgerald (1878) say " ...the live Dog is better than the dead Lion", believe in freedom in translation. The others like Nabokov (1955) believe " The clumsiest of literal translation is a thousand times more useful than prettiest of paraphrase".<sup>xxxix</sup> Walter Benjamin, Longfellow (1807-81), Schliermacher, Martindale, seem to favour much more faithful translation or believe in foreignizing the native language.<sup>xl</sup> While most of the translators like Dryden are on the side of some sort of compromise between the two extremes.

Lefevere has rightly pointed out that most of the writings done on the basis of the concept of literature as a corpus attempt to provide translators with certain guidelines, do's and don'ts and that these writings are essentially normative even if they don't state their norms explicitly. These norms, according to Lefevere, are not far removed from the poetics of a specific literary period or even run behind the poetics of the period.<sup>xli</sup> Some writings on translation based on this approach are obsessed with the translation process and coming up with some model for description of the process. As Theo Hermans correctly observes that in spite of some impressive semiotic terminology, complex schemes and diagrams illustrating the mental process of decoding messages in one medium and encoding them in another, they could hardly describe the actual conversion that takes place within the human mind, 'that blackest of black boxes'.<sup>xlii</sup> Lefevere notes, the descriptive approach was not very useful when it came to decide what is good translation and what is bad.

The alternative approach is based on non-essentialist perspectives to literature. Instead of considering literature as an autonomous and independent domain, it sees it in much broader social and cultural framework. It sees literature as a social institution and as such related to other social institutions. It examines the complex interconnections between poetics, politics, metaphysics, and history. It borrows its analytical tools from various social sciences like linguistics, semiotics,

anthropology, history, economics, and psychoanalysis. It is closely allied to the discipline of cultural studies, as discussed by Jenks in using culture as a descriptive rather than normative category as well as working within an expanded concept of culture, which rejects the 'high' versus low stratification. It is keenly interested in the historical and political dimension of literature.<sup>xliii</sup>

'Paradigm shift' to use Theo Hermans' phrase<sup>xliiv</sup> or the 'Cultural turn' in the discipline of translation theory has made a significant impact in the way we look at translation. Translation can be seen as a form of intercultural communication raising the problems that are not merely at the verbal level or at the linguistic level. A word is seen as, essentially a cultural memory in which the historical experience of the society is embedded.<sup>xliiv</sup> H.C.Trivedi observes that while translating from an Indian language into English one is faced with two main problems: first one has to deal with concepts which require an understanding of Indian culture and secondly, one has to arrive at TL meaning equivalents of references to certain objects in SL, which includes features absent from TL culture.<sup>xlivi</sup> The awareness that one does not look for merely verbal equivalents but also for cultural equivalents, if there are any, goes a long way in helping the translator to decide the strategies he or she has to use. Translation then is no longer a problem of merely finding equivalents but also of interpreting a text encoded in one semiotic system with the help of another. An interesting notion of 'intertextuality' as formulated by the semiotician Julia Kristeva conceives of any signifying system or practice as already consisting of other modes of cultural signification.<sup>xlvii</sup> A literary text would implicate not only other verbal texts but also modes of signification like food, fashion, local medicinal systems, metaphysical systems, traditional and conventional narratives like myths, literary texts, legends as well as literary conventions like genres, literary devices, and other symbolic structures. It would be almost tautological to state that the elements of the text, which are specific to the culture and the language, would be untranslatable. The whole enterprise of finding cultural equivalents raises awareness of the difference and similarities between the cultures and this brings into focus the important question of cultural identity. Else Rosario Ferre remarks that it is ultimately impossible to translate one cultural identity into another.<sup>xlviii</sup>

A rather interesting approach to literary translation comes from Michel Riffaterre.<sup>xlix</sup> He separates literary and non-literary use of language by saying that literature is different because i) it semioticizes the discursive features e.g. lexical selection is made morphophonemically as well as semantically, ii) it substitutes semiosis for mimesis which gives literary language its indirection, and iii) it has "the 'textuality' that integrates semantic components of the verbal sequence (the ones open to linear decoding)-a theoretically open-ended sequence-into one closed, finite semiotic, system" that is , the parts of a literary texts are vitally linked to the whole of the text and the text is more or less self contained. Hence the literary translation should " reflect or imitate these differences". He considers a literary text as an artefact and it contains the signals, which mark it as an artifact.

Translation should also imitate or reflect these markers. He goes on to say that as we perceive a certain text as literary based on certain presuppositions we should render these literariness inducing presuppositions. What should be noted here is that Riffaterre is perceiving literariness in a rather different way while considering the problems of literary translation: 'literariness' is in no way the 'essence' of a text and a literary text is that which contains the signs which makes it obvious that it is a cultural artefact. It is a sub-system of cultural semiotic system. However, if one is to consider Riffaterre's notion of 'text' in contrast to Kristeva's notion of intertextuality one feels that Riffaterre is probably simplifying the problem of cultural barriers to translatability.

Some other approaches to literary translation see literature as one among many other social systems and cultural practices. The most important theorization has come from provocative and insightful perspectives of theorists like Andre Lefevere, Gideon Toury, Itamar Even-Zohar, and Theo Hermans. These theorists are indebted to the concept of 'literature as system' as propounded by Russian Formalists like Tynianov, Jakobson, and Czech Structuralists like Mukarovsky and Vodicka, the French Structuralists thinkers, and the Marxist thinkers who considered literature as a section of the 'superstructure'. The central idea of this point of view is that the study of literary translation should begin with a study of the translated text rather than with the process of translation, its role, function and reception in the culture in which it is translated as well as the role of culture in influencing the 'process of decision making that is translation.' It is fundamentally descriptive in its orientation.<sup>1</sup>

In contrast to the 'corpus' approach to literary studies, Lefevere proposes the opposing 'system' concept of literature.

Lefevere states, 'Literature is one of the systems which constitute the system of discourses (which also contain disciplines like physics or law.) usually referred to as a civilization, or a society.'<sup>ii</sup>. Literature for Lefevere is a subsystem of society and it interacts with other systems. He observes that there is a 'control factor in the literary system which sees to it that this particular system does not fall too far out of step with other systems that make up a society ' (p.17). He astutely observes that this control function works from outside of this system as well as from inside. The control function within the system is that of dominant poetics, 'which can be said to consist of two components: one is an inventory of literary devices, genres, motifs, prototypical characters and situations, symbols; the other a concept of what the role of literature is, or should be, in the society at large.' (p.23). The educational establishment dispenses it. The second controlling factor is that of 'patronage'. It can be exerted by 'persons, not necessarily the Medici, Maecenas or Louis XIV only, groups or persons, such as a religious grouping or a political party, a royal court, publishers, whether they have a virtual monopoly on the book trade or not and, last but not least, the media.' The

patronage consists of three elements; the ideological component, the financial or economic component, and the element of status (p.18-19). The system of literature, observes Lefevere, is not deterministic but it acts as a series of 'constraints' on the reader, writer, or rewriter. The control mechanism within the literary system is represented by critics, reviewers, teachers of literature, translators and other rewriters who will adapt works of literature until they can be claimed to correspond to the poetics and the ideology of their time. 'Rewriting' is the key word here which is used by Lefevere as a 'convenient umbrella-term' to refer to most of the activities traditionally connected with literary studies: criticism, as well as translation, anthologization, the writing of literary history and the editing of texts-in fact, all those aspects of literary studies which establish and validate the value-structures of canons. Rewritings, in the widest sense of the term, adapt works of literature to a given audience and/or influence the ways in which readers read a work of literature.' (pp60-61). The texts, which are rewritten, processed for a certain audience, or adapted to a certain poetics, are the 'refracted' texts and these maintains Lefevere are responsible for the canonized status of the text (p179). 'Interpretation (criticism), then and translation are probably the most important forms of refracted literature, in that they are the most influential ones' <sup>liii</sup>he notes and says, 'one never translates, as the models of the translation process based on the Buhler/Jakobson communication model, featuring disembodied senders and receivers, carefully isolated from all outside interference by that most effective expedient, the dotted line, would have us believe, under a sort of purely linguistic bell jar. Ideological and poetological motivations are always present in the production, or the non production of translations of literary works...Translation and other refractions, then, play a vital part in the evolution of literatures, not only by introducing new texts, authors and devices, but also by introducing them in a certain way, as part of a wider design to try to influence that evolution' <sup>liiii</sup>. Translation becomes one of the parts of the 'refraction' "... the rather long term strategy, of which translation is only a part, and which has as its aim the manipulation of foreign work in the service of certain aims that are felt worthy of pursuit in the native culture..." <sup>liv</sup>. This is indeed a powerful theory to study translation as it places as much significance to it as criticism and interpretation. Lefevere goes on to give some impressive analytical tools and perspectives for studying literary translation. 'The ideological and poetological constraints under which translations are produced should be explicated, and the strategy devised by the translator to deal with those constraints should be described: does he or she make a translation in a more descriptive or in a more refractive way? What are the intentions with which he or she introduces foreign elements into the native system? Equivalence, fidelity, freedom and the like will then be seen more as functions of a strategy adopted under certain constraints, rather than absolute requirements, or norms that should or should not be imposed or respected. It will be seen that 'great' ages of translation occur whenever a given literature recognizes another as more prestigious and tries to emulate it. Literatures will be seen to have less need of translation(s) when they are convinced of their own superiority. It will also be seen that translations are often used (think of the

Imagists) by adherents of an alternative poetics to challenge the dominant poetics of a certain period in a certain system, especially when that alternative poetics cannot use the work of its own adherents to do so, because that work is not yet written' .<sup>lv</sup>

The problem with Leferverian system is its terminology. The words 'refracted' and 'rewriting' presuppose that a text can be written *for the first time* and that it exists in a pre-non-refracted state. These presuppositions take him dangerously close to the very 'corpus' based approach he is so vigorously attacking. Perhaps Derridian philosophy can explain why one is always in danger of belonging to the very system of thought one is criticizing. One of the obvious limitations of these types of theories is that they are rather reductionist in their approach. Though Lefevere maintains that the system concept holds that the refracted texts are mainly responsible for the canonized status of the corpus and the intrinsic quality alone could not have given canonized status for them he fails to point out the exact features and qualities of the literary text which solicit refractions. Then there are problematic words like 'the system' which Lefevere points out 'refer to a heuristic construct that does not emphatically possess any kind of ontological reality....' and 'is merely used to designate a model that promises to help make sense of a very complex phenomenon, that of writing, reading and rewriting of literature...'<sup>lvi</sup>

Another major theorist working on similar lines as that of Lefevere is Gideon Toury .<sup>lvii</sup> His approach is what he calls Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS). He emphasizes the fact that translations are facts of one system only: the target system and it is the target or recipient culture or a certain section of it, which serves as the initiator of the decision to translate and consequently translators operate first and foremost in the interest of the culture into which they are translating. Toury very systematically charts out a step by step guide to the study of translation. He stresses that the study should begin with the empirically observed data, that is, the translated texts and proceed from there towards the reconstruction of non-observational facts rather than the other way round as is usually done in the 'corpus' based and traditional approaches to translation. The most interesting thing about Toury's approach is that it takes into consideration things like 'pseudo-translation' or the texts foisted off as translated but in fact are not so. <sup>lviii</sup>In the very beginning when the problem of distinguishing a translated text from a non-translated text arises, Toury assumes that for his procedure 'translation' will be taken to be 'any target-language utterance which is presented or regarded as such within the target culture, on whatever grounds'. In this approach pseudotranslations are 'just as legitimate objects for study within DTS as genuine translations. They may prove to be highly instructive for the establishment of the general notion of translation as shared by the members of a certain target language community'. Then the next step in Toury's DTS would be to study their acceptability in their respective target language system followed by mapping these texts, 'via their constitutive elements as TRANSLATIONAL PHENOMENA, on their counterparts in the

appropriate source system and text, identified as such in the course of a comparative analysis, as SOLUTIONS to TRANSLATIONAL PROBLEMS'.<sup>lix</sup> Then a scholar should proceed to 'identify and describe the (one-directional, irreversible) RELATIONSHIPS obtaining between the members of each pair; and finally to go on to refer these relationships- by means of the mediating functional-relational notion of TRANSLATION EQUIVALENCE, established as pertinent to the corpus under study-to the overall CONCEPT OF TRANSLATION underlying the corpus. It is these last two concepts which form the ultimate goal of systematic studies within DTS... only when the nature of the prevailing concept of translation has been established will it become possible to reconstruct the possible process of CONSIDERATION and DECISION-MAKING which was involved in the act of translating in question as well as the set of CONSTRAINTS which were actually accepted by the translator.'

Toury's step by step procedure is descriptive, empirical and inductive, beginning with the observed facts and then moving towards uncovering the strategies and techniques used by translator and the implicit notion and presupposition of equivalence rather than treating the notion of equivalence as given. The concept of constraint puts him in the company of Lefevere. The essential question is not of defining what is equivalence in general, whether it is possible or not, or of how to find equivalents, but of discovering what is *meant* by equivalence by the *community or group within the target culture*.

These approaches are extremely useful in the area of Comparative Literary Studies and comparativists like Durisin whose approach is in many ways similar to Lefevere and Toury in focusing on function and relation of literary translation in the target or the recipient culture.<sup>lx</sup> He is of opinion that it is impossible to speak of theories of translation without applying the comparative procedure, as the aim of analysis of a translation is to determine the extent to which it belongs to the developmental series of the native literature. He like the other two theorists discussed, considers the translation procedure as well as the selection of the text being 'primarily determined by the integral need of the recipient literature, by its capacity for absorbing the literary phenomenon of a different national literature, work, etc. and for reacting in a specific manner (integrational or differentiatinal) in its aesthetic features' as well as the norm of time.

Interestingly, Shaffer observes that translation comes to fore in comparative literary studies as the characteristic mode of 'close reading' of the text as it carries the reader out of his native linguistic circle, returns and ensconces him more precisely within it with an increase in self awareness and in richness.<sup>lxi</sup> He remarks that the analysis of translation that succeeds in a 're-creation' occupies the central place in comparative explication and in the case of a literal translation, a close analysis of the original will be obtained by commenting on the translation.

The limitation of these types of theories is that they are descriptive and hence have a limited use for the translator as well as translation criticism. Lefevere says that translation criticism hardly rises much above, 'he is wrong because I'm right level...' <sup>lxii</sup>He also points out that it is impossible to define once and for all, what a good translation is just as it is impossible to define once and for all what good literature is. And "critic A, "judging" on the basis of poetics A' will rule translation A "good" because it happens to be constructed on the basis of the principles laid down in A'. Critic B, on the other hand, operating on the basis of poetics B', will damn translation A" and praise translation B', for obvious reasons..." <sup>lxiii</sup> He believes, "Translators can be taught languages and a certain awareness of how literature works. The rest is up to them. They make mistakes only on the linguistic level. The rest is strategy." <sup>lxiv</sup>The perspective of course is that of a value relativist and a culture relativist, which seem to be the politically correct and 'in' stances today, but the stance can be seen as symptomatic in the light of deeper moral crises in the larger philosophical context.

An ambitious and insightful essay by Raymond van den Broeck, 'Second Thought on Translation Criticism: A Model of its Analytic Function' attempts to go beyond the mere descriptive and uncourageous approach of Lefevere and Toury which tries to incorporate the ideas of their theories. <sup>lxv</sup>Like Toury and Lefevere, Broeck stresses the importance of examination of the norms among all those involved in the production and reception of translations and remarks that it is the foremost task of translation criticism to create greater awareness of these norms but he also gives room for the critic's personal value judgements. The critic may or may not agree with the particular method chosen by the translator for a particular purpose. He is entitled to doubt the effectiveness of the chosen strategies, to criticize decisions taken with regard to certain details. To the extent that he is himself familiar with the functional features of the source text, he will be a trustworthy guide in telling the reader where target textemes balance source textemes and where in the critic's view, they do not. But he must never confuse his own initial norms with those of the translator (p.60-61). Broeck attempts a synthesis of the target culture oriented inductive - descriptive approach and the notorious task of evaluating translation and the result is indeed very useful and commendable as translation evaluation is a neglected branch of translation studies. As opposed to this descriptive approach is Venuti's *The Translator's Invisibility* (1995). With a normative and extremely insightful point of view he examines historically how the norm of fluency prevailed over other translation strategies to shape the canon of foreign literatures in English. He makes a strong case for 'foreignness' and 'awkwardness' of the translated text as a positive value in the evaluation of translation. <sup>lxvi</sup>

The other approaches to the study of translation lay greater emphasis on the political dimension of literary translation. The more recent literary theories like New Historicism are interested in reading



the contexts of power relations in a literary text. In his critical exposition of New Historicism and Cultural materialism, John Brannigan states, 'New Historicism is a mode of critical interpretation which privileges power relations as the most important context for texts of all kinds. As a critical practice it treats literary texts as a space where power relations are made visible.'<sup>lxvii</sup> Such a perspective when applied to the texts that communicate across cultures can yield very important insights and open an exciting way of thinking about translation. Tejaswini Niranjana's book *Siting Translation, History, Post-Structuralism, and the Colonial Context*, examines translation theories from this perspective.

" In a post-colonial context the problematic of translation *becomes* a significant site for raising questions of representation, power, and historicity. The context is one of contesting and contested stories attempting to account for, to recount, the asymmetry and inequality of relations between peoples, races, languages."<sup>lxviii</sup> In translation, the relationship between the two languages is hardly on equal terms. Niranjana draws attention to a rather overlooked fact that translation is between languages, which are hierarchically related, and that it is a mode of representation in another culture. When the relationship between the cultures and languages is that of colonizer and colonized, "translation...produces strategies of containment. By employing certain modes of representing the other-which it thereby also brings into being--translation reinforces hegemonic versions of the colonized, helping them acquire the status of what Edward Said calls representations or objects without history '(p.3). She points out in the introduction that her concern is to probe 'the absence, lack, or repression of an awareness of asymmetry and historicity in several kinds of writing on translation' (p.9). Harish Trivedi has demonstrated how translation of Anatole France's *Thais* by Premchand was distinctly a political act in the sense that it selected a text which was not part of the literature of the colonial power and that it attempted a sort of liberation of Indian literature from the tutelage of the imperially-inducted master literature, English.<sup>lxix</sup> St-Pierre observes the fact that translators when faced with references to specific aspects of the source culture may use a variety of tactics, including non-translation, as part of their overall strategy and use many other complex tactics in order to reinvent their relations in a postcolonial context<sup>lxx</sup>. Mahasweta Sengupta has offered a rather engaging and perceptive reading of Rabindranath Tagore's autotranslation of *Gitanjali*. She points out giving numerous examples, of how Rabindranath took immense liberties with his own Bengali originals in order to refashion his Bengali songs to suit the English sensibility. He modified, omitted, and rewrote his poems in the manner of the Orientalists to cater to his Western audience.<sup>lxxi</sup>

Bassnett and Trivedi believe that the hierarchic opposition between the original work and translation reflects the hierarchic opposition between the European colonizer culture and the colonized culture. This hierarchy, they observe, is Eurocentric, and its spread is associated with the history of

colonialization, imperialism and proselytization.<sup>lxxii</sup> Because of these historical reasons, radical theories of translation have come up in the former colonies. Recalling how members of a sixteenth century Brazilian tribe called Tupinamba ate a Catholic priest, an act which could have even been an act of homage, Bassnett and Trivedi suggest that the metaphor of 'cannibalism' could be used for the act of translation as it is one of the ways former colonies might find a way to assert themselves and their own culture and to reject the feeling of being derivative and appellative 'copy', without at the same time rejecting everything that might be of value that comes from Europe. Else Ribeiro Pires Viera has considered the translation theory of Haroldo de Campos, a renowned Brazilian translator who uses very interesting metaphors for translating like, perceiving translation as blood transfusion and vampirization which actually nourishes the translator and thus subverting the hierarchic polarities of the privileged original and inauthentic translation in a post colonial context.<sup>lxxiii</sup> This type of approach to translation promotes the awareness of political and historical field in which translation operates among the readers as well as the translators.

Another significant statement on 'The Politics of Translation' comes from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who conceives of translation as an important strategy in pursuing the larger feminist agenda of achieving women's 'solidarity'.<sup>lxxiv</sup> 'The task of the feminist translator is to consider language as a clue to the working of gendered agency.' Translation can give access to a larger number of feminists working in various languages and cultures. She advises that a translator must 'surrender' to the text, as translation is the most intimate act of reading. It is an act of submission to the rhetorical dimension of the text. This act for Spivak is more of an erotic act than ethical. She also advises that one's first obligation in understanding solidarity is to learn other women's mother tongue rather than consider solidarity as an 'a priori' given. Spivak also shows concern for the 'Third World' illiterate women and the first task of the feminists is to learn their language rather than impose someone's conception of solidarity and feminism on them. 'There are countless languages in which women all over the world have grown up and been female or feminist, and yet the languages we keep learning by rote are the powerful European ones, sometimes the powerful Asian ones, least often the chief African ones' Translation for Spivak is no mere quest for verbal equivalents but an act of understanding the other as well as the self. For her it also has a political dimension, as it is a strategy that can be consciously employed. She uses the feminine metaphors of submission, intimacy, and understanding for theorizing about translation. Thus theorizing about translation itself receives a feminist slant.

Lori Chamberlain draws attention to the gender bias behind the tag 'les belles infideles' attached to translation which means that translation is like a woman, unfaithful when pretty and not beautiful when faithful. She comments, 'for 'les belles infideles', fidelity is defined as an implicit contract between translation (as woman) and original (as husband, father or author). However, the infamous

`double standard' operates here as it might have in traditional marriages: the `unfaithful' wife/translation is publicly tried for crimes the husband/original is by law incapable of committing. This contract, in short, makes it impossible for the original to be guilty of infidelity. Such an attitude betrays real anxiety about the problem of paternity and translation; it mimics the patrilineal kinship system where paternity-not maternity-legitimizes an offspring.<sup>lxxv</sup> Traditional notion of fidelity and beauty implicit in translation is seen to be closely associated with patriarchal establishment, which exploits women. Barbara Godard, another feminist translation scholar who makes a connection between feminist translation work and post modernist translation theory remarks, `As feminist theory has been concerned to show, difference is a key factor in cognitive processes and in critical praxis... The feminist translator affirming her critical difference, her delight in interminable rereading and rewriting flaunts the signs of her manipulation of the text. Womanhandling the text in translation would involve the replacement of the modest, self-effacing translator.<sup>lxxvi</sup> This position is in contrast to Spivak's position of intimate surrender to the rhetoric of the original. Godard's translator is far more assertive of the gender difference and aggressively womanhandles the original text.

All these approaches are significant developments, as they throw light on the activity of translation from a fresh perspective. What they overlook is the fact that a literary text is a far more complex artefact and the relationship it bears towards what is called `cultural' and `political' field is extremely intricate. Reducing aesthetic properties of a text to its `cultural' and `political' dimension is certainly useful but such kind of reduction has its own limitations. It overlooks the seductive and magical aspect of the work of art, which in fact makes it a work of art. At the same time words like `culture', `politics', and `history', themselves are polyvalent and open to various and often conflicting postures and interpretations. Though extremely insightful, this approach is always in danger of being very simplistic and reductive. These approaches are very different from the theories with a linguistics base. However, an attempt is made recently to bridge the gap between these two types of theoretical perspectives by Hewson and Martin.<sup>lxxvii</sup> They formulate a two-tier model for analyzing and explaining the translation phenomenon. While the first tier focuses on the range of linguistic possibilities available to the translator and the choices he or she makes while the second tier deals with the institutional, cultural contextual factors that influence the range of choices as well as the actual decisions made by the translator. Basil Hatim and Ian Mason also attempt to bridge the gap between the linguistic sciences oriented approaches and the approaches that emphasize the target culture system or the political dimension of translation as a product. They view translation as a process involving the negotiation of meaning between producers and receivers of texts and consider translating as a communicative process that takes place within a social context.<sup>lxxviii</sup> However, a comprehensive General Theory of Translation is a distant dream where all the approaches agree on one infallible approach.

## History of Translation Activity

The area of translation studies dealing with the history of translation is extremely relevant yet a rather neglected area in India. Bassnett-McGuire remarks 'investigation of the theories of translation at different times, the critical response to translations, the practical processes of commissioning and publishing translations, the role and the function of translations in a given period, the methodological development of translation and, by far the most common type of study, analysis of the work of individual translators' are the common ways of studying translation historically in the West.<sup>lxxix</sup> She has given excellent bibliography of the works, which can come under this category. The most important works include George Steiner's seminal *After Babel* (1975), T.R. Steiner's *English Translation Theory, 1650-1800* (1975), Lawrence Venuti's *Translator's Invisibility* (1995) which critically examines the history, politics and economics of the norm of nativization of the translated text in order to make it appear as if it is originally written in the receptor language, so as to make the translator 'invisible' and marginal,' J.M. Cohen's *English Translators and Translations* (1962) and certain works on specific periods of the English literary history like F.O. Matthiesson's *Translation. An Elizabethan Art* (1931). A brilliant study of Shelley as a translator is given in Timothy Webb's *The Violet in the Crucible* (1976), while Eric Jacobsen's *Translation, A Traditional Craft* (1958) contains an amazing discovery that translation is a Roman invention! However not much is available on the history of translation in India and there is an urgent need to fill this lacuna. Here an attempt is made to understand translation in the historical context in India.

Writing the history of anything in India at once raises questions about the categories of 'nation', 'society', and 'culture'. One is faced with the question of whether to regard 'India' as a social and cultural unit or a conglomeration of various cultural, literary and social traditions, because though some sort of 'national' history is possible it becomes difficult to accommodate the multifarious local and regional histories and cultural practices into the broader 'grand narrative'.

In the Indian context, the problem of periodization of the diachronic study of translation becomes extremely difficult as in the West. Bassnett McGuire while discussing this problem of periodization in the West, shows how George Steiner (1975) has managed to overcome the problem by dividing various phases of translation theory into unequal time periods based on the predominant ideological emphasis rather than on the more conventional periods of European cultural history like the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, Romanticism or Modernism.<sup>lxxx</sup> The cultural history or histories of India resists such Western models of periodization of literary history as pointed out by Devy.<sup>lxxxi</sup> Here an attempt is made to link translation activity in India to various social, cultural and political projects.

The terms used for the activity of translation in India are `anuvad', *bhashantar*, *roopantar*, *tarjuma*, and *chaya*. These terms have a history of their own. *Anuvad*, literally `saying again' or `saying after' was used in ancient India to denote a practice in which students said something after their teacher in order to memorize it, or to refer to the habit of repeating something to confirm, support something already alluded. Contrasting the use of *bhashantar* with *anuvad*, Umashankar Joshi comments that *bhashantar* implies change of language and hence is only change of formal properties of expression, while *anuvad* implies an attempt to recapture the content and the voice once again.<sup>lxxxii</sup> However, the use of the term for the activity of translation is not very old.

One notes that in ancient India the practice of turning an entire text from one language to another was not very widespread, though renderings of fragments of text from one language to another were common enough. Commenting on the dearth of translated texts in ancient and classical Sanskrit, Bholanath Tiwari comments that this is due to the fact that India was far ahead of other countries in technical, metaphysical and scientific knowledge and hence a need for translations was not very great and whenever an Indian came across anything new, he would internalize it and write in Sanskrit. Even if there had been full translation, he opines, which is quite possible, they are not extant today. He mentions that there are some portions in the *Rig Veda*, which after minor phonetic transformation resemble the parallel portions of the *Zend Avesta* probably because they were composed in an earlier language from which the language of the *Zend Avesta* and the Vedic Sanskrit developed. These he says can be considered as illustrations of `transformation' or `*roopantar*'.<sup>lxxxiii</sup> In classical Sanskrit Drama, there was an interesting convention of using Prakrits or non-Sanskrit regional languages for the dialogues spoken by maidservants, servants, and clowns. It was felt necessary to provide Sanskrit *chaya* (lit. shadow) or translation of these Prakrit dialogues.

`*Badarkaha*' or `*Brihatkatha*' written by Gunadhaya in the early part of the first millenium is a collection of brilliant short stories written in `*Paishachi*' (language of vampires) dialect, existing only in Sanskrit renderings, the most notable rendering being Somadeva's `*Kathasaritsagar*' or the Ocean of Stories.

Dr. Tiwari believes that during the Gupta Age (4th to early 7th cent. AD) many Prakrit texts must have been partially or fully rendered into Sanskrit. Some Prakrit Jain texts like *Panchsamgrah*, and *Visativisika* exist in the form of Sanskrit translations or adaptations.

`*Gaha kosha*' or `*Gathashaptashati*' attributed to a Satvahan king Hala is a wonderful anthology of love poems in Prakrit. Many verses from this collection exist in their Sanskrit avatar in *Amrushatak*, *Aryashaptashati* and in a similar collection by the medieval Hindi poet Bihari.

Though plenty of European texts and texts from other languages exist in Sanskrit, which is not a widely used language today, there was poverty of translations in the ancient and classical Sanskrit. A noted Marathi poet and well known critic Vasant Bapat has rightly disagreed with the renowned Marathi essayist V.S.Chiplunkar who believed that the word *bhashantar* did not exist in classical Sanskrit simply because Indians then had all the knowledge available in Sanskrit and did not have any need for translations.<sup>lxxxiv</sup>

The reason for its seems to be the very high prestige, power and patronage which had made it more receptive. The highly glorified 'language of gods' was a status symbol of the arrogant Brahminical culture and the values like open-mindedness, humility, respect for others' language and culture are not exactly the qualities that describe the Brahminical mindset.

However, Sanskrit was not the only language dominated by the priestly class, Prakrits like Pali or Apabrahmasa were not so receptive either. It is believed that perhaps Ashokan Edicts were originally composed in Pali and then rendered into other regional languages.<sup>lxxxv</sup> As in the case of Sanskrit, there are hardly any complete translated texts found in Prakrits though some portions from Kalidasa or the Epics are available.

Translation activity was carried out on a large scale in tandem with the spread of the Buddhism in Asia and nearby countries. Buddhist religion was born as an alternative to the casteist, ritualistic and dogmatic Brahminical religion and had a great appeal to the nearby nations who had social institutions quite similar to those in India. From BN Mukherjee's engaging account of the spread of the Buddhist thought into the heart of Central Asia and Afghanistan, one can surmise that translation is one of the main activities associated with proselytization on the one hand and the evolution of the recipient central Asian and Afghan languages on the other. Mukherjee provides a list of the Buddhist texts translated into languages such as Kucheian, Saka-Khatonese, and Sogdian languages and alludes to manuscripts of bilingual dictionaries, lexicons, and handbooks for the translators. Besides, the Buddhist texts in Pali and Sanskrit, many other texts like the *Panchatantra*, the *Hitopadesha*, the Epics, and other secular literature too seem to have traveled to different parts of Asia in various incarnations.<sup>lxxxvi</sup> Sunitikumar Pathak gives an interesting account of the spread of the Buddhist religion in Tibet, Mangolia, and Siberia. He notes that thousands of highly accurate renderings of the Buddhist and Brahminical texts were produced under royal patronage in Tibet and that in the ninth century AD there was a conference to standardize the techniques of translation in accordance with the Tibetan language and prosody. Several secular texts like the plays of Kalidasa or the famous *Amarkosha* were translated. The stress was on high fidelity to the source texts and translations had to get approval from the council of editors. They were so accurate, says Pathak, that

the scholars could reconstruct many Mahayana Buddhist texts missing in their original languages by translating the Tibetan translation back into Sanskrit and Prakrit. These translated texts also later served the role of the source texts for many other languages of Asia.<sup>lxxxvii</sup> The activity of the translation of the Buddhist texts was a highly professional and systematized activity carried out with a purpose of producing highly accurate renderings. Translation then was a part of the larger project: proselytization. While the Brahminical metaphysics is based on the concept of unchanging and transcendental essence as the origin and the base of reality, the Buddhist metaphysics bases itself on the eternally changing nature, a constant Heraclitian flux of reality. This may be one reason why the Buddhism was comfortable with translation, which is all about change, birth, and rebirth rather than unchanging essences.

Gradually by second millenium, Sanskrit was reduced to the language of theosophy, metaphysics, rituals, priests, and certain pedantic poets in the feudal courts and newly evolved languages or *bhashas* occupied the central place. Kabir called Sanskrit 'stagnant water' and the *bhasha* as flowing river. What was being questioned in the new swelling movement called *bhakti* was not only the language of gods but also the whole Brahminical outlook and the mindset. The Epics, the *Puranas*, and the secular literature available in Sanskrit were brought into the *bhashas* by means of adaptations and imitations in Drydenian sense, rather than as faithful renderings. The equivalent, which they sought, was not linguistic or textual but spiritual. To use Dr. Devy's apt phrase, it was the whole 'language of spirituality' which was translated. The activity of rewriting the Sanskrit texts into the regional languages ranged from commentaries '*teeka*', '*bhashya*' to more faithful renderings. One of the most famous *teeka* is Dyaneshwar's *Bhavarthadeepika*, a commentary on the *Bhagwad Geeta* in the twelfth century. The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* exist in almost all-major languages of India in their regional avatars. The *Puranas*, the *Bhagwad Geeta* and Kalidasa's works also were widely recomposed. The primary aim of such renderings was not to produce a 'faithful copy' of the originals but to empower even the illiterate and the oppressed. The act itself was symbolic like the act of opening up of the temple's sanctum sanctorum in the last century to the people considered untouchables or were denied access to it. In fact, it was the 'opening up' of the language of spirituality. Akho, a brilliant seventeenth century Gujarati poet and philosopher, retorted to the people who insisted on using Sanskrit as the language of philosophy by saying, 'Why do you cling to a language, knave! One who triumphs in the battle alone is considered brave!' Elsewhere he says that one interprets Sanskrit using Prakrit (regional language) in the way one has to open a tied stack of firewood for it has no meaning as a stack.<sup>lxxxviii</sup> The *bhashas* emerged richer and more vibrant and living because of these rewritings and became intimately tied with the identity of the community. This transfer of texts into the regional languages in the form of adaptations, revisions and rewriting of the Sanskrit texts has contributed to the evolution of the modern Indian languages.

The second millennium is important not only because of the evolution of the modern languages but also for the establishment of the Islam, the colonial rule, and the freedom of the emergent nation.

In Islam, the Prophet himself has encouraged the Muslims to ransack knowledge from every part of the world. The first Arabs and Persians who came into contact with India were not blinded just by her gold and but also her priceless treasure of the knowledge of astronomy, astrology, alchemy, philosophy and plenty of exciting literary texts. Translations into the Arabic, the Persian, and the Pahlavi began long before the establishment of Islamic rule in India. Many Arab scholars came to Takshashila during the later part of the first millennium to study medicine and translated important medicinal texts like *Caraka-Samhita* into the Arabic. Many Indian texts are found in Pahlavi. Some portions of the *Mahabharata*, the stories from the *Hitopadesha* and *Panchatantra* were translated into the Pahlavi and the Arabic. Many works, whose originals are lost, survive in the Arabic avatars e.g. *Asrarut Mawalad* (The Secrets of Nativities), *Indathu-l-Alamwed-Dawn-e-fi-l-Oiran* (the Beginning of the World and Revolution) .<sup>lxxxix</sup>

Many Indian scholars visited the courts of the Caliphs. The Caliph Mansur (753-774) had Brahmagupta's *Sidhanta* and *Khandyakhandyaka* translated into the Arabic. Harun (786-808) invited Indian scholars and had works on medicine, pharmacology, toxicology, philosophy, astrology, mathematics translated into Arabic. It is well known that the concept of zero and the decimals travelled to Europe via Arabs. When the Islamic rule was established in India the activity of translation continued. Firoz Shah Tughlak (1353-1388) ordered Persian translation of around 1390 volumes from Sanskrit literature captured at Kangra .It is interesting to note that Husain Shah ordered Maladhava Vasu to translate the *Bhagwatam* and the *Mahabharata* into Bengali because a Muslim lord patronized translation of non-Islamic texts into a language which was not the sacred language of Islam.<sup>xc</sup>

With Akbar, we come into an age of glory for the Hindu Muslim relationship. Besides patronizing Sanskrit writers, he had great number of classics like the two Epics, *Lilavati*, the *Atharvaveda*, and the *Bhagwat Geeta*. *Yog Vasishista*, *Singhasan Batisi*, *Panchatantra* and so on translated into Persian. It was translation from one classical language into another. Prince Dara Sikoh is also known to have translated texts like, *the Bhagwat Geeta*, *the Upanishads*, *the Ramayana* and *Yog Vasishhta*.

It is remarkable that the Islamic rulers accused of fanaticism were so keen to accept the treasures of Hindustan. The Islamic translator resembled the Roman translator in his voracious craving for knowledge, but he was in no sense a 'robber' as he treated his source texts with reverence. European culture also received many ideas that developed in India via Persian and Arabic translations. Impact of these ideas and the mode of their travel would be a fascinating account and would throw more



light on the history of ideas in Europe.

It can be seen that translation, which plays an important role in the traffic of ideas, is also very closely associated with political projects like imperialism, and the violence of encounter in the spread of religion and ideology.

The much-recounted story of British Colonization in India is a complex historical narrative, which is full of ambivalence in the attitudes of the colonizers and the colonized towards each other. While it was the greed for wealth, lust for power, and the desire to spread the Christian Faith that brought the White man to the subcontinent, the alternative realities that he had to encounter intrigued him, fascinated him, repulsed him. This outlook is not dead even today. The act of translation was one of the ways in which he could attempt to make sense of the vast geographical and diversiform cultural landscape that sprawled in front of him. While Orientalism was an attempt to translate the bafflingly complex plurality and heterogeneity of the East by using the Western frames of reference, the Missionary activity was an attempt to translate Western Christianity into the native religious vocabulary.

Orientalism as understood today, mainly due to the incisive analysis by Edward Said was an attempt to translate the East in such way so as to assist and justify the ideology of colonization.<sup>xci</sup> As Niranjana points out correctly, translation raises questions about representation across the inequality cultural barrier and history.<sup>xcii</sup>

Commerce, chiefly spice trade brought the Europeans in close contact with India and they obviously felt the need to learn the language of the natives. Many grammars of modern Indian languages were compiled by the Missionaries, the Company people, and the Orientalists and subsequently improved upon. However, what attracted them most was the rich classical literary tradition.

