RELIGION G8515
BHAKTI TEXTS OF NORTH INDIA: THE SURSAGAR
Fall, 2013

Jack Hawley
Tuesdays 4:10-6:00, Knox 116
Additional hour to be arranged: Thursdays 11:00-11:50?
Office hours: Thursdays 4-6, 219a Milbank Hall
E-mail: jsh3@columbia.edu

Introduction

Surdas (precise dates unknown, sixteenth century) is one of a handful of preeminent poet-saints who composed in dialects belonging to the Hindi language family. Some scholars, in fact, rank Sur as the finest of all Hindi poets--certainly the finest of Krishna poets--and the impact of his hagiography has been almost equally great.

In this course we will examine selections from the huge corpus of poetry (more than 5000 compositions) attributed to Surdas and in so doing study the genesis and development of the Sur tradition. Use will be made not only of traditional editions but of the current computer-assisted project aimed at producing a new critical edition of the Sursagar. Sur's position in relation to other Krishna poets and theologians, particularly those active in the influential Braj area of North India, where Krishna himself is said to have lived, will be examined.

Course description

Early in the course we will consider materials bearing on the historical status of the poet himself, and will try to appreciate--both in that light and others--the early hagiographical writing on Sur. We will also launch our reading of poems attributed to Sur by reading selections from the collection of Dhirendra Varma called Sursagar Sar (see below). Increasingly, however, we will move to the 16th-century Sursagar itself, and as well to the actual manuscripts that give us access to that collection.

Course requirements

Prerequisite: two or three years of coursework in Modern Standard Hindi, or their equivalent.

Regular attendance and participation; two quizzes to test mastery of the Brajbhasa prose and poetry; a final paper and a class presentation linked to it.
Core texts

Largely speaking, paper copies of these will be made available from the instructor. Where possible, Courseworks will list the remainder.


Gokulnath (attributed), *Sur Das ki Varta* from the *Caurasi Vaisnavan ki Varta* (xeroxed). Also, notes on the *Sur Das ki Varta* (xeroxed, as above).


Other materials on Surdas specifically


Gokulnath (attributed), *Sur Das ki Varta* from the *Caurasi Vaisnavan ki Varta* (xeroxed). Also, notes on the *Sur Das ki Varta* (xeroxed, as above).


NB: Numerous other works, primarily in Hindi, are listed in the bibliographical sections of books by Bryant, Entwistle, Sharma et al., and Hawley.

**What is an author? A bhakti author?**


**On narrative and hagiography**


William I. Smith, *Patterns in North Indian Hagiography* (Stockholm: Department of Indology, University of Stockholm, 2000).

On meter and performance


General reference and dictionary materials


Rebecca Manring, ”Outline of Braj Grammar” (Indiana University, n.d., xeroxed).

----------, *Hindi Literature from its Beginnings to the Nineteenth Century* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1984).


Syamsundardas et al., eds., *Hindi Sabd Sagar* (Benares: Kasi Nagaripracarini Sabha, 1935).


UNIT I. The Vallabhite Surdas: Biography, Hagiography, Text

Week 1. Brajbhasa grammar and literature.

9/3 Introduction to the course
Rebecca Manring, “Outline of Braj Grammar” (xeroxed).

9/5 Rupert Snell, The Hindi Classical Tradition, pp. 3-18, 29-38, 71-76.

Week 2. Surdas ki Varta (xeroxed) - 1.

9/10 Snell selection, completion
Surdas ki Varta, bhavprakas, introductory, pp. 400-404 (xeroxed).

9/12 Surdas ki Varta, prasang 1, pp. 404-409
J. S. Hawley, The Memory of Love, introduction, pp. 3-44.


9/17 Surdas ki Varta, prasang 1, pp. 409-412. Omit prasangs 2 and 3 (you have already read most of prasang 3, thanks to Rupert Snell). Also prasangs 4-6 (pp. 418-422) and 8-9 (pp. 425-433). Note: Skip the long poem on pp. 430-431.


J. S. Hawley, Sur Das: Poet, Singer, Saint, pp. 3-33.
Kenneth E. Bryant, Poems to the Child-God, pp. 1-18.

9/19 Nabhadas, Bhaktamal, entry on Surdas (Courseworks).
Hariramvyas, ‘Bhaktamal’, pad 31, in which Surdas is mentioned (edited by Heidi Pauwels in her In Praise of Holy Men (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 2002), pp. 84-86 (Courseworks).


9/24-26 Surdas ki Varta, prasangs 10-11, pp. 434-442.


Week 5. The Vallabhite Sursagar

10/1 Dhirendra Varma, Sursgaar Sar, selections to be announced.


10/3 Quiz on the brajbhasa read so far.

UNIT II. The 16th-Century Surdas: Poetry and Criticism

We will work our way through a wide selection of poetry represented in manuscripts that give us a view of the Surdas poems that were in circulation in the 16th century, and will also consider problems of appreciation/criticism and edition that arise in connection with them. Our text is an advance copy of Bryant and Hawley, Surdas: Sursagar (Harvard University Press, forthcoming), which we will occasionally compare with what appears in the “vulgate” edition of the Nagaripracarini Sabha. From time to time we will also bring in the facsimile edition of the oldest manuscript in which poems attributed to Surdas are archived: the Fatehpur manuscript of 1582. Notes on certain of these poems can be found in Hawley The Memory of Love.

Week 6. Krishna growing up

10/8-10

Week 7. The pangs and politics of love

10/15-17

Week 8. Krishna departs for Mathura, never to return
Week 9. The bee-messenger

Week 10. Lordly encounters—and others

Week 11. Ramayana

Week 12. The poet’s petition and praise

Week 13. Interval

NB: No class on 11/26: American Academy of Religion.
Or on 11/28: Thanksgiving.

Week 14. Wrap-up

12/3 Quiz on poems read in the second unit of the course.
12/5 To the holy rivers.

Week 15. Papers and presentations

12/7 Draft papers are posted to Courseworks: discussion board
12/10 Class discussion of the papers
12/16 Final version of the papers posted to Courseworks: discussion board.