



## CONTEMPORARY CINEMA AND MEERABAI: A STUDY OF GULZAR'S *MEERA* (1979)

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### ABSTRACT

*The article attempts to take a close look at the relationship between tradition and modernity in the present context of commercial transformation of Indian visual culture and media, more specifically, the genre of the movies. Tradition gives us a perceptiveness to observe the past that contributed to the present, and to examine how it affects future developments. At times, India has shown an edifying rift between those who saw tradition as a fortress of conflict, and those who saw it as an impediment to modernising Indian culture. Tradition has never existed on its own concurrence; it has always incorporated and nurtured. In this context, it thus becomes imperative to comprehend the social ground within which formatting breathes, to understand the role of formatting itself. This work will be an effort at examining the link between the devotional songs and gender of the famous woman-Saint, Meerabai of Rajasthan, as represented in the popular 1979 movie titled Meera directed by Gulzar. The analysis will focus on the songs excerpted from the film, as well as relate them to the popular bhajan tradition of the Saint Meerabai. By the contextual placement of the songs, the director invites the viewers to read in-meanings that may undermine those of other performance contexts, while at the same time profit from the songs' popular enticement. Noted scholar Heidi Pauwels introduced the concept of "inter-aurality" to understand the phenomenon on the Meera bhajan cult; this work will be a reading and exploration of an intertextually sensitive close reading of the movies' songs as derived from one of her essays "Bhakti Songs Recast: Gulzar's Meera Movie". The movie has been divided on the basis of the songs employed by the director. Rather than following the custom wherein the films' music score merely serves as an aid, in the Meera movie, the songs actually advance the storyline. Also, in terms of the treatment of gender, the evaluation has shown some disparate forces at work simultaneously: There is advocacy of women's resistance to patriarchal norms, as well as reinforcement of a status quo. There remains then, no simple way to characterise the modernity of this movie, it becomes a chalk-and-cheese site of an analogous opposition.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The influential Bollywood movie *Meera* directed by Gulzar (Sampoorn Singh, b. 1936) in 1979, produced by Premji, and starring the actress Hema Malini is indicative of a popular view of Meerabai as prevalent in the late seventies. Notwithstanding the fact that it was not a success at the time of its release, it continues to be influential because it is still shown in connection with religious functions and is regularly broadcast on television. The movie is directed largely toward women, and whenever it is shown, it draws a larger female audience, even more than a typical devotional movie, because it is about a female Saint. Thus, it makes for a good focus to study how *Bhakti* and gender intersect.

Gulzar's movie has been derided by many academics: It has been called vulgarising, and is regarded as middle-class, which carries the stigma of "bourgeois". Whenever it is mentioned in academic studies, it is dismissed quickly. However, this movie is interesting in its own right and deserves serious study. It is not simply a facile, superficial interpretation of an over-sentimentalised romantic Meera, as is sometimes implied. Rather it is a complex film that represents a multivocal creative adaptation of the Meera story. One could expect an interesting angle on the Saint from Gulzar, the director who just before writing *Meera* brought out a daring movie about man-woman relationships. *Mausam* (1975) dealt with the relationship between a young prostitute (Sharmila Tagore) and the man responsible for her mother's downfall (Sanjeev Kumar). Gulzar sympathetically portrayed the flawed hero and heroine, allowing the prostitute to angrily voice her view of men's exploitation in strong language. In short, Gulzar's portrayal of the Saint Meera might be expected to touch upon some contemporary issues<sup>1</sup>.

The approach towards the movie is intertextual and consists of a close reading of the film against the background of the hagiographic narrative and sung traditions about Meerabai. The way the movie retells the Meera story by unravelling allusions to traditional hagiographic stories will be investigated. The most salient features of differences with the tradition, which tells us a great deal about the modern interpretations of *Bhakti* are being endeavoured to be drawn out here. There are apparently disparate forces at work simultaneously; the Saint is eulogised as well as undermined, there is advocacy of women's resistance to patriarchal norms, as well as reinforcement of a status quo.