In the seventeenth century, John Marshall translated the Saun Bead (the *Sama Veda*) from a Bengali version and the *Bhagwat Purana* from a Persian version into English. In the eighteenth century, Warren Hastings induced brahmin pandits to compile a compendium of Hindu law in Sanskrit and had it translated into Persian from which he translated it into English. Translation in his case was not carried out merely out of a practical need but out of the political desire to rule India.

Charles Wilkins was the first Englishman to learn Sanskrit. He published a Sanskrit grammar (1779) and the *Bhagwat Geeta* (1785). He is distinctly along with Sir William Jones, the pioneer of Indology. Besides being an excellent scholar, he was also a pioneer in printing in Indian characters. He himself cut matrices and cast type of Bengali, Arabic and Persian as well as the Devnagari script.

Sir William Jones founded the Asiatic society of Bengal. He translated the *Shakuntala* (1789), the *GeetaGovind* (1792) the *Manusmriti* (1794), and the *Hitopadesha*. He was among the first to note that Sanskrit, Greek and Latin had a common source and it was a sort of a shock for the European scholars who had believed till then that Hebrew was the origin of all languages.

Frenchman, Anquetil-Duperron, a Persian scholar published a translation of four Upanishads from a 17th century Persian version in 1786 and later fifty more Upanishads in 1801.

In 1823 H.H. Wilson, who was the secretary of the committee of Public Instruction, which translated many English books into Sanskrit, Arabic, and Persian, translated the *Meghdutam*, the *Rigveda*, and the *Vishnu Purana* into English.

One of the greatest Orientalist achievements is the fifty one volume translation *The Sacred Books of the East* edited by Prof. Max Muller (1823-1900) which contains translations by scholars from many countries.

In 1881 the Pali Text Society started publishing original works as well as translations from the Buddhist texts mainly from Pali. The main driving forces behind this society were Mr. and Mrs. Rhy Davids. The society also translated the *Jataka* tales and other important texts into European languages.

The characteristic feature of the Orientalist translations, was that they promoted the idea of 'The Glorious India that was' in contrast to the fallen and barbaric country that lay in front of the alien rulers. The image of the 'spiritual' and the 'supercivilized' India had to be manufactured in order to establish kinship with the colonized nation without doing any damage to the colonizer's sense of superiority and this was managed by fabricating a designer 'Golden India' that had ceased to be one thousand years ago.

It was the Missionaries in India, who were more interested in the living indigenous languages. The first two British Missionaries in India were William Carey and John Thomas. Carey towards the end of the eighteenth century came to India and translated the New Testament in Bengali in 1801 and the Old Testament between 1802 and 1809. He also prepared a dictionary of Bengali language. He produced the Grammar of Mahratta Language (1805) and translation of St. Matthews Gospel and two books of the Fables in Marathi, which were followed by the Scottish Missionary Society's Bible. Carey also inspired many Indians to develop prose in the indigenous languages especially in Hindi, Bengali, and Marathi. The missionary activity, which included translating the Bible and other books

into the modern Indian languages, preparing grammars and developing prose in these languages had a deep impact on their growth.

As the education in English became more widespread, the Orientalist and Indological translations inspired the Indians who received English education. Raja Ram Mohun Roy (1772-1833) was among the earliest scholars to translate the *Upanishads* into English. Romesh Chander Dutt (1848-1909) translated the great Epics (1898) and the *Rigveda* into English verse. . Popular novels by Walter Scott or Wilkie Collins were translated into Indian languages and they have played a major role in the development of the modern novel in India. Shakespeare was a particular favourite and translations from his plays exist in almost all major languages of India. Like RC Dutt and Raja Ram Mohan Roy many other Indian scholars translated from the Sanskrit classics into English.<sup>xciii</sup> Commenting on the differences between the medieval translation and renderings from Sanskrit, Devy notes correctly that the medieval translation aimed at `liberating the society, whereas the colonial translations were merely reactionary. They came either as a reaction to the colonial situation that had hurt the national pride of India or as imitations of Indological translation of Sanskrit works by scholars like Sir William Jones, Max Muller and others.<sup>xciv</sup>

When we come to the twentieth century the translation activity in India can be divided into three main categories: i) translations from non Indian languages into Indian languages, the source language being mainly English sometimes as the language of the original or sometimes as the third language acting as a `filter',<sup>xcv</sup> ii) translations from Indian languages into non Indian languages, mostly into English, forming a category called Indo-English literature or Indian literature in English Translation (ILET)<sup>xcvi</sup> and iii) translations from one Indian language into another and not infrequently with the use of English or Hindi as a mediating language. This last category needs to be exhaustively studied in order to have some idea of the complex cultural and linguistic situation in India.

The practice of translation from non-Indian languages, mainly English into Indian languages came into prominence with the onset and progress of missionary activity as has been noted. During the early colonial period, Shakespeare and the popular novelists of the nineteenth century were translated into Indian languages. The translations reflected the political situation of the colonization as well as the aesthetic and ethical norms prevalent in Indian cultures. Kher has compared various versions of Shakespeare in Marathi and shown how these translations reflect the ethical and the aesthetic conventions prevalent during the time.<sup>xcvii</sup> Trivedi has pointed out that Premchand's translation of Anatole France's *Thais* reflects how the resistance to the colonial situation is encoded in the strategies Premchand selected in dealing with the text.<sup>xcviii</sup> Tiwari provides a useful list of English works translated into Hindi.<sup>xcix</sup>

Interestingly, the other category that of translations from Indian languages into English has received considerable critical attention compared to the other two categories. Its chief characteristic is the fact that it is tied to the colonial history and the politics of the hegemonic status of English in India. It transgresses, if the translator is an Indian, the cardinal and implicitly accepted rule of translation: one should always translate into one's mother tongue.

Trivedi provides a fourfold division of the Indian literature translated into English: i) Indic and Indological works mainly translations of the ancient and medieval Sanskrit or Pali texts into English, ii) translations of the late ancient and medieval works, largely to do with bhakti, e.g. A K Ramanujan's translations or Rabindranath Tagore's translation of Kabir. Trivedi calls these two trends as neo-orientalists or post Orientalist trends, iii) fictional works depicting various aspects of modern India realistically like the work of Tagore or Premchand. Trivedi remarks that this category broadly conforms to Fredric Jameson's inadequate description of the Third World national allegory and iv) Modernist or High modernist writers translated into English, a category which Trivedi believes is contrary to Jameson's thesis as it shows that internationalism/universalism cosmopolitanism can flourish in the Third World as well.<sup>6</sup>

In Trivedi 's first category can be put the works of brilliant Indologists and Sanskrit scholars like Wendy Donniger O Flatthey, Barbara Stoller-Miller, or Lee Siegel who have produced excellent translations of Sanskrit classical texts with erudite and insightful commentaries, forewords and appendices. Indian scholars like Sri Aurobindo, CC Mehta, and P Lal have translated from Sanskrit classics into English. The list is quite long, but the shadow of orientalism looms large over these translations and so does the desire to indulge in the 'glories of past'.

AK Ramanujan's translations from the South Indian saint-singers and of the ancient Sangam Classics, Tagore's translations of Kabir (1915), Sri Aurobindo's Vidyapati (1956), Chitre's Tukaram (1991), Heifetz and Rao's Dhurjati (1987) or R Parthasarthy's *The Cilappatikaram* (1992) and many other works more or less well received belong to the second category described by Trivedi. It is unfair to label these translations as neo- or post- Orientalist as these are scholar who belong to the colonized cultures and they translate into the language of the colonizers rather than the other way round. Besides, Orientalism worked in tandem with the colonizing project and reinforced it. Nevertheless, the colonial history does play a crucial role in the production and reception of these types of translations. It would be extremely interesting to consider P.Lal's observations which are cited by St.Pierre as they would provide an insight into why Indians translate from the bhakti compositions into English, ' I soon realized that an excessive absorption in the milieu and tradition of English was divorcing me from the values that I found all round me as an experiencing Indian, so

I undertook the translation of Indian-in practice, mostly Hindu-sacred texts, in the hope that the intimacy that only translation can give would enable me to know better what the Indian "myth" was, how it invigorated Indian literature, and what values one would pick up from it that would be of use to me as an "Indian" human being and as an Indian using a so called foreign language, English, for the purposes of writing poetry. <sup>'ci</sup>. St. Pierre rightly comments that such an attitude, `arises out of a desire to ground oneself more fully into the Indian source culture.'

Indeed the Indian translators of the bhakti or ancient Indian texts are educated in English and haunted by the feeling of being `uprooted' from the Indian soil. It is the desire to `Indianize' or `nativize' one's self that these Indians have while translating `Indian' texts into a non-Indian language. Translation becomes an important strategy in overcoming the sense of being fragmented and alienated. In this light one can understand Dilip Chitre's remark, ` I have been working in a haunted shop rattled and shaken by the spirits of other literatures unknown to my ancestors ...Europe has already haunted my house...I have to build a bridge within myself between India and Europe or else I become a fragmented person.'<sup>cii</sup>

The desire to relate the East and the West in `positive' manner springs from the English educated Indian's conscious or unconscious fear of alienation and of not belonging to the very country he or she is born in. This crisis may be due to the historical, or to use a more fashionable word, `post-colonial' condition, but then this should definitely separate it from the translations of the Orientalists.

The third trend as pointed out by Trivedi, and is very well documented by Sujit Mukherjee who gives an excellent list of various Indo-English realistic fictional works translated into English in his appendix which depict various aspects of modern Indian life. Mukherjee makes a strong case for inclusion of these works in the academic study of what is called `Eng.Lit.'<sup>ciii</sup>

The fourth category of Modernist and high modernist poets and writers translated into English features in Mukherjee's list too. He also provides a list of Indian dramas translated into English. Mukherjee's list is not comprehensive or complete, neither is it updated, but it reveals what a great help this kind of effort provides to the scholars.

A rather neglected area, however, is the study of translations from one Indian language into another and the theoretical formulation and analysis of such translations. The essay, `Translation in a Plurilingual Post-colonial context: India' by Paul St.Pierre (1997) <sup>civ</sup>is an illuminating analysis into this area which offers some interesting insights into the complexities of this area. He discusses various projects like *Aadan Pradan* (lit. interexchange) run by the National Book Trust, and Sahitya

Akademi projects for translating a major literary work from one language into another. He points out that these projects aim at 'forging national integration through the exchange of creative literature' (p.140, he is quoting from the National Book Trust 'manifesto'). Yet, he is aware of the disparity and asymmetrical relations between various languages due to political and social reasons. He points out that more translations are published in the northern and central Indian languages than in the south Indian languages, when one considers the ratio of the population of speakers and the number of books published by the NBT. These, he believes, 'do not simply represent what one might suspect to be an underlying north south bias...' but this requires interpretation, if one takes into account local contexts- availability of translators, for example, and cultural traditions-as well as historical relations between languages and communities in India. Such relations and contexts continue to exist in Modern India and they influence cultural productions, such as translations. They are as much a result of colonial policy-the formation of a unitary states out of a plurality of princedoms, feudatory states, etc., - as of decisions to maintain the divisions in modern India along linguistic lines. Thus India is not only a state in which linguistic divisions are maintained, but it is also a nation in which such divisions can lead to new rivalries or continue the old ones. (p.142)'.

He examines the case of Bengali texts translated into Oriya and shows how far greater number of Bengali texts in Oriya translations reflect the near hegemonic status of Bengali in Oriya. Indeed, the unequal relations among Indian languages deeply affect the traffic of translated texts between the languages. One has only to consider the number of Gujarati books translated into Marathi or Bengali and vice versa to realize that translation hardly takes between languages having equal footing and there is a distinct imbalance between them. An interesting picture emerges when we consider the number of books from Indian languages translated into other Indian languages. Bengali and Marathi have the least amount of translations from Indian languages .<sup>cv</sup> Does this number reflect some sort of regionalist arrogance these languages have *vis a vis* other literatures in Indian languages? There is indeed such a thing as hierarchy among the literary languages of India. Though there are better days coming for translations from Indian languages into English, are there better days in store for translations from one Indian language into another Indian language? Questions like these need to be examined more thoroughly.

St. Pierre ends his essay by underscoring the need to contextualize the practice of translation in India and says that, ' Translation... underscores the connection of translation to power: relations between languages and between communities are actualized and transformed through translation;' translation strategies reproduce more than mere meaning. The close examination of such relations and strategies makes it possible to elucidate the locations of powers within and between cultures in a concrete fashion, and this should, it seems to be one the goals of translation studies. (p.145).'

To sum up this brief diachronic study of translation in India one can remark that translation in India has always been a part of larger social and historical projects such as the spread of religion as in the Buddhist translation activity or the Christian missionary activity or even inter-religious interface as in contact with Islam; it could be a part of colonizing project or even a part of resistance to it; it can be a part of the need to redeem oneself from the alienation from the local 'roots' as in the case of translations from *bhakti* or even a part of the project of constructing a nationhood. As regards the diachronical study of translation in India, there is a constant need to contextualize it and analyze it with reference to the institutional and ideological framework. A thorough going study of this type is badly needed in order to increase not only our understanding of the subject but also our awareness of the context of cultural complexity in which literature and other cultural productions work.

#### 4) Translation and Philosophy

When Derrida states, 'the theme of a transcendental signified was constituted within the horizon of an absolutely pure, transparent and unequivocal translatability',<sup>cvi</sup> we realize that his notion of translation is no longer the one which is 'commonly understood'. In fact, Derrida's philosophy questions the possibility of delimiting any notion or concept to the domain that claims it, philosophy, literary studies, or 'popular belief'. For Derrida, translation as a notion is tied up not only to the areas conventionally dealing with translation such as translation studies, translation theory, linguistics or literary studies but fastened to the very structure of the Western thought that produces not only the disciplines mentioned above but also metaphysics, religion, politics or aesthetics. Thus, any similar discussion which deals with epistemological and ontological questions raised by the activity of translation and operates at a level of generalization and abstractness which makes it inconvenient for the discussions to be put into the categories discussed through out the chapter will have to be uneasily accommodated in the category of translation and philosophy. It deals with the question of hermeneutics, cognitive sciences, or metaphysics raised by translation.

George Steiner in his seminal *After Babel* discusses the historiography of translation and notes that the period between the essay by Schleiermacher in 1813 and the essay by Valery Larbaud in 1946 is the period 'of theory and hermeneutic inquiry. The question of the nature of translation is posed within the more general framework of theories of language and mind.... it gives the subject of translation a frankly philosophical aspect.'<sup>cvi</sup> He remarks that the seminal essay by Walter Benjamin in 1923, 'caused a reversion to hermeneutic, almost metaphysical inquiries into translation and interpretation.' In fact, Steiner himself believes that translation is involved whenever the act of understanding takes place and it does not just take place between two cultures or languages but between classes, genders, and age groups, in short between any two human beings.

Walter Benjamin's 'The Task of Translator' written in 1923 is one of the most significant statements

in the philosophy of translation as it is the key statement in the universalist, liberal-humanist tradition.<sup>cvi</sup> Considering the plurality and heterogeneity of human languages in the post-Babelian world, Benjamin believes that translation 'ultimately serves the purpose of expressing the central reciprocal relationship between languages. It cannot possibly reveal or establish this relationship itself, but it can represent it by realizing it in embryonic or intensive form (p.72)'. Benjamin is trying to hypothesize the notion of a 'pure language' of humanity, which includes all exclusive and different languages. There is a distinct influence of the Kabalistic mysticism on Benjamin's thought as Steiner notes in as he believes in the holy language in which all languages unite at some messianic moment.<sup>cix</sup> As all the languages for him are incomplete in themselves, translation 'in a singularly impressive manner at least points the way to this region: the predestined, hitherto inaccessible realm of reconciliation and fulfillment of language (p.75)'. He becomes more philosophical while distinguishing between the original work and the translation, quoted below is one of his more 'lofty' passages:

'The intention of the poet is spontaneous, primary, graphic; that of the translator is derivative, ultimate, ideational. For the great motif of integrating many tongues into one true language is at work. The language is one in which the independent sentences works of literature, critical judgements will never communicate- for they remain dependent on translation; but in it the languages themselves, supplemented and reconciled in their mode of signification, harmonize. If there is such a thing as a language of truth, the tensionless and even silent depository of the ultimate truth which all thought strives for, then this is language of truth the true language, and this very language whose divination and description is the only perfection a philosopher can hope for, is concealed in concentrated fashion in translation. (pp.76-77)'. For Benjamin the original work remains within the specificity of a single isolated language organically, while translation forays into the realm of the universal monolithic language of man, which is also the language of truth. He quotes Mallarme who said that as 'the supreme language is lacking' if one were to remove the plurality of idioms on earth, one would materialize the truth.

This perspective is characteristic of what Steiner calls Universalist-humanist stand. Commenting on this stand he remarks, 'the one (perspective) declares that the underlying structure of language is universal and common to all men. Dissimilarities between human tongues are essentially of the surface: Translation is realizable, precisely because of these deep-seated universals, genetic, historical, social from which all grammars derive can be located and recognized as operative in every human idiom, however singular or bizarre its superficial forms... hence the universalist position touches closely on the mystical intuition of a lost primal or paradigmatic.'

The opposing view to the universalist position would be the relativist position which Steiner calls the 'monadist' view. 'It holds that universal deep structures are either fathomless to logical and



psychological investigation or of an order so abstract, so generalized as to be well nigh trivial. The extreme monadist position, we shall find great poets holding it- leads logically to the belief that the real translation is impossible ' <sup>cx</sup>. The Sapir-Whorf thesis in language and cognitive sciences of course is a good example of this perspective. It holds that the 'real world' is largely unconsciously built up on the language habits of the groups or the community speaking that language. The people belonging to various language communities live in a different world. Chomskian view on the other hand puts emphasis on the universal deep structures underlying all languages and is distinctly universalist. G.M.Hyde offers an insightful critique of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis by saying that one does not have to be a Chomskyan to see that all languages have built into them devices for circumventing their own limitations and that literature itself is made up of a massive body of these devices, designed to institutionalize just these processes of circumvention. <sup>cx1</sup>

Octavio Paz believes that poetry is universal and communicates to the whole humanity, but unlike Benjamin, he points out, ' while translation overcomes the differences between one language and another, it also reveals them more fully. Thanks to translation, we become aware that our neighbors do not speak and think as we do (p.154).' <sup>cxii</sup>Paz is not worried by the fact that there is no single monolithic language of humanity of Pre-Babelian times, he values differences and considers them enriching. Although an universalist, he does not want to straightjacket the human being.

In contrast, the famous philosopher Jose Ortega Y Gasset believes that translation is a utopian act, but then all tasks which man undertakes are utopian for, 'the destiny of man-his privilege and honor is never to achieve what he proposes, and to remain merely an intention, a living utopia'. He then makes a distinction between a good utopian and bad utopian. While the former thinks, 'that because it would be desirable to free men from the divisions imposed by language, there is little probability that it can be attained; therefore it can only be achieved to an approximate measure', while the bad utopian thinks that because it is desirable, it is possible.' All utopian acts of good utopian are toward betterment and progress. Gasset interestingly suggests that it would be a great anguish if one were condemned to do only those activities that are deemed possible of achievement. Translation for Gasset is impossible and necessary. <sup>cxiii</sup>

Going back to Derridian philosophy, as it seems to be a critique of both the positions, translation seems to assume a crucial role. Derrida's philosophy is the philosophy of language, which analyses the language of philosophy in a strategic way. He believes that any signification takes place not because of presence of things or concepts but because of 'differance'. The term 'differance' is a typical Derridian neologism in French which combines the Saussurian notion that we recognize every entity in language, whether it is a phoneme or anything else, not because it is a positive presence in itself but because it differs from all the other entities in a linguistic system, and CS

Peirce's idea that interpretation or the meaning of a sign is yet another sign and so on and so forth, the notion of 'deferring' of the final meaning or the transcendental signified. Hence all the entities of the system of signification are not intuitively and immediately present as positive things in themselves, but appear so because of the 'difference'. He applies this perspective to the whole of Western philosophy and observes that it is built around binaries like presence versus absence, speech versus writing, male versus female, original versus imitation, white versus black, light versus dark, signified versus signifier, beginning versus end, nature versus culture and so on. Each term is dependent on its other for its identity because of the difference between them. Yet, Derrida observes that the first term of each binaries is privileged and a violent hierarchy is created. This structure of the western thought Derrida believes is due to the logocentrism and the metaphysics of presence. He offers a critique of the notion of sign as divided into the signifier and the signified. The signified is believed to be something outside of language or the system of signification but actually, it is a part of the system because what we call signified is yet another signifier. It is the metaphysical desire for transcendental signified or the concept independent of language, present without the need of mediating signifier, that creates the division between the signifier and the signified in the history of western thought. This metaphysics creates desire for transcendental signified which acts as a sort of anchor, centre or ground outside of system or structure supposedly giving it coherence and unity which cannot be coherence or unity if this centre is transcendental and outside of the structure. Translation is tied up to the very notion of sign, which is a product of western metaphysics. Derrida comments, 'within the limits to which it is possible, or at least appears to be possible, translation practices the difference between signifier and signified. But if this difference is never pure, translation is no more so... we will never have, and in fact we never had, any 'transfer' of pure 'signified'- from one language to another, or within one language- which would be left virgin and intact by the signifying instrument'.<sup>cxiv</sup> Translation is founded on a myth that one can separate word/s from their 'meaning', or can substitute other word/s from the same or some other language, and yet keep the 'meaning' intact. This belief that the 'meaning' can remain intact and unchanged if the 'word/s' are changed gives rise not only to the notion of translation but also to the notion of 'transcendental signified'. It presupposes the notion of unproblematic 'translation' within the language itself as if pure synonymy exists within the language itself. This logocentric slant, Derrida finds even in Jakobson's tripartite division of translation mentioned in the section on translation and language sciences.<sup>cxv</sup> Derrida reads the story of Babel and it 'does not merely figure the irreducible multiplicity of tongues: it exhibits an incompleteness, the impossibility of finishing, of totalizing, of saturating, of completing something on the order of edification, architectural construction, system and architectonics. What the multiplicity of idioms actually limits is not only a 'true' translation, a transparent and adequate inter-expression; it is also a structural order, a coherence of construct. It is then, (let us translate) something like an internal limit to formalization, an incompleteness or construture'.<sup>cxvi</sup> For Derrida, the differences between languages and within the language actually

limit not just the translation but also resists a systematic and coherent fabrication of any philosophical construct. In Derridian philosophy, the allegory of Babel becomes an allegory of not just 'necessity and impossibility' of translation, necessity as impossibility, but also an allegory of deconstruction of philosophical system in the process of edification due to 'differences' within the language. It is necessary to translate because of differential plurality and heterogeneity of idioms and languages and it is impossible to translate because of the same reason. As in most cases, in the Derridian approach, the reading of an allegory becomes the allegory of reading and interpretation itself.

In Derrida's philosophy, the idea of 'origin' also becomes problematic as no 'word' or sign in order to be a word or sign can be used once and for all or for the 'first time'. Signification in order to be significant has to be iterated and can never be for the first time. Hence, the loss of 'origin' is a condition for signification. Thus no text can be original and what is 'original' cannot be significant or text. The text is already an *anuvad*, a repetition with a difference. It is already a translation. Octavio Paz in the same essay echoes this perspective when he says, 'Each text is unique, yet at the same time it is the translation of another text. No text can be completely original because language itself, in its very essence, is already a translation- first from the non-verbal world; and then because each sign and each phrase is translation of another sign or another phrase. However, the inverse of this relationship is also entirely valid. All texts are originals because each translation has its distinctive character. Up to a point, each translation is a creation and thus constitutes a unique text (p.154).' Hence, all writing has to be rewriting in order to be writing, in order to have significance. Hence Lefevere's category of 'rewriting' reserved for translation, criticism and so on is already problematic as it is again functioning within the same metaphysical Platonic distinction between the 'original' versus 'imitation/copy' which it seeks to overcome. The same can be said about his category of 'refraction' which assumes the existence of 'non-refracted', pure non-deviant writing.

Besides, Derrida reads political significance behind the desire for a single language of man, unique, homogenous, and undifferentiated- the desire that led people to construct the tower of Babel. This for Derrida is a desire, 'to bring the world to reason, and this reason can signify simultaneously a colonial violence (since they would thus universalize their idiom) and peaceful transparency of human community. Inversely, when God imposes and opposes his name, he ruptures the rational transparency but interrupts also the colonial violence or linguistic imperialism.' He seems to be giving answer to George Steiner's query regarding the reason behind existence of an immense plurality and heterogeneity of languages and whether such a plurality has a function in Darwinian scheme of evolution.<sup>cxvii</sup>

Towards the 'end' of his commentary on the Babel allegory, Derrida in his distinctive style defends

translation by arguing that paradoxically even to understand that translation is impossible, one would have to use 'understanding' which in itself is an act of translation.

Whatever reasons one may have for disagreeing with Derrida, it is a fact that the metaphysical underpinnings of culture affect the way translation is conceived, produced, and received. The Christian Platonic metaphysics attributes a secondary status to translation as it is a 'copy' and not 'original' and that it is because of post Babelian condition and the Babel is seen as the other Fall.<sup>cxviii</sup> As we have seen that the brahmanical metaphysics is about essentialist, monistic, transcendental, unchanging, original and absolute nature of reality, and it sees all change as illusionary and superficial *Maya*. The *Atman* of *Bhagwad Geeta* remains the same, birth after birth, as it is the unborn one, what changes after the death is merely clothing, like Derrida's transcendental signified of western metaphysics which remains the 'same' in spite of the change in material signifiers. It sees all transformation, including translation as illusion and deception of senses. The Buddhist metaphysics sees reality as immanent and in a state of constant Heraclitian flux and devoid of all essences and origins. *Anaatma* or non-self is truth and the selfhood is not organic awareness, it is divisible and heterogeneous. Reality is constantly being transformed. Transformation and change is the fundamental nature of existence. Hence, we are constantly being translated along with the whole world. No wonder the Buddhists could accept translated texts in far more positive spirit rather than brahmins and their 'language of gods'.

From the above discussion, one can see that translation can be fruitfully considered a subject of philosophical reflection and can yield some invaluable insights into the epistemological and ontological considerations. Translation is seen not just as an activity of 'interpretation of verbal signs from one language by the verbal signs from another language' but being of the nature same as interpretation and enmeshed in the whole philosophical and metaphysical deliberations about interpretation.

### **Conclusion**

One good thing that happened with the 'the Age of Theory' in the later half of the twentieth century is the realization of the importance of the marginal. Translation along, with other marginalized voices like women, blacks, homosexuals, 'third world' writers, and the other oppressed voices, is considered a very significant area of study. The rapidly developing translation studies is essentially interdisciplinary because like the study of language, it poses questions to domains as diverse as cognitive sciences, language sciences, social sciences, literary studies, Artificial Intelligence, philosophy, cultural studies and so on. Translation studies see translation as occupying a greater place in human life than it was previously supposed. The study of translation can increase our

understanding (which in itself is an act of translation) of human being and the way human beings translate the world they occupy and the way they understand the self and the other.

To use a cliché, translation has great significance for a multilingual country like India. The Indian moves between the diverse ethnic and linguistic world with habitual ease, constantly translating for oneself and constantly being translated. One wonders whether the identity of the Indian can be found in this capacity to translate and be translated in order to move between diverse worlds.

Translation Studies then should have a greater place in the academic world especially in India as elsewhere Translation Studies is recognized as an exciting discipline in its own right. As the world shrinks and becomes a global village, translation will constantly remind the global villager that there are things which are bound to be different forever and that though the world has shrunk in size, it will never lose its enigmatic beauty of enriching plurality.

**CHAPTER 3**  
**BACKGROUND TO THE POETRY OF NARSINH MEHTA**

Forewords, afterwords, notes, glossaries, and introductions usually accompany literary translations. These accompaniments help the reader to understand the translations better and to put them in proper perspective. Literature, as a social institution may not be dependent on other social institutions but is certainly related to other social institutions, ideas and historical forces, and so understanding of these relationships is important for any serious study of literature. In this chapter a social, historical, cultural and literary background to Narsinh Mehta's poetry is provided in order to 'frame' the translations. The well-known British critic Jonathan Culler prefers the word 'frame' to the word 'context' as it does not suggest that the historical and social situation in which literature exists is passive and given, but it suggests that this situation is a dynamic force which determines the way literary text is produced, circulated and consumed.<sup>cxix</sup> The chapters three and four along with the glossary serve as 'frames' for the translations of Narsinh Mehta. The present chapter is divided into i) Introduction to the Bhakti Movement, ii) Gujarati society, language and literature at the time of Narsinh, and iii) Life and works of Narsinh Mehta.

**3.1 Introduction to the Bhakti Movement**

Those who love *Hari* long not for the ultimate release,  
Instead, they desire to be born over again  
To sing forever, to dance forever,  
To celebrate forever and to gaze forever at Nanda's darling!  
Great is the wealth of *Bhakti* found only on the earth,  
Not found even in the realms of Brahma!  
Narsinh Mehta (5.2.8)

The Buddhist caves at Talaja, a small village near Junagadh, traditionally considered the birthplace of Narsinh Mehta, until today echo the timeless gospel of renunciation, compassion and the relentless thirst for spiritual knowledge. In spite of unending process of movements, counter movements and sect formations, some ideas have never lost their appeal for the people of the subcontinent. The idea of *Bhakti* or the unconditional devotion and intense love for the Divine is indeed such an idea.

The word '*Bhakti*' comes from the Sanskrit root '*bhaj*' which means to love, adore, revere, possess, experience, undergo, and enjoy<sup>cxx</sup>. The earliest reference to the word 'Bhakti' is traced to a rule in *Ashtadhyayi* (IV.3.98) by the great grammarian Panini (fifth century BC), for the formation of words like *Arjunaka* and *Vasudevaka* in the sense of 'a person whose object of worship (or *bhakti*) is Arjuna or Krishna respectively.<sup>cxxi</sup> The word is also used in the sense of 'fondness for' as in the example given by Panini himself, fondness for cakes! The word also occurs in an extremely important text *Shveteshvatara Upanishad*, more or less contemporary of *Ashtadhyayi*. The book teaches '*Para-Bhakti*' - Supreme Devotion - to Shiva and this fact has led some scholars like Sircar<sup>cxxii</sup> to believe that it points to the importance of non-Aryan contribution to the idea of *bhakti*. What is interesting to note is the fact that the idea of *bhakti* seems to be tied to the names of Vishnu (for Krishna) and Shiva from very early times.

The evolution of *Vaishnavism* or *Bhagwatism*, i.e. the devotion and worship of Vishnu and his *Avataras* (lit. Descent, or incarnations) is in itself a fascinating narrative. Vishnu, certainly not the greatest of deities of the *Vedic* age, evolved into the supreme Godhead in the course of the centuries and the idea that he incarnates himself to save humanity and the world became the basis of '*Avatarvada*' - the doctrine of Incarnations. Shri Krishna and Shri Rama occupy a very high place in the Indian Pantheon and many sects flourish to this day based on the doctrine of devotion to either of these, especially to Shri Krishna.

The earliest systematic dogmatic exposition of the doctrine of *Vaishnava Bhakti* is to be found in the *Srimad Bhagwad Geeta* - The Song of the Divine Lord, which is in fact the spiritual counsel given by Shri Krishna to Arjuna on the battlefield of *Kurukshetra* and it forms a part of the great Epic *Mahabharata*. The earliest reference to the name of Shri Krishna is in the ancient *Vedic* texts and even in the Buddhist and Jain texts. However, here he is more of a human being rather than the Supreme Godhead. It was in the course of centuries that his name was connected to that of Vishnu and Vasudeva and his deification was complete by the first half of the first century BC.<sup>cxxiii</sup> The name of Radha, a cowherd girl married to someone else and the divine consort of Krishna came to be associated with Krishna in the later half of the first century AD<sup>cxxiv</sup> and yet her name is not mentioned in the later text *Srimad Bhagwatam* (between sixth and eighth century), which is one of the most important texts of Vaishnava canon. Radha was immortalized in fact in the great poem '*Geeta Govind*' of Jayadeva (twelfth century) thus starting the immortal love affair that captivated the hearts of millions of Indians from centuries. At once erotic and allegorical, at once physical and metaphysical, the Radha Krishna Motif is one of the central motifs in Indian Medieval Literature.

The love of Radha for Krishna is the ideal and ultimate form of *Bhakti*. *Narada Bhakti Sutra* (around 900 AD), after enumerating the various points of view about the characteristics of *Bhakti*,

says that the essential quality of *Para-Bhakti* -the ultimate *Bhakti*- is the state of total surrender to Him and an experience of extreme anguish on forgetting Him like that of the gopis (I.19 to 21). This sutra also points out eleven forms of *Bhakti* in the form of *asakti* or attachment and love namely; *roopa asakti*, love for the divine form; *pooja asakti*, love for worship; *smarana asakti*, love of remembering Him, *dasya asakti* or love of service; *sakhya asakti*, or affection for god as a friend, *vatsalya asakti* or love for god as a child, *kaanta asakti* or love for god as that of a wife, *atmanivedan asakti*, or the love for self surrender; *tanmaya asakti*, or complete absorption in Him; *Param virah asakti*, or the love for the pain of separation from Him [5.82). These forms of love are similar to the famous *Navadha Bhakti* or the nine types of devotion mentioned in the *Bhagwatam* [VII.5.23) which are Listening (*Shravana*) and singing (*Kirtana*) of the lord's praises, *Padasevana*, serving at his feet, *archana*, worshipping, *vandana* or bowing before Him. The rest are similar to the list given by the *Narada Bhakti Sutra: Dasya, Sakhya, Atma Nivedana and smarana*.

Thus, the emotional attachment and the passion for the Lord are expressed by analogies from human relationship. The relationship between the Lover and beloved, the Mother and the Child, the Master and the Servant, amongst the friends and so on is frequently used. One more analogy, which brings out in a remarkable fashion the devotee's complete surrender and the dependence on the Lord, is the analogy of the Monkey and its baby and the cat and its baby kitten.' The baby monkey clings to the mother in the same manner the devotee clings to his God in his need for divine love and protection. The mother cat carries her baby with great care to a safe place; in the same way the devotee believes, God carries his faithful believer lovingly towards a safe protected life.'<sup>cxxxv</sup>

While the emotive dimension of the *Bhakti* doctrine has relied heavily on the allegory of human love, the metaphysical aspect of the *Bhakti* doctrine has remained predominantly *Vedantic* through the ages. The most important thinkers who have contributed to the development of this doctrine are the Vedantic philosophers like Ramanuja (eleventh century AD), Nimbarka (twelfth century AD) Madhavacharya (twelfth century A.D.) Vallabhacharya (1478-1530 AD), Shri Chaitanya (1488-1533 AD) and others. The most important texts of the doctrine are *the Srimad Bhagwatam, Sreemad Bhagwad Geeta, and the Bhakti Sutras of Narada and Shandilya*.

Whatever may be the history of the *Bhakti* doctrine, what is today known as '*Bhakti* movement' gathered momentum after the remarkable changes in the socio-economic structure of the Hindu society. A.K.Ramanujan quite accurately observes, 'A great many-sided shift occurred in the Hindu culture and sensibility between the sixth and ninth century. ... *Bhakti* is one name for that shift...'<sup>cxxxvi</sup>

He has made an interesting use of the word 'shift' as he says 'to suggest a linguistic analogy, for example, 'the great consonantal shift ' precisely described in Indo-European linguistics. The



sociology of this shift is indeed complex. Historically the great empires were disintegrating and the decentralized regional and feudal powers started proliferating. <sup>cxxvii</sup>The regional identities and the languages started gaining prominence. A powerful religion Islam started making inroads into the Indian society. The Buddhism after being banished from the country was on the decline. This new form of religion found its earliest voice in the south and the Tamil Saint-singers called the Alvars (between sixth and ninth century AD) sang in Tamil the earliest and beautiful songs for Vishnu. The movement spread into the adjacent regions and gradually over the whole country.

One *shloka* from the *Bhagwad Mahatmya* describes the journey of the movement very well:

)%pnnaa d'ivaDo saahM vaRiWM kNaa-Tkogata .

@vaica%@vaicanmaharaYT``o gauja-ro jaINa-taMgata..

“I was born in Dravid Land, I grew up in Karnataka, I was honoured and revered in some places in Maharashtra, but I became old when I reached the land of Gujars. <sup>cxxviii</sup>

The success of this movement can be attributed to many factors. The dimension of the social reforms, especially protest against the axisphysiating caste system and ritualistic Brahmanism, appealed to the people Govardhanaram Tripathi, a noted Gujarati writer states that the movement of *Bhakti* drew heavily from the pre-Buddhist Brahminical system of thought in order to mislead the orthodox cravings of the Brahminical Establishment and the prevalent prejudice against Buddhism and to preserve the reformist dimension at the same time. <sup>cxxix</sup>This of course can be debated, for the Bhakti movement was not as radical as the Buddhism, the Jainism, or the Lokayat Charvak systems. However, one thing is certain that this new face of the religion was more democratic and protestant than the earlier version of Hinduism. Aijaz Ahmed, a renowned Marxist scholar notes: 'Bhakti had been associated, on the whole, with an enormous democratization of literary language; had pressed the cultural forms of caste hegemony in favour of the artisanate and peasants ... was ideologically anti Brahminical; had deeply problematised the gender construction of all dialogic relations.' <sup>cxxx</sup>

Indeed, women poets singing in an assertive voice like Meera, Andal, and Mahadevi Akka and the male saint-singers using the persona of woman like the followers of *Sahajiya* Sect of Bengal does highlight certain rebellious attitude towards the conventional construction of genders within patriarchy. Narsinh Mehta too is known to have sung ‘*Purusha tan leena thayu maru* (My masculinity dissolved), while beholding the vision of *Ras leela* .

The movement was also essentially anti-scholastic in its attitude. As the famous couplet of Kabir (1440-1518) puts it: “that in Bhakti real Pundit is one who knows the ‘*dhai akshar*’ or two-and-half letter word *prema* and not the one who has spent his life pouring over ‘*pothis*’ or books.”

Related to the dimension of social protest and the rejection of the ritualized religion is the fact that the regional languages were used to communicate the religious and the philosophical ideas in place of the elite languages like Sanskrit. Intense literary activity in these regional languages promoted a sense of identity with the linguistic community and nourished their growth into the modern Indian languages of today. The movement not only gave us a rich body of beautiful literary pieces but also strengthened the sinews of the very languages we use.

