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Book Review

-Rashmi Jain,

Meera vs Meera is a book of criticism that has been skilfully translated by Pradeep Trikha. The book was initially written by Madhav Hada which was titled Pachrang Chola Pahar Sakhi Ri. The English title is fascinating and apt as it presents the essence of this book. It sheds light on various facets of Meera that has been explored through history, folklore, myths, narratives or comics. The struggles, conflicts, devotion, emotions, courage, self-determination and poetry of Meera that has been derived through various sources have been brilliantly portrayed in this book. Whether Meera was a 'devoted saint-poet' or a 'determined queen' has been competently answered. The writer/translator has tried to glorify the real self of Meera amidst the multiple interpretations available through the centuries, and this is what Meera vs Meera is all about. Pradeep Trikha has said in the translators note "the present attempt to translate Pachrang Chola is an attempt to reach out the larger audience and readers of English Language. It will bring forth the rich cultural heritage of the vernacular sources of Madhav Hada to highlight their human vision and lofty ideals and also bring forth Meera's quest for truth, beauty, liberty, justice and happiness translation involves trans-creation, it is always the rewriting of the original text, 'a meta-text'; it reproduces not only what the author in the original language says but what he means..." (220-221)

The book has six sections namely 'Life', 'Society', 'Religious Narratives', 'Poetry', 'Canonization', 'Image Construction' along with a Translator's Note. All those desirous of knowing about Meera can read this book to quench their thirst for knowledge.

Meera vs Meera explores the mystic journey of Meera through folklores, myths, history and prejudices. Writer/Translator has taken references about Meera's life from Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan by Lieutenant Colonel James Tod and historians like Shamaldas, Munshi Devi Prasad, Harinarayan Purohit, Thakur Chatur Singh, Gauri Shankar, Hirachand Ojha and many others. Tod created and shaped Meera's image as a holy saint and mystic poet, and his portrayal influenced the post colonial writers. The mythical study promoted Meera's saffron ascetic attire. However, historian Thakur Chatur Singh, the paternal descendant of Meera reveals

that she belonged to an affluent family and never gave up her royal robes. Medieval scholars constructed Meera's image as a devotee of Krishna holding veena in hand and singing songs moving from one place to another. However, whenever Meera went on pilgrimage, she was accompanied by many people, including royal servants, caretakers, devotees, horse chariots, and similar retinue.

The society of Meera appeared quite different through the feminist and post-colonial lens, but it was neither stagnant nor too progressive or liberal. In Rajput clans ideals like loyalty, honour, pride, women's honour and dignity are of paramount importance. Yet women were shackled by certain restrictions on autonomy, mobility and economic independence. However, Meera's courage, determination to be vocal against social superiority, elites' moral authority, and prejudices of the times provided her opportunities to live on her terms and conditions.

Meera was admired for her poetry and for being a saint devotee by other peer saints. Meera's love for Lord Krishna and other miracles found in Nabhadas's Bhaktamal or Priyadas's Bhaktirasabodhini's religious narratives Mahipati's Bhaktlila-Mitra or Raghavdas's Dadupanthi Bhaktamal are full of miraculous incident and stories of Meera. The story of getting the Krishna idol at childhood in a peculiar manner, drinking poison considering it as an elixir or merging in lord's idol, all brought unflinching support and fame for Meera.

Meera, in her poetry, combines transient and the eternal. Her poems were reformative and used the region's familiar language, which conveys devotional integrity and transparency. "The use of symbols and imagery associated with her material experiences, such as those related to the adornment of the feminine body. Words like *katakana*(bracelet), *moondro* (ring), *ghaagroo* (skirt, also known as *lehenga* in Hindi)...*choodo* (ivory bangles)..." (175) are used in her poetry. Meera's poetry shows longing to meet her Lord Krishna for instance '*Ubhi dhari arj karat hun, arj karat bhaie bhor*' and '*chaalo Agam ke desh Kaal dekhat darey/Vahan bhara prem ka hauj, Hans Kela karey*' (let's go to God's kingdom where death do not dare tread,/ Reservoir of His love is filled to the brim)(175). Her poems are transcendental in nature but 'challenges gender stereotypes and perils of woman saint's life'.

In twentieth-century Meera's image has been constructed and popularised through books published by publication houses like Gita Press, Diamond Books, Amar Chitra Katha and movies. Gita Press, Amar Chitra Katha and films wanted to cater to the middle-class audience,

therefore constructed Meera's image as an ideal Hindu wife and saint devotee. Diamond Books targeted the urban audience by showing Meera's fearless and rebellious nature. Meera had an enduring universal appeal, so various images have been created to heal, educate, and inspire future generations. It is said 'Jaki Rahi Bhavana jaisi, Prabhu Murat dekhi tin tesi' (Ramcharitmanas) Similarly, the readers would find various opportunity to introspect Meera's personality from a varied perspective.

The translation is a challenging and tedious task which has been proficiently done by Pradeep Trikha. Madhav Hada has paved the journey of Meera in a similar manner Pradeep Trikha has translated the mysterious journey of Meera through various twists and turns treading on the roads of myths, folklore, history and narratives. In the translator's note, he mentioned that he is "wandering in an exile in search of perfection if not Paradise. In Pachrang Chola Meera too had to wander from place to place translating her quest of spirit to merge into her Krishna so that the journey of her soul should transcend from 'a form' to 'the form' of the ultimate." (221). Similarly, the readers would go through meandering ways to reach their destination and would have an experience of enriching soulful journey to find out the real identity of Meera. Many tales about Meera are available in regional languages. However, this translation of Pachrang Chola into English would give an overall view regarding Meera's life and time which have global importance. Pradeep Trikha deserves applause for translating Pachrang Chola to Meera vs Meera. This work has emerged as an outstanding source of information for modern readers and researchers alike.