*Figure 3.1<sup>2</sup>*

Gulzar has done his homework well. He is very knowledgeable about the hagiographic traditions about Meera as well as scholarly writing about her life. He is aware that his interpretation is not “the truth” but a creative adaptation of the story as passed on to him. The movie thus knowingly takes its liberties with the traditional scenarios and the scholarly versions of the Meera story. There is, for instance, an interesting interpretation of Indian history running through the movie, with a political message that is in conformity with the nationalism permeating Bollywood. Even Meera’s Krishna in this movie is postcolonial, more in sync with Gandhi’s non-violent *Gita* interpretation rather than the erotic god of medieval mysticism.

Though Gulzar works very much within the hagiographic tradition, he “updates” the stories in a profoundly modern way. Most obvious is that he frames Meera’s story within a narrative of a nation that conforms to modern academic reconstructions, and within the conventions of popular Indian cinema. Most interesting for this study’s purpose is that he raises a whole host of contemporary women’s issues. To some extent, Meera can be seen as setting an inspiring example for young *bahus* to stand up for their beliefs.

One might have expected *Bhakti* to have transformative potential for women’s lives toward greater independence. The Meera cult story, without doubt, has inspired defiance against restrictive gender roles.

The movie was shot well. The cinematography seemed good, well-executed, and nothing from the set looked economical or last minute (quite a contrast to some of the films that followed in the eighties). There’s always a danger when one is playing a saint or a god/goddess that one will come across as wooden, full of expressions of ‘mystique’ and ‘inner-peace’. Hema Malini managed to avoid that completely: She seemed like a real person,

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so did the others dealing with her, and her full sainthood only fully came across towards the end. In other words, there was a character development that progressed all the way through from beginning to end, you could see how her faith deepened and became fuller as she responded to the circumstances and adversity she was faced with. Vinod Khanna as Rana Bhoj also did an excellent job - his pain seemed real, he wasn't overly melodramatic, his bafflement and indecision on how to deal with his wife came across as totally sincere.

The following table interprets the *bhajans* and different shades of the film according to the moods of the characters and the action cuts.

Chapter	Action	Mood	Bhajan
1	Introduction to Meera. Setting of family.	Affection and fondness	<i>Mere toh Giridhar Gopala. Dusro na koi</i>
2	Death of elder sister. Marriage to Rana.	Solemn and distressing	<i>Karunaa suno shayam mori</i>
3	Life begins anew in in-laws' house. Yet steadfast devotion to Lord Krishna.	Pleased and carefree	<i>Rana ji main toh Govind ke gunn gaoon</i>
4	Immersion in Lord Krishna.	consecration	<i>Shyama mane chakkhar raakho ji</i>
5	Renouncement of all worldly pleasures.	religious zeal	<i>Main saware ke rang rachi</i>
6	Driven to despair for her Lord.	frustration	<i>Jaago bansi wale lalna</i>
7	Appeals to Krishna to come once.	Melancholic love	<i>Pyare darshan dijo aaye</i>
8	Unhappy with being alone.	Urging.	<i>Jo tum todo piya</i>
9	Heralding that he should not make her wait.	Restlessness	<i>Kar na fakiri phir kya dilgiri</i>
10	Yearning and wait over.	Merged into Krishna.	<i>Mere toh Girdhar Gopala dusro na koi</i>

Gulzar casts Meera's life in the troupe of tension between arranged marriage and love marriage, a staple of the popular movie, to which Meera's story lends itself well. Meera had given her heart to Krishna, who she considered to be her true love; she had cogitated him her bridegroom from when she was little, the movie tells us. When she comes of age though, her

marriage is arranged for political reasons, to the neighbouring Sisodiya's king, Raja Vikramajit<sup>3</sup>. As a part of this agreement Meera is married (against her wish) to Vikramajit's son, Rana Bhojraj<sup>4</sup>. Like many a film's heroine then, Meera's marriage is arranged by her elders without regard for her personal wishes, but she does not protest. The viewers witness her feelings: We see her torn between her exclusive devotion to Krishna and her forced worldly marriage.