Besides helping the modern Indian languages in acquiring a sense of identity, the movement also had an effect of imparting something of homogeneity to the Indian culture. V.Raghavan quite rightly calls these saint-singers of the movement ‘the great integrators’.<sup>cxxxix</sup> They drew on pan-Indian stock of motifs, myths, legends, and beliefs largely from the Sanskrit literature and combined it with the common day to day rhetoric and the local colloquial idiom. The pan-Indian literary and philosophical tradition blended with the local and the regional culture in the Bhakti movement, or to use more technical and fashionable words the ‘*Marga*’ or the ‘Great Tradition’ fused with the ‘*desi*’ or the ‘little traditions’.<sup>cxxxix</sup> While the latter was enriched and strengthened the former got a new lease of life and an enviable position in the hearts of the most neglected and the most deprived sections of the Indian Society.

It is needless to point out that when the society was undergoing such remarkable changes, the very structure of the Hindu religion was being transformed. One noticeable change was the great importance given to the position of the ‘Guru’ - the Spiritual Master. Vishal Mangalwadi and Dr. Sudhir Kakar<sup>cxxxix</sup> a clinical psychoanalyst, give an excellent account of the sociology of the persona of the Guru. Dr. Kakar sees the role of the Guru in the Indian society much similar to the role of psychotherapist in the West. During the analysis of the psychological and the cultural factors that determine the role of the Guru in the Indian Society, he notes that in the Vedic times (1500-500 BC) “The Guru was more a guide to their correct performance and an instructor in religious duties. Not yet...the venerated incarnation of divinity” (p. 42).

In the later Upanishadic era (800-500 BC) the importance of the guru increased considerably and yet, ‘the Upanishadic Guru is still a recognizable human-teacher of acute intellect, astute and compassionate demanding from the disciple the exercise of reason than the exercise of reason than the exercise in submission and blind obedience.’ (p.42).

After the first millennium, the importance of the *guru* snowballs mainly due to the impact of the *tantric* cults and the widespread belief that the true knowledge is esoteric. 'The Guru', Kakar remarks, 'does not show the way to the Lord but is the Lord' (p.43). Quoting the well-known shloka which says that Guru is Lord Brahma, Guru is Vishnu and Guru is Maheshwara, Kakar observes that the 'Combined forces of the Bhakti and *tantra* pushed towards an ever-increasing deification of the Guru, a massive idealization of his mystery and power (p.44).

Vishal Mangalwadi quotes C.O.McMullen (p.17) who quite correctly observed that the institution of *guru* came as protest against the *brahminical* priestly monopoly over the religion and the philosophy of the Hindus. He also quotes Peter Brent who sees the Guru as a 'chosen father' figure (p.18) who comes as a rescuer from the conflicts in rather rigid and authoritarian nature of the Indian family.

Nevertheless, what is important to notice is the relation that the dominating figure of the *guru* has with the tendency of the Indian society to spawn sects. The great emphasis laid by the ideology of *Bhakti* on the unquestioning submission to the magical and the super-human power and to the authority of the *guru* provided a fertile soil for the growth and proliferation of a cacophony of sects. The idea of unquestioning submission paralyses the development of the critical and rational faculty of human intelligence.

Dr. Devy has described how the text of *Dyaneshwari*, which had raised some radical questions about the Indian society, was accepted as a sacred totem, an authority which should not be questioned.<sup>cxxxiv</sup> The *guru's* seat or '*gaddi*' occupies the highest place in the hierarchy of a sect, and it is occupied later by his disciples who succeed him, and contributes towards promotion of that sect.

The chain of the gurus is linked to the evolution of the sect. The relation between these sects was always not happy and there was always implicit or explicit competition and one-up-man-ship between these. The believers of these sects were greatly interested in 'converting' the people from other sects or those not tied to any sect. Ramanujan has made an interesting observation regarding this aspect of the new version of the Hinduism, 'Missions are born. Bhakti religions proselytize, unlike classical Hinduism. (p.27).<sup>cxxxv</sup>

The picture of the society that emerges is of course not a very pleasant one when religious dogmatism, feudal exploitative economy, sectarianism was flourishing. Yet it was an age of the most exquisite poetry, and the contribution of the *Bhakti* movement to the great body of the Indian literature is indeed quite substantial.

### 3.1.1) Poetics of the Bhakti Literature:

The poetics of the *Bhakti* literature, unlike the classical Sanskrit Literature, presupposes the oral performance of the composition. The performer and his or her audience are face to face. Most of the types of compositions like '*bhajans*', '*Kirtana*', '*abhangas*', and *padas* are meant to be performed aloud. Music, recital, incantations are indispensable aspects of these compositions. The quality of the composition has to rely on the quality of the performance. The aesthetics of the *Bhakti* are very much specific to the performance, therefore, most of the tools of academic literary criticism are of little use as it presupposes a printed text.<sup>cxxxvi</sup> The aesthetics of this kind of poetry involve the aesthetics of personal involvement unlike, as Ramanujan observes, the classical *rasa* aesthetics where the aesthetic experience is generalized, distanced and depersonalized by the means of poesis, the *Bhakti* poetry prizes '*bhava*, *anubhava*, the personal feeling, an intense involvement and intense identification.<sup>cxxxvii</sup>

The immense popularity enjoyed by the love-ongs of Radha and Krishna are typical examples of this. Kakar and Ross comment on the aspect of identification and involvement in these songs: "With this (sexual love) the creators and the audiences of Bhakti poetry seek to project themselves into Radha's love for Krishna through poems that recount all its passionate phrases ... all adopt a feminine posture and persona to recreate Radha's responses in themselves. Radha's passionate love for Krishna raised to its highest intensity is not an allegory for religious passion, but is religious passion." (p.88)<sup>cxxxviii</sup> Ramanujan has also shown how the whole erotic tradition became a new signifier with Bhakti as the signified.<sup>cxxxix</sup>

The imagery of sexual love is abundant in *Bhakti poetry* and is at once symbolic and earthly. Evelyn Underhill puts this kind of symbolism as one of the three great classes of symbols in the Western Mysticism and the best illustration of this would be the Song of Solomon in the Old Testament. Underhill brings to our notice an important statement by Professor Pratt (p. 138) which says that the excellent reason why the mystics must use the expressions from earthly love is that they have no other language to describe their experience without which they have to give up the attempt to describe it at all.<sup>cxl</sup> The poetry of love for the God uses the imagery of love of humans in many ways; the love of a friend for a friend, of a servant for his master or the love of a mother for her child ('that erotic plaything' as Freud called it). In some cases, it may be even the love of a dog for its master as in Tukaram.<sup>cxli</sup>

The word 'mysticism' is often used (or abused) in the context of *Bhakti* literature. But it is one of the most tired and vague words used in Indian Literary Criticism and as Perry puts it, the job of

finding mysticism in the poets and thinkers both Indian and Western has been 'staple of work' of Indian academics from long.<sup>cxlii</sup> Mysticism is supposed to be the experience of the Presence of the Infinite and Eternal Divine, which in itself is a metaphysical concept and the Western Scientific thought, has been mostly hostile to it. The Indian psychoanalyst Kakar has done impressive work on 'mysticism' which is at once sympathetic and balanced.

Not all the Bhakti poetry is silken and soft like love songs. Poets like Akho (c. 1615-1674) or Tukaram (1608-1649) often use language that is bitter, satirical, and even violent. Often this language is used with didactic intentions, especially when castigating the evils of the society and exposing hypocrisy in the traditional religious beliefs. The *Bhakti* poetry is hardly ivory tower poetry as it shows genuine concern for social reforms and correction of moral behavior. Some common themes like 'The Importance of Reciting His Name' or 'The Characters of a True Saint' frequently occur in the poetry of many languages. *Kabir bhai koi satguru kahawai* and Narsinh's '*Vaishnava Jana to Tene Kahiye*' are classic examples of the latter theme. Didacticism, like eroticism in the *Bhakti* poetry tends to be stereotyped and clichéd and it requires a real genius to execute it well.

Besides the love poetry and moralizing ones, an important category, though certainly not an exclusive one, is that of Metaphysical and Philosophical compositions using more abstract and conceptual themes of the Vedantic Philosophy like the relation of the Self to the *Brahman*, the problem of *Saguna* or *Nirguna* nature of the Brahman, the problem of One and Many, and so on. The ideas of course come from the Essential Vedantic texts like the *Upanishads*, the *Bhagwad Geeta*, and the traditional Vaishnava Canon.

Besides ideas, even the imagery comes from these classical sources. V.Raghavan provides an excellent list of images and illustrations:” The seed and the Tree, the Sea and the Rivers, the spider and its self-woven web, the River and the Boat, the Chariot and the Charioteer, the King and his subjects, the Child and its fantasies, the Stage and Acting, the Puppet and Puppeteer, the Dream, the Dance and the Poet (Lila).” (p.34)<sup>cxliii</sup>

It may be wondered whether the *Bhakti* literature had its distinctive style as conceptualized in the Western aesthetics. Dr.Devy (1998) in his extremely scholarly and insightful essay on the problematic of historiography in the Indian context mentions that the individualistic conception of personal style as was present in the West was hardly important and 'the greatest among the artists in India resist the creation of an 'individual' or 'unique style'. Their genius lies not in initiating 'style periods' but in forging 'style communities' which defy chronological classification.... 'Style periods' in Western literary history are distinguished by what is unique to them, but the 'style

communities' in India are distinguished by their openness to influences almost to the point of self-erasure. The poetry of the medieval saints in India represents the most distinctive example of a 'style community'. (p. 167).<sup>cxliv</sup>

The idea of 'style community' has obvious affinities with the idea of '*gharanas*' in Indian classical music. While it is true that 'style' was related to the community or a sect or a school like *padas* were associated more with the *Vaishnava*, *Vachanas* with the *Lingayats*, *abhangas* with the *Varkaris*, it can be debated whether the Bhakti poetry was 'impersonal' for poets like Meera, Narsinh, Tukaram or Namdev are very autobiographical. In fact if a genealogy of the form of autobiography is to be prepared then the several *bhakta* poets will have to be considered its pioneers.

Thus, the *Bhakti* poetry was always the poetry of people and about people. While reveling in the profusion of imagery and music, it did not neglect the social concerns. It is always open to allegorical interpretations and allows the sacred and the profane, the physical and the metaphysical, the immediate and the symbolic to coexist. Concerned with the social and the religious reforms, it is often very didactic and sermonizing. It is anti-scholastic and anti-clerical when it comes to religious beliefs. It celebrates the Presence and the Absence of the Divine and is irreverent to the conformist concerns about the Caste, the Class, and the Gender to an extent of being Dionysian. Even the *bhaktas* saw it as a risky affair, as Basavanna warns 'Don't you take on this thing called Bhakti ... if you risk your hand with a cobra in a pitcher, will it let you pass?'<sup>cxlv</sup>

It has played a constructive role of preserving traditions and adding to them. It has enriched the languages we use today. In short, it can be said that the whole complex phenomenon of the *Bhakti* movement marks an exuberant, rich and formative period in the long history of Indian cultural existence amid the most trying and unfriendly environment.

### **3.2 Gujarati Society, Language and Literature at the time of Narsinh**

#### **3.2.1 Social and Historical Background:**

If one could go back some four thousand years into the past, one would see the romance of ships full of cargoes of precious gems or bales of cloth sailing in and out of the prosperous dockyard of Lothal some distance away from Ahmedabad. The recent excavations have revealed the remains of mighty *Mohen-ja-daro* and the *Harrapa* Culture in places like Lothal, Bhaga Talav (Dist: Bharuch) .<sup>cxlvi</sup> Thus, it can be seen that the cultural history of what is today called Gujarat is more than four thousand years old. Yet the sight of ships going up and down the Arabian Sea from Lothal during the Mohen-ja-daro age illuminates a very peculiar and predominant feature of Gujarati life

till today: trade, both national and international.

The undisturbed coastline of Gujarat and a history of very active and flourishing ports like Dwarka (Kusasthali as it was called in the ancient times), Bharuch (known as Brhigu-Kaccha in the times of Jataka), Veraval, Mangrol, Porbunder (these three are mentioned by Ptolemy in 140 AD) and the newer ones like Surat, and Okha have given Gujarat an enviable repute as one of the most commercially active regions in the history of the sub-continent.<sup>cxlvii</sup> The community of merchants and businessmen has always held sway over the political and cultural equations of the region. Narsinh, however, did not belong to this community. He belonged, rather, to the community that traded the name of Rama! He sings, 'O Saints! We are traders of the name of Rama..!' *Ame Vehvariya Ramanama na...*'

The region of the Northern Gujarat was known as 'Anarta' and the South Gujarat was called the Land of Nagas and later as Lat in the ancient times. What is today called Saurashtra was called Surashtra and later was called Kathiawar during the British rule. Kutch region had the same name right from the earliest of times.<sup>cxlviii</sup>

Politically, Gujarat formed a part of the mighty Mauryan Empire and after the decline of the Mauryans, the region was taken over by the Sakas in the first century AD the greatest of Sakas Satrap was Rudradaman (A.D. 130-158) who renovated the great lake *Sudarshana* made by the Mauryans. After the great king Vikramaditya (Chandragupta II) killed him in about AD 395, the region went to the Guptas. Due to the invasions of Huns, the Gupta Empire declined and a strong Gurjara Chief named Bhattarka made himself independent and founded the famous Vallabhi Dynasty, also called the Maitrakas or Gurjars at a place called Vallabhi near Khambat. The kings of this dynasty are supposed to be foreigners. Vallabhipura was the capital, rich and prosperous not only in terms of wealth but in terms of learning and knowledge. Its fame attracted people like Hiuen Tsiang (A.D.640) and Sthirmani (same century), both Buddhist monks from China in quest of spiritual knowledge. However, it also attracted the plunderers. In AD 760, Vallabhi was plundered and sacked by the Arabs. The Chavadas (AD 746 to 942), the Solankies of the Chalukyas (AD 942 to 1244) whose rule is also called the Golden Age of Gujarat and the Waghelas (AD 1219 to 1304) were the last Hindu rulers of Gujarat before the advent of the Marathas in the eighteenth century. The Muslim dynasties, which ruled over Gujarat, were as follows: The Khiljis (AD 1304 to 1320), the Tughlaqs (AD 1320 to 1403), the independent Gujarati Sultanate (AD 1403 to 1573), and the Mughals (1573 to 1758AD). Then the reign passed on to the Marathas and finally into the hands of the British.<sup>cxlix</sup>

Gujarat, as we have seen, boasts of a history of more than four millennia. It has been affluent and

cultured from ancient times. However, its wealth made it particularly vulnerable to aggression from plunderers. The Arabs because of its fame for being prosperous sacked the great city of Vallabhi. Yet Gujarat has not only managed to withstand hostility from the foreigners but has also resurrected herself like the phoenix. King Mularaj founded the Chalukya dynasty at Anahilvad Patan in mid of the tenth century and the reign of the Chalukyas is called the Golden Age of Gujarat. The Chalukyas saw Mahmud of Ghazni plunder the magnificent temple of Somnath in AD 1024 and raid Patan. However, thanks to the greatness of the Chalukya kings, Patan soon revived its glory and became the centre of power, wealth, and learning. The great king Siddharaj Jaisinh (AD 1094 to 1143) made Patan the capital of his empire. His nephew Kumarpala (AD 1143 to 1174) added to the glory and under the guidance of the famous Jain Muni Hemachandracharya, he promoted the ethical principle of non-violence strictly in his kingdom. Many famous lakes, Chaityas, temples and Jinalayas stand to this day as witnesses of this golden age when the generous kings patronized arts and learning.

In spite of being Shaivas, the Chalukyas extended their patronage to the Jains and the Vaishnavas besides other sects. This, of course, was keeping in line with the catholic and flexible nature of the Gujarati people. Perhaps the attitude of sympathy to tolerance to the otherness of other cultures and beliefs is due to constant interaction with many provinces because of the continuous trade activity. The mercantile community in Gujarat found the ideals of non-violence and self-discipline quite appealing. Consequently the Jain religion gained considerable influence under the rule of the Chalukyas and has until today played a very important role in Gujarati society.

When the Hindu rulers lost power and the Muslim rule came into existence, there were far reaching changes in the society. Because of the activities of conversion, forced and voluntary, the institution of caste became more orthodox and rigid. The position of women deteriorated. The people, of course, were as superstitious as ever. The temples and religious places of worship were demolished on a large scale. There were constant conflicts and bloodshed among the 'Amirs' and the Sultan after the establishment of an independent Sultanate in Gujarat by A.D.1403. The brothels grew in number because of constant skirmishes in Gujarat. The system of slavery, which was present even in early times, was common. The economy was agrarian though trade and commerce existed and the socio-political structure was feudal. King Ahmed Shah I (AD 1411 to 1442) founded a new city of Ahmedabad after Patan ceased to be the centre of power. Nevertheless, one important thing to be kept in mind is that in the medieval Gujarat as in medieval India, religion was the most important force.

Many religious sects existed like the Shaivas. The famous Jyotirlingam of Somnath and many Shiva temples bear ample evidence of the age when Shaivism dominated the Shakta sect whose followers



worshipped the Mother Goddess in the form of Shakti, the sect of Sun Worshipers, as the famous temple of Modhera testifies, and the Parsis, who had come from Iran in the ninth or the tenth century, the Jains and the Vaishnavas.

Pandya draws attention to a very interesting fact that though the Shaiva sect held its sway in the early medieval times and the importance of the Somnath temple, one of the 12 Jyotirlingams of India, had spread far and wide, the Shaivite literature available today is meager.<sup>cl</sup> The Vaishnavism side by side flourished as can be seen from an inscription of King Sarangdeva Waghela, which bears the famous Dashavtara Shloka from the invocation in the Geeta Govind, by Jayadeva.<sup>clh</sup> It is significant as Narsinh's works bear considerable influence of *the Geeta Govind*. The *Vaishnavism* grew considerably with the passage of time and we can witness the advent of sects like Vallabhacharya's *Pusti Marga* in the early sixteenth century and of the *Swaminarayana* sect founded by Sri Swaminarayana or Sri Sahajanand (B. 1781), which are flourishing to this day. The development of Vaishnavism in Gujarat owes a great deal to the works of the early great poets like Narsinh Mehta and Meerabai and the poets who belonged to the above-mentioned sects. Thus, Vaishnavism grew from strength to strength besides Jainism, which gradually lost its supremacy. The philosophy of *advaita Vedanta* has been quite popular in Gujarat from ancient times. It is believed that Shri Sankaracharya (first century AD) came to Gujarat and received his initiation on the banks of the river Narmada. It is also believed that he wrote his famous *Shankarbhasya* here.<sup>clii</sup> Religious bigotry, especially of the Muslim kings, casteism, superstitious outlook, excess of religion and sects etc are by no means symptoms of a healthy society and the overall picture of Gujarat at the time of Narsinh does not look very pleasant. Yet, great poets do flourish even in adverse or unfavorable conditions as literary histories have shown so many times. That is the case with Narsinh also.

### 3.2.2 Gujarati Language.

The Gujarati language is at least a thousand year old or more. But the name 'Gujarati' is found in Premanand (1638-1734 A.D.) in the '*Naag Daman*' or the 'subduing of the Snake' episode of his '*Dasham Skanda*' (15.64).

He says, "*Roode Copar Mare Abhilaasha, Bandhu Naag Daman Gujarati Bhaasha*" (It has been my heart-felt wish, so I compose 'Naag Daman' in the Gujarati Language.

Narsinh himself uses the word '*Apabrashta Gira*' in '*Surat Sangram*' (72.2). Bhalan calls it '*Apabramsha*' or '*Gurjar Bhaash*' and Padmanabh calls it simply Prakrit. The region where Gujarati was spoken was called Gujarat right from the times of Bhalan.<sup>cliii</sup> Gujarati is a modern Indo-Aryan Language, which has evolved through Sanskrit, Prakrit, and the Apabramsas. In the beginning of the millenium it was the common language of both Gujarati and the Western Rajasthan and so a noted

Gujarati poet and scholar Umashankar Joshi calls the earliest form of Gujarati 'Maru Gurjar' to indicate it was common to both Marwar and Gujarat.<sup>cliv</sup> Shri K. K. Shastri has traced the historical development of the language as follows:

I) Gurjar Apabramsa or Old Gujarati (from the sixth century to the first half of the fourteenth century AD).

a) First Stage from the sixth century AD to the eleventh century AD

b) Second Stage from the eleventh century to the first half of fourteenth century AD

II) Gurjar Bhasha or Medieval Gujarati (from the later half of the fourteenth century to the first half of the seventeenth century AD)

III) Modern Gujarati (from the later half of the seventeenth century onwards).<sup>clv</sup>

A language gives an identity to the culture. A literary tradition forms an integral part of the language and hence of the cultural identity. An immense body of literature, exquisite in quality, is obviously the pride of any culture. Gujarat, whose cultural history is more than 4000 years old and whose language which is more than a thousand years old with poets of the stature of Narsinh, Meera or Premanand, indeed has a lot of things to be proud of.

### 3.2.3 Literary Background

Brahmins and the Jains composed literature in pre-Sultanate times in the so-called language of gods' -Sanskrit- too. Some Pehlvi works were also translated by the Parsis into Sanskrit and later into Prakrit.<sup>clvi</sup> In the eleventh century AD, we also find Sanskrit dramas written by the followers of Hemachandracharya like Ramachandra (C.1093-1174) and others. *Nalavitasā* and *Kaumudimitranandan* are the famous plays of Ramachandra. Around 26 dramas in Sanskrit are believed to have written by Gujarati writers. The drama, however, did not become popular.<sup>clvii</sup>

Later a form of language called Apabramsa (Lit. corrupt, deteriorated language) that was spoken in northern India was made popular mainly due to the work of the Jain Sadhus and other poets of the tenth century. Along with Apabramsa came literary forms like *rasas and phagus*. The *rasa* form became so common and popular during the time that the noted Gujarati Scholar Sri K. K. Shastri has called the age as *rasa Yug*.<sup>clviii</sup> A huge body of *rasa* exists today. *Rasa* is essentially a performative composition meant for dancing and singing during celebrations usually in the Jain temples. It was performed in a circle to the beats of clapping. As it was meant to be sung, it was composed in singable meters like *chaupai, dohas, and soratha*. *Roopaka* was a type of *rasa*, which was meant for theatrical performance. These compositions also contained didactic elements. The *rasa*, besides being sermonizing, could also be narrative and heroic.<sup>clix</sup>

The dance form of *rasa* is associated with Krishna from quite early times. *Hari Vamsa*, a later supplement to the great epic *Mahabharata*, mentions the Gopis dancing *Hallishkrida* quite similar to the *rasa*. In *Puranic* times it was called *Hallisaka* <sup>ckx</sup>Narsinh describes the *rasa* dance performed by his Lord and the enamoured Gopis in many of his *padas*.

The literary form of '*pada*' is a very important and popular form found in the medieval Gujarati literature. Literally it means 'feet' in Sanskrit but it is more of a type in itself. The closest equivalent to this type in the English Literary tradition would be the lyric. However, unlike the lyric, where experimentation in rhyme and stanza form takes place, the rhyme scheme in *pada* is more or less fixed. The first couplet is the refrain and is called the *dhruvapada* or *tek*. The *dhruvapada* was to be made as dramatic and attractive as possible, as the popularity of the *pada* depended on it. The main idea of the *pada* is usually expressed in the *tek*. The poet usually added his other name in the last couplet, which became the 'signature' line, for example, '*bhane Narsaiyyo*' or '*Meera ke prabhu Giridhar Nagar*'. Devices like alliteration, internal rhyme, and so on were used in plenty.

The role of temples and the routine rituals in the development of the *pada* is extremely significant. Various *padas* are meant to be sung at various times of the day, during the *darshana* time, at the time of offering *prasada*, at the time of decorating the idol, or at the time of 'waking' the deity etc. The matutinals of Narsinh called the *prabhatis* are to be sung in the morning. They are much similar to the compositions called *bhoopali* in some places. *Aarti, thal*, the songs relating to the birth of Sri Krishna, the songs of the spring festivals like *Holi, bhajans*, and *kirtanas* are extremely popular types of *padas* <sup>ckxi</sup>It is interesting to observe how close the literary activity was to the religious ritual in the medieval times. A mention must be made of the very famous forms of *padas* peculiar to the Gujarati culture called *garbo* and *garbi*. Both these forms are associated with the festival of *Navratri* (the first nine days of the month of *Ashvina*), and the worship of the Mother Goddess. The word *garbo* literally means a small earthen pot with holes. Since traditionally, women danced in a circle with the *garbo* on their heads, the form of song came to be called *garbo*. The word *garbi* was used as a synonym for *garbo* in earlier times; but later it became mainly an all-men dance where *garbo* is placed in the centre of the circle of dancers and a lamp is put in it. Many times the word is used interchangeably. The name of Dayaram (1776-1852 AD) is associated with the forms as he has written many melodious and sweet *garbo* and *garbis*. The literary form of *pada* was used by great poets like Meerabai, Narsinh, and others and forms a contrast to the great body of *rasa* compositions written by the Jain sadhus.

The other literary forms popular during the medieval times were *phagu* (from *falgun* in Sanskrit meaning 'spring'), a typical season-related form akin to *baara maasa* and the *akhyana*, which is a

narrative verse form which uses a well known story and is recited by *maan-bhatt* or *gagariya bhatt* i.e. a brahmin who sings while playing on *maan* or *gaagar*, that is, a big narrow-necked pot of copper. Premanand (1636-1734 A.D.) has contributed a lot in making *aakhyana* a popular and successful form. *Prabandha* (lit. A composition) was another narrative form typical to Gujarat and Malva, that used a historical or a biographical theme, used mainly by Jain sadhus. The greatest *prabandha* in Gujarat, however, is written by a non-Jain poet named Padmanabha (around 1456 AD) called *Kanhad De Prabandha*. The other miscellaneous forms are *muktak*, a very short, independent composition and *padayatra* which is nothing but a string of padas used for the sake of narration.

A mention must be made of the existence of prose in early Gujarat. It existed mainly as translation of the classical Sanskrit texts like the *Bhagwat Geeta* into Gujarati *Prakrit*. It was meant mainly to teach and preach so it was called *balavbodh*. The Jain Sadhus contributed quite considerable prose, which is in the form of *balavbodh*.<sup>clxii</sup>

Major literary figures known during the time of Narsinh are as follows:

i) Hemachandracharya (1088-1172 A.D). The great Jain monk composed lexicons like *Deshi Naama Mala* and *Abhidhan Chintamani*. His major contribution is *Siddhahema Shabdanushasana*, a grammar of Sanskrit, Prakrit, and Apabramsa. He was the first to codify the grammar of Prakrit.

ii) Jain poets like Shalibhadra Suri (C.1185) who wrote *Bharateshwar Bahubali Rasa*, the oldest available *rasa*, Vinayachandra (C.1244) who wrote the oldest known Baramasi '*Neminaath Chatuspadika*', Jinapadamasuri (C.1344) who wrote *Sirithuli Bhadda Phagu*' - the first *phagu* known in Gujarati. Mention must be made of the unknown composer of *Vasanta Vilasa* (fifteenth century) considered to be the finest *phagu* in the language.

iii) Bhaalan (1405-1489 AD) the great poet and the translator of the famous *Kaadambari* by Ban Bhatt in Sanskrit.

iv) Padmanabha (C.1456) the author of the *Kanhad De Prabandha* which can be considered among the finest heroic poems in Gujarati.

v) Meera (1499-1547) the immortal contemporary of Narsinh, whose exquisite love songs have earned her a place among the best medieval poets in any language.

These poets have made Gujarati rich and imparted vitality to it. The fact that their compositions still form part of the daily life of millions of people in Gujarat shows how integral their place is in the

Gujarati literary tradition.

### **3.3 Life and Works of Narsinh Mehta**

#### 3.3.1 Life of Narsinh Mehta

Narsinh Mehta (1414? - 1481? AD) is undoubtedly the most loved poet of Gujarat. Tradition has conferred the title of ‘*adi kavi*’ or the First Poet of Gujarat, not because he was the first poet who composed in Gujarati, but because he was the first major poet popularity of whose compositions has stood the test of time. His melodious *prabhatis* or matutinals can be heard in Gujarati households to this day. His beautiful songs dealing with the love of Radha and Sri Krishna are models and a constant source of inspiration for all future poets of Gujarat.

Indeed, Narsinh has always existed in popular imagination as a person in flesh and blood, close not only to the heart of his Lord, but also to the hearts of millions of Gujarati people. Yet, as in the case of most of the Indian poets of antiquity, there is hardly any definitive and concrete evidence about details of his life. Consequently, there is a wide divergence among scholars as to the poet’s life.

Like most of the *bhakta* poets of India, Narsinh has become a legend. The narrative of his life is woven with many ‘miracles’ and has provided material for many later poets who have sung about many incidents of his life. Based on his autobiographical compositions like *Putra No Vivah*, or *Mameru* or *Hundi Na Pado* there are many later poems by poets like Vishwanath Jani (1682 AD), the famous Premanand (1636-1734 AD) and the great Rajastani poet Meera (1499-1547 AD).

Tradition places Narsinh’s date of Birth as Margasira (Nov-Dec) in Vikram Samvat 1470, i.e. 1414 AD. The date has given birth to a very lively debate among critics some of them of formidable scholarship like Shri K.M.Munshi, Shri K.K.Shastri, and Shri Umashankar Joshi. The details of the debate are too elaborate to be discussed in the present work and are outside the scope of this work.

Narsinh was born in Talaja, Bhavnagar District of Saurashtra, in *Nagar* brahmin community, known, besides its scholarship, for its rigidity, orthodoxy and exclusiveness and the poet always seems to refer to it with a touch of irony. His father’s name was Krishnadasa and Narsinh was the youngest of the three brothers. He was born when his father was quite old and he lost him at the tender age of three. Then he went with his mother to live with his paternal uncle Parvatdas, a devout

Vaishnava who probably lived at Mangrol. By then, Narsinh had taken to the company of sadhus and Saints. Shri K.M.Munshi, who tried to shift Narsinh's traditional date of birth to somewhere between 1474 A.D. and 1522 A.D. is of the opinion that it was during these years that the young poet came into contact with sadhus from Vrindavan who lit the torch of *sakhi bhava* or *gopi bhava*, a kind of *Bhakti* - a psychological stance of being a beloved of the God in Narsinh.<sup>clxiii</sup> However, the critics who disagree with Munshi believe that Narsinh's kind of *Bhakti* was derived directly from the Vaishnava Canon comprising of the *Srimad Bhagwatam* (between 500 & 900 A.D.), *Srimad Bhagwad Geeta*, Jayadeva's immortal masterpiece *Geet Govind* (twelfth century) as well as from *Varkaris* and *Namdharis*, wandering saint-minstrels from Maharashtra and other great poets like Kabir.

Whatever may have been the case, the young Narsinh danced and revelled in the company of Sadhus, saints, women, lower caste people, and, at times, even wore the clothes of women.<sup>clxiv</sup> The conservative Nagar community was shocked and his would-be father-in-law broke off his betrothal with his daughter, as he thought that his prospective son-in-law was no good in business or studies.

There is hardly any definite account of Narsinh's early life and his education. A small cave near Talaja, dating back to second century A.D. is called 'Narsinh *Nishal*' or 'Narsinh's school'. It is quite possible that the young poet went there for seclusion and reflection. From his compositions, we can make out that he had some knowledge of Sanskrit and a thorough knowledge of Vaishnava Canon. He is also deeply influenced by Vedantic philosophy. His handling of *sringar* -the erotic *rasa*- shows that he is also probably familiar with classical Sanskrit court-poetry - *kavya* Literature. He was also an excellent musician. Narsinh may not have been educated to be a businessman or a priest but he was certainly well equipped to be a major poet.

After the death of his mother (about 1425 AD), Narsinh married Manekbai probably in the year 1428 A.D. and soon he lost his uncle. Narsinh and his wife went to stay at his cousin Bansidhar's place in Junagadh. However, the cousin's wife, his *bhabhi*, was a particularly ill-tempered woman, always taunting, and insulting Narsinh. When he could take it no longer, he left the house and went to a nearby forest where he fasted and meditated for seven days by a secluded Shiva Lingam until Shiva appeared before him in person. On the poet's request, the lord took him to Dwarka and showed him the eternal *rasa leela* of Sri Krishna and the gopis, the cowherd girls of Vrindavan. A legend has it that the poet transfixed by the spectacle burnt his hand with the torch he was holding but he was so engrossed in the ecstatic vision that he was oblivious of the pain.

“My manhood dissolved and I became the Lord's lover.

I lost the awareness of my body, I became his go-between

and I mixed with the gopis to convince Radha to discard her pique...” (*Putra Vivah*)

Then the Lord Krishna pleased with his devotee's love, placed his hand on his head to bless his devotee. The poet says,

‘My throat choked and I was speechless.

I who was unconscious before became conscious

The worldly sins receded and my primal speech

awoke from its sleep `

Narsinh, as the popular account goes, at Sri Krishna’s command decided to sing His praises and the nectarous experience of the *rasa* in this mortal world. He resolved to compose around 22,000 *kirtans* or compositions. After this dream-like experience, the transformed Narsinh returned to his village, touched his *bhabhi's* feet, and thanked her for insulting him.

In Junagadh, Narsinh lived in poverty with his wife and two children, a son named Samaldas, and a daughter for whom he had special affection, Kunwarbai. He revelled in devotion to his hearts’ content along with sadhus, saints, and all those people who were Hari’s subjects -*Harijans* irrespective of their caste, class or sex. It also seems that he must have fallen into a somewhat ill repute for his close relations with Lord's *sakhis* and *gopis*, Narsinh’s women followers, with whom he danced and sang .<sup>clxv</sup>

The Nagars of Junagadh despised him and spared no opportunity to scorn and insult him. Once during his regular visit to the holy tank of Damodar temple near the foot of Girnar Hills, some people belonging to the so-called lower castes, requested him to sing and dance the Lord’s *kirtana*. The saint was very happy to accept the offer, for all who were Hari’s subjects -*Harijans*- were beloved to him. Scandalized Nagars said:

‘O what kind of person are you, O Mehta!

You care not for caste, you care not for creed, you care not for discrimination!’

(5.3.4.1)

To this Narsinh ironically replied:

We are like that-yes we are like what you say!

We are indeed base, baser than the basest in the world!

Say what you will; we are neck-deep in his love!

We are like that-yes we are like what you say!

I, Narsaiyyo, am a man of base deeds, for I love Vaishnavas  
Who ever distance themselves from *harijans*  
Have wasted their births!  
We are like that-yes we are like what you say!  
(5.3.4.2)

By this time, Narsinh had already sung about the *rasa leela* of Radha and Krishna. The compositions are collected under the category of *sringar* compositions. They are full of intense lyricism, bold in their erotic conception and are not without allegorical dimensions, this saves the compositions from being something of erotic court poetry of medieval India.

Soon after his daughter Kunwarbai's marriage (around 1447 AD.) to Sringara Mehta's son, Kunwarbai became pregnant and it was a custom for the girl's parents to give gifts and presents to all the in-laws during the seventh month of pregnancy. This custom, known as *Mameru*, was simply out of the reach of poor Narsinh who had hardly anything except intransigent faith in his Lord. How Krishna helped his beloved devotee is a legend depicted in 'Mameru Na Pado'. This episode is preserved vividly in the memory of Gujarati people by compositions by later poets and films. Other famous legends include 'Hundi (Bond)' episode and 'Har Mala (Garland)' episode. The episode in which none other than Samalsha Seth (The Dark one as *Seth*) cleared a bond written by poverty stricken beloved, is famous not only in Gujarat but in other parts of India as well. The *Har Mala* episode deals with the challenge given to Narsinh by Ra Mandlik (1451-72 AD.) a local king and a vassal of Delhi's Sultan, to prove his innocence in the charges of immoral behavior by making the Lord Himself garland Narsinh. This episode is depicted by Narsinh and later poets like Premanand. How Sri Krishna, in the guise of a wealthy merchant, helped Narsinh in getting his son married is sung by the poet in 'Putra Vivah Na Pado'.

Around 1451 AD, Narsinh lost his wife and his son. He took the traumatic losses in a philosophical way.

My wife and my son died soon  
The people of the city wept and cried  
I said,  
'One whose moment has arrived departs  
My mind is not in the least grieved...' (Mameru).

In his later life, Narsinh sang about renunciation, significance of *Bhakti* and ethics. His later compositions show his real genius as they have a variety of metaphorical and allegorical dimensions



as compared to the cloying monotony of his earlier erotic works. He has an uncanny knack for expressing abstruse metaphysical concepts in an amazingly simple language. His works are immensely popular in Gujarat and give Narsinh the unparalleled status he has in Gujarati canon of literature.

Mahmud Begada (Mahmud Shah I) 1458-1511 AD, invaded Junagadh in 1467 AD and soon after many a sporadic Muslim raid, the city was annexed to the Gujarat Sultanate. Perhaps to escape the consequences, he went to Mangrol where, at the age of 66, he is believed to have expired. The crematorium at Mangrol is called 'Narsinh Nu Samshan' where perhaps one of the greatest sons of Gujarat was cremated.

His was a life of poverty, of art, of visions, of love and of rebellion. It was also a life of intense music and immense passion; in short, a life meant to be a legend. Till today, one can still hear the voice of Narsinh Mehta, going for a holy dip in the sacred tank of Damodar Temple at the foot of Girnar Hills.

### 3.3.2 The Works of Narsinh Mehta

One of the most important features of Narsinh's works is that they are not available in the language in which Narsinh had composed them. They have been largely preserved orally. The oldest available manuscript of his work is dated around 1612 AD, and was found by the noted scholar K.K. Shastri from Gujarat Vidyasabha. Because of the immense popularity of his works, their language has undergone modifications with changing times. This undoubtedly has problematized the notion of 'originality' as a quest and a privilege, as a central concern in traditional scholarship. That also means that Narsinh has been continuously 'translated' in newer and newer forms of Gujarati with the passage of time. Authenticity of many of his works has been questioned and some scholars have even suggested that there might have been more than one Narsinh. All this is of course very common in the case of ancient and medieval Indian poets.

For the sake of convenience, the works of Narsinh are divided into four categories:

- I. Autobiographical compositions: *Putra Vivah*, *Mameru*, *Hundi*, *Har Same No Pado*, *Jhari Na Pado*, and compositions depicting acceptance of Harijans.
- II. Miscellaneous Narratives: *Chaturis*, *Sudama Charit*, *Dana Leela*, and episodes based on *Srimad Bhagwatam*.
- III. Songs of *Sringar*.
- IV. Songs of Devotion, Philosophical poems and Didactic works.