*Figure 3.2<sup>5</sup>*

Gulzar as an Urdu poet, brings this to the fore in his sensitive contextualisation of one of Meera's *bhajans*, which contrasts bridal imagery with that of the ascetic:

*bala maim bairagana humgi,  
jina bhesam mera sahiba rijhe, so hi bhesa dharumgi  
kaho to kusumala sadi ramgavam, kaho to bhagava bhesa  
kaho to motiyana mamga bharavam, kaho chitakavam kesa<sup>2</sup>*

Friend, I will be an ascetic  
Whatever dress pleases my Lord, that is the dress I will wear  
If you say so, I will wear a red sari; if you say so, an ochre one  
If you say so, I will have my hair parting dressed-up with pearls  
If you say so, I will let my hair grow wild.

Gulzar shows this song as playing in Meera's head when she is carried in her palanquin on her way to her in-laws'. This fits well – it evokes the genre of women's wedding folk songs, and Meera has adopted many folk songs for her particular purpose.



Gulzar remains true to the hagiographic tradition, both in his telling the stories around songs, and redacting the songs to suit his purposes. At the same time, he also “updates” the songs in a profoundly modern way with reference to contemporary women’s issues. While this may come over as feminist-friendly in some instances, there are also some missed chances, as when the defying “Rana” song is “domesticated”. Meera’s devotion is shown to be excessive and to undercut her real-life happiness. Thus the message is that she is not to be imitated by ordinary women; that she is unique; that no other woman can be like her or should follow in her footsteps. In fact, the viewers find at times that identification with Meera’s voice is encouraged, at others distance is preserved. Whereas he is unambiguous on the caste issue, Gulzar is less clear on gender equality. He shows both: Advocacy of women’s resistance to patriarchal norms, as well as reinforcement of the status quo.

The movie does justice to Meera’s songs through a sensitive and creative contextualisation, and the device of having them “grow” as she matures in her *Bhakti*. However, there is also an undercurrent of criticism. Meera’s words are literally turned against her in the final trial. Even more significant is the way Meera’s last song, which the audience comes away with humming, is left hanging “in the air”: Gulzar’s recasting of Meera’s songs reveals an ambiguity about the female *Bhakti* Saint and her potentially patriarchy-defying message.

The character of Rana bhoj, played by Vinod Khanna is also intriguing in the film. Not only does he look great and act impressively, but his character was also highly fascinating in its comprehensive turmoil over Meera being more devoted to Krishna than her husband. It was stimulating and thought - provoking to watch.



Figure 3.3<sup>6</sup>

Some verses of her poems shall be presented demonstrating Meerabai’s specific kind of emancipation. In spite of persecution, contempt and miseries Meerabai did not give up her unreserved love for Krishna. In this way she could successfully oppose the nobility and their



misogynist culture, and preserve her self-determined and fulfilling way of life as a Krishna-devotee.

*karunaa suno shyaam mori  
mai to hoi rahi cheri tori  
karunaa suno shyaam mori  
tumare kaaran sab sukh chhodyaa  
ab mohe kyon tarasaa ho  
viraha vyathaa laagi ur antar  
so tum aae bujhaa  
karunaa suno shyaam mori<sup>3</sup>*

Listen to my plight Shyama  
I have been your servant  
For you I have given up all happiness  
Why are you holding out against me?  
The pain of separation burns inside my heart  
Come out and douse this fire.

Meerabai's extraordinary religious exclusivism causes her to leave her traditional life as a noble lady and leads her to the other Krishna devotees. Her reason of radical decision of exclusive Krishna-worship she illustrated with comparative pictures. According to these pictures she made the best choice for her life. Accepting whatever happens, Meerabai however, is ready to bear all consequences of her exclusivism:

*ari mai to prem diwani  
mera dard na jane koi  
ari mai to prem diwani  
mera dard na jane koi  
ari mai to prem diwani*

Oh my!  
I am crazy in love  
Only the wounded know the condition of the wounded  
Or those who have gotten hurt.