Autobiographical works deal with the incidents from the poet's life and reveal how he encountered the Divine in various guises. They consist of 'miracles' showing how Narsaiyya's Lord helped his devotee in the time of crises.

*Putra No Vivah* (Son's Marriage) deals with the incident of his son's marriage and depicts how the poet, like Sudama, went to Dwarka to seek Lord's assistance and how Sri Krishna himself attended the marriage procession.

*Mameru* depicts the incident in which the penniless father prayed to Lord Krishna, as he had no money to do 'Mameru' - the custom of giving gifts to the girl's in-laws by her parents in the seventh month of her first pregnancy. Krishna of course turns up and saves his devotee's honor.

*Hundi Na Pado* describe the episode when some Nagar pranksters pointed out to Narsinh when some pilgrims bound to Dwarka wanted a bond (a *hundi*) which could be encashed at Dwarka as the journey was quite dangerous one. The poet who had full faith in his Lord wrote a hundi and, wonder of wonders, it was accepted by Samalsha Seth (The Dark One) in the guise of Seth.

*Jhari Na Pado* depict an incident in Narsinh's life when, during one festival, he felt extremely thirsty and a woman named Ratnabai came to give him water from a Jhari (a water pot with a sprout). So fascinated was the sensitive poet by her beauty that he saw his own Beloved in His *Mohini* form or Vishnu in the form of an enchantress.

*Har Same Na Pado* deals with the challenge given by the king Ra Mandalik to Narsinh in order to prove his innocence in the charges of immoral behavior by making Lord Krishna garland the accused poet in person. This work is of doubtful authenticity and probably interpolated later.

Compositions dealing with acceptance of Harijans. These compositions deal with the conflict Narsinh had with his caste-men. Once Narsinh was invited to celebrate and dance *kirtana* by sweepers who belonged to a lower caste and the saint who believed that caste, class or gender is of no consequence in *Bhakti*, readily accepted and thus invited the wrath of his *Nagar* community.

Miscellaneous narratives are the earliest examples of *akhyana* or narrative type of compositions found in Gujarati. These include :

(i) *Chaturis*, 52 compositions resembling Jaydeva's masterpiece *Geeta Govinda* dealing with various erotic exploits of Radha and Krishna.

(ii) *Dana Leela* poems dealing with the episodes of Krishna collecting his dues (*dana* is toll, tax or dues) from *gopis* who were going to sell buttermilk etc. to Mathura.

- (iii) *Sudama Charit* is a narrative describing the well-known story of Krishna and Sudama.
- (iv) *Govinda Gamana* or the Departure of Govind relates the episode of Akrura taking away Krishna from Gokul.
- (v) *Surata Sangrama*, The Battle of Love, depicts in terms of a battle the amorous play between Radha and her girl friends on the one side and Krishna and his friends on the other.
- (vi) Miscellaneous episodes from *Bhagwatam* like the birth of Krishna, his childhood pranks and adventures.

The *Songs of Sringar* are hundreds of *padas* dealing with the erotic adventures and the amorous exploits of Radha and Krishna like *Ras Leela*. Various clusters of *padas* like *Rasahasrapadi* and *Sringar Mala* fall under this head. Their dominant note is erotic (*Sringar*). They deal with stock erotic situations like the ossified *Nayaka-Nayika Bheda* of classical Sanskrit Kavya poetics.

The Songs of Devotion, philosophical and didactic works are the works of a mature poet and bring out the best in him. He can express abstruse metaphysical concepts interwoven with traditional imagery in an amazingly simple language. This then is the secret of Narsinh's popularity. It is these poems that have earned Narsinh the place he has in Gujarati literature and religious life. They deal with stock themes of *Bhakti* literature like the qualities of a true devotee, futility of scholarship, outward rituals and the worldly pleasures, importance of *Bhakti*, ethical purity, renunciation and so on. While most of them are typical of *Bhakti* literature, some of them have a refreshing quality mainly because of the use of metaphors and allegorical treatment of material from daily life, e.g. *Ram Nama Nu Aosad Mare* (the Name of Rama is my medicine); or *Ame Vehvariya Rama Nama Na..* (We are the dealers of Rama's Name..). Other excellent pieces are the dramatic lyrics dealing with metaphysical concepts. *Vaishnava Jana to..*' which is purely a didactic poem which is popular throughout India, mainly because it was the favorite of Gandhiji.

The above mentioned poems are still heard all over Gujarat.

## CHAPTER 4

### CRITICAL INTRODUCTION TO THE POETRY OF NARSINH

Poetry confers immortality upon mortal poets. Modern literary philosophy pays more attention to the literary texts rather than the authors. There can be hardly any doubt that critical judgements should be directed towards the literary texts rather than the people who produce them, as the literary critics have no moral right to judge people's souls. The tradition of evaluation of Narsinh has been largely hagiographic. Only recently has it become more analytical and critical. The objective of this chapter is to provide a brief introductory critical evaluation of Narsinh Mehta's poetry paying close attention to his place in Gujarati literary tradition, his poetic language, artisanship, his handling of the legend of Radha and Krishna, and his philosophical and moral vision. This has been done by taking into consideration the writings of the major Gujarati critics who have contributed to Narsinh criticism like Umashankar Joshi, K.M.Munshi, K.K.Shastri, Dhiru Parikh, Chandrakant Sheth, and Anantraï Rawal. The chapter is divided as follows: i) the *Adi Kavi*, ii) Narsinh the Poet, iii) The legend of Radha and Krishna, and iv) Philosophical and Didactic poems of Narsinh.

#### 4.1 The *Adi Kavi*

Gujarati people have crowned Narsinh Mehta as their *adi Kavi* - the first poet of Gujarat. It was not that they did not have poetry or poets before Narsinh, but because there was no poet before him who was true to the very ethos of Gujarat and who had captured the imagination of the Gujarati people before him. The noted poet and critic, Shri Umashankar Joshi has correctly pointed out that it is in Narsinh's poetry that the Gujarati language finds its true voice for the first time.<sup>clxvi</sup>

As mentioned in the earlier chapter, a great bulk of pre-Narsinh literature exists composed by the Jain Sadhus in the form of *ras* and *fagu*. Yet, all this exists only in the cloisters and *bhandaras* of monks rather than on the tongues or in the memory of people. Narsinh is preserved orally for over half a millenium and his songs are sung with devotion and love all over Gujarat even today and will undoubtedly continue to do so. It means that Narsinh's poetry hardly required any patronage other than people's love. Thus he is essentially a people's poet and belongs to the masses rather than just to the sects or *bhandaras*. He is what Tulsidas is to Hindi literature or Dynaneshwar to Marathi literature. The popularity of his compositions has withstood the ravages of history. He is indeed the *adi kavi* of Gujarati in this sense.

As mentioned before, no composition is found 'written' by Narsinh and the oldest manuscript of a composition is dated 1594 AD.<sup>clxvii</sup> The language of the composition too has evolved, as mentioned earlier, and the language in which they are found is today's Gujarati as they were preserved orally and handed down generation after generation in this way. Thus, Narsinh's poetry is an integral part of the historical evolution of the Gujarati language and the growth of the individuality of the language.

Apart from being the integral part of the growth of the language, Narsinh's poetry has also found a permanent place in the memory of the Gujarati culture. Many poems were written on various miraculous incidents associated with his life by later poets like Vishwanath Jani (1682 AD), Premanand, and Meera. His legendary life is depicted in many films and his poems have many imitators. His influence on the later poets is very great. Some of the incidents of his life have even become the names of some the welfare schemes of Government of Gujarat, for instance *Kuvarbai nu Mameru Yojna*. Not to mention the immense popularity of his *Vaishnava Jana to..* because of Gandhiji. The word *harijan* promoted by the Father of the Nation for the neglected and the exploited sections of the society first gained currency due to Narsinh's poems. Whatever may be the political angle, it can hardly be overlooked that Narsinh is still alive in the memory of the Gujarati people. all this and besides the fact that he was a brilliant poet, leaves no doubt in our mind that he should be known as the *adi kavi* of Gujarat.

#### **4.2 Narsinh the Poet**

The fact that Narsinh's poetry is preserved for over half a millenium and that it is still sung with love through the length and the breadth of Gujarat is proof enough of his caliber as a poet. It is always very fruitful to enquire into the characteristics of his beautiful compositions, which have given him such a high place in Gujarati life.

What one immediately notices, whenever one approaches Narsinh's poems, is that they are essentially songs and are meant to be sung. One admires the exquisite musical quality of all his compositions, which reveals that the poet had deep understanding of music. The music has not only kept the great composition alive, but also as a noted Gujarati critic Ramanlal Mehta says it has preserved Gujarati language and saved it from extinction.<sup>clxviii</sup> One finds that each of his compositions is set to certain traditional *ragas* or the melodies of the Indian classical music like '*Vasant*', *Prabhat*, and *Kedar*. That reminds us of the music of Jaydeva's *GeetGovind* and indeed Jayadeva had a remarkable influence on Narsinh. It is necessary to keep in mind the fact that most of the medieval Indian literature is musical and that poetry then was not divorced from its conception

as music and utterance.

It is this conception of poetry as music and utterance that determines largely its rhetoric and its aesthetics. It influences the choices the poet makes during the act of composition and it determines a horizon within which its audience receives the poem. For example, the beauty of the sound of a word, its acoustic texture and its feel become the criteria for the composer and the audience. We find plenty of alliteration, assonance, consonance, rhyme, onomatopoeia and the like in his compositions. We find all these in plenty in Narsinh's poetry and in fact, in most of the medieval Indian verse.

*Kesar bheena Kahnji, kasumbe bheeni naar,*

*Lochan bheena bhaav shu, oobha kunje dwar !*

Kanji is drenched in saffron, the damsel drenched in deep orange!

Their eyes drenched with love, they wait at the doors of garden!

The traditional Indian rhetoric makes a very useful distinction between *sabdalkars* and *arthalkars*. *Sabdalkars* are the figures of sound like alliteration, rhymes, and so on, while *arthalkars* are the figures of sense like metaphor and simile. In the medieval Indian poetry, great importance was given to *sabdalkars* as they determined the musicality of the composition. For instance, Narsinh sings:

*Pachali raat na naath pacha valya, shu karu re, sakhi,- hu na jaagi;*

Last night my lord went away seeing me asleep,

What shall I do now friend, as I could not wake!

(5.1.21)

It is of course impossible to render *sabdalkars* into a language so different from the original and this becomes one of the major problems of translating Narsinh or for that matter any of the medieval poets of India. This problem will be considered in the chapter six.

The aspect of orality and performativity raises some crucial problems regarding the critical approach to the poetry that is essentially musical in nature. The old idea of the New Criticism which tends to take poetry as a static object or merely words on a page which is to be dissected has to be abandoned here for the poem is more like a drama which is enacted here and now and the impact of the poem depends on the specificities of the particular performance. For instance, a composition of Tukaram if sung by the singer of the stature of Pandit Bhimsen Joshi will create a hugely different impact from the performance of a lesser artist. This of course is obvious but this point is often neglected. The poem as a song is a performance and hence dependent on the performer and the context of the performance and hence while approaching it a new set of critical tools is needed. The point being

made here is that the aesthetics of a performative composition is different from that of a composition meant to be read silently and alone, as they are different types of discourses and contain a different type of rhetoric. At present, the investigation of this new type of critical approach is best left for future. One can study Narsinh's poems from the conventional analytic approach that examines features like images, figures of speech, and other specialties of his poems.

If one considered the form in which Narsinh composed, the *pada*, then one is struck by the fact that he has in fact done some pioneering work to establish this form in Gujarati. It was not that this form did not exist earlier, but Narsinh showed how it can be best composed. The *pada* is a short lyrical composition meant to be sung. It is of a few lines, ranging from two or three lines to around eight to ten. It consists of an opening dramatic couplet that is sung as a refrain and closes with the couplet containing the name of the composer. This final couplet is called *bhanita* and the refrain is called *dhruvpada*. Umashankar Joshi has noted the excellent use of *dhruvpada* in Narsinh.<sup>clxix</sup> It is always dramatic and sets the tone of the *pada*.

O today it's Diwali! O it's the Festival of Lights for me!  
For the Lord with garland of wild flowers, at last, has come to me!

(5.2.20)

In the use of the *pada* form, Narsinh shows a distinct influence of Jayadeva (twelfth century AD) and his great *Geet Govind*, which was already popular in Gujarat before Narsinh. Jayadeva's is the most influential treatment of Radha-Krishna love story and it almost started a tradition of this theme that had its followers in almost all the major languages in India. Vidyapati in Bengali, Narsinh in Gujarati, Soordas in Hindi are some names in this great tradition of love songs of Radha and Krishna. This tradition was preserved and enriched by later Vaishnava poets in various languages. Like Jayadeva, Narsinh also set his *padas* in various elaborate ragas and Narsinh acknowledges Jayadeva's influence in one of his *padas* in which he uses Sanskrit phrases from the *GeetGovind*:

*"Twamasi Shringaar Mam, har oor bhushan, twamasi mam magna, chit sang dole ...*

*Twamasi mam pran vallabh sada, sundari ..*

Putting her arms around him, the girl with a ravishing face said, `Thou art my life,' the lord replied, `Thou art my embellishment, my garland, in thee alone am I absorbed and thou alone sway my soul.' The dark one turned to gaze the moonlike face of the jewel among beauties, Their eyes met, their desolation ended, the lord pleaded and took the other half of his self close to him.

(5.1.36)

In other places, Narsinh has counted Jayadeva as one of the few poets who have understood the secret of *Bhakti*. Many ragas used by both the poets are similar and of course, the theme being the same, especially in the love songs of Narsinh, the extent of Jayadeva's influence is quite remarkable.

Besides Jayadeva, the folk songs also seem to have appealed to Narsinh, as he knew that his real audience was the masses. The folk songs can be said to be part of what critics' term as *desi* or local literary traditions in contrast to *marga* or pan-Indian or Sanskritic literary traditions comprising of the *Shruti* (lit. 'heard') i.e. the Vedic literature, the *Smriti* (lit. Remembered') that is the epics and the *Puranas* and the classical Sanskritic literature. Shri Khodidas Parmar has shown how the lilt, the cadences, and the rhythms of Narsinh's songs were influenced by the folk songs of the period.<sup>clxx</sup> Thus, in Narsinh, we find a confluence of the local and the pan-Indian literary traditions. This is one of the important characteristics of the *Bhakti* literature. Indeed, Narsinh has contributed a lot in strengthening not only the literary tradition of Gujarat but also its tradition of music.

As the musical effect is one of the prime considerations in Narsinh's poetry, he selects words that embellish these effects. In love songs, he is very fond of using 'sweet' words. This is very much in the tradition of Vaishnava *Bhakti* which considers Krishna as *Madhuradhipati* - the Lord of Sweetness- about whom it is said *Madhuradhipati akhila madhuram* (Everything is sweet about the Lord of Sweetness). This *Bhakti* is *madhurya Bhakti* - the sweet love for the Lord is a distinct characteristic of Narsinh's love songs. Harit Buch says that Narsinh 'fondly pampers' his words<sup>clxxi</sup> and truly so; for instance, he uses the suffix *di* with some words to make a sort of sweet diminutive like *gordi* from *gori* turning the fair one into sweet little fair one. In his *madhurya Bhakti*, Narsinh uses the rhetoric of sweetness and has amply used phrases like 'drinking nectar from his lips' or 'his nectar of love'. Having a firm base in the local idiom has also contributed to making his language delightfully colloquial and the remarkable knowledge of Sanskritic literary tradition has given him a firm grip on Sanskritic vocabulary which does not slip into stiff artificiality of the lesser poets. Thus, the confluence of two streams of tradition, one Sanskritic, and the other local and folk has also resulted in enhancing and enriching the idiom and the vocabulary of this splendid poet.

Poetry exploits the potential of language to operate at various levels of meanings. The stylistic devices that are used to exploit and explore the other levels are called figures of speech. The figurative language goes beyond what is called 'literal' sense or the dictionary meaning and hence plays a crucial role in imparting 'literariness' to the language. The noted Gujarati critics like K.K.Shastri, Dhiru Parikh and Chandrakant Sheth have examined the figurative language of Narsinh. While Sheth has explored various aspects like symbolism and imagery, Shastri has approached the subject from the point of view of Indian poetic theories like that of *rasa* and



*alamkara.*<sup>clxxii</sup>

Sheth is inclined to use the Western critical tools for analyzing his poetry. He draws our attention to a very interesting use of metaphors and symbols like that of mango, for instance:

"In my garden the mango tree has blossomed  
And mangoes ripe are dripping with nectar!  
Wake up and relish them, my slender Lord,  
I'll pluck them for you and you enjoy!"  
Fair one, in the middle of the night,  
How your jingling anklets chime!

"In my garden are juicy grapes, sumptuous citrus fruits,  
And betel vines,  
O Narsaiyya's Lord come to my place  
For my heart is tender and mad!"  
Fair one, in the middle of the night,  
How your jingling anklets chime!

(5.1.11)

The erotic undercurrent of the image is obvious. The fruits symbolize the libidinous pleasure. Indeed, it is an invitation to love. Besides, it shows how indirection in meaning is achieved using figurative language. It is a very common device in folk and tribal literature. The image of the mango tree is one of the many recurrent motifs in Narsinh's poetry. In some poems the blossoming of the mango tree signals the arrival of spring season and in classical and medieval Indian literature, the seasons function as signifiers for various moods, or to use Ramanujan's phrase, they function as 'correlative-objectives' which unlike objective correlatives are conventional and traditional.<sup>clxxiii</sup> The mood that the spring signifies is, as is well known, erotic and signals the celebration of life and desire. The other often-used motifs are also connected with spring; for example, bees, flowers, blossoming trees, and honey, which function to reinforce the erotic mood. In one beautiful song, Narsinh sings of the coming of spring and the Lord of Love:

The sap of the earth has spread through the branches,  
The god of love in the eyes has come to dwell...!  
Filling the breasts with voluptuous love to brim,  
The connoisseur, the Master of the god of pleasures has indeed arrived!  
The sap of the earth has spread through the branches,

(5.2.32)

K.K.Shastri has analyzed Narsinh's poems from the point of view of the *rasa* theory and has pointed out the predominance of the *sringar* or the erotic *rasa* in his poetry. In the traditional Indian *rasa shastra*, the erotic *rasa* is divided into two major types of *shringar* on the basis of the situation depicted. The first type is called *viparalamba* or the erotic *rasa* of lovers separated and distanced and the *sanyog* or the erotic *rasa* of their union. The love poetry of Narsinh abounds in both the types. Narsinh's Radha sings about the pain and desolation of the separation from her beloved:

Today, dear, this harsh winter closes in  
And scares the frail ones like me.  
My frozen little body sets our being ablaze!  
But for my love, who will slake me?  
Cold, cold is my bed in winter!  
But for my love, who will embrace me passionately?

(5.1.5)

An interesting contrast between the fire of desire and the chill of desolation is depicted. The paradoxical state is heightened when the very chill of desolation fans the fire of desire.

The *sanjog shringar* is also found in plenty in Narsinh:

Don't wake me up vigorously, O Madhukar!  
You will break my delicate waist, my love!  
As if smeared with vermilion  
My lips have turned crimson with your bites!

I swear, I am exhausted and about to drop,  
But the wicked one does not listen to me!  
Don't wake me up vigorously, O Madhukar!  
You will break my delicate waist, my love!

(5.1.8)

As is well known Krishna must be around the age of ten and Radha in her late teens, the *sanjog shringar* in Narsinh becomes quite bold at times.

Don't untie the threads of my choli, my love  
The fruits of my breasts are not good enough for you!

*Ananga*, the god of love, stirs not in the unbloomed youth  
There can be no ecstasy without lovemaking.'  
Don't untie the threads of my choli, my love

The fruits of my breasts are not good enough for you!

Hearing the words of the dark girl,

Narsaiyya's lord clasped her to his heart

And played many love games with her during their first union.

Don't untie the threads of my choli, my love

The fruits of my breasts are not good enough for you!

(5.1.7)

The frank depiction of eroticism in Narsinh has led many present day critics to grope for Metaphysical and occult explanations. Umashankar Joshi and others have rightly termed it as *ooghado Shringar* - 'Open Eroticism' .<sup>clxxiv</sup>

### **4.3 The Legend of Radha and Krishna**

All that can be said is that eroticism and sexual love were not something to be taboo in the medieval Indian society. Jayadeva, one of Narsinh's poetic gurus, was quite explicit in his treatment of the sexual dimension in the legend of Radha and Krishna. The temples of Khajuraho or the court poetry in Sanskrit and in other languages is remarkably old at times. Though metaphysical explanation is not ruled out, it just depicts how the physical and the metaphysical were not considered to be mutually exclusive or dialectical in the medieval Indian epistemology but were considered to be inextricably entwined and interwoven. Siegel has pointed out that this inseparability result in a very typical and very poetic ambiguity in the depiction of erotic in medieval Indian literature.<sup>clxxv</sup>

The erotic symbolism in Narsinh is quite subtle and is replete with nuances. The depiction of *ras leela* can in itself have erotic suggestions of foreplay. From the jingling of bangles of the gopis, from the invitation of the haunting flute to the festival of *Holi*, the entire *Leela* is all loaded with sexual suggestions.

In spite of erotic overtones, the songs never become crude as far as the artisanship is concerned.

What is it about your eyes, love? Tell us, tell us truly!

It makes our hearts go flutter; it makes our hearts go wild, when you see us!

What is it about your eyes, love? Tell us, tell us truly! (5.1.42)

Yet, it should not be forgotten that sexual love itself was symbolical of the metaphysical and Narsinh is quite conscious of the fact. Frequently the last couplet of his *pada* containing his signature or *bhanita* has a metaphysical and mystic slant. The joy and the pleasure of the union become the Bliss that takes one Beyond the blighted world. The searing desolation of separation takes on existential overtones, of what-it-is-to-be-in-this world and which is nothing but living in the joyless world shorn of divine transcendence. The dark beauty of the beloved is the beauty of the ever elusive yet ever so near Divine Beauty. His kiss is the experience of the state of immortality.

This is how I bewitched him, friend,  
I rolled over him in our love play!  
'No, no!' cried he as he tried to flee,  
And he cried out for his mother!  
But I clasped him passionately to my breasts!  
This is how I bewitched him, friend  
I rolled over him in our love play!

I drank his eyes with my eyes  
His lips with mine,  
I drank him as if he was the elixir of Immortality!  
Amorously, I took him on my breasts  
I enjoyed myself doing what he wanted me to do!  
This is how I bewitched him, friend,  
I rolled over him in our love play!

Playing ecstatically with the Narsaiyya's Lord  
I could hardly make out the world around me!  
This is how I bewitched him, friend,  
I rolled over him in our love play! (5.1.39)

Kakar and Ross in their beautifully written insightful psychoanalytical reading of the immortal legend write, ' Radha's passionate love for Krishna, raised to its highest intensity, is not an allegory for religious passion but is religious passion.... the augmentation of passion, or more specifically, the heightening of sexual excitement, is the 'great feeling', the *mahabhava*, that pervades the Radha-Krishna legend.<sup>clxxvi</sup>

Scholars note the adulterous angle in the legend and write, ' For them (the *Bhakti* poets) the

adulterous was symbolic of the sacred, the overwhelming moment that denies the world and the society, transcending the profanity of everyday convention, as it forges an unconditional (and unruly) relationship with god as the lover."(p.94)

They analyze the profusion of the imagery of darkness and night associated with the legend and which finds its place in the love songs of Narsinh. They observe, ' what do darkness and night mean to Krishna as he passively offers himself to Radha's embraces? Here, too, only under the cloak of night does the Lord reveal the deepest 'secrets of man'-that he, too, would be woman.' (p.102). Kakar and Ross read in the legend the unconscious desire of men to sacrifice their masculinity behind all the 'trappings of heroism and machismo and hold it to be one of the reasons for the appeal of the legends as they believe that this desire is universal. Thus the legend exists at multiple levels of signification and to consider the legend from a single level would be to ignore, willfully or unwillingly, the layers of meaning of this legend which is at once a myth, an allegory, a legend, a fantasy and a beautiful story.

A prominent feature of Narsinh's poetry that needs to be dealt with is the influence of the classical Sanskrit *kavya* literature as reflected in his handling of the Radha Krishna legend. *Kavya* tradition in Sanskrit is primarily a court poetry tradition. Outstanding examples of this tradition are Jayadeva and Kalidasa. The *Kavya*, which is *marga* tradition, is marred by elaborate and artificial conventionality.

A well known convention is that of 'eight types of *nayikas* or heroines as cataloged by Bharata in *Natya Shastra* :

' Heroines (*nayika*) are known to be of eight kinds such as "one dressed up for Union" (*vasaksajja*), " one distressed by separation" (*virahotkanthita*),"one having her husband in subjection"(*swadhina-bhartrka*), "one separated from her lover by a quarrel"(*kalahantarita*), "one enraged with her lover"(*khandita*), " one deceived by her lover"(*vipralabdha*)," one with a sojourning husband"(*proshitabhartrka*) and "one who moves to her lover"(*abhisarika*) '(223.210-211). <sup>clxxvii</sup> The classical tradition also divides the woman into a) *veshya*, the courtesan, b) *swakiya*, the wife and c) *parkiya*, the other woman Narsinh is deeply influenced by this tradition and hence his Radha lacks individuality and ends up becoming just one more stereotyped *nayika* of the *kavya* tradition, rescued only when she is given metaphysical dimension of *shakti* or the Energy in some of his songs.

Kakar and Ross have with their tongues in their cheeks summed up the stereotyped description of woman's body in traditional Indian literature as follows: ' the face of the heroine, for instance, is always like a moon or lotus flower, eyes like waterlilies or those of a fawn. She always stoops slightly from the weight of her full breasts, improbable fleshy flowers of rounded perfection that do

not even admit a blade of grass between them. The waist is slim, with three folds, the thighs round and plump, like the trunk of an elephant or a banana tree. The navel is deep, the hips heavy." clxxviii

These stereotyped descriptions too have a bad influence and are found in some places in Narsinh. The love songs of Narsinh Mehta which are sweet and beautiful tend to become monotonous and even boring after some time unless rescued by a mystic or metaphysical touch. Whatever the quality of these songs, it must be admitted that they are works of an artist who has not yet reached his peak. The real genius of Narsinh lies in his philosophical poems and the poems about death, old age and the ones about his personal miseries. Yet these too are the works of art and lay a strong foundation of an entire tradition of singing Radha -Krishna legend in Gujarati and hence their importance.

Narsinh is also given credit for developing narrative poetry though his narratives are not so elaborately crafted as those of Premanand and those who succeeded him. Krishna Sudama legend and the autobiographical narrative poems of Narsinh have an important place in Gujarati literary tradition as they are the examples of the earliest narrative and autobiographical verse in Gujarati. Besides, his autobiographical poems also shed some light on the personality of Narsinh though their authorship is not always considered authentic.

His poems about the childhood of Krishna are also favourite with Gujarati people. His song about the subduing of the *Kaliya*, the cobra, is sung with devotion and love all over Gujarat.

#### **4.4 Philosophical and Didactic Poems of Narsinh**

In one of his very famous compositions, Narsinh the philosopher poet makes a very interesting observation about the state of Advaita (Non-duality):

As salt dissolves in water, my name will dissolve in you,

Thus, says Mehta Narsinh, the thinker, who is none other than what he thinks of,

Will be one with the object of his thought!

Only because *I* truly exist, *you* exist! Without me, you cannot be!

You will exist only as long as I exist! (5.2.24)

Narsinh's greatest strength is his ability to express complex philosophical thought in a hauntingly beautiful language that is extremely simple and accessible even to the illiterate and poorer section of the society. Perhaps this is one of the main reasons of his immense popularity. The complex philosophical vision embodied in the poems is inseparable from the beauty of his word music.

Narsinh is not merely a philosopher, he is primarily a *bhakta*, and so he reminds his Lord that even His existence is dependent on His devotee's existence. *Bhakti* always has a subversive slant to it.

The Self and the Other, the Devotee and the Lord, the Lover and the Beloved are mutually dependent on each other for their existence. The state of *advaita*, Narsinh says, is the indescribable state of Complete Bliss'. The metaphor used by Narsinh for describing the state of *advaita* is a popular one, known also as *luna-neer nyaya* or the illustration of salt and water where after dissolution one cannot know one from the other.

In *advaita* there is loss of the self as well as the Other and Narsinh depicts this mystic state in one of his extremely beautiful 'Love Songs':

The bliss of my lord's closeness lasted as long as the night.

Then it vanished, my lord's bliss, when my arch enemy-the Sun did rise.

I became indistinguishable from the light, and in no time, my beloved too was gone.

In tracing his footsteps, in searching him, I lost myself.

The bliss of my lord's closeness lasted as long as the night.

Then it vanished, my lord's bliss, when my arch enemy-the Sun did rise.

In this seemingly strange play, my eyes turned inwards

I left my small selfhood as I lay utterly vanquished.

The words can't express this experience, which the scriptures call Ineffable.

The bliss of my lord's closeness lasted as long as the night.

Then it vanished, my lord's bliss, when my arch enemy-the Sun did rise.

(5.2.30)

The state of Advaita is analogous to the orgasm; it cannot be described using words, for the human language is incapable of it.

No one seems to believe the wonder of what I say, but those who have attained this state know it well.

The sea of Being is of absolute Oneness, and Narsinh relishes it enrapt.

The bliss of my lord's closeness lasted as long as the night.

Then it vanished, my lord's bliss, when my arch enemy-the Sun did rise.

This obvious closeness of the abstract metaphysical conception of Advaita with the concrete and physical experience of sexual union has helped many Indian medieval saint-singers sing of the former without going very far from the latter and the other way round. Narsinh indeed is no different. Yet, it is significant to note that this type of erotic allegory in the form of beautiful songs

came into predominance only with Narsinh's poetry in Gujarati literary tradition.

The philosopher in Narsinh also gave him insights into some of the classical philosophical problems the *brahminical* system of thought, for instance, the problem of the One and the Many, the conflict between Monism and Pluralism.

In this entire universe, you alone exist, Shri Hari,

Yet, in infinite forms you seem to be!

(5.2.11)

This is one of the most popular songs of Narsinh. It is of course a statement made by a Vaishnava Vedantist but it is also in the form of a very beautiful lyric. The irreducible plurality and heterogeneity of the Cosmos can baffle even a layman. Nevertheless, Narsinh sees that the Lord creates this plurality himself, as a part of his *leela*.

Only to taste the nectar of being manifold,

You created the *jiva* and the *Siva* and countless other forms!

In this entire universe, you alone exist, Shri Hari,

Yet, in infinite forms you seem to be!

The Lord for His Enjoyment according to Narsinh creates the world. He goes on to give a classical Vedantic illustration, his personal favourite:

Ornaments differ not from what they are made,

As the Vedas and other scriptures truly say,

Only their names differ once their forms are cast,

Gold is always gold in the end!

In this entire universe, you alone exist, Shri Hari,

Yet, in infinite forms you seem to be!

Narsinh indeed excellently illustrates the essential Vedantic idea of underlying Unity behind the apparent plurality in this splendid song.

The conception of the 'creation' as sung by Narsinh is particularly significant here as it distinctly shows the influence of post-Sankara Vedantism, especially that of thinkers like Ramanujacharya and other *Bhakti* saint-singers like Namdev and Dynaneshwar.

Sankara had distinctly rejected the idea of 'creation' as the world itself was nothing but an illusion arising out of *avidya* or ignorance. Narsinh frequently uses terms like *Satchiddananda*, which have



lead many to believe that he was influenced by Vallabhacharya's *Shuddhadvaita* though the time in which Narsinh composed his songs was much earlier than the time in which Vallabha preached his doctrine and besides, his influence reached Gujarat even later. The critics who have given a thought to this problem draw attention to the fact that the germ of this version of Vedanta existed before Vallabha himself, especially in the compositions of Dynaneshwar and songs of Namdev.<sup>clxxxix</sup> Yet what is still significant is that Narsinh was even influenced by Sankara as can be seen from some of his songs. He was not worried much about doctrines and seems eclectic in his philosophical thinking. Tripathi has included Narsinh's compositions in his excellent study, 'Kevaladvaita in Gujarati Poetry'.<sup>clxxx</sup>

In his hauntingly beautiful song '*Jagi Ne Jou To Jagat Dise Nahi...*' Narsinh sings about one of the Sankara's favourite ideas - *Maya*:

When I wake up, the world recedes from my sight.

Only in sleep, its bewildering miseries and enjoyment perplexes me!

My being is a play of the Consciousness:

The *brahman* playing with the *brahman*!

(5.2.39)

The metaphor of sleep and awakening has a crucial significance in the Vedantic thinking, especially that of Sankara. The plurality and the relativity of the phenomenal world arose out of ignorance hence was compared to the experience of dreaming where one mistook dreams for reality and once one is awake, one realizes that what one saw in sleep was unreal. Hence the knowledge that the *brahman* alone exists is compared to awakening.

The image of the *brahman* frolicking with the *brahman* is a strikingly original one. Another rather original image is in his famous song *Nirakh ne Gagan Ma ...*:

Where the brilliant flame with effulgence of million suns is lit

Which pales even the brilliance of gold,

There *Satchitananda* frolics in joy

And happily swings in the glorious cradle of gold!

Look, who is roving in the sky!

I am He, I am He, the echoing word replies!

(5.2.15)

The poet is looking up in the sky and sees his beloved Lord in the brilliant sun rising in the morning. Here the ancient idea of Vishnu as the Solar God is evoked. He is also the Logos -the Word, the *Shabda*, who is chanting *So'ham, So'ham* or "He am I". A very original image is that of the *Satchitananda* in the form of Golden Child rocking in the cradle of gold. The rhetoric of the whole

poem is very dramatic and reaches to the point of being sublime. These are the poems which express Narsinh's philosophy which is Upanishadic in its outlook. A noted Gujarati critic, Anantrai Raval has called these songs as 'Narsinhoapnishad'<sup>clxxxii</sup>

ut Narsinh is too much of a *bhakta* to be a pure Sankaracharian. In another poem, he gives an important place to Radha in the form of *Shakti*, the Divine Creative Power.

You alone are the beginning, the middle, and the end!

You alone, you alone, Sri Hari!

Yet he is not alone, he is not distinct from his creation,  
Which is his all-encompassing energy!  
Sri Krishna is without the beginning,  
Total bliss is his nature and Radha his ravishing beloved!  
You alone are the beginning, the middle, and the end!  
You alone, you alone, Sri Hari!

(5.2.42)

As can be seen, the *bhakta* in Narsinh makes him see the whole philosophy of Vedanta in a different light. The concept of *moksha* is of considerable importance in the Vedantic thought. *Moksha* or the ultimate release from the bondage of this afflicted World and the cycles of births and rebirths, is one of the *purusharthas* or the purposes of being in the Hindu scheme of life. However, for a true *bhakta* like Narsinh, it is of minor importance, a by-product:

Those who love *Hari* long not for the ultimate release,  
Instead, they desire to be born over again  
To sing forever, to dance forever,  
To celebrate forever and to gaze forever at Nanda's darling!  
Great is the wealth of *Bhakti* found only on the earth,  
Not found even in the realms of Brahma!

(5.2.8)

This utterance with rather Dionysian overtones is indeed a radical departure from the conventional Vedantic thinking which lays great emphasis on attainment of the *moksha*, from the cycles of births and rebirths. While the scholastic and conventional Vedanta is Apollonian in its outlook emphasizing *jnana* or knowledge, *dhyana* or meditation, control of emotions and senses and *karmakanda* or rituals, the *Bhakti* is Dionysian with its rebellious, celebratory nature and its faith in unconditional love. Hence for Narsinh, the *Bhakti* is the key to the great metaphysical lock.

Blessed is the land of *Vraj*, blessed is his eternal sport,  
Blessed are the people of *Vraj* as eight magical powers  
Wait at their doorsteps and *Mukti* becomes their maid!  
Great is the wealth of *Bhakti* found only on the earth,  
Not found even in the realms of *Brahma*!

(5.2.8)

The eight *siddhis* are the eight types of magical powers which *yogis*, the adepts, are supposed to attain after rigorous discipline and austerity.

True fulfillment of my birth is in loving my beloved forever!

Never with dry rituals and harsh austerities

Would I torture my tender body!

All the time I'd play the games of love with my beloved!

True fulfillment of my birth is in loving my beloved forever!!

(5.2.35)

Rejection of austerities and rituals is one of the recurrent themes in the *Bhakti* literature and indeed of Narsinh's poetry.

Yoga and austerities has he reserved for the detached yogis

But sheer enjoyment has he in store only for his lovers.

Penance and rituals he has reserved for the insensitive ones

But the joy of singing our lord's praises, he has kept for Narsinh!

The sap of the earth has spread through the branches

The god of love in the eyes has come to dwell...!

(5.2.32)

The *bhaktas* also reject bookish learning and armchair speculation of *pundits* and philosophers, for they are poor substitutes for Love.

This is not the way to find the essence of Truth, O Pundits!

Even with all these heaps of bookish learning,

You won't fathom it at all without being truly pure!

This is not the way to find the essence of Truth, O Pundits!

You won't fathom It at all without being truly pure!

You go for dry empty husk and cast away the grains!

One cannot appease hunger by mere dry chaff!

This is not the way to find the essence of Truth, O Pundits!

(5.2.34)

The image of chaff and grains is one of Narsinh's favourites. In one of his marvelous songs, he sings:

Serve me the draught of love's ambrosia

One bedecked with peacock feathers!

This futile threshing of arid philosophies tastes so insipid!

These emaciated cattle crave merely the dry husk,

They pine not for the ultimate liberation!

Serve me the draught of love's ambrosia

One bedecked with peacock feathers!

(5.2.29)

Experience of the *brahman*, first hand, and nothing else will work for Narsinh; everything else is sheer waste of time.

So what if you have taken a holy bath or offered twilight prayers and worship?

So what if you have stayed at home and given alms?

So what if you keep matted locks and smear ashes?

So what if you have plucked hair on your head?

Unless and until you have grasped the essence of the Self

Vain are all your efforts and like unseasonal rains, you have wasted your human birth.

So what if you indulge in recitation, penance or go on a pilgrimage?

So what if you count beads and chant the holy name

So what if you put on a *tilak* or worship Tulsi?