Meerabai's decision to leave her noble status is irrevocable. Reason is that she wants not second-hand life but a nectarian one. This nectarian life, her unconditional love for Krishna, crowds Meerabai out of the repressive anti-female culture which ties the women to the love



of their husbands. Krishna indirectly forces Meerabai to manage her own way of life. He forces her even if it is painful because of her still traditional idea that the meaning of life of a woman absolutely depends on a husband or male lover.

*jo tum todo piya mai nahi todu  
toso preet tod karishna kon sang jodu  
jo tum todo piya mai nahi todu*

You might break all relations with me  
But can I?  
No I won't  
You are the river in which I swim like the fish  
Without you I have no life  
No soul

The song remains incomplete, but is continued in the next scene where Meera visits the temple near the lake (“*Shyama mane chakhar rakho ji, chakhar rahu бага lagasu nita utha darasana pasu*”<sup>7</sup>). At this point the Sant Raidas passes by and Meera has shifted into another famous song (“*mora mukuta pitambara sohe gala baijayati mala, Vrindabana me dhenu carave mohana murali vala*”<sup>8</sup>). One variant of the second line of the incomplete song comes back later in the movie, in a more fitting context. When Meera protests the closure of her favorite temple and has incurred the wrath of her in-laws, she sings: “*Hari ruthya kumhalasya ho maya*”<sup>9</sup> “When Hari is angry, I’ll shrivel up, oh friend.” The change in wording works very well in the context of her hunger strike, as she indeed seems to be withering away.

While Meera returns to her in-laws after this incident, that is not the end of her familial troubles. Gulzar illustrates how her devotion gets her further in trouble with her in-laws through her songs, such as: “*Jo tuma todo piya mai nahim todure*”, “Even if you break it off, my love, I will not give up our relationship”<sup>10</sup>. The song comes right after Meera dreams that her Krishna *murti* is thrown in a well by her enemies and she wakes up to find her room locked up from outside. In the course of the song, Meera is shown as having somehow escaped the palace and traveling on pilgrimage as if in search of Krishna. This changes the interpretation of the song: Instead of Meera sticking with her Lord in the face of his unfaithfulness towards her, or his trying to escape her, as the song on its own implies, here she is seen as steadfast in the face of persecution from her in-laws<sup>11</sup>. This song is followed by a rather triumphantly sung pilgrimage song: “*karana fakiri phira kya dilagiri, sada magana mai rahana ji*”, “Let’s take to the road as a mendicant, then there’s no sorrow, just remaining immersed for ever”<sup>12</sup>.





Meerabai's Lord she is waiting for does not come although she is looking for him all the time. The old desires for dependence of an almighty and loving protector are still determining her emotions, therefore she says I "gaze and gaze" but she feels such a protector will never come. Meerabai wants answers and messages from her beloved Lord. However he refuses to give her revelations, rewards, commands or orders for her life. He keeps silent and absent. Therefore Meerabai has to live by her own. Krishna's permanent staying away from her gives her an implicit message: Her fantasy needing a male caretaker – he may be a human or a divine one – was all over so that the choice she had was nothing else but freedom:

*karna fakiri phir kya dilgiri  
sada magan mey rehna ji  
koi din gadi na koi din bangla  
koi din jangal basna ji*

*koi din hathi na koi din ghoda  
koi din paidal chalna ji  
koi din khajan koi din laado  
koi din fakam faka ji*

If you love  
Then you are not a miser  
If you are in love  
Then you follow wherever your beloved goes  
In love there is no stinginess.

From her traditional andro-centered standpoint, Meerabai criticizes Krishna that he has attracted and fascinated her "with sweet words" so that she became full of love for him. He, however, disregards all her desires leaving her and letting her alone. Captivated in her traditional thinking she denounces him as an irresponsible lover who forgets her love, yet snaps the ties of love arbitrary. This agonizing experience continues in Meerabai's life, yet hoping for the fulfilment of her desires all the time. But despite these horrible pains caused by her desires and hopes, Meerabai was not able to leave her Lord<sup>13</sup>. Reason was his attractive beauty; a beauty she never beheld in this world again. Krishna's irresistible beauty means the attraction of free existence which he stands for. Having become conscious of this beautiful freedom Meerabai can abandon it nevermore whatever pain it might bring.



*Figure 3.4*<sup>14</sup>

Meerabai's laments that a yogi befriends no one show her internal conflict: Her chosen and beloved God is not a servant of her illusionary and authoritarian desires of a life arranged and protected by a man, but forces her to take over responsibility for her own existence.

Meerabai in Gulzar's movie has a disturbing appeal for women. Her relationship to patriarchy is far from simple. And it is hers songs, more than her life, which complicate the refraction of wifhood and widowhood. Her songs, like those of many women Saints, are largely concerned with love or *madhura bhava*<sup>15</sup> – perceived as the highest and most encompassing relation. Meera's location as a Rajput woman is crucial here since 'love' is scarcely a private matter though it may appear to be so. The notion of personal (not individual) devotion to a reciprocating husband-lover gathers special resonances and inflections in a medieval Rajput court. It becomes both response and challenge to the way marriage is institutionalised by a polygamous, expansive, military aristocracy, the way it regulates relationships between men and women, and the way the 'private' is structured by and into the public domain<sup>16</sup>. Her choice of Krishna as the object of worship and devotion is both ironic and complex. Krishna is not simply a monarchic, patriarchal god like the *maryadapurushottam* Ram. He has two distinct aspects (though one may be more prominent in certain traditions), and there is an implicit structural relation between the two. Not only is Krishna sympathetic to the 'feminine', he can at times be subject to it<sup>17</sup>. Worship is satisfying for both god and devotee. Krishna cannot taste his own beauty and sweetness unless it is objectified in another person toward whom he can direct his love. Finally, he has powers superior and yet analogous to those of humans and is open to direct appeal.

Meera's *bhajans* derive their emotional and cultural power from the metaphoric use of the common analogies between god and master, god and lover, between earthy husband as lord and master and lover, between soul and wife, between divine service and wifely or domestic service, between the bondage of the soul to the god, the bondage of the wife to the husband and the servant to the master, and between the spiritual desire to the soul and the sensual desire<sup>18</sup>. In her songs, Krishna is the beloved, the husband-lover, the bridegroom, the

husband, the master, the protector, the king, and of course, God. Meera is the eternal virgin, the bride, the wife-beloved. She glories in single-minded devotion, immerses herself in servitude, suffering and in the vicissitudes of loving Krishna.



*Figure 3.5*<sup>19</sup>

The ideological and semantic accretions of these analogies and metaphors of bondage have given them a ‘determinate’, readily paraphrasable meaning. Though deeply implicated in them, Meera’s compositions do not merely replicate these meanings. The passionate intensity of the songs actively works against and sometimes displaces them because the female is centrally a desiring subject. The *smriti* literature acknowledges sexual desire but presents it as something which must be regulated for both men and women within the primarily procreative conjugal relation<sup>20</sup>. The practices of Rajput polygamy regulate the sexual desire of women<sup>21</sup> but allow men an insatiable appetite and access to a potentially unlimited number of women. Meera’s desire for Krishna is by definition unregulated, unconnected to procreation. Though her songs bear the traces of an Advaitic *nirguna Bhakti* in the assertion of the identity of the individual soul with god, she yearns more often to realise such identity through union.

Not only in the portrayal of Meera’s life, but also in presenting her *bhajans* in context, the director brings his own interpretations. In the movie, the selection and placement of Meera’s *bhajans*, coupled with the exclusion of some of the key couplets, change the understanding of these poems and reduce them to being merely instrumental in the progression of the story<sup>22</sup>.