So what if you drink the water of Ganga?

So what if you speak of the *Vedas* or grammar?

So what if you enjoy yourself and have a good time?

So what if you have grasped the distinctions between the six systems of philosophy?

So what if you have adhered to the distinction of caste?

All these are worldly pursuits for filling one's belly

Until you have seen the absolute *brahman*.

Says Narsinh, without beholding the Essence

One wastes his birth precious as *Chintamani* Jewel.

Unless and until you have grasped the essence of the Self  
Vain are all your efforts and like unseasonal rains, you have wasted your human birth!  
(5.2.36)

The philosophy of *Bhakti* repudiated the institution of caste and Narsinh who was against all types of distinction and injustice had to undergo many hardships for his rebellious beliefs. It is well-known that the word *harijan* or the “subjects of Hari”, Hari’s people, used by Gandhiji in his effort to eradicate untouchability, was earlier used by Narsinh. Though it was used for the people belonging to the neglected sections of the society, it meant everyone who loved Hari, irrespective of his caste, class, or gender. In a well-known incident, the kind-hearted saint-poet was invited by poor sweepers, labelled heartlessly as ‘untouchables’ by the *brahminical* establishment, to sing and celebrate their devotion for Hari. Of course, the magnanimous poet agreed saying, “The Lord and bigotry hardly go together, for all are equal in His eyes.” This led him into conflict with the Brahmin orthodoxy. They berated him and ostracized him and with his characteristic irony Narsinh said,  
We are like that-yes we are like what you say!  
Call us depraved by love, we will still serve our loved Damodar.  
We are like that-yes we are like what you say!

The customs and rituals, we heartily dislike  
And even that which gives us all the worldly riches  
Can't be compared to our lord!  
We are like that-yes we are like what you say!  
(5.3.299)

Thus, Narsinh’s *Bhakti* was a rejection of conventional religion and the true *bhakta* that he was, he was a non-conformist. He had the making of a rebel in him. Even the devotional songs that he sang were openly erotic and they must have made the conservative establishment of his times wince.

Has your heart turned to stone, love?  
The breast-fruits can’t be gifted to anyone just like that!  
For by being close to the heart they give pleasure;  
They give pain if they are to go away.  
What is the connoisseur of love who knows not this secret?  
Then why do you demand them,  
My love, at such an unearthly hour?  
Has your heart turned to stone, love?  
The breast-fruits can’t be gifted to anyone just like that!

(5.1.12)

Just as Narsinh repudiates all conventionality and artificiality of the social norms, he also seems to have questioned the norms of sexuality and gender.

The legend has it that when Narsinh had the vision of the Divine *ras-leela* of his beloved Lord, so engrossed and involved was he in that vision that he identified himself with the dancing milkmaids and even became the *Sakhi* or the girlfriend of Radha and Krishna.

O torchbearer is Narsaiyyo!  
Torchbearer of Hari!  
With mind brimming with deep love  
And nectar on his tongue,  
O torchbearer is Narsaiyyo!  
Torchbearer of Hari!

The girls enjoy the very thing they so relish,  
And their glances are playful and inviting,  
In such an engrossing moment,  
Narsaiyya's manliness has vanished!  
O torchbearer is Narsaiyyo!  
Torchbearer of Hari!

(5.2.21)

This dissolution of masculinity in *Bhakti* is expressed elsewhere too.

The Absolute *Purushottama* passionately plays as his lovers plead!  
And by being his girlfriend, Narsinh relishes the very nectar  
The women of Vraj so delightfully revel in!  
You alone are the beginning, the middle, and the end!  
You alone, you alone, Sri Hari!

(5.2.42)

So many times in his love songs, the persona is that of a Gopi or Radha, talking to her girlfriend. In one of his padas, Narsinh talks about the 'Fortune' of being a woman:

Essence of essence is the birth of the weaker sex,  
For her strength alone can please the mighty hero!  
What's the use of this manliness, friend,  
When it is of no use to the lord at all?  
Essence of essence is the birth of the weaker sex!

A man might attain the ultimate release,  
If he sticks to the path of virtue,  
But to indulge in the scrumptious joys  
Of pretended anger  
And the lord pleading to make up and other such games,  
You simply have to be a woman!  
Essence of essence is the birth of the weaker sex!

For her strength can please the mighty hero!  
Even the gods like Indra and the great sages  
Revere the very dust of gopis' feet,  
Considering themselves lesser than the gopis  
As they find their manhood insipid!  
Essence of essence the birth of the weaker sex,

For her strength can please the mighty hero!  
Woman, the treasure trove of fortune  
Experiences and enjoys all day and night  
The very nectar, the Vedas and the Scriptures  
Struggle to express!  
Essence of essence is the birth of the weaker sex!

Let my dreams come true  
My dark one, my lifter of the mountain, life of my life!  
For just like the master dragging the meek beast  
The leash of love draws Narsinh!  
Essence of essence is the birth of the weaker sex,  
For her strength can please the mighty hero!

(5.2.6)

This may seem to be one more expression of the hypocritical attitude of the patriarchal Indian society. Though the idea of woman in these poems look stereotyped, Narsinh by upholding the Woman as a model and an ideal for *Bhakti*, is actually subverting the monopoly of men in the field of religion. In spite of the fact that Narsinh is upholding woman as a model for the relationship with the divine, his depiction of erotic in the poems is very much chauvinistic, one has only to consider the gross description of woman's body in his poems.

The language of his erotic and love poems is sweet and mellifluous and imparts beauty to his lyrics. However, in some of his other devotional and didactic poems the language tends to become rough:

Wayward progeny of a lewd whore, what teaching will bring you to your senses?

Blind teacher and on top of that, a deaf disciple, how on earth can they grasp the knowledge of *brahman*?

Wayward progeny of a lewd whore, what teaching will bring you to your senses?

(5.2.37)

Not very often does Narsinh refer to a guru and there is hardly any information about his guru or whether he actually had one.

At times, the language becomes bitter and ironic. There is the description of a marriage procession that is, in fact, a funeral procession, and the marriage ceremony, which is actually a funeral ceremony (5.2.7 p.242). The comparison is elaborate and Narsinh creates the eerie effect by juxtaposing what is erotic, auspicious and life affirming with what is inauspicious and life-denying - Death! This type of pada contains the rare feeling of bitterness which is unbecoming of poets like Narsinh.

Girls merrily watch the procession of a handsome young groom!

How pure and clean he looks with tilak adorning his forehead!

How attractive are his consorts!

How happily they sprinkle vermilion around!

Girls merrily watch the procession of a handsome young groom!

The pada goes on to describe one procession as if it is the other and tells us how the bridegroom



decides to stay at his in-laws, a thing that is looked down upon in the Hindu culture. Finally, Narsinh gives the key to the allegory:

The *Jiva* is being whisked away by the heralds of Death!

See how they have tortured his mortal remains!

It is good if one meets Narsaiyya's Lord, for He alone can rescue you from the world of woes!

Girls merrily watch the procession of the handsome young groom!

This is one composition, which is said to have *bibhatsa ras* by K.K. Shastri.<sup>clxxxii</sup> His other didactic compositions are of course extremely popular. As is well known, his *Vaishnava Jana To.* is one such composition which has given Narsinh international repute, thanks to Gandhiji. It is a conventional *Bhakti* poem enumerating the qualities of a true devotee and true saint in the manner of Kabir who sang of the qualities the true *sadhu* should possess. It is highly significant that Narsinh's definition of the true Vaishnava begins not on a typically religious note. One who knows the pains and sufferings of others is a true Vaishnava not the one who is 'religious' in observing *karma-kanda*! Religion for Narsinh is humanitarianism.

Some of his poems at times have existential overtones. For instance his poem on the onset of old age and humiliation associated with it is brought out with rare poignancy:

Who has sent the old age? I thought youth was here to stay!

Even threshold seems a mountain now

The outskirts of the village seem distant like foreign lands to me.

Even the small pail is now the mighty Ganga for me

And the hair on my body has irreversibly grayed!

Who has sent the old age? I thought youth was here to stay!

The poem goes on to recount more miseries one has to face in the old age. The tragic note is unmistakable:

Nine ganglions have come away and my hour has finally arrived.

Women disparage and children swear at me, such is the final moment!

My sons have at last arrived at the door

Only to take the purse from my chest and depart!

Who has sent the old age? I thought youth was here to stay!

The children come to meet the old man not to bid a loving farewell but to take his purse! The futility of *samsara*, the mundane world of attachment, miseries, and small pleasures is depicted with a rare feeling and insight.

Many of his didactic poems begin by urging the people to be true devotees of Lord Krishna. The sense of urgency fills Narsinh's advice because life is too short and one usually wastes it by doing everything other than *Bhakti*.

Meditate! Meditate on Hari, O dimwitted sloth,  
So that the misery of the innumerable births is allayed!  
(5.2.16)

These are the opening lines of his compositions. They have a remarkable dramatic quality in them. It should be remembered that the quality and the popularity of *pada* depends a lot on the opening lines. A few other popular opening lines can be cited from his poems:

Pointless it is to lament,  
For it's always the wish of the Lord of the Universe,  
The world teacher that prevails!  
(5.2.26)

Passing for the wise and faking wisdom,  
The fools have arrived to preach!  
(5.2.25)

We will simply forsake anything that stops us  
From chanting the name of Narayana!  
(5.2.38)

We can of course go on quoting. Nevertheless, the dramatic openings which are also refrains of the *pada* show Narsinh to be the master of the *pada* genre. Umashankar Joshi in his classic essay on Narsinh is not correct in saying that it is one of Narsinh's drawbacks that while his opening stanza and the refrain are dramatic and attractive, the rest of the *pada* does not live up to the expectation.<sup>clxxxiii</sup> It should be kept in mind that the first line, the refrain and the signature line or the

*bhanita* determine the structure of the pada and acts as a spinal column on which it stands.

The language of Narsinh, with the exception of stray *pada* here or there, lacks the expressive range of Kabir and the sting of Akho or Tukaram. It also lacks the sense of the delicate texture of the feeling of love one comes across in Meera. But when it comes to the expression of grandeur and the sublime or the sweetness or melody and feeling, he can be rated among the best. One can also point out that the social awareness was certainly not one of his strong points, if one juxtaposes his oeuvre besides that of Kabir, Tukaram, or even Akho. While most of his compositions are about devotion, his attack on casteism and superstition is limited in scope. It is highly significant that the crisis in the Hindu society because of the Muslim invasion is hardly reflected in Narsinh's poetry.

The legendary conflict with the King Ra' Mandalik is well known but less known is the fact that the very king was a vassal to the Islamic power in Delhi and that he was finally converted to the Islamic faith. It is strange that Padmanabh's superb heroic narrative *Kanhad de Prabandha* deals with the theme of desecration of the shrine of Somnath and invasion of Allauddin Khilji and Narsinh's poetry fails even to depict its impact on Gujarati society. Neither does he show his acquaintance with the Jain philosophy, which had achieved a sort of mild hegemony before him in Gujarat. However, it should be admitted that this does not make him an inferior artist but a different type of artist.

The artist in Narsinh, the *bhakta*, compels him to experiment in imagery and rhetoric. At one place he compares his Lord to an unfailing medicine and the whole *pada* goes on to compare each name of his beloved Lord with different type of medicines found in the only system of medicine which was popular in Narsinh's times. In another place, he sings of the tragedy of the old age, how everything seems to betray an old man, including his selfish children and the only hope that remains is of that of Lord. In one of his padas he imagines a conversation between a parrot caged in the palace of Lord Rama and in another *pada* he calls himself a trader, whose goods are, of course, *Rama Nama* chants!

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

In Narsinh, we find that Gujarati poetry is beginning to explore its potential and possibilities with remarkable energy for the first time. Narsinh seems to have laid a true foundation to the Gujarati literary tradition. Though a huge bulk of the Jain literature existed before Narsinh, it could not find a place on the tongue of the Gujarati people, nor could it find a place in their cultural memory. Narsinh has found an abiding place in the hearts of people because he had reached the true roots of Gujarati culture, which lay in the simultaneous existence of the undercurrent of the libidinous and

erotic, in orality and performativity and in the metaphysical and the ethical. This was something that the pre-Narsinh Jain literature could not completely do justice to, owing to its renunciation was the only pivot around which it circled. Because of his ability to express complex philosophical ideas in a homely and simple language, in the language of the people and his democratic outlook towards caste, class, and gender, he caught the imagination of the illiterate, the poor and the neglected along with the microscopic educated minority. Narsinh indeed is the first poet of Gujarat, a pioneer of a tradition, which had plenty of followers, a legend that has become part of the active memory of Gujarat.

## 5.1 Songs of *Sringar*

### 5.1.1

As if it was rapture of rains of milk  
And all the sweetness of sugar was being hoarded in heaps!  
For my love came to my place today  
He took me passionately in his arms  
And talked sweet nothings in my ear  
Something I relish so much, dear friend!  
As if it was rapture of rains of milk  
And all the sweetness of sugar was being hoarded in heaps!

Unaware of the time passing, I enjoyed him until midnight!  
Listen, sister mine, how I have indulged in his love with relish!  
Now that Narsaiyya's lord have I fathomed, I am his slave!  
As if it was rapture of rains of milk  
And all the sweetness of sugar was being hoarded in heaps!

417.245

### 5.1.2

At what auspicious hour did you stick to me like a *bindi*, O dark one?  
Life of my life, I won't forsake you even for a moment, my slim beloved!  
At the door, I find you leaning, and at the windows, I see you sitting near.  
I keep running into you, in any street I take,  
sweetheart, sweeter than the elixir of immortality!  
At what auspicious hour did you stick to me like a *bindi*, O dark one?  
Life of my life, I won't forsake you even for a moment, my slim beloved!  
When I prepare to eat, I find you close, and near bed as I prepare to sleep.  
When I am on my way to Vrindavan, I find you embracing me!  
At what auspicious hour did you stick to me like a *bindi*, O dark one?  
Life of my life, I won't forsake you even for a moment, my slim beloved!

`You are loved by Nanda's child!' my in-laws cruelly mock me.  
When I go to fill water at the banks of Yamuna, you toy with my skirt!  
At what auspicious hour did you stick to me like a *bindi*, O dark one?  
Life of my life, I won't forsake you even for a moment, my slim beloved!  
How he loves to dog the ones he loves, my cherished connoisseur,  
It is good to attain Narsaiyya's lord; he occupies the lotus of my heart!  
At what auspicious hour did you stick to me like a *bindi*, O dark one?  
Life of my life, I won't forsake you even for a moment, my slim beloved!

143.158

### 5.1.3

Be still, be still, O moon, do not make the dawn yet,  
The life of my life has come to my home!  
It is after hundreds of millions of lives of penance,  
That I have attained my Vitthal, my love!  
Be still, be still, O moon, do not make the dawn yet,  
The life of my life has come to my home!

The *chatak* sweetly sings, `pee yoo! pee yoo!'  
And cuckoo too sings in honeyed notes,  
I implore you O rooster, herald not the break of the day!  
Be still, be still, O moon, do not make the dawn yet,  
The life of my life has come to my home!

The moon adorns the moonlight like a tree adorning the entwined creeper,  
And just as the earthen pots adorn the swan-gaited maids,  
Govind adorns the milk-white girls.

Be still, be still, O moon, do not make the dawn yet,  
The life of my life has come to my home!

The sea is adorned by the surging waves;  
The waves are adorned by the wavelets,  
And gopis adorn our Govind!  
It is pleasing for Narsinh to attain his lord

And for the gopi to adorn Govind!  
Be still, be still, O moon, do not make the dawn yet,  
The life of my life has come to my home!

369.231

5.1.4

Cherish red, love, for the beautiful season is tinged with red!  
Rosy is the glow on laughing Radha's teeth  
And scarlet are the bangles on her exquisite hands.  
Cherish red, love, for the beautiful season is tinged with red!

Deep red are the flowers that drop from the *kesudo* tree,  
The dust that blows is rusty and brown,  
Red are the beaks of our feathered friends, the parrot and the *myna*!  
Cherish red, love, for the beautiful season is tinged with red!

Red are the garments of all my friends, whose braids have come off,  
For frolicking with Narsaiyya's lord, they are drowned in the nectar of joy!  
Cherish red, love, for the beautiful season is tinged with red!

93.142

5.1.5

Cold, cold is my bed in winter!  
But for my Lord, who will embrace me passionately?  
Cold, cold is my bed in winter!

Today, dear, this harsh winter closes in  
And scares the frail ones like me.  
My frozen little body sets our being ablaze!  
But for my love, who will slake me?  
Cold, cold is my bed in winter!  
But for my love, who will embrace me passionately?

Every single moment of this night is aeon to me!  
How futile is my empty bed,

I thank heavens that I met Narsaiyya's Lord,  
For I attained the Nectar of Immortality!  
Cold, cold is my bed in winter!  
But for my Lord, who will embrace me passionately?

300.211

5.1.6

Cover me with a blanket O Kanha, my *chunri* is all drenched!  
Hold me close O Kanha; I am bare and shivering!

My dark love, hold me with tenderly,  
Embrace me in your ecstasy!  
put your arms around me and sip the heavenly nectar from my lips!  
Cover me with a blanket, O Kanha, my *chunri* is all drenched!  
Hold me close O Kanha; I am bare and shivering!

In this gentle drizzle, the frogs and peacocks cry!  
Narsaiyya's lord has come to love  
And the dark clouds and lightning thunder in the sky!  
Cover me, with a blanket, O Kanha, my *chunri* is all drenched!  
Hold me close O Kanha; I am bare and shivering!

325.218

5.1.7

Don't untie the threads of my *choli*, my love  
The fruits of my breasts are not good enough for you!  
  
Ananga, the god of love, stirs not in the unbloomed youth  
There can be no ecstasy without lovemaking.  
Don't untie the threads of my *choli*, my love  
The fruits of my breasts are not good enough for you!



Hearing the words of the dark girl, Narsaiyya's lord clasped her to his heart

And played many love games with her during their first union.

Don't untie the threads of my *choli*, my love

The fruits of my breasts are not good enough for you!

365.230

5.1.8

Don't wake me up vigorously, O Madhukar!

You will break my delicate waist, my love!

As if smeared with vermilion

My lips have turned crimson with your bites!

I swear, I am exhausted and about to drop,

But the wicked one does not listen to me!

Don't wake me up vigorously, O Madhukar!

You will break my delicate waist, my love!

My eyes have kept awake for four dawns and nights I pray I implore!

Narsinh's lord much as you may trouble me in the bed,

It is still not enough!

Don't wake me up vigorously, O Madhukar!

You will break my delicate waist, my love!

364.229

5.1.9

`Embrace me with such a passion

That you enjoy this short-lived youth to its best!

Let your eyes meet mine, your lips meet my lips

And your breast press against mine;

It pleases my mind to feel this way for a moment or two!

`Embrace me with such a passion

That you enjoy this short-lived youth to its best!

The lustful one, the lover of his devotees, Narsaiyya's lord  
Then approached the delicious bed!  
`Embrace me with such a passion  
That you enjoy this short-lived youth to its best!

314.215

5.1.10

Enjoy this girl and celebrate the night!  
Why are you still fast asleep?  
In no time will it dawn,  
Soon you'll be off into the woods  
Yodeling with your cowherd friends!  
Enjoy this girl and celebrate the night!

Inviting is the bed, nectarous is the girl,  
Luscious are her breasts overflowing from her *choli*!  
Though the girl is tender, her breasts are firm  
They'll jab you when you embrace!  
Enjoy the girl and celebrate the night!  
Why are you still fast asleep?

Though he is small, he is matchless in beauty,  
Yet as mighty as an untamed lion is our lustful Lord!  
O gem of a gallant is the Narsaiyya's Lord,  
In meeting him, the ravishing maiden attained the ultimate bliss.  
Enjoy the girl and celebrate the night!  
Why are you still fast asleep?

405. 241

5.1.11

Fair one, in the middle of the night,  
How your jingling anklets chime!  
You have woken up the whole town

With melodious jingling of your anklets!  
Fair one, in the middle of the night,  
How your jingling anklets chime!

"I came back after vainly groping in the bed,  
For I found my beloved asleep with a girl next door!  
One after other girl my beloved enjoys!  
Surely, this is not what we expect  
From some one very much our own!  
Fair one, in the middle of the night,  
How your jingling anklets chime!

"At the most we can cover a well  
But how on earth do you cover an ocean?  
If he were merely a man of our fancy  
We'd have shown him the door  
But how do you decline the man you have married!"  
Fair one, in the middle of the night,  
How your jingling anklets chime!

"In my garden the mango tree has blossomed  
And mangoes ripe are dripping with nectar!  
Wake up and relish them, my slender Lord,  
I'll pluck them for you and you enjoy!"  
Fair one, in the middle of the night, how your jingling anklets chime!

"In my garden are juicy grapes,  
sumptuous citrus fruits, and betel vines,  
O Narsaiyya's Lord come to my place  
For my heart is tender and mad!"  
Fair one, in the middle of the night,  
How your jingling anklets chime!

Has your heart turned to stone, love?  
The breast-fruits can't be gifted to anyone just like that!  
For by being close to the heart they give pleasure;  
They give pain if they are to go away.  
What is the connoisseur of love who knows not this secret?  
Then why do you demand them,  
My love, at such an unearthly hour?  
Has your heart turned to stone, love?  
The breast-fruits can't be gifted to anyone just like that!

These are the only ornaments of the delicate ones  
How can I give them to you O Narsinh's Lord?  
Come to my place and I'll clasp you firm to my heart!  
Has your heart turned to stone, love?  
The breast-fruits can't be gifted to anyone just like that!

309.213-214

5.1.13

Her eyes twinkle in the veil like the light of dawn!  
The girl brimming with youth, with her braid come off  
-See how heedless is the god of love!  
Her eyes twinkle in the veil like the light of dawn!

Intoxicated and nourished with the wine of love, her eyes dance and sway,  
See how they close when the beautiful lord mates with her on the bed!  
Her eyes twinkle in the veil like the light of dawn!

She bewitches every god with these eyes  
And the pride of every austere sage she shatters!  
She can make him dance to her tunes, how can Narsaiyya's lord escape?  
Her eyes twinkle in the veil like the light of dawn!

208.178

5.1.14

`Hold your immaculate flame O lamp,  
My beloved has arrived to embrace me on the bed!'

`Needlessly don't break the threads of my *choli*  
And that's my braid and not a snake.'

`Hold your immaculate flame O lamp,  
My beloved has arrived to embrace me on the bed!'

`Why dwindle O lamp?'

`And that's my bracelet not the maker of the day.'

`Hold your immaculate flame O lamp,  
My beloved has arrived to embrace me on the bed!'

The beautiful girl attained joy looking at the lamp  
As she met the beloved of devotees, Narsaiyya's Lord

`Hold your immaculate flame O lamp,  
My beloved has arrived to embrace me on the bed!'

373.232

5.1.15

I went to fetch water from the lake, but my love wont let me, O mother!  
Kneading my firm breasts, he lusted for the nectar of my lips, O mother!  
I went to fetch water from the lake, but my love wont let me, O mother!

`How did you hurt your lips' my mother-in-law suspiciously asks.

`It was my girl friend's nail as she was helping me with the pots'  
I went to fetch water from the lake, but my love wont let me, O mother!

I had gone in a great hurry but my love held me back,  
It is excellent to attain Narsaiyya's Lord,  
For he made me like himself, O mother!  
I went to fetch water from the lake, but my love wont let me, O mother!

456.257

5.1.16

I woke up all of a sudden from my sleep  
I thought I embraced my lord,  
I indulged in many colorful and erotic games  
And drank nectar of his divine lips  
As he took me on his chest!  
I woke up all of a sudden from my sleep!

Just think of my dream, my winsome friend,  
None other than Narsaiyya's lord came to me!  
I woke up all of a sudden from my sleep!

242. 409

5.1.17

I won't let you embrace! I won't let you drink the nectar from my lips!  
Why are you so lustful, young one of Nanda?  
I won't let you embrace! I won't let you drink the nectar from my lips!

Unstained is the name of our family you will only bring us dishonor,  
Beloved of Laxmi, just stay away from me!  
I won't let you embrace! I won't let you drink the nectar from my lips!

Once I see you, I feel like relishing you, love, tell me how am I to hold myself back!  
Playing with Narsaiyya's lord, I wish to cross over to the other shore!  
I won't let you embrace! I won't let you drink the nectar from my lips!

271. 201

5.1.18.1 and 5.1.18.2 are connected *padas*.

5.1.18.1

“ I'll tie you to my bed with garland of flowers,

Leaving all my coyness aside!  
Then who will dare come to my place to take you away from me?  
And what can that enraged rival girl do to me?  
I'll tie you to my bed with garland of flowers,  
Leaving all my coyness aside!

You are the Lord with garland of wild flowers and I, a delicate flower vine,  
If you can't water me, then why, dear  
Did you plant me in the first place?  
A wasp for the time being can dwell among flowers,  
But in lotus, my love, it has to sacrifice even itself!  
I'll tie you to my bed with garland of flowers,  
Leaving all my coyness aside!

If one truly loves one's beloved,  
Then he should hold everything one has at her feet!"  
Says Narsaiyyo, "why don't you do something  
To calm your ire, gopi!"  
"I'll tie you to my bed with garland of flowers,  
Leaving all my coyness aside!"

230.185

5.1.18.2

"Listen, my beautiful one ", says Shri Hari, "I won't ever leave your place!  
There's no girl like you at all with whose garland of flowers  
Would I be tied!

"Listen, my beautiful one!" says Shri Hari, "I won't ever leave your place!

"I am the lord with garland of creepers and you, a delicate flower vine,  
I will water you with the nectar of my eyes,  
With love will I enclose you and tend you  
Holding you in my strong arms!

"Listen, my beautiful one!" says Shri Hari, "I won't ever leave your place!

How lucky you are, my lovely one, and how fortunate!

Is it because you have mastered some magic charm,  
That I, who can untie the bonds of the fourteen worlds,  
Am tied with your garland of flowers?  
"Listen my beautiful one, " says Shri Hari, "I won't ever leave your place!

I plead, proud one, please comply!  
Never ever will I leave your place, I swear!"  
Narsaiyya's Lord, brave and gallant  
Passionately indulged in the battle of Love!  
"Listen my beautiful one, " says Shri Hari, "I won't ever leave your place!

230.185

5.1.19

It's my beloved over there at midnight,  
Playing his mellifluous flute!  
Overwhelmed with mad desire I rush  
To the rendezvous of Vrindavan!  
It's my beloved over there at midnight,  
Playing his mellifluous flute!

Regardless of my in-laws reproach,  
I put on my ornaments  
And I went out to worship my Jadava  
And to play *ras* all night long!  
It's my beloved over there at midnight,  
Playing his mellifluous flute!

Absolute bliss it was,  
I drank the beloved of Laxmi with my eyes to my heart's content!  
By beholding Narsaiyya's Lord  
I soothed the intense pain of desolation!  
It's my beloved over there at midnight  
Playing his mellifluous flute!



109.147

5.1.20

Kanji is drenched in saffron, the damsel drenched in deep orange!  
Their eyes drenched with love, they wait at the doors of garden!  
Who shall we say is more beautiful? The lord if Vraj or his lover?  
When we gaze at the best among men-both are equally priceless pearls!  
Kanji is drenched in saffron, the damsel drenched in deep orange!  
Their eyes drenched with love, they wait at the doors of garden!

With gait full of frolic, they fly into the garden  
And lose themselves completely in the limitless celebrations of colors!  
Indeed, it is ultimate joy to meet Narsinh's Lord!  
Kanji is drenched in saffron, the damsel drenched in deep orange!  
Their eyes drenched with love, they wait at the doors of garden!

431. 249

5.1.21

Last night my lord went away seeing me asleep,  
What shall I do now friend, as I could not wake!  
He kept his word, but I fell asleep gazing him with adoration!  
Last night my lord went away seeing me asleep,  
What shall I do now friend, as I could not wake!

Where is Krishna now, dear friend, and will he care for me?  
I should go and plead for mercy!  
The dark one is considerate; he will surely deign and forgive me;  
I should really go and implore!  
Last night my lord went away seeing me asleep,  
What shall I do now friend, as I could not wake!

`Wake up, girl, and throw off your indolence, for the lord hasn't left yet,  
He still waits serenely at the door to test your love!'  
`Blessed is Narsaiyya's lord, no doubt today I'll be late to milk the cows!

Last night my lord went away seeing me asleep,  
What shall I do now friend, as I could not wake!

484.266

5.1.22

Let's go and play dear friend; leave aside the churning of curds!  
For spring has arrived, forest creepers have blossomed,  
Cuckoos sing happily among *kadamb* trees, mango trees have bloomed  
And hanging around every flower are the mischievous bees!  
Let's go and play dear friend; leave aside the churning of curds!

Wear these ornaments and necklaces, elephant-gaited one!  
How many times to tell you to get started!  
We'll kiss the nectarous mouth of our admirer, embrace him, and gambol  
Leaving aside all our coyness and shame!  
Let's go and play dear friend; leave aside the churning of curds!

We'll capture Hari with love and clasp his joy to our heart  
He will run holding our hands with love!  
Narsinh too is lost in the ecstasy of revelry  
And the days we have lost will return!  
Let's go and play dear friend; leave aside the churning of curds!

81.137

5.1.23

Lift your veil, mischievous girl, for Vitthal gazes at your body!  
The lotus of your body blooms like the full sixteen-digit moon!  
Lift your veil, mischievous girl, for Vitthal gazes at your body!

Your body, fragrant like sandalwood,  
Has captured the mind of the Lifter of the mountain!

Lift your veil, mischievous girl, for Vitthal gazes at your body!

While lust has gripped the lustful ones, O what nectar Narsinh enjoys!

Lift your veil, mischievous girl, for Vitthal gazes at your body!

444.253

5.1.24

Ma! The dark cobra with pearl, my Kanha has stung my being!  
My life rolls away in waves, someone retrieve it for me please!  
Don't give me medicines, Ma; don't summon the medicine man,  
Deliver me to Govind, my charmer, in Gokul!  
Ma! The dark cobra with pearl, my Kanha has stung my being!  
My life rolls away in waves, someone retrieve it for me please!

The snakebite seems fatal, thought the charmer aloud,  
It is well for Narsinh to attain his lord; the charmer removed the poison from the girl's body.

Ma! The dark cobra with pearl, my Kanha has stung my being!  
My life rolls away in waves, someone retrieve it for me please!

307.213

5.1.25

My fruit-like breasts are your possessions  
How can they be offered to anyone else?  
Come once to my home and I will tell you more, by dear admirer!  
My fruit-like breasts are your possessions  
How can they be offered to anyone else?

My youth is forsaking me  
If you don't come which man will I enjoy?  
My fruit-like breasts are your possessions  
How can they be offered to anyone else?

I have seen many admirers on this earth,  
But there is none like you Narsinh's Lord,  
sweeter than the nectar of immortality!  
My fruit-like breasts are your possessions  
How can they be offered to anyone else?

310.214

5.1.26

My lord, embrace me deeply, and soothe my heart.  
Take me in your fond embrace I'll offer you my body, young and tender.  
Come and make love to me, my love, I'll clasp you firmly.  
My lord, embrace me deeply, and soothe my heart.

The bliss not found in the heaven or *Vaikunth* is in his embrace,  
In going to meet Narsinh's Lord in forest!  
My lord, embrace me deeply, and soothe my heart.

33.215

5.1.27

No one understands my state; they think I've been possessed!  
In fact, dear friend It'll be me who'll possess Krishna today  
And spend the beautiful night with him!  
No one understands my state; they think I've been possessed!

Anxiously my in-laws inquire and call for doctors of all sorts!  
Only when Narsaiyya's lord comes to make love to me,  
Will I be cured of the fever!  
No one understands my state; they think I've been possessed!

293.209

5.1.28

`Play *raas* with us love,  
Play your sweet flute to us!  
`More alluring is Vrindavan than Vaikunth, show it to us, love.  
Play *raas* with us love,  
Play your sweet flute to us!

On the banks of Jamuna, Jadava plays his honeyed flute,  
The gopis slip away, seduced by the sound,  
Leaving their crying kids behind.  
`Play *raas* with us love,  
Play your sweet flute to us!

With corrylium in her eyes, she goes to fulfill her promise;  
But she has dressed herself all wrong, with anklets in ears.  
`Play *raas* with us love,  
Play your sweet flute to us!

His enchanting face she lovingly eyes, takes his hands in hers,  
She offers him everything she has!  
`Play *raas* with us love,  
Play your sweet flute to us!

Enchanting are the woods of Vrindavan in full autumnal moon.  
Red, the color of passion decorates her limbs  
The girl looks so enchantingly different!  
`Play *raas* with us love,  
Play your sweet flute to us!

One girl laughs, one claps and other excitedly sprinkles vermilion.  
Where Radha and Madhav play *raas* it is pure joy unbound.  
`Play *raas* with us love,  
Play your sweet flute to us!

One who sings or hears this Radha Mohan Raas,  
Will attain Vaikunth, the abode of bliss, says Narsinh, His servant  
`Play *raas* with us love!  
Play your sweet flute to us!

Ravishing is her youth dear, for she has ensnared the lord of Yadus!

In the bed, rapturously she took him on her breast.

Ravishing is her youth dear, for she has ensnared the lord of Yadus!

Unrestrained, she was with the dark one at amorous play!

In inner union, she tasted the nectar of his lips.

Ravishing is her youth dear, for she has ensnared the lord of Yadus!

Never does he leave his love alone, wherever she looks he is always there!

Says Narsinh, by whom the lord stands by has no fear in the life.

Ravishing is her youth dear, for she has ensnared the lord of Yadus!

337.221-222

5.1.30

She plays with the dark one, her sweet anklets chime.

In full bloom of her youth, she goes to meet Mohan

Maddened with desire!

She plays with the dark one, her sweet anklets chime.

She looks gorgeous in her ravishing blue garments

She has the gait of swan in her walk

Her choli firm on her breasts

Threatens the honor even of adept sages!

She plays with the dark one, her sweet anklets chime.

Teeming with immense love, she approaches the bed

Puts her pretty arms tenderly around his neck

Lightly Narsaiyya's lord takes her close to his chest

And with unlimited joy she celebrates the night!

She plays with the dark one, her sweet anklets chime.

138 .156

5.1.31

Someone silence that bird; he doesn't leave me alone!

He is sent by the Creator himself

To shoot the arrows of desolation at me!

Someone silence that bird; he doesn't leave me alone!

His cry is so beautiful, he cries in the middle of the night

He is no songster; he is a wicked bird

Who kills even those who are already dying!

Someone silence that bird; he doesn't leave me alone!

It is already dark night, and on top of it, the lightening flashes!

The heart of the maiden separated from her love sinks.

Someone silence that bird; he doesn't leave me alone!

How shall the night pass when the *chataka* is singing?

And what will happen if the dawn passes away too

Without Narsaiyya's lord?

Someone silence that bird; he doesn't leave me alone!

288.207

5.1.32

Sweet flute, tell us what austerities have you performed?

You play on his lips and resonate in the forests

Stealing our hearts!

All night long, you rejoice with him and he never puts you aside

Like a ruthless arrow, you run through our hearts!

Sweet flute, tell us what austerities have you performed?

You play on his lips and resonate in the forests

Stealing our hearts!

From you our beloved gets all the witchcraft he needs!

Says Narsinh, how you become daring

And seduce all those lovely proud girls!

Sweet flute, tell us what austerities have you performed?

You play on his lips and resonate in the forests

Stealing our hearts!



123.151

5.1.33

Tell me truly, my dark beloved,  
To which lovely girl were you making love?  
O my wild beloved, disheveled are your clothes and eyes are weary with sleep!

Tell me truly, my dark beloved,  
To which lovely girl were you making love?

Bedecked brilliantly like the constellations sparkling in the sky,  
My matchless one, why come to me when you sleep with someone else?

Tell me truly, my dark beloved,  
To which lovely girl were you making love?

Useless it is to argue with the lustful, says Radha,  
O Narsaiyya's lord, what is your game behind all this?

Tell me truly, my dark beloved,  
To which lovely girl were you making love?

270 .201

5.1.34

The arrow of desire has pierced my heart!  
I kept awake whole night, friend, weeping miserably!  
I wait for him, here in the courtyard for a moment  
For a moment there at the temple  
Or on the veranda desolately!  
To whom but to my love, can I speak my heart, friend!  
The arrow of desire has pierced my heart!

If my love arrives now, how will I contain the sheer joy?  
Passionately will I clasp the Narsaiyya's lord to my heart, dear friend!  
The arrow of desire has pierced my heart!

I kept awake whole night, friend, weeping miserably!

285.206

5.1.35

The dark one came stealthily last night  
Playing the enchanting *raga bhairav* on flute,  
At the break of day.

The dark one came stealthily last night!

I had vowed never to speak to him again when I slept  
But I found my feet tapping to the tune  
And opened the doors to let him in!  
The dark one came stealthily last night

O what great austerities has this caste of cowherds performed  
That with gopika's captivating words'  
Narsaiyya's lord, no less, is charmed!  
The dark one came stealthily last night  
Playing the enchanting *raga bhairav* on flute,  
At the break of day.

103.145

5.1.36

The dark one turned to gaze the moonlike face of the jewel among beauties,  
Their eyes met, their desolation ended, the lord pleaded  
And took the other half of his self close to him.  
Putting her arms around him, the girl with a ravishing face said,  
*`Thou art my life,'*  
The lord replied,  
*`Thou art my embellishment, my garland,*  
*In thee alone am I absorbed and thou alone sway my soul.'*  
The dark one turned to gaze the moonlike face of the jewel among beauties,  
Their eyes met, their desolation ended, the lord pleaded

And took the other half of his self close to him.

*'Thou art* forever beloved of *my* very breath, gorgeous one,  
My pride, my fawn-eyed girl, I promise thee  
Even if we do not see each other,  
Your reflection will forever be in my heart.'

The dark one turned to gaze the moonlike face of the jewel among beauties,  
Their eyes met, their desolation ended, the lord pleaded  
And took the other half of his self close to him.

Blessed is this beautiful girl, the most desirable,  
Whom Krishna himself praises,  
The very Godhead on whom the likes of Shiva and Virancha meditate,  
Narsaiyya's Lord is the ocean of bliss, is indeed praising himself!

376 .233

5.1.37

The flute resonates today! The flute resonates today!  
The women dance with the lord, dance, and sing as they play!  
The flute resonates today!