*Figure 3.6*<sup>23</sup>

Meera gained enlightenment (*moksh*); she wasn't a *pativrata*, though. She didn't sacrifice for her husband. However, she had taken Lord Krishna as her husband before she married. Heroism entails an inversion of *pativrata* norms in serving its aims. Thus, Padmini and the others physically transgress the *zanana* boundary and logically transcend the *pativrata* category but are *pativratas* nonetheless. Meerabai is a different matter. Although Rajput women list Meera as one of the two women they most admire, they are aware that she radically and finally departs from the pattern that the military heroines establish. On the one hand, they say that they admire Meera as a Rajput woman because of her exceptionally good character. On the other hand, they assess Meera as an exemplar of good character who is not a *pativrata*. The reason: Rather than serve her (human) husband, Meera opts to dedicate herself to God. She is a devotee, a *bhakt*, of Lord Krishna. Many Rajput women celebrate her even though or perhaps because she radically oversteps the limits of the paradigm. Appreciating the dramatic nature of Meera's transgression requires a good look at the way her story is told in Rajasthan. As J. S. Hawley in *Three Bhakti Voices: Meerabai, Surdas and Kabir in Their Times and Ours* points out, "In doing so she concocts an unorthodox mixture of home and homelessness that has precedent only in a few extreme Tantric groups and in the mythology of Parvati and Shiva."

I am not staying here, not staying where  
 The land's grown strange without you, my dear,  
 But coming home, coming to where your place is  
 Take me, guard me with your guardian mercy, please  
 I'll take up your yogic garb-  
 And search through the world as a yogi does  
 With you-yogi and yogini, side by side. (Hawley: 124)





Moreover, in some verses, Meera depicts her marriage to Krishna, thus challenging not only the orthodox view that yogic life is not for women but also the axiom that yogis do not marry. To quote Hawley again:

*“On more than one occasion she says that she wears the forehead mark and necklace of a yogi as if they were bangles—the essential jewellery of a married woman—and by doing so suggests that the love of Krishna is a force strong enough to fuse even logical opposites such as these.”*

Meera’s courage originates from God and is sustained by her love for God. Because Meera sees herself as God’s wife, she is able to abandon her family. This distinction is the basis for the crucial qualification mentioned above: While admiring Meera, women clearly recognize her unmistakable, even shocking, deviation from the female role they aspire to fulfill. *Bhakti* is a high calling, but Meera was married.

Every song of *Meera* is soaked in devotion and speaks about the pangs of separation from her Lord and her pining for communion with him. The intense devotional content, lucid poetic expression and the exquisite melodies have helped their oral transmission from generation to generation. As biographer Anantrai Raval has put it: “Meera is one of the brightest stars in the galaxy of immortal poets and mystics of all time<sup>24</sup>.” Meerabai reveals glimpses of her love towards Lord Krishna, through her sweet *padavali*, propelling her audience to ponder about ‘unconditional love’ in which one doesn’t demand petty material things for one’s sake. Probably that is what, Swami Vivekananda meant, when he said ‘Unselfishness is God<sup>25</sup>’.

Meera does not, then, play out a scenario. She creates an incomparable and intensely personal relationship with God. Thus, her behavior cannot be measured against our merely human standards. Her devotion to God has taken her out of the social realm, the realm of norm and custom. Even though Meera’s situation was intolerable — she was mercilessly persecuted by her in-laws — still, ordinary good wives in harsh conditions should concentrate, even meditate, on their devotion to their husbands or, if widowed, to their husbands’ memories. Nonconformity is the privilege of Saints. As the film’s story tells us, Meera’s life ends through absorption into Krishna. As in the case of other heroines, Meera’s death validates her motivations and sanctions her objectives. When Meera melds with Krishna’s image, she attains her life’s purpose, union with God. She shows that she has lived as a human being but that she has done so in the context of a transcendent mystical association with God. Because her death is miraculous, her character cannot be judged by mundane criteria. In addition to validating her character, Meera’s death confirms her claims of divine marriage, for it certainly connotes *sati* immolation. The *sati*’s ashes commingle with those of her husband, and so the *sati* unites with him in a way not possible during life. When Meera’s body dissolves into stone, she also unites with her beloved in a miraculous





manner. In both cases, a wife partakes of her husband's essence and destiny. Meera's death is not just equivalent to *sati* immolation; it is even more impressive as testimony to her greatness. She merges into Krishna and is finally beyond their grasp.

*Meera's* story and example is a comfort to Hindus, and people believe it as a matter of faith. One can read all the various stories of her life and find them gripping even from a secular viewpoint, similar to how people often read *The Bible* as mere literature. Meera's was a very unsettled and unpredictable time, with old established orders failing and new kingdoms emerging, everyone fighting for survival. In part, her reaction and those like her was a response to the instability of the time by trying to find something (God) that was rock solid. As T.S. Eliot said, "Without some kind of God, man is not even very interesting<sup>26</sup>."

## CHAPTER NOTES:

1. Heidi Pauwels, *Indian Literature and Popular Cinema: Recasting Classics*, London and New York: Routledge Contemporary South Asia, 2007, p. 103.
2. Sourced from *Shemaroo* (snap-shot).
3. Essayed wonderfully by the extremely popular Shammi Kapoor. He is hailed as one of the most entertaining lead actors that Hindi cinema has ever produced. He was one of the leading stars of Hindi cinema during the late 1950s, the 1960s and early '70s. He made his Bollywood debut in 1953 with the film *Jeevan Jyoti*.
4. Played by the Bollywood matinee idol Vinod Khanna. The versatile actor debuted in Sunil Dutt's 1968 film *Man Ka Meet* as a villain. He is one of the few Hindi actors who began by playing villains and moved on to play the hero. He got his first break as the solo lead hero in the film *Hum Tum Aur Woh* (1971), which was followed by the 1971 multi-hero film *Mere Apne* directed by Gulzar. In 1973, his performance as an army officer facing death row in another film scripted and directed also by Gulzar, *Achanak*, was critically acclaimed.
5. Sourced from [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) (snapshot).
6. Sourced from [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) (snapshot).
7. Gulzar 1979, ls. 96–8.
8. *Ibid.*, le. 110.
9. *Ibid.*, le. 124. The possibility of a meeting between Meerabai and Ravidas cannot be ruled out. After the death of her father in March 1527, Meera's devotion and ecstatic mysticism brought her insurmountable misery and suffering. She left her home and started living the life of a recluse and during that period she is said to have visited Kashi and other holy places. It may be that during her visit to Kashi late in 1527 she became a disciple of Ravidas. Ravidas breathed his last in 1584 Bikrmi Sambat. *Sant Ravidas Ki Amar Kahani* is a 1983 Indian devotional movie based on the renowned Saint Ravidas, directed by Babubhai Mistri. Ravidas' life has become the inspiration



for the people of today and in one such incident when his disciples were going to take holy dip in the sacred river Ganges and wanted Guru Ravidass to accompany them and Guru replied that he has promised to deliver shoes to his customer on that particular day and will not be able to join them due to this particular reason and when one of his disciple urges then Guru Ravidass uttered his belief saying that: “*Manchanga tow kathoti mein Ganga,*” i.e. If your heart is pious then the holy river is right in your tub and you need not go anywhere else to take a dip. There is a small *chhatri* (umbrella) in front of Meera’s temple in Chittorgarh district of Rajasthan. It has Guru Ravidass’ engraved foot print also.