The sound of clapping, the sound of drumming,  
The harmony of the jingling anklets unbound!  
Mohan is with the women, ravishing and proud,  
Their ringing bells, and their melodious sound!  
The flute resonates today!

Rapt, oblivious, and absorbed in each other as they happily play!  
Says Narsaiyyo, unbound is the joy of the *ras* players,  
As tumultuous love comes down in showers!  
The flute resonates today! The flute resonates today!

65.131

5.1.38

The sea of ecstasy has ebbed and gone, dear friend  
The ocean of sorrow floods and overwhelms.  
How shall we the weak survive, now that you have forsaken us?

The sea of ecstasy has ebbed and gone, dear friend  
The ocean of sorrow floods and overwhelms.

Friend now that he has left nothing remains; he has taken everything.

The sea of ecstasy has ebbed and gone, dear friend  
The ocean of sorrow floods and overwhelms.

We didn't hold out our *palav* in complete surrender then,  
Now what is the point of rubbing our hands in vain?  
The sea of ecstasy has ebbed and gone, dear friend  
The ocean of sorrow floods and overwhelms.

He knows not our pains, and he has broken all the bonds of childhood love,  
He has broken all the bonds of affection; Hari-that dandy has betrayed us!

The sea of ecstasy has ebbed and gone, dear friend  
The ocean of sorrow floods and overwhelms.

You can explain to stupid,  
But how can you deal with the experienced ones, love?  
Separated from you I roam aimlessly, O Trikramji!  
Don't abandon us like this!  
The sea of ecstasy has ebbed and gone, dear friend  
The ocean of sorrow floods and overwhelms.

Gopis have become mad for Govind,  
'Do return home O beloved of Laxmi!'  
What shall I say, dear friend, to Narsaiyya's Lord?  
Only that, please understand the plight of your lovers!  
The sea of ecstasy has ebbed and gone, dear friend  
The ocean of sorrow floods and overwhelms.

5.1.39

This is how I bewitched him, friend, I rolled over him in our love play!

‘No, no!’ cried he as he tried to flee, and he cried out for his mother!

But I clasped him passionately to my breasts!

This is how I bewitched him, friend, I rolled over him in our love play!

I drank his eyes with my eyes , his lips with mine,

I drank him as if he was the elixir of Immortality!

Amorously, I took him on my breasts

I enjoyed myself doing what he wanted me to do!

This is how I bewitched him, friend, I rolled over him in our love play!

Playing ecstatically with the Narsaiyya's Lord

I could hardly make out the world around me!

This is how I bewitched him, friend, I rolled over him in our love play!

401.240

5.1.40

"Today Kanuda my darling, has deserted me!"

Radha’s necklace he has given to Rukmini!

In every street, I cry in every house, I search,

But it was in Queen Rukmini's palace that I found my pearls!

"Today Kanuda my darling, has deserted me!"

Radha’s necklace he has given to Rukmini!

If I had been awake, I wouldn't have let him steal

But unfortunately I was in the grip of arch-enemy-the sleep!

I woke up weeping for Hari!

"Today Kanuda my darling, has deserted me!"

Radha’s necklace he has given to Rukmini!

"I will blow the bellows and fire the earthen pot, I swear!

I will even call sage Narada for the sake of my necklace!"

"Today Kanuda my darling, has deserted me!"

Radha's necklace he has given to Rukmini!

Radha was filled with rage; her eyes were filled with angry tears.

" Give back my necklace, dear Hari, else I will die!"

"Today Kanuda my darling, has deserted me!"

Radha's necklace he has given to Rukmini!

Platefuls of pearls were brought

And the unpierced pearls were strung together!

It is good to attain Narsaiyya's lord, for he alone can comfort angry Radha.

"Today Kanuda my darling, has deserted me!"

Radha's necklace he has given to Rukmini

282.205

5.1.41

Today my left eyelid twitches, O I will meet my love today!

I'll take his arms around my neck and I'll do what he says!

My braids are playful and my bangles jingle with joy,

I will look gorgeous when he embraces me!

Today my left eyelid twitches, O I will meet my love today!

It won't do if he won't embrace,

I will be thrilled when he will fondly grasp my breasts!

Today my left eyelid twitches, O I will meet my love today!

I'll not pain my body with recitation penance or pilgrimage

I'll only joyously play with Narsinh's Lord!

Today my left eyelid twitches, O I will meet my love today!

312.214

5.1.42

What is it about your eyes, love? Tell us, tell us truly!

It makes our hearts go flutter; it makes our hearts go wild, when you see us!

What is it about your eyes, love? Tell us, tell us truly!

The magic of your eyes makes my mind quiver with joy!  
Usually, my love, a proud gorgeous girl happens to bewitch man's mind,  
But it is you who has enthralled the minds of proud alluring girls!  
What is it about your eyes, love? Tell us, tell us truly!

Your eyes have ravished our hearts, love!  
Turn out the elixir rob us of everything we have, O Narsaiyya's lord!  
What is it about your eyes, love? Tell us, tell us truly!

197.174-75

5.1.43

Who is it playing *panchama* at my door?  
Is he not content playing with me the whole night?

Leave, leave my wrist, for no longer is it night!  
Get up now, my lazy lord, my lord of very being!

Who is it playing *panchama* at my door?  
Is he not content playing with me the whole night?

See the birds are chirping and it is daylight already,  
The night has fled, my love, and the day has begun!

Who is it playing *panchama* at my door?  
Is he not content playing with me the whole night?

One with conch shell, discus and mace, rider of Garuda,  
Narsaiyya's Lord made love with his Radha on bed!

Who is it playing *panchama* at my door?  
Is he not content playing with me the whole night?

427.248

## 5.2     Devotional, Philosophical, and Didactic Poems

### 5.2.1

*Ananta* is the name of my infallible medicine,  
Preferred only by the few fortunate ones!  
If we stay near the Vaishanava, our reliable *vaid*,  
The god of death won't dare close upon us!  
*Ananta* is the name of my infallible medicine,  
Preferred only by the few fortunate ones!

*Hari* cleanses my being *Sanrangdhar* becomes my ginger  
And the Indestructible One happens to be my *ajmain* seeds!  
Krishna is the herb, which cures, the sweet Dark One, my sugar,  
And Rama, the remedial salt, is my rejuvenating compound!  
*Ananta* is the name of my infallible medicine,  
Preferred only by a few fortunate ones!

*Chaturbhuj* is my medicinal powder,  
The Many Named One is my tested drug;  
The pills, I make of *Govind's* name,  
The dust from *Hari's* feet becomes my perfect cure!  
*Ananta* is the name of my infallible medicine,  
Preferred only by a few fortunate ones!

Such are the true medicines then! If only one takes them.  
For they can beat back the swarming mosquitoes of *Maya*!  
Lord of *Yadus*, the Deity of *Yagna*, graces me with such cures!  
Play with the Narsaiyya's Lord,  
So that the god of death comes not close to you!  
*Ananta* is the name of my infallible medicine,  
Preferred only by a few fortunate ones!



24.280

5.2.2

By the grace of the holy ones, all things turn out well  
And by Krishna's grace, one attains Krishna himself  
By the grace of the world, one is born repeatedly in various forms!  
By the grace of the holy ones, all things turn out well...

Ever engrossed in the company of the lord's devotees,  
The holy ones are ever happy and never do they grieve,  
The world, however, roams around maddened  
And trapped in its own intricate snares.  
By the grace of the holy ones, all things turn out well.

The worldliness goes against Hari, for the layers and layers of sin,  
put him away,  
So strengthen your devotion  
Says Narsaiyyo, serve the holy ones and the Truth  
And you will surely attain the ultimate bliss...  
By the grace of the holy ones, all things turn out well..

44.287

5.2.3

Come friend! Let's go and behold the mango tree blossoming near Gokul!  
Its sixteen thousand branches sheltering the three worlds!  
Come friend! Lets go and behold the mango tree blossoming near Gokul!

Vasudeva of Yadavas cast the seed; it sprouted in Devaki's womb!  
Nanda brought it home in exchange and Yashoda nurtured it by her milk.  
Come friend! Let's go and behold the mango tree blossoming in Gokul!

Its roots are deep in the seven nether worlds, and it extends unto the heavens!  
Narada, Sharda intone its praises, like wasps around the perfumed lotus!  
Come friend! Lets go and behold the mango tree blossoming in Gokul!

Says Narsaiyyo Dhruva, Rukamangad, Ambarish, Pralhad have all plucked  
The fruits of devotion and service-O it lives in the hearts of his devotees!  
Come friend! Lets go and behold the mango tree blossoming in Gokul!

91.141

5.2.4

Dark clouds thunder and Madhava dances!  
How sweetly bells on his anklets ring!  
Gopis play *pakhavaj* and drums; their beloved plays melodious flute!  
Frogs, peacocks sing, and cuckoo flutes its honeyed song!  
Striking are the colours of *cholis* and garments!  
Dark clouds thunder and Madhava dances!  
How sweetly bells on his anklets ring!

Blessed is the bank of Jamuna river! Blessed, the bamboo grove,  
And blessed too is this birth! Blessed indeed is Narsaiyya's sweet tongue,  
Which has sung the alluring melody of Malhar!  
Dark clouds thunder and Madhava dances!  
How sweetly bells on his anklets ring!

480.264

5.2.5

Dearer than life is the Vaishnava to me, he is ever in my heart  
I leave behind all the pilgrimages, austerities and joys of Vaikunth  
Just to be where he is!  
To uphold my beloved devotee King Ambarish  
I smote the vanity of the sage Durvasa,  
For sake of my devotees, I cast off my pride  
And came into the world ten times.  
For dearer than life is the Vaishnava to me....

I rushed on Garuda, my eagle to deliver the Elephant, my loved devotee,

I discriminate not between the high and low,  
As one who worships me is like me!  
Dearer than life is the Vaishnava to me.....

Lakshmi, the better half of my very being, herself serves my servants!  
My devotee's feet are holier than millions of Gangas  
Millions of Kashis and all the holy shrines put together!  
Dearer than life is the Vaishnava to me...

When he walks, I walk in front, when he sleeps I wake!  
I don't spare the one who tries to harm my loved ones,  
I destroy him and all his clans!  
For dearer than life is the Vaishnava to me....

My devotee alone can deliver the ones whom I shackle  
But not even I can release those whom he binds,  
Once he binds me, even I can't free myself!  
Dearer than life is the Vaishnava to me...

When he sits and sings, I stand and listen  
And I dance when he stands and sings!  
Never even for a moment I am away,  
As Narsaiyyo truly says, from such a devotee  
For dearer than life is the Vaishnava to me....

47 .288

5.2.6

Essence of essence is the birth of the weaker sex,  
For her strength alone can please the mighty hero!  
What's the use of this manliness, friend,  
When it is of no use to the lord at all?  
Essence of essence is the birth of the weaker sex!

A man might attain the ultimate release,  
If he sticks to the path of virtue,

But to indulge in the scrumptious joys of pretended anger  
And the lord pleading to make up and other such games,

You simply have to be a woman!

Essence of essence is the birth of the weaker sex!

For her strength can please the mighty hero!

Even the gods like Indra and the great sages

Revere the very dust of gopis' feet,

Considering themselves lesser than the gopis

As they find their manhood insipid!

Essence of essence the birth of the weaker sex,

For her strength can please the mighty hero!

Woman, the treasure trove of fortune

Experiences and enjoys all day and night

The very nectar, the Vedas and the Scriptures

Struggle to express!

Essence of essence is the birth of the weaker sex!

Let my dreams come true

My dark one, my lifter of the mountain, life of my life!

For just like the master dragging the meek beast

The leash of love draws Narsinh!

Essence of essence is the birth of the weaker sex,

For her strength can please the mighty hero!

4.273

5.2.7

Girls merrily watch the procession of a handsome young groom!

How pure and clean he looks with *tilak* adorning his forehead!

How attractive are his consorts!

How happily they sprinkle vermilion around!

Girls merrily watch the procession of a handsome young groom!

The palanquin is of green bamboo shoots, and is carried by four,

Wet cloth they have for headgear, Rama *nama* they chant!  
Girls merrily watch the procession of a handsome young groom!

A pendal is built for the ceremony; dung fuel is fetched for fire,  
And mongrels are already eyeing the sweets with relish!  
Firewood is carried in front and fire is being carried behind!  
Girls merrily watch the procession of a handsome young groom!

Lo, here the groom is going to his in-laws  
And the mother-in-law is overjoyed!  
Here the fiery sparks ornament the pendal,  
And the marriage altar is decorated by fire!  
Wake up hideous mother-in-law, the groom is at the door!  
Girls merrily watch the procession of a handsome young groom!

`Cremation's the name of the ceremony  
and `crematorium' the village of marriage!  
The bride is the daughter of Lalbai, the Red One,  
and Chita Kukmari is her name!  
Girls merrily watch the procession of a handsome young groom!

The groom here has decided to stay at his in-laws,  
His escorts have returned!  
Lavishly they have spent on the feast and had a grand marriage!  
Putting a rupee on earthen pots and bowls,  
Indeed, they have performed it well!  
Go and tell the groom's father to lament loudly if he wishes!  
Girls merrily watch the procession of a handsome young groom!

The *Jiva* is being whisked away by the heralds of Death!  
See how they have tortured his mortal remains!  
It is good if one meets Narsaiyya's Lord,  
For He alone can rescue one from the world of woes!  
Girls merrily watch the procession of the handsome young groom!

From Jayant Kothari ed. *Narsinh Padmala*

## 5.2.8

Great is the wealth of *Bhakti* found only on the earth,  
Not found even in the realms of Brahma!  
By living a virtuous life, even if you attain  
The land of immortality, you will inevitably end up  
In the inexorable cycles of birth and rebirth!  
Great is the wealth of *Bhakti* found only on the earth,  
Not found even in the realms of Brahma!

Those who love *Hari* long not for the ultimate release,  
Instead, they desire to be born over again  
To sing forever, to dance forever,  
To celebrate forever and to gaze forever at Nanda's darling!  
Great is the wealth of *Bhakti* found only on the earth,  
Not found even in the realms of Brahma!

Blessed indeed is the soul born in land of *Bharat*  
And sings the praises of *Govind*;  
Blessed are his parents for he alone has made his birth a success!  
Great is the wealth of *Bhakti* found only on the earth,  
Not found even in the realms of *Brahma*!

Blessed is the land of *Vraj*, blessed is his eternal sport,  
Blessed are the people of *Vraj* as eight magical powers  
Wait at their doorsteps and *Mukti* becomes their maid!  
Great is the wealth of *Bhakti* found only on the earth,  
Not found even in the realms of *Brahma*!

*Shanker* and *Shukajogi* know the taste of this nectar,  
So do the girls of *Vraj*, says Narsinh, who relishes of this nectar.  
Great is the wealth of *Bhakti* found only on the earth,  
Not found even in the realms of *Brahma*!

1.272

5.2.9

How will I worship you, Krishna  
O treasure house of compassion!  
Ineffable is this mysterious bliss....  
How will we contain him in our tiny casket?  
He encompasses everything, moving and motionless!  
How will I worship you, Krishna?  
O treasure house of compassion!  
Ineffable is this mysterious bliss....

The beloved of Laxmi bathes in torrential rains  
How will he be pleased by a mere trickle from our conch-shell?  
Fifty and nine winds fan him.  
O how will he prefer my small effort?  
How will I worship you, Krishna?  
O treasure house of compassion!  
Ineffable is this mysterious bliss....

By becoming the Sun, you scorch the three worlds,  
By becoming the moon, you cool them,  
O Vitthal! You pour down by becoming the clouds,  
You blow by becoming the gale!  
How will I worship you, Krishna?  
O treasure house of compassion!  
Ineffable is this mysterious bliss...

You are the fragrance in every herb,  
What then is a gardener with a mere bunch of flowers?  
What is our offering with perfumes and fragrant oils?  
When the aroma can be hardly compared to yours?  
How will I worship you, Krishna?  
O treasure house of compassion!  
Ineffable is this mysterious bliss...

Kamala serves you daily with exquisite delicacies  
What then is our insignificant offering? Says Narsaiyyo  
He who has tasted the elixir called Krishna is never born again!  
How will I worship You, Krishna?  
O treasure house of compassion!  
Ineffable is this mysterious bliss...

34.284

5.2.10

In the middle of the night, my dear,  
The alluring flute resonates in Sri Vrindavan!  
Its ravishing melody woke me up from the sound sleep!  
It was the ultimate ecstasy of oneness, my dear,  
Beyond the state of wakefulness, dream, and deep sleep!  
In the middle of the night, my dear,  
The alluring flute resonates in Sri Vrindavan!

My mind was purged of *trigunas* and all the illusions!  
In the middle of the night, my dear,  
The alluring flute resonates in Sri Vrindavan!

Wherever I cast my eyes, my dear,  
I see the pearls of *Mukti* around!  
Wandering around I joyously behold the divine *Leela* of Narsaiyya's Lord!  
In the middle of the night, my dear  
The alluring flute resonates in Sri Vrindavan!

61.294-95

5.2.11

In this entire universe, you alone exist, Shri Hari,  
Yet, in infinite forms you seem to be!  
You are divine in the body, fire among the elements,



The fire you become among the elements,  
In the void, you become the Word, which the Vedas hail!  
In this entire universe, you alone exist, Shri Hari,  
Yet, in infinite forms you seem to be!

O Sustainer of the Earth! You are the wind!  
You are the water and you are the Earth!  
You are also the outstretched tree blossoming in the sky!  
In this entire universe, you alone exist, Shri Hari,  
Yet, in infinite forms you seem to be!

Only to taste the nectar of being manifold,  
You created the *jiva* and the *siva* and countless other forms!  
In this entire universe, you alone exist, Shri Hari,  
Yet, in infinite forms you seem to be!

Ornaments differ not from what they are made,  
As the Vedas and other scriptures truly say,  
Only their names differ once their forms are cast,  
Gold is always gold in the end!  
In this entire universe, you alone exist, Shri Hari,  
Yet, in infinite forms you seem to be!

But the books messed up this truth and left it unsaid,  
So the people worship whatever they like,  
With all their hearts, words and deeds.  
In this entire universe, you alone exist, Shri Hari,  
Yet, in infinite forms you seem to be!

You are the seed in a tree and the tree in a seed,  
I see you close just behind the veil,  
You will never find him with your mind, says Narsinh,  
Love him and he will manifest himself before you!  
In this entire universe, you alone exist, Shri Hari,  
Yet, in infinite forms you seem to be!

49.289

5.2.12

It's you, it's you, you are looking for, just think and experience for yourself!

Why do you roam around in vain!

It's you, it's you, you are looking for, just think and experience for yourself

Having lost at your own game,

you have unknowingly assumed your mortality!

What you think you are, is merely your outward form.

Avoid deception and seek your true self!

It's you, it's you, you are looking for, just think and experience for yourself!

Bewildering is this game and you have remained the same!

Arriving and departing from this world, without loss, without gain!

By being all the things in this entire universe,

Your true self plays this divine game!

It's you, it's you, you are looking for, just think and experience for yourself

Only you were caught in the ebbing tide of self-ignorance,

Only you contemplated on the Self!

With 'Narsinhness', you experienced this game

- you indeed were made for your game!

It's you, it's you, you are looking for, just think and experience for yourself 52.291

5.2.13

Let us not mind the happiness and the grief that come our way,

For they are inseparable from our life.

None can evade them, for Lord Raghunath himself has inlaid them!

Let us not mind the happiness and the grief that come our way!

Even an upright man like King Nala, whose wife was Queen Damayanti,

Had to roam half-naked in the forest without food or water.

Let us not mind the happiness and the grief that come our way!

Even the mighty brothers like the Pandavas,  
Who had Queen Draupadi for a wife,  
Underwent hardships for twelve long and exacting years in the forest Without even proper sleep.  
Let us not mind the happiness and the grief that come our way!

Even a woman as chaste as Sita,  
Whose husband was none other than the Lord,  
Was abducted by Ravana and subjected to suffer terrible misery,  
Let us not mind the happiness or the grief that come our way!

Even the King as powerful as Ravana, who had Mandodari as queen,  
Had all his ten heads severed and his great Lanka ravaged!  
Let us not mind the happiness and the grief that come our way!

Even a person so righteous as Harishchandra,  
Who had Taralochana as his queen,  
Had to bear immense agony and serve in a menial caste!  
Let us not mind the happiness and the grief that come our way!

Even an ascetic as great as Shiva, who had Parvati for his wife,  
Was deceived by a *bhil* woman and had his austerities disturbed!  
Let us not mind the happiness and the grief that comes our way!

When all the gods are in distress,  
They remember *antaryami*, the lord of their hearts,  
And indeed are rescued by the Sarangdhar, the bearer of the mighty Saranga bow, the Narsaiyya's  
Lord!  
Let us not mind the happiness and the grief that come our way!

Listen my friend! In my rapt ecstasy, I saw the matchless one!  
You should have seen him; he was sweeter than the nectar of immortality!

The scriptures sing of him as being beyond sight or speech!

Just think, the love of the one called *Satchitananda*

Exceeds even the nine forms of devotion!

Listen, my friend! In my rapt ecstasy, I saw the matchless one!

The one who cannot be contained in the nine types of *Bhakti*,

Is contained in mine-the tenth type of *Bhakti*!

He has that virginal nectar which he offers to his lovers!

Listen my friend! In my rapt ecstasy, I saw the matchless one!

The incomprehensible *brahman* with his inimitable sports

Is yet changeless from innumerable aeons!

He is hardly accessible to the rigorous austerity and arid rituals

Yet, he is more like your favorite delicacy!

Listen my friend! In my rapt ecstasy, I saw the matchless one!

My beloved is forever constant; he never grows or diminishes!

He appears and departs, but never is he emptied or full!

Listen my friend! In my rapt ecstasy, I saw the matchless one!

Perfect is the bliss of *Purushottama* and ultimate is his state,

The state beyond the destructible and the indestructible,

Just think of it, dear friend!

Listen my friend! In my rapt ecstasy, I saw the matchless one!

Once you see him, friend, the world of differences will cease!

The troubles forever solved and you will be fearless forever!

It is divine to meet the Narsaiyya's Lord

For my heart is brimming with rapture! Listen, dear friend!

In my rapt ecstasy, I saw the matchless one!

5.2.15

Look, who is roving in the sky!  
I am He, I am He, the echoing word replies!  
At the feet of the dark one, I wish to die  
For simply matchless is Krishna, my love!  
Look, who is roving in the sky!  
I am He, I am He, the echoing word replies!

Unfathomable is the mystery of his dark beauty,  
As one loses one's way in the eternity of celebration!  
As one clutches at the love's life-giving roots  
Both the living and the lifeless become ambrosia for him!  
Look, who is roving in the sky!  
I am He, I am He, the echoing word replies!

Where the brilliant flame with effulgence of million suns is lit  
Which pales even the brilliance of gold,  
There *Satchitananda* frolics in joy  
And happily swings in the glorious cradle of gold!  
Look, who is roving in the sky!  
I am He, I am He, the echoing word replies!

Without wick, without oil, without thread,  
Shines perpetually, the immaculate Flame!  
Look, who is roving in the sky!  
I am He, I am He, the echoing word replies!

See him without eyes; recognize the one without form,  
Enjoy the nectar without tongue!  
Look, who is roving in the sky!  
I am He, I am He, the echoing word replies!

He is unknowable, imperishable; he is everywhere,  
Narsaiyya's lord has encompassed all

And is snared by saints in the subtle strings of love!  
Look, who is roving in the sky!  
I am He, I am He, the echoing word replies!

53.291

5.2.16

Meditate! Meditate on Hari, O dimwitted sloth,  
So that the misery of the innumerable births is allayed!  
For, doing other mundane things is simply futile  
As the Death, baiting you with delusions will carry you away!  
Meditate! Meditate on Hari, O dimwitted sloth!

Only at the feet of Sri Hari is our total well being!  
Surrender to him and happiness will know no bounds!  
Stop doing other useless things and recite His Name!  
Meditate! Meditate on Hari, O dimwitted sloth!

Forsake the delusions of Maya and rest near Hari's feet!  
Be not confused for such indeed is the truth!  
The palace of Hope ascends to the sky  
But O fool! See how vulnerable are its walls!  
Meditate! Meditate on Hari, O dimwitted sloth!

O vitality and youth have left the body  
All that remains is white haired skeleton of a ghost now!  
Yet, you don't remember Sri Hari's name!  
O beware, O beware for momentary is this Game,  
You have to win entire kingdom before the lemon  
Playfully tossed up touches the ground!  
Meditate! Meditate on Hari, O dimwitted sloth!

O divine are the qualities of Hari, whoever follows them  
Surely attains everlasting fame in this world!  
O Narsaiyya the pauper truly loves his Lord  
For no other deed is as valuable as this!  
O meditate! O meditate on Hari, O dimwitted sloth!

11.275

5.2.17

Meditate, meditate, the lord is in your eye,  
As a divine ecstasy in your inner forehead.  
In person, he will touch you with love,  
His wonderful face with incomparable eyes!  
Meditate, meditate, the lord is in your eye,  
As a divine ecstasy in your inner forehead.

The mind will be gladdened, the past deeds will flee,  
And this earth will seem like the woods of Vraj,  
Where beneath the bowers, Krishna sports,  
as his wonderful companions look on!  
Meditate, meditate, the lord is in your eye,  
as a divine ecstasy in your inner forehead.

In the music of the haunting flute, with savour of the song, the cymbals, and the gong, ring in  
ecstasy,  
In the beating of *mridangam*, in the beating of the drums, in the strains of *shenai*, the *brahman*  
plays!

Meditate, meditate, the lord is in your eye, as a divine ecstasy in your inner forehead.

If you sing him, you will see him in person, sporting amorously.  
All the bliss, will Narsaiyya's lord give you

And your ill deeds will vanish as you meditate.

Meditate, meditate, the lord is in your eye,  
as a divine ecstasy in your inner forehead.

12.276

5.2.18

My beautiful dark one, I 'd sacrifice everything for your playfulness!

Playfully you grazed the cows at Gokul,  
And playfully you played your melodious flute!  
Playfully you consumed the forest fire  
And playfully you slew fierce Kamsa!

My beautiful dark one, I 'd give up everything for your playfulness!

Playfully you lifted up Goverdhan Mount,  
And playfully you tuck your garment at the waist!  
Playfully you entered the waters of Jamuna  
And playfully you bridled the terrible Kaliya!

My beautiful dark one, I'd sacrifice everything for your playfulness!

Playfully in the form of Vamana you approached emperor Bali  
And playfully demanded the Earth,  
Only to push him into the nether worlds!

My beautiful dark one, I'd sacrifice everything for your playfulness

Playfully you became king Rama  
And obeyed your father's wishes  
And playfully you slew evil Ravana to bring beloved Sita back!  
My beautiful dark one, I'd sacrifice everything for your playfulness!

Indeed, in countless ways do you play!  
Playfully one meets Narsaiyya's lord ,walking around with a playful gait!  
My beautiful dark one, I'd sacrifice everything for your playfulness!

221.182

5.2.19

O Mind, acquire the greatest treasure, the jewel invaluable!



Hoard the fortune and amass the essence,  
Which fulfills all your desires!

No thief can steal it; no fire can burn it  
No cheat can rob you of it!

It accompanies you even after you pass away  
It saves you at the final hour!

O Mind, acquire the greatest treasure, the jewel invaluable!

Great is the glory of the Wealth which sages like Shuka and Sanak know!  
By Krishna's grace, Nagar Narsinh follows something of it and praises it!

O Mind, acquire the greatest treasure, the jewel invaluable!

5.2.20

O today it's Diwali ! O it's the Festival of Lights for me!  
For the Lord with garland of wild flowers, at last, has come to me!  
He invites me and soothes the searing desolation of so many days!

O today it's Diwali! O it's the Festival of Lights for me!  
For the Lord with garland of wild flowers, at last, has come to me!

Light, O Light brilliant lamps! Draw *rangoli* with exquisite pearls!  
Sing, O sing the auspicious hymns, sweet proud girls,  
And beat, beat the festive drums,  
For today is Diwali! O it's Festival of Lights for me!  
For the Lord with garland of wild flowers, at last, has come to me!

A wonderful crown graces his head,  
An exquisite necklace of *champa* flowers graces his neck,  
His cheeks stuffed with red betel leaves!  
And dressed in beautiful yellow garment,  
He exudes alluring perfumes of sandalwood!  
O today it's Diwali! O it's festival of lights for me!  
For the Lord with garland of wild flowers, at last, has come to me!

Because of you, we are not orphans, O Lord!  
Can we ever sing your praises enough?  
Just don't go away, Narsaiyya's lord, that's all I ask!  
O today it's Diwali! O it's the Festival of Lights for me!  
For the Lord with garland of wild flowers, at last, has come to me!

220.182

5.2.21

O torchbearer is Narsaiyyo! Torchbearer of Hari!  
With mind brimming with deep love  
And nectar on his tongue,  
O torchbearer is Narsaiyyo! Torchbearer of Hari!

A group of girls, overflowing with ecstasy

And dancing in circle with abandon;  
Some clap while some warble sweetly,  
O torchbearer is Narsaiyyo! Torchbearer of Hari!

The girls enjoy the very thing they so relish,  
And their glances are playful and inviting,  
In such an engrossing moment,  
Narsaiyya's manliness has vanished!  
O torchbearer is Narsaiyyo! Torchbearer of Hari!

19.116

5.2.22

One who feels others grief as his own,  
Who obliges others in distress  
Without being swollen with pride,  
He alone can be called a Vaishnava!

Humbly he bows before everyone in the world and indeed scorns none .

He is resolute in his words,  
Deeds and mind - Glory be to his mother!  
For he alone is a true Vaishnava!

He views everyone with equal eyes;  
He has relinquished the tormenting thirst  
And looks upon another's woman as his own mother!

He alone can be called a Vaishnava!  
His tongue never utters a false word,  
Never does he covet another's wealth.  
One who feels others grief as his own  
He alone can be called a Vaishnava!

Maya never overpowers him  
And the spirit of renunciation

Is ever firm in his mind.  
He is forever rapt in chanting Rama Nama  
And all the pilgrimages reside within him.  
He alone can be called a Vaishnava!

He is without greed or cunning.  
He has abandoned lust and wrath.  
Says Narsinh, mere sight of such a man is enough  
To liberate seventy and one generations of your kin!  
He alone can be called a Vaishnava!

48.289

5.2.23

Only a few truly know, dear, the nectar of Hari,  
The rest are merely full of pride!  
The true Vaishnava always treads the path of love  
And true adoration for Hari.  
True saints know the true virtues, dear, and attain endless bliss.  
Only a few truly know, dear, the nectar of Hari.

Hari loves only those who are loved by his people, dear,  
Rest is all deception and waste!  
Only a few truly know, dear, the nectar of Hari

Where his people are content, dear, there he resides - Sri Gopal himself!  
Only his eternal *leela* is true, rest is all falsehood!  
Only a few truly know, dear, the nectar of Hari

46.288

5.2.24

Only because *I* truly exist, *you* exist! Without me, you cannot be!  
You will exist only as long as I exist!  
If I no longer exist, you too will cease to be, and become ineffable,  
For who will name you if I cease to be?

So long as *saguna* exists, *nirguna* remains  
Says my satguru; When *saguna* leaves, *nirguna* ceases too.  
This is the ineffable state of complete bliss!  
Only because *I* truly exist, *you* exist! Without me, you cannot be!  
You will exist only as long as I exist!

The same is true of *Jiva* and *Siva*  
As long as *Jiva* remains, *Siva* remains,  
When *Jiva* ceases to be, *Siva* too simply cannot be.  
With this ceases the conflict of contrasting appellations!  
Only because *I* truly exist, *you* exist! Without me, you cannot be!  
You will exist only as long as I exist!

As salt dissolves in water, my name will dissolve in you,  
Thus, says Mehta Narsinh, the thinker,  
Who is none other than what he thinks of,  
Will be one with the object of his thought!  
Only because *I* truly exist, *you* exist! Without me, you cannot be!  
You will exist only as long as I exist!

51.290

5.2.25

Passing for the wise and faking wisdom,  
The fools have arrived to preach!  
Disrupting our devotion and flaunting their ignorance  
The fools have arrived to preach!

"None in our kin ever did this, so why should we?"

Why play a saint, put tilak or worship *tulsi*?" they ask.

Passing for the wise and faking wisdom,

The fools have arrived to preach!

"It's the vulgar who sing Hari's praise, why should we?

We won't ever go to the place where they sing Krishna's praises!"

Passing for the wise and faking wisdom,

The fools have arrived to preach!

They overflow with vices and yet they preach,

When Death comes to castigate you,

Who will come to your rescue?

Passing for the wise and faking wisdom,

The fools have arrived to preach!

Only he who renounces his family

And bears the derision of the world will meet Hari!

Says Narsaiyyo; this priceless morning will flow away

In some futile gibberish!

Passing for the wise and faking wisdom, the fools have arrived to preach!

42.286-287

5.2.26

Pointless it is to lament,

For it's always the wish of the lord of the universe,

The world teacher that prevails!

Never is it as we wish it to be.

One who knows this is finally saved.

Pointless it is to lament!

To think that one is the real doer of the deeds is sheer ignorance

Like that of a dog trotting under the cart

And thinking that he is carrying the burden!

Whole cosmos is ordered like this

Only a handful of *yogis* and seers know something of this!

Pointless it is to lament!

One will never grieve, if this Knowledge is born in him  
For by killing Ignorance, his real Foe, he can have only friends!  
Be it a prince or a pauper, his royal cover shelters all!  
One foolishly worries what is in store for him,  
Vines, leaves and fruits grow spontaneously and on their own!  
Pointless it is to lament!

The mundane pleasures are mere delusions -nothing but Krishna is true!  
Says Narsaiyyo, I pray with all my heart,  
That I would be able to love Hari  
In all my births to come!  
Pointless it is to lament!

63.295

5.2.27

Recite O parrot King Rama's name! *Sati* Sita instructs;  
Dangling the cage near her, she makes him rehearse.  
" I will have green bamboo shoots fetched,  
I will make a pretty cage and deck it with exquisite jewels!  
Recite O parrot King Rama's name!" *sati* Sita instructs.

O parrot! I will have delicious bread crumble made for you  
And I will serve you with sugar and ghee!  
What else, O parrot will I order for you?  
Recite O parrot King Rama's name!" *sati* Sita instructs.

Yellow are his wings, pale his feet and a black band decks his throat  
O with a little tune, he worships Narsaiyya's Lord!  
Recite O parrot King Rama's name! *Sati* Sita instructs.

22.279

5.2.28

Saints, we are the traders of Rama's name!  
Merchants from distant villages come to us  
Saints, we are the traders of Rama's name!

Our goods happen to be modest and to everyone's taste;  
All castes come to us for purchase.  
Saints, we are the traders of Rama's name!

Unlimited are our assets;  
Why should we deal merely in millions or billions?  
It is pure musk, buy it if you want-its sure bargain!  
Saints, we are the traders of Rama's name!

To enter the name of Laxmi's beloved in the ledger  
And jot down the name of Chaturbhuj in a chit - that's Narsaiyya's job!  
Saints, we are the traders in Rama's name!

31.283

5.2.29

Serve me the draught of love's ambrosia  
One bedecked with peacock feathers!  
This futile threshing of arid philosophies tastes so insipid!  
These emaciated cattle crave merely the dry husk,  
They pine not for the ultimate liberation!  
Serve me the draught of love's ambrosia



One bedecked with peacock feathers!

Parikshit could not grasp the secret of Love,  
Sukaji knowingly hid this flavor of love,  
And wrote the book with penance and austerity,  
Showing us the royal road to liberation!  
Serve me the draught of love's ambrosia  
One bedecked with peacock feathers!

You killed and emancipated many demons,  
Released countless saints and *yogis*,  
Your love also possessed the *gopis* of *Vraj*  
And even your true devotee, the rare connoisseur!  
Serve me the draught of love's ambrosia!  
One bedecked with peacock feathers!

Most endearing is the way of love  
For the lovelorn beings can be quenched only by love!  
By singing his sweet exploits  
The vessel sets a sail brimming with the ultimate joy!  
Serve me the draught of love's ambrosia  
One bedecked with peacock feathers!

I have grasped the Gopinath's glorious hand  
And nothing tastes as sweet!  
Narsaiyyo yearns for this way and the knowledge of love  
Which the monks or *Satis* could never dream of!  
Serve me the draught of Love's ambrosia  
One bedecked with peacock feathers!

5.2.30

The bliss of my lord's closeness lasted as long as the night.  
Then it vanished, my lord's bliss, when my arch enemy-the Sun did rise.  
I became indistinguishable from the light, and in no time,  
my beloved too was gone.  
In tracing his footsteps, in searching him, I lost myself.  
The bliss of my lord's closeness lasted as long as the night.  
Then it vanished, my lord's bliss, when my arch enemy-the Sun did rise.

In this seemingly strange play, my eyes turned inwards  
I left my small selfhood as I lay utterly vanquished.  
The words can't express this experience, which the scriptures call Ineffable.  
The bliss of my lord's closeness lasted as long as the night.  
Then it vanished, my lord's bliss, when my arch enemy-the Sun did rise.

No one seems to believe the wonder of what I say,  
but those who have attained this state know it well.  
The sea of Being is of absolute Oneness, and Narsinh relishes it enrapt.  
The bliss of my lord's closeness lasted as long as the night.  
Then it vanished, my lord's bliss, when my arch enemy-the Sun did rise.

58.293

5.2.31

The naive milkmaid goes around selling Hari!  
In her little pot, she has put the sweetheart of sixteen thousand gopis!  
She is selling the only refuge of the helpless!  
'Anyone to buy my Murari?' In every street she cries.  
The naive milkmaid goes around selling Hari!

When the pot was opened, they heard the marvelous flute  
And as they saw the face, the women of Vraj swooned at the sight!  
The naive milkmaid goes around selling Hari!

Even gods like Indra and Brahma watch with wonder  
For they see the Lord of fourteen worlds in that little pot!  
The naive milkmaid goes around selling Hari!

The milkmaids are so fortunate to have the lord of their heart with them;  
Indeed, Narsaiyya's lord pampers and spoils his servants!  
The naive milkmaid goes around selling Hari!

33.283

5.2.32

The sap of the earth has spread through the branches,  
The god of love in the eyes has come to dwell...!  
Filling the breasts with voluptuous love to brim,  
The connoisseur, the Master of the god of pleasures has indeed arrived!  
The sap of the earth has spread through the branches,  
The god of love in the eyes has come to dwell...!