10. Ibid., le. 139.
11. This famous song features in several “secular” movies, as analyzed by Booth, 2000, pp. 136–8.
12. Gulzar, 1979, ls. 139–40.
13. Edmund Weber, “Hindu Feminism: The Emancipation of Meerabai”, No. 129.1. 2009. <http://web.uni-frankfurt.de/irenik/rekultur129.1.pdf>. Retrieved on December 20, 2013.
14. Sourced from [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) (snapshot).
15. “Krishna was adored in three different ways: *vatsalya bhava*, *madhura bhava* and *sakhya bhava*. Nanda and Yashoda, Krishna’s foster parents, adored Him in *vatsalya bhava*, whose spirit is: “How lovely the child is; how pleasingly he speaks, how charming is his smile”. Nanda and Yashoda were the first to find the cosmic reflected in Baby Krishna. Radha attained Krishna through *madhura bhava*. In Krishna she found everything that was charming and sweet in life. The spirit of *madhura bhava* is this: “I will make my entire existence, whether physical, mental, social or spiritual one-pointed to derive bliss from Krishna.” The cowherds – who had neither schooling nor learning, but who had sincerity and a loving heart – adored Him in *sakhya bhava*, as a friend. The gods also received Him in *sakhya bhava* as their friend.” Sourced from *The Time of India*, May 20, 2011, Shri Shri Anandamurti, Retrieved on July 5, 2013. [http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2011-05-20/vintage-wisdom/28374730\\_1\\_bhava-baby-krishna-vraja-krishna](http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2011-05-20/vintage-wisdom/28374730_1_bhava-baby-krishna-vraja-krishna).
16. Kavita Sangari, “Meerabai and the Spiritual Economy of *Bhakti*,” *The Economic and Political Weekly* July 14, 1990, p. 1540.
17. [tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/Mahabharata](http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/Mahabharata)
18. Kavita Sangari, “Meerabai and the Spiritual Economy of *Bhakti*,” *The Economic and Political Weekly* July 14, 1990, p. 1550.
19. Sourced from [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) (snapshot).
20. The *Manu Smriti* was one of the first Sanskrit texts studied by the European philologists. It was first translated into English by Sir William Jones. His version was published in 1794. British administrative requirements encouraged their interest in the *Dharmashastras*, which they believed to be legal codes. In fact, these were not codes



of law but norms related to social obligations and ritual requirements. According to Manu, women are not allowed to do any work independently either inside the house or outside the house. In the childhood she has to be under the control of her father and brothers and after marriage she is under the control of her husband.

21. Rajput women are quite consistent in responding to the twofold question: Who are the best exemplars of Rajput women and why are those women good? The names of Padmini and Meerabai overwhelmingly predominate. Both Padmini and Meerabai, in quite different ways, reject the *pativrata* role and reaffirm the *pativrata* paradigm. They also show that rejection and reaffirmation are vital to the admiration they inspire. Interestingly enough, although all women understand Padmini as an illustrious *pativrata*, almost all deny that Meera, though virtuous, can properly be called a *pativrata*, at least without altering the ordinary sense of the term.
22. There have been several popular movies that while not being strictly “devotionals”, evoke and have been inspired by Meera’s life. One of the famous classics is *Jogan* (1950, dir. Kedarnath Sharma, starring Nargis Dutt and Dilip Kumar). Two more movies made in the 90s – *Meera ke Girdhar* (1993, dir. Vijay Deep, starring Upasna Khosla) and *Meera ka Mohan* (1992, dir. K Ravi Shankar, starring Ashwini Bhave and Avinash Wadhawan) – are not the conventional religious films either; but send out the message that self-sacrifice and long-suffering submission to patriarchal structures, if coupled with intense devotion, will pay off in the end.
23. Sourced from [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) (snapshot).
24. [http://www.saibabaofindia.com/poetry\\_of\\_meera\\_bai.htm](http://www.saibabaofindia.com/poetry_of_meera_bai.htm). Retrieved on April 14, 2013.
25. [http://greenmesg.org/swami\\_vivekananda\\_sayings\\_quotes/character-unselfishness.php](http://greenmesg.org/swami_vivekananda_sayings_quotes/character-unselfishness.php). Retrieved on June 7, 2013.
26. [https://secure.imodules.com/s/717/images/editor\\_documents/Martino/t.s.\\_eliot\\_the\\_boy\\_and\\_the\\_river.pdf](https://secure.imodules.com/s/717/images/editor_documents/Martino/t.s._eliot_the_boy_and_the_river.pdf). Retrieved on June 7, 2013.