He has turned things topsy-turvy, this lord with the garland of flowers,  
The one with incomparable might, the sweet ambrosia of the entire universe  
He has conferred upon this girl!  
The sap of the earth has spread through the branches  
The god of love in the eyes has come to dwell...!

Amazing strength he has given to this frail woman

While cowardice he has reserved for the most manly of men  
Upon her, he has conferred the laughter of the forest creepers  
And the music of *koels* has he put in her voice.  
The sap of the earth has spread through the branches  
The god of love in the eyes has come to dwell...!

Yoga and austerities has he reserved for the detached yogis  
But sheer enjoyment has he in store only for his lovers.  
Penance and rituals he has reserved for the insensitive ones  
But the joy of singing our lord's praises, he has kept for Narsinh!  
The sap of the earth has spread through the branches  
The god of love in the eyes has come to dwell...!

95.142

5.2.33

This dark night- my enemy, has flowed away,  
The mystic Sun is up dazzling in the sky!  
The three worlds now lay open before me,  
The engulfing deluge of Maya is finally allayed!  
This dark night- my enemy, has flowed away,  
The mystic Sun is up dazzling in the sky!

Pretty friend, all my limbs are wide-awake  
To behold the irresistible Master of all *Yogas*!  
Millions of gods of love are surging with the winds  
O I have seen the God of gods!  
This dark night- my enemy, has flowed away,  
The mystic Sun is up dazzling in the sky!

Innumerable lotuses have bloomed  
O how the imprisoned wasp is ultimately freed!  
I have met the Narsaiyya's Lord over there  
He has filled me with absolute contentment!  
This dark night- my enemy, has flowed away,  
The dazzling mystic Sun is up dazzling in the sky!

59.293

5.2.34

This is not the way to find the essence of truth, O Pundits!  
Even with all these heaps of bookish learning,  
You won't fathom it at all without being truly pure!  
This is not the way to find the essence of truth, O Pundits!  
You won't fathom it at all without being truly pure!  
You go for dry empty husk and cast away the grains!  
One cannot appease hunger by mere dry chaff!  
This is not the way to find the essence of truth, O Pundits!

Indulging in sensual pleasures,  
you weave the cloth of your own debasement!  
Everyone merely wallows in wagging tongue!  
In all this verbiage, your heart is still untouched!  
Casting off the grand clothes of the true knowledge, you go for the rags!  
This is not the way to find the essence of truth, O Pundits

Piles of pedantic phrases you may have hoarded;  
Grandiloquence of many kinds you may have mastered  
And many kinds of stuffy philosophies you may parrot;  
But still you are immersed in the mundane world  
And the egoism still rules your mind-  
O innumerable aeons have flowed away in this way!  
This is not the way to find the essence of truth, O Pundits!

Indeed, you have mastered the scriptures and the like  
Yet you stumble in the darkness of the night  
Wandering like blind among the thorns!

I have known this subtle Truth, says Narsaiyo, I have sung it here!  
This way you won't find the essence of truth, O Pundits!

56.292

5.2.35

True fulfillment of my birth is in loving my beloved forever!

Never with dry rituals and harsh austerities

Would I torture my tender body!

All the time I'd play the games of love with my beloved!

True fulfillment of my birth is in loving my beloved forever!

When the final liberation waits on me like a menial servant,

Why should I worship someone else?

True fulfillment of my birth is in loving my beloved forever!

In all our births to come we will ever be your servants!

And the divine *leela* of Narsaiyya's lord we will sing forever!

True fulfillment of my birth is in loving my beloved forever!

488.267

5.2.36

Unless and until you have grasped the essence of the Self

Vain are all your efforts and like unseasonal rains,

You have wasted your human birth.

So what if you have taken a holy bath

Or offered twilight prayers and worship?

So what if you have stayed at home and given alms?

So what if you keep matted locks and smear ashes?  
So what if you have plucked hair on your head?  
Unless and until you have grasped the essence of the Self  
Vain are all your efforts and like unseasonal rains,  
You have wasted your human birth.

So what if you indulge in recitation, penance or go on a pilgrimage?

So what if you count beads and chant the holy name  
So what if you put on a *tilak* or worship Tulsi?  
So what if you drink the water of Ganga?  
Unless and until you have grasped the essence of the Self  
Vain are all your efforts and like unseasonal rains,  
You have wasted your human birth.

So what if you speak of the *Vedas* or grammar?  
So what if you enjoy yourself and have a good time?  
So what if you have grasped the distinctions  
Between the six systems of philosophy?  
So what if you have adhered to the distinction of caste?  
Unless and until you have grasped the essence of the Self  
Vain are all your efforts and like unseasonal rains,  
You have wasted your human birth.

All these are worldly pursuits for filling one's belly  
Until you have seen the absolute *brahman*.  
Says Narsinh, without beholding the Essence  
One wastes his birth precious as *Chintamani* Jewel.  
Unless and until you have grasped the essence of the Self  
Vain are all your efforts and like unseasonal rains,  
You have wasted your human birth.



5.2.37

Wayward progeny of a lewd whore,  
What teaching will bring you to your senses?  
Blind teacher and on the top of that, a deaf disciple,  
How on earth can they grasp the knowledge of *brahman*?  
Wayward progeny of a lewd whore,  
What teaching will bring you to your senses?

Not knowing that one's self is the complete *brahman*,  
He wanders around worshipping others,  
He maintains pleasures of dreams are true,  
And he bickers and praises sensuality.  
Wayward progeny of a lewd whore,  
What teaching will bring you to your senses?

He neither knows the Lord as *nirguna*,  
nor has he seen face of His *saguna* form;  
He worships the dead matter, despises the living!  
He is ignorant and lost in the feeling of duality.  
Wayward progeny of a lewd whore,  
What teaching will bring you to your senses?

A true disciple, on the other hand, comes from a true mystic *guru*,  
He alone knows the secret of the *brahman*,

He knows his Lord is close and not distinct from him,  
Narsinh remains close to such a person.

Wayward progeny of a lewd whore,  
What teaching will bring you to your senses?

41.286

5.2.38

We will simply forsake anything that stops us  
From chanting the name of Narayana!  
The beloved of Laxmi we will fervently worship  
With all our hearts, words and deeds.

Like a snake that casts off its skin, we will forsake our clan,  
Our families and even our parents!  
We will leave our wives our sons and even our sisters!  
We will forsake anything that stops us  
From chanting the name of Narayana!

Prahlad left his father and held on to the name of Sri Hari,  
Bharat and Shatrughna left their mother and held on to Sri Rama!  
We will forsake anything that stops us  
From chanting the name of Narayana!

For the sake of Sri Hari, the wife of the sage even left her husband  
Yet untainted by sin, she attained all.  
For the sake of Vitthal, the women of Vraj leave behind everything  
And walk away into the forest of love, says Narsaiyya,  
In Vrindavan, they will revel in passionate love of Hari!  
We will forsake anything that stops us  
From chanting the name of Narayana!

17.277

When I wake up, the world recedes from my sight.  
Only in sleep, its bewildering miseries and enjoyment perplex me!  
My being is a play of the Consciousness:  
The *brahman* playing with the *brahman*!  
When I wake up, the world recedes from my sight.  
Only in sleep, its bewildering miseries and enjoyment perplex me!

The five elements have sprung from the Supreme *brahman*  
And are ever in his mutual embrace.  
Blossom and fruit are parts of the same tree,  
And bole no different from the branch.  
Vedic lore avers that gold is not different from the ornaments,  
Names and forms differ once they are cast,  
Yet, gold is always gold in the end!  
When I wake up, the world recedes from my sight.  
Only in sleep, its bewildering miseries and enjoyment perplex me!

By his own will, he became *Jiva* and *Siva*  
And created the mystery of the fourteen worlds  
'You alone are him! You alone are him!' chants Narsinh  
Remembering him, countless saints have attained their goal!  
When I wake up, the world recedes from my sight.  
Only in sleep, its bewildering miseries and enjoyment perplex me!

5.2.40

Who has sent the old age? I thought youth was here to stay!  
Even threshold seems a mountain now  
And outskirts of the village seems distant like foreign lands to me.  
Even the small pail is now the mighty Ganga for me  
And the hair on my body has irreversibly grayed!  
Who has sent the old age? I thought youth was here to stay!

Nobody asked for it, then how did it come? Never ever did I wait for it.  
At my house, I am humiliated, 'Shove his cot in corner' they say.  
One loves *laddoos* in childhood, in old age  
One relishes *sev* and daily longs for *rabdi*  
Such are burning vices of the age!  
Who has sent the old age? I thought youth was here to stay!

In morning, my vital breath gets upset from hunger  
And they say, 'He is not dying. Why doesn't he sit in one place?'  
Who has sent the old age? I thought youth was here to stay!

Many sons had I, today their wives are cursing me  
And sons-in-law have taken all my daughters,  
See what is one's plight in the old age!  
Who has sent the old age? I thought youth was here to stay!

Nine ganglions have come away and my hour has finally arrived.  
Women disparage and children swear at me, such is the final moment!  
My sons have at last arrived at the door  
Only to take the purse from my chest and depart!  
Who has sent the old age? I thought youth was here to stay!

How shameful is this old age! Hence, cast away your vain pride!  
Only because of religious ways,

Mehta Narsinh has made it beyond this world.  
Who has sent the old age? I thought youth was here to stay!

66.297

5.2.41

With absolute joy, I sing the *brahman*!  
But those encaptivated by their *karma* speak ill of me!  
Even the great religious heads cannot fathom you,  
They can't even make out priceless jewels from mere beads!  
With absolute joy, I sing the *brahman*!  
But those encaptivated by their *karma* speak ill of me!

What is arcane even for the scriptures is pretty clear for the gopis,  
Rare are the ones who can fathom this!  
The beloved of Rama lusts not after women,  
But these confounded mortals spread base lies!  
With absolute joy, I sing the *brahman*!  
But those encaptivated by their *karma* speak ill of me!

The perfect one is full of the perfect bliss, others worship elsewhere,  
But Narsaiyyo sings the attributes of the absolute  
And not carnal craving as the lustful think!  
With absolute joy, I sing the *brahman*!  
But those encaptivated by their *karma* speak ill of me!

2.272

5.2.42

You alone are the beginning, the middle, and the end!  
You alone, you alone, Sri Hari!  
You are the indivisible *brahman*,  
Who even the likes of Brahma cannot fathom  
And the misled men search elsewhere!

Millions of suns and moons dwell in your moonlike face,  
Where the seeking eyes of men never reach  
And just like the darkness,  
which loses against the effulgent blaze of the sun  
*'Neti ! Neti!'* the Scriptures vainly preach!  
You alone are the beginning, the middle, and the end!  
You alone, you alone, Sri Hari!

The Lord of the Earth is the Lord of million million universes  
The million million universes are like pores of his skin!  
*Saguna* is a mere guise of *Nirguna* !  
You can shatter the veil of Illusion, once you grasp this Mystery!  
You alone are the beginning, the middle, and the end!  
You alone, you alone, Sri Hari!

Yet he is not alone, he is not distinct from his creation,  
Which is his all-encompassing energy!  
Sri Krishna is without the beginning,  
Total bliss is his nature and Radha his ravishing beloved!  
You alone are the beginning, the middle, and the end!  
You alone, you alone, Sri Hari!

None knows the secret of the Vedas,  
And hardly few know their essence,  
Like Suka, Sanak and the divine minstrel Narada  
Who meditate on the Absolute *brahman*!  
You alone are the beginning, the middle, and the end!  
You alone, you alone, Sri Hari!

The Absolute *Purushottama* passionately plays as his lovers plead!  
And by being his girlfriend, Narsinh relishes the very nectar  
The women of Vraj so delightfully revel in!  
You alone are the beginning, the middle, and the end!  
You alone, you alone, Sri Hari!

5.2.43

You may have obtained *nama*, but without Rama  
Your title of Vaishnava is barren like a cradle in a childless home  
Or a marriage procession without groom!

Lord resides within you, but you couldn't discern him;  
You wander aimlessly thinking him to be afar;  
You calculate about the One beyond the calculations;  
You limit the Illimitable

And in this state of twoness, you count your futile beads!  
You may have obtained *nama*, but without Rama  
Your title of Vaishnava is barren like a cradle in a childless home  
Or a marriage procession without groom!

You try to be Harijan without having Hari!  
How can pangs of hunger subside by a bash of hollow words?  
How can throes of separation subside by mere donning of ascetic clothes?

It is like the futile roaring of rainless clouds!  
You may have obtained *nama*, but without Rama  
Your title of Vaishnava is barren like a cradle in a childless home  
Or a marriage procession without groom!

You think you have become harijan by merely singing lord's praises,  
You try to rival a swan, when your deeds are those of a crow!



The lord will indeed disregard you!  
You may have obtained *nama*, but without Rama  
Your title of Vaishnava is barren like a cradle in a childless home  
Or a marriage procession without groom!

Says Narsinh, only he is worth our obeisance,  
Whose mind has dissolved into the formless;  
In whom the delusion of the world of differences is shattered  
And in whom the flame of renunciation is resplendent.  
You may have obtained *nama*, but without Rama  
Your title of Vaishnava is like a cradle in a childless home  
Or a marriage procession without the groom!

19.278

5.3 Miscellaneous Compositions

5.3.1

Always up to some prank, this mischievous little Govindji over there

It's always I who has to suffer!

As this little cowherd foolishly totters, the girl becomes fervid!

Always up to some prank, this mischievous little Govindji over there

It's always I who has to suffer!

'*Kum now yoo, vow eye doo*', if you can't speak properly why do you babble like this?

Says Narsaiyyo, stop all these childish pranks, just take us to your place, and enjoy us!

Always up to some prank, this mischievous little Govindji over there

It's always I who has to suffer!

308.213

### 5.3.2

Awake O Jadava, O Krishna the cowherd!

Who will take the cows to graze?

When hundreds of cowherds come thronging

Who will be their leader?

Awake O Jadava, O Krishna the cowherd!

Who will take the cows to graze?

Who will relish sweet dishes made from milk and *ghee*?

Who will drink deliciously thickened milk?

O Hari, mighty like an elephant, who will bridle terrible Kaliya?

Who will bear the weight of the entire earth?

Awake O Jadava, O Krishna the cowherd!

Who will take the cows to graze?

While grazing the cows on the banks of Jamuna

Who will play the honeyed flute?

We will always please you by singing your praises, says Narsaiyya

Else, who will grasp our hands when we sink?

Awake O Jadava, O Krishna the cowherd!

Who will take the cows to graze?

7.274

5.3.3

`Gimme that moon to play with, Ma! Gimme those stars!

Gimme those clusters and stuff them all in my pocket!

He flushes, he cries, he stares at the moon

Jasoda wipes his tears, 'Don't be so crazy, Kanha!

The moon is far up in the sky! There are kids in every house,

You alone don't seem to have any sense!'

`Gimme that moon to play with, Ma! Gimme those stars!

Gimme those clusters and stuff them all in my pocket!

Taking water in a bowl, she showed him the moon

And consoled Narsaiyya's Lord!

`Gimme that moon to play with, Ma! Gimme those stars!

Gimme those clusters and stuff them all in my pocket!

4.100

(5.3.4.1 and 5.3.4.2 are autobiographical compositions)

5.3.4.1.

In Damodar lake, near Girnar hill, Mehtaji frequently took bath.

Poor sweepers full of devotion for Hari approached him

And touched his feet with devotion.

‘Great soul, pray come to our place, and sing *kirtans* with us!’, they prayed.

In Damodar lake, near Girnar hill, Mehtaji frequently took bath.

‘So what we too may attain the wealth called Bhakti

And escape the bewildering snares of life and death!’

They joined their hands and implored him.

In Damodar lake, near Girnar hill, Mehtaji frequently took bath.

Seeing them plead, Mehtaji, the kindest of all Vaishnavas,

Was overcome with compassion.

‘The love for lord and the bigotry hardly go together,

For all are equal in his eyes.

Purify the place and wait for me,” the generous Vaishnava replied.

In Damodar lake, near Girnar hill, Mehtaji frequently took bath.

Mehta came with *prasad* and spent the whole night celebrating.

In the morning, he sung *bhajans*

And all Vaishnavas’ hearts were full of contentment.

In Damodar lake, near Girnar hill, Mehtaji frequently took bath.

Singing Hari’s praises on cymbals and drums as he returned home,

The *Nagaras* mocked him, ‘Is this the way a *brahmin* behaves?’

In Damodar lake, near Girnar hill, Mehtaji frequently took bath.

But Mehta kept silent, what can you say to unworthy people?

All the men and women of this caste woke up and derided him,

‘O what kind of person are you, O Mehta!

In Damodar lake, near Girnar hill, Mehtaji frequently took bath.

You care not for caste, you care not for creed,

you care not for discrimination!’

Nevertheless, Narsaiyyo said humbly  
'O I have the support of the true Vaishnavas  
In Damodar lake, near Girnar hill, Mehtaji frequently took bath.

#### 5.3.4.2

We are like that-yes we are like what you say!  
Call us depraved by love, we will still serve our loved Damodar.  
We are like that-yes we are like what you say!

Our minds were once preoccupied in the worldly matters  
Now, absorbed in Hari's nectar, it wanders door to door singing!  
We are like that-yes we are like what you say!

The customs and rituals, we heartily dislike  
And even that which gives us all the worldly riches  
Can't be compared to our lord!  
We are like that-yes we are like what you say!

We are indeed base, baser than the basest in the world!  
Say what you will; we are neck-deep in his love!  
We are like that-yes we are like what you say!

I, Narsaiyyo, am a man of base deeds, for I love Vaishnavas  
Who ever distances himself from *harijans* has wasted his birth!  
We are like that-yes we are like what you say!

#### 1.48-49

#### 5.3.5

Kaanji, Kaanji is what everyone calls you,  
But we will only call you cowherd!  
And if you unjustly accuse us,  
We will go and stay at Mathura!  
Kaanji, Kaanji is what everyone calls you,  
But we will only call you cowherd!  
You are only a kid, slurping at the buttermilk!

When we catch hold of your hand,  
You are scared out of your wits!  
Kaanji, Kaanji is what everyone calls you,  
But we will only call you cowherd!  
The one whom gods like Brahma and Shanker  
And sages like Sukaji attempt to please,  
Is tied to a mortar by his mother for stealing butter!  
Kaanji, Kaanji is what everyone calls you,  
But we will only call you cowherd!  
Everybody in the world knows him as a cowherd among his cows,  
It is great to attain Narsaiyya's Lord,  
The complete and compassionate *brahman*!  
Kaanji, Kaanji is what everyone calls you,  
But we will only call you cowherd!  
20.105

### 5.3.6

'Leave this river full of lotuses, child  
You might wake up our master fast asleep.  
He will definitely not spare you if he wakes  
Moreover, the sin of murdering a mere child will be on our heads!  
Leave this river full of lotuses, child  
You might wake up our master fast asleep!  
Tell me, boy, have you lost your way, or has some foe led you astray?  
You seem to have run out of your time, dear child  
Or else, why would you ever think of coming here?  
Leave this river full of lotuses, child  
You might wake up our master fast asleep!'

`No I haven't lost my way and no foe can lead me astray,  
O consorts of Cobra, back there in Mathura  
I just happened to lose your man's head in a friendly bet!

`Leave this river full of lotuses, child  
You might wake up our master fast asleep!

`You are so cute, so pretty, and irresistible!  
Tell us how many children your mother has  
So that you are unwanted?

Leave this river full of lotuses, child  
You might wake up our master fast asleep!

`I am Natwar, the younger of the two brothers  
Go and wake up that snake of yours  
I am Krishna- the dark one!

`Leave this river full of lotuses, child  
You might wake up our master fast asleep!

`Come, come, we will give you garland worth lakhs  
We will give you a necklace made of pure gold  
Without letting our master know!

Leave this river full of lotuses, child  
You might wake up our master fast asleep!

`What am I to do with that garland of yours?  
Pray what is the use of that necklace to me?  
And why should you pilfer in your own house, O serpents?

`Leave this river full of lotuses, child  
You might wake up our master fast asleep!

Distraught they shook up the sleeping master by feet.  
They wrenched him by his whiskers in great distress,  
`O wake up Master', they said, `there is a child at our door!'

`Leave this river full of lotuses, child  
You might wake up our master fast asleep!



The two powerful ones were locked in a mortal combat,  
In no times Krishna mastered the colossal cobra,  
His thousand hoods hissing furiously  
Like the thundering lunar constellation in monsoon!  
`Leave this river full of lotuses, child  
You might wake up our master fast asleep!'

`He will torture our cobra!' the wives lamented,  
`He will take him to Mathura and behead him!  
O forgive our husband', they pleaded,  
`We ignorant sinners could not recognize you!  
`We could not fathom you O Lord!  
`Leave this river full of lotuses, child  
You might wake up our master fast asleep!'

They offered pearls in devotion and somehow managed to rescue  
Their seized husband from Narsaiyya's Lord!  
`Leave this river full of lotuses, child  
You might wake up our master fast asleep!'

### 5.3.7

Let go your embrace for a while and send my lord! I fall at your feet!

Radhika, the jewel incomparable, beloved of Vitthal! I implore!

With your love, you've conquered the invincible, bound the boundless

And are completely in charge of the house

As even the earth, the bearer of the oceans moves around

Seeking your grace!

Let go your embrace for a while and send my lord! I fall at your feet!

Radhika, the jewel incomparable, beloved of Vitthal! I implore!

What's the use of man's love for man?

It's always woman who goes with him best.

In whose *maya* the whole world is immersed

Hari himself is immersed in Radha's company!

Let go your embrace for a while and send my lord! I fall at your feet!

Radhika, the jewel incomparable, beloved of Vitthal! I implore!

Forsake your vanity, frolicsome girl! For one's pride vanishes in no time!

Says Narsinh, send my lord and the mud will be cleansed,

As the vessel is washed.

Let go your embrace for a while and send my lord! I fall at your feet!

Radhika, the jewel incomparable, beloved of Vitthal! I implore

(From autobiographical composition 'Mameru' 12.25)

### 5.3.8

Little Hari, my cute one, don't you know the secret?

Can't you understand such small thing?

Why do you hug me in front of these mean people?

Little Hari, my cute one, don't you know the secret?

I am still so young and yet you occupy my heart!

Don't you have any morals?  
You tug at the sari of someone's wife the first thing in the morning!  
Little Hari, my cute one, don't you know the secret?

A few rare ones know that solitude is best  
For the union with Hari or humans!  
The whole world drops away in meeting Narsaiyya's Lord!  
Little Hari, my cute one, don't you know the secret?

275. 202

5.3.9

This cute little Gokul, my beloved has made it into Vaikunth!  
He pampers his devotees here and gives unlimited joy to the Gopis!

He, who cannot be grasped by all the philosophies,  
And never appears even before the greatest of sages,  
Churns buttermilk at Nanda's place  
And grazes cows in the Vrindavan woods!  
This cute little Gokul, my lord has made it into Vaikunth!

My beloved, the ultimate indestructible *brahman*,  
serves here all on his own  
And stands naked in front of the Gopis pleading for butter!  
This cute little Gokul, my beloved has made it into Vaikunth!

Narsaiyya's lord, who is beyond reach even of gods  
And who even Lord Shanker serves,  
Gives himself unto his devotees,  
So that even the ultimate liberation becomes their maidservant!  
This cute little Gokul, my beloved has made it into Vaikunth!

**CHAPTER 6**  
**TRANSLATING NARSINH MEHTA'S POEMS:**  
**CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES**

'We have here indeed what may very probably be the most complex type of event yet produced in the evolution of the cosmos,' commented I A Richards on the possibility of transferring Chinese philosophical thought into English<sup>clxxxiv</sup>. Indeed, as an act that involves not just interpretation of words from one language into another, but also that which involves interpreting one world in terms of another; translation is one of the most enigmatic and significant human activities, and it is also one of the most unglamorous and mundane. Besides, it is also extremely vulnerable to criticism, which can range from cold neglect, a flippant dismissal to condemnation.

Translating Narsinh Mehta was even a more risky venture as the huge chasm that separates the source language and culture from the receptor language and culture seemed almost unbridgeable. They were separated from one another by time and place. A translator who would undertake such a task would immediately get a first hand experience of all the challenges, which are sometimes called the 'problems' of translation, as they are discussed in the chapter two.

The earlier translators of Narsinh's compositions included names like Mahatma Gandhi, K M Munshi, and Swami Mahadevanand. However, the most complete and critically edited collection of the poems appeared only in 1986. Hence, I had a good fortune of using texts that were more reliable as originals for my translation. As noted earlier in the chapter on the background to Narsinh Mehta, all the poems were preserved orally and the earliest manuscript of Narsinh's compositions is believed to date almost a century after his death. Therefore the earlier collections of Narsinh's poems like Shri Iccharam Desai's collection (1913) relied largely on recording the orally preserved compositions and collecting manuscripts. As a result, plenty of interpolations and variant readings had found place in these collections. Dr. Shivilal Jesalpura's critically edited texts are believed to be quite reliable in the critical circle.

The present selection of Narsinh's poems is by no means 'representative' though it includes, more or less, all the types of poems he attempted, for instance, the erotic, the metaphysical-philosophical type, those relating to Krishna's childhood, narrative type and the didactic ones. The aim was to select his most famous compositions as well as those, I thought, would read well in translation and to provide fairly accurate and readable renderings of his outstanding poem to non-Gujarati readers. Omissions are inexcusable and yet unavoidable at times and I take the blame for them solely on myself.

The chapter is divided for the sake of convenience into following sections: i) *eyr ybroken*, which focuses on aspects of translating *songs*, ii) translating culture which discusses the aspects of culture involved in translating, iii) linguistics and semantics of translating, and finally conclusion.

### **6.1 `eyr ybroken'**

*'Soun ys noght but eyr ybroken'* says the eagle to Chaucer in *The House of Fame*, which translates into contemporary English as 'sound is nothing but broken air'. Walter.J.Ong in 'A Dialectic of Aural and Objective Correlatives' cites the line from Chaucer .<sup>clxxxv</sup> Ong's main argument is that while considering a poem as some sort of object or a thing, one overlooks the fact that it is also sound. The 'tactile and visualist bias' is very old and pervasive especially when we consider the work of literature in terms of objects, structures, skeletons and other spatial analogies. But when we consider literature in terms of sound, oral and aural existence, we enter more profoundly into this world of sound as such, 'the I-thou world' where, through the mysterious interior resonance persons commune with persons, reaching one another's interiors in a way in which one can never reach the interior of an object (p.499). The reduction of sound to 'broken air' and thus to spatial analogies is much too facile. 'In its ineluctable interiority,' writes Ong, 'related to this irreducible and elusive and interior economy of the sound world, all verbal expression, and in particular all true literature, remains forever something mysterious.' This means that a written text is already a loss of this mysterious element, and it is already a translation of words as sounds. Narsinh Mehta's songs already lose this mysterious quality once they are presented in print but come back to life mysteriously when retranslated into oral performance. Post-Structuralism celebrates this loss of oral aural mystique in writings and believes that writing is more mysterious than the text vocalized, though it need not concern us in the present chapter.

The biggest challenge one has to face as a translator is the fact that Narsinh's poems are actually *songs* and are meant to be performed live before the audience, which even includes the God, and in a certain religious conventional context. For instance, his famous matutinals, or '*prabhatiyas*' as they are called, are conventionally sung in the morning. Some of his songs are usually sung in a religious gathering in a temple or at home. William Radice, in his introduction to the translation of Rabindranath Tagore's poems, quite rightly points out that the songs being very culture specific are impossible to translate<sup>clxxxvi</sup>. The emotive associations of Narsinh's word music have no equivalents in English. The compositions are full of features that mark them as oral performative texts, for example, features like consonance, internal and end rhymes, refrains, repetitions, parallelisms, meters used for the songs, the specification for a particular *raga* and so on. In short, the extensive use of what Indian aestheticians call *sabdalamkar* or the 'ornaments of sound' is a characteristic feature of Narsinh's poetry as well as most of the medieval Indian poetry. In Indian aesthetics,

*sabdalamkaras* form a contrast to the *arathalamkars* or the 'ornaments of sense'. The *arthalamkaras* include figures of speech like hyperbole, irony as well as simile and metaphor and the like.

If one is to consider the suggestion put forward by scholars like Radice<sup>clxxxvii</sup> and Riffaterre<sup>clxxxviii</sup>, to substitute all 'literariness inducing' devices in the source text with parallel devices in the target text and translate songs into songs, rhymes into rhymes, consonance into consonance, meter into meter, then great liberties will have to be taken with the semantic content of the original. One would rather agree with W H Auden's observation that the sound of words, their rhythmical relations and all meanings and associations of meanings which depend upon sound, like rhymes and puns are untranslatable. He points out, 'poetry is not, like music, pure sound. Any elements in a poem which are not based on verbal experience are to some degree, translatable into another tongue, for example, images, similes and metaphors which are drawn from sensory experience' (p.34).<sup>clxxxix</sup>

In the case of Narsinh's poetry, many elements like meter, word music, consonance, and rhymes had to be sacrificed in order to stay close to the semantic content. Gujarati meter of course, cannot have an equivalent in English because the Indian languages, in contrast to the accentual English language are quantitative; that is, it is the length of the syllable rather than the stress that gives them their distinctive character. Besides, as Lefevre has opined<sup>cxc</sup> 'imitating meter, rhyme, and alliteration usually distorts the poem altogether. Narsinh's songs are translated into free verse in order to do better justice to the semantic element as well as to retain the poetic quality. An attempt has been made to reproduce the lyrical quality of the compositions by reproducing approximately some refrains, repetitions, and some consonance wherever it is possible. However, an attempt is made to reproduce this quality mainly by reproducing the lyrical tone and the lyrical outlook of the compositions.

Light, O Light brilliant lamps!

Draw *rangoli* with exquisite pearls!

Sing, O sing the auspicious hymns, sweet proud girls,

And beat, beat the festive drums,

For today is Diwali! O it's Festival of Lights for me!

For the Lord with garland of wild flowers, at last, has come to me!

(5.2.20)

Tell me truly, my dark beloved,

To which lovely girl were you making love?

(5.1.33)

However, this lyrical quality was difficult to reproduce in the case of Narsinh's devotional, didactic and philosophical verse. The fact that word music imparts a great deal of beauty to Narsinh's poetry makes it difficult to translate this type of poetry into English, as its propositional content is not

lyrical in the conventional sense of the word. The success of these poems is largely due to the happy marriage of the word music with the sentimental moralistic and philosophical content. The epigrammatic and compact expressions inevitably had to be recomposed into rather loose syntactical patterns of English. In this type of poetry, as most of the word music and sentimental verbal associations could not be recomposed into the language as different as English, the translations appear dull, prosaic and without the impact which the source texts have in Gujarati. For instance, the famous *Vaishnava Jana to* ...was rendered in following way:

One who feels others grief as his own,  
Who obliges others in distress  
Without being swollen with pride,  
He alone can be called a Vaishnava!

Humbly he bows before everyone in the world  
And indeed scorns none.  
He is resolute in his words,  
Deeds and mind - Glory be to his mother!  
For he alone is a true Vaishnava!

He views everyone with equal eyes;  
He has relinquished the tormenting thirst  
And looks upon another's woman  
As his own mother!  
He alone can be called a Vaishnava!

(5.2.22)

Meditate! Meditate on Hari, O dimwitted sloth,  
So that the misery of the innumerable births is allayed!  
For, doing other mundane things is simply futile  
As the Death, baiting you with delusions will carry you away!  
Meditate! Meditate on Hari, O dimwitted sloth!

(5.2.16)



In some *padas*, the content is technical and occult rather than conventionally lyrical. Therefore, the translation is in danger of being awkward and stiff, for instance in a composition like this

Meditate, meditate, the lord is in your eye, as a divine ecstasy in your inner forehead.

In person, he will touch you with love, his wonderful face with incomparable eyes!

(5.2.17)

The inner forehead referred here is the occult 'third eye' or the *aajnya chakra* in certain esoteric *tantrik* practices of *kundalini* energy.

Besides, certain expressions typical to Gujarati songs like *re* and *lol* coming at the end of a musical phrase and which are vocal gestures of endearment, and ejaculation could not be reproduced in English. In certain places, expression *O* is used. However excessive use of *O* in English translation would sound old fashioned or even more terrible-it would sound Victorian.

Care has been taken not to translate songs into the 'modernist' free verse, which relies on devices like dislocation of syntax and use of minimalist-Imagists conventions. It should be pointed out that in translating a text from different poetics, equivalent should be sought at the level of aesthetics that affect the text. The attempts to adapt a text belonging to different poetics, to contemporary modernist poetics do not do full justice to the source language text.

Translating a discourse whose medium is oral word and whose performer- audience relationship is largely face to face, into a discourse whose medium is written word and the relationship between the performer and the audience is not face to face, raises some complex questions. What one is doing here is not merely reproducing sense and style of the source language text but also *shifting* one type of *discourse* into another type. This type of discourse shift is involved in the translation of most of the medieval Indian poetry into English. This shift is largely responsible for converting live sparrows of oral-performative texts into dead eagles of written text. Most accusations and laments for loss of 'flavour' and 'charm' from people against the translation of *Bhakti* poetry are actually laments for loss of 'ear experience' of the word music and emotive associations linked to the source language text. This results not only from difference between two acoustic personalities of the languages but also from the difference between two types of discourses. Popovic has discussed various types of shifts that take place while translating: Constitutive Shift is the inevitable shift that takes place between two languages, two poetics and two styles; in generic shift the characteristic features of a text as a literary genre change and in individual shift the translator's own style and

idiolect may introduce a system of individual deviations.<sup>cxci</sup>

## **6.2 Translating Culture**

The difference between cultures is another major challenge one faces while translating poets like Narsinh into English. In fact, language and culture cannot be separated and both are inextricably interwoven with each other. Julia Kristeva's thesis that one signifying cultural practice is interwoven with the elements from other signifying cultural practices—that is, the notion of intertextuality, is particularly important here.<sup>cxcii</sup> A verbal text as a signifying practice already contains elements from other signifying systems like mythology, systems of food and fashion, indigenous medicinal system, metaphysics, literary conventions and genres, musical system, festivals, religious-ritualistic beliefs and even superstitions. No text can be an island or can remain isolated in a network of signifying structures called culture. Hence, one does not translate a piece of text, though it may seem isolated, but tries to find equivalents for the entire network involved in the construction of the text. All this becomes very apparent when one attempts to translate Narsinh.

Genres hardly have equivalents in a different literary tradition, as they are conventions of a particular literary tradition. They may travel to another tradition but they are no longer the same. The flexible and lyrical form of *Pada*, which has been discussed in the chapter three, has no equivalent in English. Hence, the free verse renderings of Narsinh's poems have no fixed form in English.

Of course, the mythology of Krishna and Radha has no equivalent in English culture, nor do the allusions and references to *Puranic* characters and events have parallel in the target language culture. They are untranslatable and therefore have been only transliterated. A glossary of culture-specific Indian terms has been provided as appendix. Narsinh often refers to *Puranic* characters like Pralhad, Harishchandra, Shukadevaji, and Narada to give an illustration of true devotees and the miracles they can bring about. A glossary seems to be the only way out.

Certain items referring to codes of dress and food too do not have equivalents in English or even if it has a rough and approximate equivalent, the connotations and details are very different. For instance, '*choli*' which occurs often is a sort of bodice, but the whole lot of conventional erotic associations and connotations are lost and certain type of triviality sets in. It may also be because the whole way of looking at sex and the erotic is greatly different in the Indian and the Western culture. It can be said about '*jhanjhar*' and '*payal*' which means anklets but in Gujarati, it carries a distinct

charge of erotic associations. In such cases, in some places I have only borrowed the lexical items in English or replaced equivalents in English. I have mainly borrowed '*choli*' within italics and used anklets for '*jhanjhar*'. The same can be applied to Gujarati food items, for instance certain Gujarati delicacies like '*rabdi*' a kind of sweetmeat have been only transliterated. The terms are explained in the glossary.

Items belonging to the indigenous medicinal system, '*ayurveda*' are also to be found in the compositions. In a interesting '*pada*', Narsinh compares his beloved Lord with various types of ayurvedic medicines like dried ginger or '*ajmain*'<sup>exciii</sup>. In most of the places, I have borrowed the item in English or replaced it by approximate equivalents.

Certain omens like 'fluttering of left eye' and 'auspicious moment' or '*muhurat*' are culture specific and are untranslatable.

So are traditional kinship terms and the conventional stereotypes that are so peculiar to Indian culture. For instance, *saasu* or the mother-in-law is a stereotype oppressor of her daughter-in-law along with *nanand* or the sister-in-law as her accomplice. Hence in many padas of Narsinh when Radha, a married girl in love with Krishna, refers to her in-laws she is evoking a typical or rather stereotyped situation where the in-laws are keeping an eye on their daughter-in-law's activities. Allegorically they connote the norms and the dictates of the mundane world, which interfere with devotional activities and thus are detrimental in *Bhakti*.

Similarly, gopi or Radha addresses her female companion as *sakhi*, which literally means female friend. However, the use of words like female friend or girl friend would not be appropriate in English. Hence, the word friend had to be used. Yet, the word *sakhi* has special connotation in certain Vaishnava sects. The ideal devotee would be like *sakhi* to the Lord, His Girl friend. This signification cannot be rendered into English.

Certain references to the Indian eroticism, especially the reference to *Kamashastra* or the lore of eroticism, appear awkward in translation. For instance, there is a reference to woman-on-man coital position called *vipreeta rati* or literally 'intercourse in contrary way' in Narsinh's poem no. 21. As using the phrase like 'the contrary way' would appear awkward and even incomprehensible, I have used, 'I rolled over him in our love play' in order to suggest the playful element in the whole business.

This is how I bewitched him, friend,

I rolled over him in our love play!  
`No, no!' cried he as he tried to flee,  
And he cried out for his mother!  
(5.1.39)

Associated with eroticism is the conventional notion of what constitutes a woman's beauty in Indian tradition. For instance, in the following poem:

Wear these ornaments and necklaces, elephant-gaited one!  
How many times to tell you to get started!  
We'll kiss the nectarous mouth of our admirer, embrace him, and gambol  
Casting aside all our coyness and shame!  
Let's go and play dear friend! Leave aside the churning of curds  
(5.1.22)

The reference to the girl as `elephant gaited one' would raise brows or sniggers in West. *Gajagamini* or the woman whose gait is like that of an elephant is considered beautiful in Indian tradition. A plump woman with narrow waist but `droops slightly from the weight of breasts' is sexually attractive in India. This notion of woman's attractiveness is quite different from the Western notion of woman's beauty. Therefore, it becomes difficult to convey such a notion in English translation.

The words like *ras*, which literally means `flavour', `sap', `essence', and `nectar' is used in many ways in Indian tradition. It is used in Indian aesthetics to denote an aesthetic mood that is based on *bhava* or the essence of aesthetic experience and *rasika* is the person who wants to enjoy the *rasa*. The *rasika* is translated as connoisseur when used for Krishna when he is filled with erotic excitement. However, the word connoisseur hardly communicates this sense.

Terms belonging to Indian metaphysical and philosophical systems also do not have accurate equivalents in English. Concepts like *maya* or the *brahman* has been at times rendered as `illusion' or `the absolute' only to avoid monotony, though they are not quite the same. In most places, they have been borrowed in English. The words that describe the *brahman* like the *satchitananda* literally meaning that which has the qualities of the Truth, The Consciousness, and the ultimate Bliss have been borrowed without translating. In fact, the whole way of looking at things differs in the two cultures especially the way of looking at sexuality, religion, sentimentality, and even the moral issues. These of course cannot be translated.

### 6.3 Linguistics and Semantics of Translation

Culture and language are not mutually exclusive domains of human signification. There is a great difference in the syntactical and lexical organization between Gujarati and English language. For instance, while the verb usually occurs at the end of clause in Gujarati, it occurs between the subject and the remaining part of the predicate in English. Gujarati has more inflexions and hence greater flexibility in word order compared to the more or less rigid order of English. As a result whereas an inversion would not be appear as a jarring deviation in Gujarati, it would certainly appear so in English. Unlike the prepositions in English, Gujarati has post-positions. These differences in the syntactic and lexical organization between the two languages call for a number of 'adjustments' while reproducing the message in the receptor language. For instance, the famous composition *bhootal bhakti padarath motu...* had to be rendered as:

Great is the wealth of *bhakti* found only on the earth,

Not found even in the realms of Brahma!

(5.2.8)

However literally it would be something like:

(earth-on) (*bhakti*) (wealth) (great) (Brahma's realm-in)(not)

At the lexical level, too the distinction between pronouns of address in Gujarati like honorific '*tamey*' and familiar '*tu*' cannot be rendered into English. Some lexical peculiarities of Narsinh's poetry could not be reproduced in English. For example, Narsinh's fondness for using '*di*' suffix to nouns like '*gori*' (fair one) or '*deha*' (body) turning them into '*gordi*' (dear cute fair one) or '*dehadi*' (cute little body). This suffix turns the nouns into their diminutive forms and at the same time signifies excessive fondness for the thing.

Translating idioms word by word is almost impossible for an idiom means a group of words whose meaning considered as a unit is different from the meaning of each word considered separately. Certain idioms in Narsinh Mehta's poems have a function which is not merely semantic, that is, the images signified by the idiom are very poetic and hence add to the overall experience of the poem. For instance, in a poem '*doodhe voothya meh, sakarna dhim jaamyā re*', the refrain is an idiomatic expression which literally means 'it was raining milk and sugar was being heaped' and connotes a feeling of extreme bliss or ecstasy. Nevertheless, the image of sugar and raining milk is important in the poem, as the experience of Krishna is not just of extreme ecstasy but of extreme sweetness. Krishna is associated with sweetness, he is known as '*madhuradhipati*' - the killer of a demon

named Madhu and also the lord of sweetness whose everything is sweet. Hence, the image suggested by the idiom is retained in the translation.

`As if it was rapture of rains of milk

And all the sweetness of sugar was being hoarded in heaps!

(5.1.1)

Ambiguity arises when there is more than one clear interpretation. A signifier does not have a single unequivocal signified in such cases. Ambiguity is not considered as a flaw in a literary text but is seen as one of the properties that enhance aesthetic quality of the text.

Narsinh's very famous composition, `*prem ras paa ne...*' contains an interesting example of ambiguity. In the composition, Narsinh says, `*tatva nu tapanu tuchh a laage..*' in which the word `*tapanu*' is interpreted by the critics in two ways: i) as `*tu -panu*' as 'you-ness' to signify the otherness or separateness of the Lord as a lover and as an entity and ii) as the noted critic Anantra Rawal<sup>xciv</sup> has observed it indicates the chaffing or producing useless husk which metaphorically denotes arid and futile philosophical debates disliked by Narsinh who lays great stress on affective rather than rational relationship with the divine. These interpretations are not mutually contradictory as both denote the things Narsinh disliked and hence have negative associations, but while the first one is distinctly Vedantic as well as erotic, the other interpretation is more appropriate in the context as the next line uses the metaphor of husk and grain, and had to be retained. The translation offered is as follows:

Serve me the draught of love's ambrosia

One bedecked with peacock feathers!

This futile threshing of arid philosophies taste so insipid!

These emaciated cattle crave merely the dry husk,

They pine not for the ultimate release!

Serve me the draught of love's ambrosia

One bedecked with peacock feathers!

(5.2.29)

Another interesting example of ambiguity arises from the clever use of the word *bhog* which can mean not just enjoyment but also suffering in the well known philosophical poem *Jaagi ne jou to jagat dise nahi, oongh ma atpata bhog bhaase*. It means that when I am awake spiritually I cannot see the phenomenal world, but only in sleep do I perceive the bewildering temptations/woes.

Sleeping and awakening of course are used as metaphors for the states of ignorance and enlightenment respectively. It turns on the head the conventional belief that we can perceive the phenomenal world only when we are awake. The cognition of the phenomenal world and all its temptations and woes is actually a dream and illusion born out of the sleep of ignorance. In English, however, the word that combines the signification of pleasure and suffering was not available. Hence, a compromise had to be made

When I wake up, the world recedes from my sight.

Only in sleep, its bewildering miseries and enjoyment perplexes me!

(5.2.39)

This of course takes away much of the force and poetic quality of the poem but somehow the plurisignation had to be rendered in order to capture Narsinh's fatalistic vision of the phenomenal world.

Another interesting situation arises when a text contains two languages, a situation alluded to by Derrida<sup>cxv</sup>. There is a poem in which many Sanskrit phrases from the *Geeta Govind* are borrowed directly by Narsinh in his poem. The poem is *Sundariratna-mukhchandra avalokva...* In the second stanza Narsinh puts a Sanskrit phrase *twamasi mam jeevan* in the mouth of the charming milkmaid, Radha, to which Krishna replies using Sanskrit phrases *twamasi shringar mam, twamasi mam* .In translation, these portions are translated into archaic English and also put into italics to suggest that they have been borrowed into the text. The poem in translation appears as follows:

The dark one turned to gaze the moonlike face of the jewel among beauties,

Their eyes met, their desolation ended, the lord pleaded and took the other half of his self close to him.

Putting her arms around him, the girl with a ravishing face said, ` *Thou art my life,*' the lord replied, ` *Thou art my embellishment, my garland, in thee alone* am I absorbed and thou alone sway my soul.'

(5.2.36)

The last line of this poem is also a case of ambiguity. Krishna is lavishly praising Radha through out the poem and in the end Narsinh Mehta says *Narsaiya no swami sukhsagar, eh ni stuti eh karta. Eh ni stuti eh karta* can mean two things first he is praising her and at the same time it can mean he is praising himself. This deliberate ambiguity suggests the fundamental oneness within difference between Radha and Krishna. They are separate yet they are one. Krishna in praising Radha is

actually praising himself! This is due to the clever use of pronouns in Gujarati. In translation this sense has been retained in following way at the cost of ambiguity in the original:

Blessed is this beautiful girl, the most desirable, whom Krishna himself praises,  
The very Godhead on whom the likes of Shiva and Virancha meditate,  
Narsaiyya's Lord is the ocean of bliss, is indeed praising himself!

While translating, an attempt has been made to stick as close to the stanza and line length of the original and yet in English the line usually turns out to be longer and occupies larger visual space. Therefore, the stanza form many times does not match in terms of number of lines or in terms of the length of lines in the stanzas. The compactness of sentence construction makes it difficult to reproduce the line length and the length of stanza of the original. The compact philosophical expression is only approximately conveyed in English. For instance, the compact and dense lines

*hu khare tu kharo, hu vina tu nahin;*  
*hu re haiesh tahan lagi tu re haishe.*

This had to be rendered in loose and elaborate constructions.

Only because *I* truly exist, *you* exist! Without me, you cannot be!

You will exist only as long as I exist!

If I no longer exist, you too will cease to be, and become ineffable,

For who will name you if I cease to be?

(5.2.24)

However, there is no addition in the semantic message of the original text.

## **6.4 Conclusion**

It becomes clear from the above given illustrations that translation is inevitably interpretation of a text from one language by the means of another and it is very difficult to render the richly suggestive plurivalency of signifiers in another language. One realizes that the formal properties of language and culture are usually 'lost' in translation. One has to abandon many times the whole structure of 'signifier', and ideally replace another signifier to the signified in one language without



changing it. Nevertheless, as seen in the chapter two, one cannot completely separate the signified from its signifier. The whole problematic of translation, it seems is the problematic of the relationship between the signifier and the signified, the form and the 'meaning'. This theoretical problem strikes the translator with even more intensity when one is dealing with ambiguities and contradictions in the source language text.

One can completely agree with AK Ramanujan's formulation of the problems of translation, `...

One can often convey a sense of the original rhythm but not the language-bound meter; one can mimic levels of diction, even the word play, but not the actual sound of the words. Items are more difficult to translate than relations, textures more difficult than structure, words more difficult than phrasing, linear order more difficult than syntax, lines more difficult than pattern. Yet poetry is made at all those levels-and so is translation.<sup>cxvii</sup>

Translation of Narsinh Mehta's poems into English, as can be seen, required various strategies and adjustments. Lefevere provides a very useful list of seven strategies in the translation of poetry: i) phonemic translation (imitation of ST sounds) somewhat similar to Pound's method of translation, ii) literal translation, iii) metrical translation (imitation of the metre of ST), iv) prose translation (rendering as much as sense as possible), v) rhymed translation (added constraint of rhyme and meter), vi) blank verse translation and vii) interpretation (complete change of form or imitation).<sup>cxviii</sup> All these strategies had to be applied in the present translations to varying extent except the translation of sound, meter, and rhyme. There is no single formula or a general catalogue for translating as various texts from various languages, registers, idiolect, cultures and historical period require various strategies specific to the target language, culture and context. One can completely agree with Hewson and Martin who observe that `.... translation does not involve re-usable techniques to convert a ST into TT but rather a variety of conversion strategies which are to be assessed in relation to the comparative requirements of LC1 (Language Culture 1) and of LC2 (Language Culture 2). Translation is not instrumental but a *comparative* and *adjustable* process...<sup>cxviii</sup>

The strategies and devices involved indeed are dependent on the source language and the source cultures as well as the target language and the target culture.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **ON 'SHUTTING' THE THESIS**

The verb 'to conclude', if we are to go by the Concise Oxford Dictionary, has descended from Latin *cludere clus* which means 'to shut'. This dead metaphor has come to signify the restfulness of

finding an absolute and final answer, a result, decision, and a definite closure to an inquiry and examination-the 'once-and-for-all' of a critical inquiry. Contemporary literary philosophy has thoroughly questioned the idea of definite closures and endings along with the ideas of absolute origins and beginnings, that is the teleology of critical inquiry. However doctoral research thesis in India still follows the dated teleological model as if nothing has happened in the way we think about literature and criticism. While my inquiry yielded some invaluable insights into the area of translation, it has also raised some important questions whose pursuit has already taken me to the exploration of other research areas. Research never takes us to a dead end but opens more portals for other research work.

Working on 'Translation of Narsinh Mehta's Poems into English: With a Critical Introduction' has been a deeply engaging journey through a whole forest of ideas about literature, translation, culture, philosophy, history and criticism. At times it was exciting, at times boring, at times incredibly fascinating, and at times even frustrating, but it was always an enlightening journey. The discovery of an illuminating idea or a satisfying 'equivalent' during the process of translation lit up the dark periods of lethargy, unsystematic groping and beating around the bush. As the research combined the creative thought process with analytical and logical exposition, I could experience first hand, what is meant by 'writers' block' when a certain phrase or a line from Narsinh's poem stared at me in face and I was at loss for finding a corresponding word or a phrase in English. Discipline and patience were combined with sudden moments of illumination.

Translation as process and as product emerged as an extremely complex and multidimensional area of inquiry whose study could provide valuable insights into culture, metaphysics, politics, society, and history. It illuminated the forces that determine the mode and the manner in which human beings communicate with each other and make sense of the world in which they live. No wonder, Translation Studies has been recognized as one of the very significant disciplines to emerge in recent times and it is interdisciplinary in orientation.

As I travel by train to the place where I work, I frequently hear the exquisite songs of Narsinh sung by fellow commuters and I am always amazed to know how living a poet who lived more than five hundred years ago can be. The main driving force behind literary translations is the desire to communicate and share the aesthetic experience with fellow humans who have no access to it. This is one of the main reasons why I undertook translating Narsinh Mehta whose songs haunted me as they did the generations of countless Gujarati people. The major challenge was to translate the poems that are actually songs. The inevitable choice of either sacrificing most of the superb word music or sacrificing the profound and equally radiant semantic content had to be made and the former alternative seemed more feasible as in translation one has to abandon the phonetic texture of

the source language text and replace it with the phonetic texture of the receptor language. Technically speaking, translation of Narsinh Mehta's poems brought home the fact that translation of songs from medieval Indian literature into English involves nothing less than conversion of one type of discourse into another. The compositions in the original language were meant to be sung and performed in front of live audience unlike the English translations. This involved the shift from oral text to written text, from face to face performance to reading experience. It was also a shift from a different language and culture to a different language and cultural frame. It was a conversion from one type of poetics into totally different one. So the difficulties in translation had to be dealt not only in terms of formal linguistics, but also in terms of culture, history, politics, metaphysics and so on. A verbal text as a signifying practice already contains elements from other signifying systems like mythology, systems of food and fashion, indigenous medicinal system, metaphysics, literary conventions and genres, musical system, festivals, religious-ritualistic beliefs and even superstitions. No text can be an island or can remain isolated in a network of signifying structures called culture. Hence, one does not translate a just an isolated piece of text, but tries to find equivalents for the entire network involved in the construction of the text, this of course is next to impossible. Besides culture and language are not mutually exclusive domains of human signification. There is a great difference in the syntactical and lexical organization between Gujarati and English language. Hence, the differences in the syntactic, lexical, and phonetic organization between the two languages call for a number of 'adjustments' while reproducing the message in the receptor language. It is very difficult to render the richly suggestive plurivalency of signifiers in another language. One realizes that the formal properties of language and culture are usually 'lost' in translation. One has to abandon many times the whole structure of 'signifier', and ideally replace another signifier to the signified in one language without changing it. Nevertheless, as seen in the chapter two, one cannot completely separate the signified from its signifier. The whole problematic of translation, it seems is the problematic of the relationship between the signifier and the signified, the form and the 'meaning'. This theoretical problem strikes the translator with even more intensity when one is dealing with ambiguities and contradictions in the source language text. All this becomes very apparent when one attempts to translate Narsinh.

The translated text and the original text are two different animals inhabiting two different worlds. Yet, at a deeper level there was definitely something in common between the two worlds that made the translations possible. The strategies while dealing with the poems were formulated with an intention of taking the target reader as close as possible to the originals, while at the same time making necessary and unavoidable compromises.

On the other hand, the critical examination of Narsinh's poetry revealed the reasons behind his immense popularity and the merits that have earned him renown as one of the greatest poets in

Gujarati. The greatness of Narsinh lies not only in the fact that he wrote some of the most wonderful songs ever written in this country, but also in the fact that he was among the earliest poets to democratize the language of spirituality. One of his forte has been the ability to express complex philosophical ideas in a simple accessible and yet extremely beautiful language. The superb word music of his composition combined with his philosophical, ethical and social vision has also played an important role in securing for him an indisputable place as a poet in Gujarati literary tradition. The language of his compositions shows a remarkable synthesis of the pan-Indian Sanskritic literary tradition and the local folk idiom. Perhaps this is the reason why he appeals to the elite as well as the masses. As his poems were handed down from generation to generation orally, they were preserved in people's memory. Hence, these compositions have a definite place in cultural memory of Gujarat. Narsinh's poetry is an integral part of the historical evolution of the Gujarati language and the growth of the individuality of the language.

In the light of all these features, Narsinh can be called one of the best representatives of *bhakti* movement in India. The movement was at once literary, philosophical and reformist in nature and Narsinh can be placed besides Tulsidas, Kabir, Meera, Basavanna, Dyaneshhwar and other great saint singers of medieval India. Translation of his exquisite poems has been a process of discovery and ever growing intimate involvement.

This research had a definite personal and political dimension to it as perhaps all the research work has in spite of the claim of unequivocal 'neutrality' and objectivity'. As a Maharastrian, born and brought up in Gujarat and engaged in the profession of teaching English literature and language, I discovered that translation is a way of making intimate ties across languages, cultures, historical periods, and across regions. Translation becomes one the strategies of relocating oneself in the complex cultural and linguistic topography of Indian society. Research into the pre-medieval Indian literature, its poetics, its politics, and its sociology was also an exploration of a very crucial phase of the evolution of modern Indian languages, cultures, and identity. The word 'research', if we again take the help of the Concise Oxford Dictionary, etymologically means intensive search. This intensive search was also a quest for personal identity and location. It was fascinating to discover how 'objective' critical inquiry is usually linked to personal concerns.

Besides, being a part of English Studies establishment, this research bears testimony to a certain dramatic reorientation of academic values, priorities, and attitudes long associated with traditional 'Eng.Lit.' academia. The very recognition of translation as a valid area of research and that too of a medieval Gujarati poet into English is possible today due to the heightened awareness of historical and political contexts in which English or Western literatures and the respective canons, were produced, consumed, circulated and promoted. This thesis is one among a growing number of

doctoral researches on translation. English Literary Studies in India has recognized the immense relevance and potential of Translation Studies in contextualizing, in situating itself in the complex social realities of Indian society. I have discussed translation as an inevitably political act in chapter two, accordingly, my translations too have a political purpose: they are in open support of favourable changes in the outlook of the English Studies in India, growing out of the need to contextualize itself, and redefine its purpose and mode in a multilingual, hierarchical society with rich literary traditions and a colonial past.

As I sat as an uneasy medium in the seance, evoking the spirit of an undead Gujarati poet and scribbling in a language which has hardly any use besides utilitarian or professional in the life of an average Indian, I was faced with innumerable questions like the ones asked by *Vetala*, the famous yarn-spinning ghoul in an immensely popular legend of King Vikram and *Vetala*. The search for the answers to these questions could not be contained within the thesis. Some of these questions were: why am I translating into English, as against the usual practice of translating into one's mother tongue? Is a native speaker of English a better translator of the Indian literatures? Will Kabir, Meera, and Narsinh Mehta find themselves in the academic curriculum of what is called 'Eng.Lit.'? Do the compositions, which I am translating, truly belong to Narsinh Mehta? If not, will they be given the same importance as they were given when it was believed that Narsinh had composed them? Are translations condemned to a state of perpetual incompleteness as against 'originals' which are believed to be blissfully complete, final, and unique? Should translations be evaluated as translations or as original texts in another language? Though there are better days ahead for translations from an Indian language into English, what is the future of translations between Indian languages? Should any theorizing about translation be inevitably bound to a consideration of translations in which one language is English? Is translation of medieval and ancient Indian literature in any way 'easier' than translation from modern or modernist Indian literature? Is it not the fact that translation as an interpretative activity something quite similar to what the Indian student does while dealing with a literary text in his or her classroom?

As I attempt to close the doors, which I had opened, of a mysterious zoo full of numerous questions regarding translation, many more questions dash out making it impossible to shut the doors forcibly...

### Appendix : A Glossary of Indian Words

The following books have been used for reference in preparing this bibliography:

a) The *Puranic shabda kosha* section in *Narsinh Mehta. Narsinh Mehtani KavyaKrutiyo (ed.)*. Shivalal Jesalpura

b) Glossary in *Gita Govind of Jayadeva: A Love Song of the Dark God*. Barbara Miller-Stoller, (ed. and trans.)

c) Jan Knappert, *Indian Mythology: An Encyclopedia of Myth and Legend*.

d) John Dowson, *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology and Religion, Geography, History, and Literature*.

e) P.G. Deshpande, *Gujarati-Angregi Kosha*

*Agnya chakra*: See *Kundalini*.

*Ajmain*: Bishop's weed, *carum copticum*, a medicinal plant used usually in the treatment of stomachache in 'ayurveda' or the Indian system of medicine.

*Ambarish*: Son of King Mandhata and a great devotee of Vishnu. Sage Durvasa was angry with him due to some reasons and created an evil spirit to kill him. However, Vishnu killed the spirit with his discus and saved him.

*Ananga or Kamadeva*: Love, the bodiless god, referring to his body's destruction by *Siva* when he tried to arouse desire for *Parvati* in the great ascetic; like *Kandarpa*, *Kama*, *Madana*, *Manasija*, *Manoja*, *Manmatha*, *Smara* etc., this epithet of the god of love is also used to denote the concept "love", the line between the personification and the concept being blurred.

*Anant*: 'The infinite'. A name of the serpent *Sesha*. The term also applied to *Vishnu* and other deities.

*Asta Siddhis*: The Eight Magical Powers a person can acquire after rigorous study of Yoga.

*Atman*: Transcendental Soul or Self of human being. Some Vedantic philosophies considers it to be indistinct from the *brahman* (See *brahman*).

Bali: See Trikam

Bhagwad Geeta: It is the divine sermon delivered by Krishna to Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. The discourse forms the part of the great epic Mahabharata. The Hindus consider the text sacred especially the followers of Krishna.

Bhagwatam: Srimad Bhagwatam is the chief *Purana* for the Vaishnava canon. It depicts the story of Krishna.

*Bhajan*: Devotional song sung at a religious congregation.

Bharat: Half-brother of Rama, see Rama.

*Bhil*: name of a forest tribe; member of that tribe, *Bhil*.

*Bindi*: A mark put on forehead by women as an auspicious sign.

Brahma: One of the gods of the Hindu trinity comprising of Brahma or creator of the Universe, Vishnu or its preserver and Shiva or Shanker its destroyer. Compared to the other two gods he is less popular in India. He has four heads. He is born out of a lotus that blooms from Vishnu's navel. Also called Viranch or Viranchi.

*Brahman*: The Absolute Truth, the origin, and the cause of existence, the universal soul and the essence of all being in the Vedantic philosophy. Krishna and Vishnu are equated with the *brahman* in the Vaishnava sects.

*Chataka* bird: Bird supposed to drink water only from the clouds; pied crested cuckoo.

Chaturbhuj: The one having four hands, the epithet applied to fourhanded form of Vishnu.

*Chintamani* Jewel: A jewel with power to bestow anything that its bearer desires.

*Choli*: Woman's bodice.

Damodar: See Vishnu.

Devaki: Mother of Krishna.

Diwali: Hindu festival of lights. The new moon day of *Ashwin* month.

Dwaraka, Dwarika: 'The City of Gates'. Krishna's capital, in Gujarat, supposed to be submerged after his death. One of the seven sacred cities.

Gagendra Moksha, Gajagrah: An elephant who was a great devotee of Vishnu went to drink water in a river when a crocodile caught him. The elephant prayed to Vishnu and the Lord saved him.

Ganga: Ganga is the most sacred of all rivers. Bathing in it can wash away all sins.

Garuda: Eagle, who is the vehicle of Vishnu, often depicted as half man half eagle.

Gokul: A district near Mathura where Krishna once lived.

*Gopis*: the cowherd girls at the village Gokul. Radha is one of them. Krishna's sports with gopis and Radha form the immensely popular legends of adolescent Krishna.

Govardhan: Krishna lifted the mountain Govardhan to protect cowherds from the anger of Indra, king of gods who sent down a torrential downpour.

*Guru*: A religious and spiritual master and guide.

Hari: Literally, 'the tawny one', the Vaishnavas interpret it as 'the destroyer of pains'. Used for Vishnu and Krishna.

*Harijan*: Hari's subjects or Hari's devotees. The word was made popular by Mahatma Gandhiji in his fight against untouchability to signify the castes derogatorily labeled as lower or untouchables.

Harishchandra: For the sake of righteousness, King Harishchandra sold his wife, his son, and even



himself. In spite of many terrible calamities, he never abandoned the path of truth. Therefore Vishnu was pleased with him and returned everything he had lost and even bestowed *Moksha* or ultimate liberation upon him.

Holi: A springtime festival of harvest, celebrated on the full moon day of Falguna month. Involves lighting of bonfire and is celebrated by throwing colours on one another.

Indra: One of the most ancient and prestigious gods of India, the supreme god of Vedic times, the god of skies, of rain, of lightning and thunder.

Jadava: Name of Krishna. See Krishna.

Jagannatha: Krishna, as the Lord of the World.

Jasoda, Yashodhara: Wife of the cowherd Nanda in Gokul village. Krishna was taken to her place immediately to escape the wrath of Kamsa. She brought him up like her own son.

*Jhanjhar*: Anklets.

*Jiva*: the mortal soul, as opposed to Siva, the divine soul.

Kaliya, Kalinag: a huge serpent who lived in Yamuna river and terrorized everyone around. He poisoned the waters of the river. Krishna fought him and defeated him.

Kamala: Laxmi, consort of Vishnu, and goddess of wealth and fortune. As she is depicted as standing on a lotus (*kamal*), she is called Kamala. Also called *Sri*.

*Karma*: Deeds. The reason for rebirth according to Hinduism. The bondage of one's acts is one of the chief reasons of being bound to *samsara*. See *samsara*.

Kashi: Varanasi, a Hindu place of pilgrimage.

Kedar: Kind of *raga*; favourite of Narsinh Mehta. See *raga*.

Kesudo: Kind of saffron coloured flowers; flowers of *butea frondosa*. The tree bearing these flowers.

*Kirtan*: A religious performance including singing of Lord's praises, moral sermons and music.

Koel: Cuckoo bird.

Krishna: Literally means "black," or "dark". It is a prominent name of the epic hero who is identified with Vishnu in the Mahabharata and who is counted as one of the standard incarnations of Vishnu. Krishna Devakiputra is mentioned in the Chandogya Upanishad as a pupil of the mythical teacher Ghora Angiras. His relationship with Radha is set in the context of his youthful adventures among the cowherds and his adolescent erotic play with cowherdresses of Vrindavan forest. He was born in the Yadu clan and hence is called Yadava. He was taken to a village named Gokul in order to escape the wrath of his maternal uncle Kamsa by his father Vasudeva and was left with a cowherd named Nanda. He is called Jadava or Yadava, Nandanandan or the son of Nanda, also called Hari, Mohan, Vasudeva, Govind, Vanmalin and so on.

*Kundalini* energy: The cosmic divine energy at the base of human spinal column according to the Tantric systems of meditation (see *tantra*) and other occult sects. The goal of *tantric* practice is to uplift this cosmic energy or *Kundalini* from its base (called *muladhara chakra*, its original support at the base of the spinal column) and bring it to the thousand petaled lotus or *Sahasrahara chakra* on the top of the head. The path through which this energy flows is a subtle channel called *sushumna* at the core of the spinal column. Various *chakras* or wheels, also conceived as lotuses, are located on various spots on the path of *Kundalini*. Each *chakra* has got its definite colour and piercing of each *chakra* by *Kundalini* releases magical powers for the adept. The *Agnya chakra* is the one on the forehead and resembles the third eye. The piercing of *Sahasrahara* results in ultimate release.

*Ladoo*: Sweetmeat, sweetballs.

Laxmi: See Kamala.

*Leela, lila*: Graceful play; commentators often gloss *lila* with spontaneity. The etymology and meaning of *lila* in various contexts remain controversial. In Vaishnava literature it refers to the graceful pattern of divine activity, symbolized in Krishna's sensual play among the gopis and, on another level, his relation to Radha.

Madhava, Madhusudhana: The killer of the demon Madhu, i.e. Krishna.

Madhu: Honey; the name of a demon that Krishna defeats.

*Malhar*: a *raga* (see 'raga') associated with monsoon season in the Indian classical music system.

Mathura: An ancient and sacred city on the river Yamuna; the name is said to mean Madhu-vana 'full of honey'. Here, Krishna was born.

*Maya*: Literally, magic. The divine power of the *brahman* responsible for creating this phenomenal world. Hence the phenomenal world which is relative and transient. *Maya* is also personified as a seductress who seduces the ascetic or devotee from the path of devotion.

Mohun, Mohana: *Moha* means delusion, delirium; *mohana* means deluding enticing, epithet used for Krishna.

*Mridangam*: A type of Indian drum.

Murari: Krishna as killer of a demon named Mura.

*Mukti or Moksha*: The ultimate release, final liberation from the cycle of birth and rebirth in this *samsara*.

Nala: King of Nishad. Famous for virtues. Damayanti, the queen of Vidarbha rejected gods in swayamwara to marry him. He lost his kingdom while gambling. Therefore, he left his wife and son. After many efforts, he managed to regain everything he had lost including his wife and his son.

Nanda: The cowherd at whose place Krishna spent his childhood.

Narada: Sage Narada is one of Brahma's sons. He is a great devotee of Vishnu. He acts as messenger for gods and has a tendency to start quarrels and fights wherever he goes.

*Neti Neti*: 'Not this! Not this!' In an effort to define the *brahman*, the Upanishads often try to define it by negating all that is not *brahman*. See Upanishads.

Nirguna: See saguna.

*Pakhavaj*: A type of Indian drum.

*Palav*: The end of woman's sari.

*Panchama*: The fifth degree of the scale of a *raga*; a particular raga characterized by erotic mood. Its sound is related to the sound of cuckoos in spring.

Pandavas: Five sons of the king Pandu. Their cousins Kauravas harassed them. With the help of Krishna, they won the war of Kurukshetra against Kauravas. This is the story of the Mahabharata.

Parikshit: He was Arjuna's grandson and son of Abhimanyu. He heard the great Bhagwatam from Shukadevaji and attained *Mukti* or ultimate liberation.

Parvati: Wife of Lord Shiva.

Pralhad: A young boy named Pralhad was a great devotee of Vishnu and son of a demon named Hiranyakashapu. Vishnu took the form of Narsinh or 'half lion and half man' and killed Hiranyakashapu in order to liberate Pralhad from his atrocities.

Prasada: food offered to deity and taken by devotees after worship or sacrifice, sweetmeat etc. distributed at religious ceremony as gift from the deity, guru etc. Satisfaction, grace, delight, also favour.

*Purushottama*: The best among men that is Krishna.

*Rabdi*: A sweet dish made of thickly boiled milk.

Radha: A gopi in love with Krishna. She is married to someone else and so forms *parkiya* Nayika of the immortal Radha-Krishna Legend, which is central to Indian medieval literature and arts. Allegorically, she stands for the human soul longing for the Universal Soul, *brahman*. She is also the Shakti or Energy of *brahman*, the creative power, and His beloved.

*Raga*: Lit. Colour, especially red colour; passion, especially sensual passion; the two meanings form the basis of puns. In the classical system of Indian music, *raga* means a melodic pattern; see panchama, Vasant, *Malhar*, and *kedar*.

Rama: Eldest son of Dasaratha, a king of solar race, reigning at Ayodhya. He is believed to be the seventh incarnation of Vishnu and made his appearance at the end of the *Treta* or second age. His story is told in the Vana Parva of the Mahabharata but becomes the grand subject of Ramayana, another great epic of India. He voluntarily relinquished the claim to the throne and went to forest as exile with his wife Sita. Sita was kidnapped by the demon Ravana, the mighty king of Lanka.

Rama killed Ravana to rescue Sita.

*Rangoli*: A kind of stone powder, coloured powder; designs drawn with it on the floor.

*Ras*: A traditional dance in which the dancers dance in a circle. Krishna and gopis danced *ras*. Krishna assumed many forms and danced with each girl. Symbolic of Krishna's *leela*. See Chapter 3.

*Rasa*: Basically, "sap," "juice"; essence, flavour, taste, any object of taste. Technically, *rasa* is esthetic mood based on *bhava*; it is a term for essence of esthetic experience, generally translated "mood", or "emotional mood", but the distinction is blurred.

*Rasika*: A sympathetic person with taste for the presentation of esthetic emotion; one who can experience *rasa*.

Ravana: See Rama.

*Rishi*: A Sage. A seer.

Rukmangad: An ancient king and devotee of Krishna.

Saguna: The conception of *brahman* having attributes as opposed to *Nirguna*, without attributes.

*Sakhi*: Female companion; Radha's friend and messenger to Krishna, Radha's circle of friends. The stock figure of the female companion in Sanskrit poetry and drama assumes special significance in the *rasa-shastra* and theology of Bengali Vaishnavism

*Samsara*: The mundane world, which is transient, painful, and relative. *Samsara* is conceived as a cycle of birth and rebirth and liberation from this inexorable cycle is the goal of human life in Hindu thought.

Sanak: A *Rishi*. One of the four mind-born (*manas-putra*) sons of Brahma.

Sarangdhar, Sarangpani: Vishnu as the bearer of mighty Sarang bow.

*Sati*: A chaste Hindu woman

*Sev*: A kind of fried dish made from gram flour, kind of macaroni.

Sharda, Saraswati: She is the Hindu goddess of learning and knowledge.

Shatrughna: Half-brother of Rama. See Rama

*Shehnai*: A traditional Indian wind musical instrument played at auspicious moments.

Shiva, Shanker, Siva: He is one of the great gods of Hindu trinity (See Brahma). He is depicted as a great ascetic who lives and meditates on Kailasa mountain. His wife is Parvati and he has two sons: Ganapati or Ganesh, the famous elephant headed god and Kartikeya. Also, the divine and auspicious soul in human being as opposed to jiva. See Jiva.

Shukadevaji, Suka: He was the son of Sage Vyas who composed the Mahabharat. He was a parrot (*Shuka*) in his previous life. He narrated the great Bhagwatam to Parikshit.

*Sringar*: Sexual love; technically, the esthetic mood of sexual love.

*Sruti*: That which is heard, the scriptures like the Vedas and the Upanishads are believed to be revealed to sages in the form of the Word, *Sabda*. Hence called *sruti*. The Puranas and the Epics are called *smriti*, 'remembered'.

*Tantra*: 'Rule, ritual'. The title of a numerous class of religious and magical works, generally of later date than the Puranas, and representing a late development of religion. The chief peculiarity of the Tantras is the prominence they give to the female energy of the deity, his active nature being personified in the person of his *Sakti*, or wife. It consists of occult and esoteric rites associated with *Kundalini*.

*Trigunas*: Three modes of matter, namely *Satva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*.

Trikram: Vishnu in the incarnation of Vaman (literally dwarf) demanded land which would be covered by three steps from the demon King Bali. He assumed a huge form and with first step he covered entire earth, with second he encompassed the whole heaven and the in the third step he put his foot on the head of the King Bali and pushed him into the nether world. Therefore, Trikrama means the one with three steps. See Vishnu.

*Tilak*: Auspicious mark of pigment on forehead. It symbolizes sanctity. Various sects use various

types of *tilaks*

*Tulsi*: The basil plant; considered holy by Hindus and is believed to have medical properties.

*Upanishads*: 'Esoteric doctrine'. The third division of the Vedas attached to the *Brahmana* portion, and forming the part of *Sruti* or revealed word. Generally written in prose with interspersed verses, but some are wholly in verse. There are about 150 main Upanishads. The oldest may date as far back as the sixth century BC.

*Vaid*: Medicine man, especially the one who uses the indigenous Indian medical system called the *ayurveda*.

*Vaishnava*: Literally, a devotee of Vishnu but more specifically the follower of various Vaishnava sects.

Vaman: See Trikram.

Vanamalin: Means, "wearing a garland of forest flowers" and symbolizes Krishna's sensual presence in the forest.

*Vasant*: springtime, deity presiding over the season of flowers.

Vasudeva: Scion of Yadu, father of Krishna who is himself also called Vasudeva 'God of Wealth.'

*Vedas*: Root word is *vid*, 'know'. The Vedas are the holy books, which are the foundations of the Hindu religion. There are four Vedas: - i) Rig-Veda, ii) Yajur Veda, iii) Sama Veda and iv) Atharva Veda. Believed to be revealed orally to the *Rishis* or the sages and hence the whole body of the Vedas is called *Shruti* or 'heard'. The date of their composition is a matter of controversy generally believed to have been composed in the second millennium BC.

Viranch, Viranchi: See Brahma.

Vishnu: Root, *vish*, 'to pervade'. One of the gods of Hindu trinity along with Brahma and Shiva. His function is to protect the universe. He assumes various incarnations or '*avatars*' to protect the universe from evil. His incarnations are, *Matsya* or the Fish, *Kurma* or the tortoise, *Varaha* or the Boar, *Narsinha* or the half man half lion, *Vaman* or the Dwarf, *Parshuram*, *Rama*, *Krishna*, *Buddha* and *Kalki* who is yet to come. He has many names: Achyuta, 'unfallen, imperishable;' Ananta, 'the

endless', Chaturbhujā, 'four armed;' Damodar, 'bound round the belly with a rope' as Krishna, Keshava, 'the hairy, the radiant;' and so on.

Vraja: The area around Mathura where Krishna lived as a child.

Vrindavan, Brindavan: a forest near Vraja.

*Yoga*: 'union', 'chance', practice of asceticism leading to union with God by controlling senses and mind, system of philosophy.

Yogeshwara: the best and the greatest of *yogis*- Shiva. Also applied at times to Krishna.

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exciii Songs of Narsinh, song no. Narsinh.76 (24 p.280)

exciv Anantrai Rawal (in Gujarati) '*Narsinh Mehta na Pado'* p.96

excv Jacques Derrida, '*Des Tours de Babel'*, in R.Schulte and J.Biguenet (eds.) p.218-227

excvi A K Ramanujan, Introduction to *Hymns for the Drowning: Poems for Visnu by Nammalvar*, translated from Tamil by AK Ramanujan, p.xvi

excvii Cited in Susan Bassnett-McGuire, *op.cit.*, pp.81-82

excviii Lance Hewson and Jacky Martin, *Redefining Translation The Variational Approach*, p.7.