

**The Unknown Traveler with his Magic Mirror appears as
the Beggar King and his True Heart-Son:
Metaphors, Literary Images, and Leitmotifs of Contemporary Hindu Tantric Poetry**

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The corpus of poetry produced either within India's tantric traditions or as part of the *rasa*, or "mood," of bhakti tantrism conservatively spans the early medieval period through the present. While the published work of poets such as the Ālvārs and Nāyanmārs from the sixth through ninth centuries, the Vīraśaiva saints from the tenth through twelfth centuries, and Rāmprasād Sen from the eighteenth-century are fairly well known, that of contemporary tantric poets and spiritual adepts is not. Two twentieth-century mystic poets who have produced large aggregates of poems are Prabhāt Ranjan Sarkar, who lived from 1921 till 1990, and Lee Lozowick, who was born in 1943. Sarkar's poems number over five thousand, while Lozowick's currently surpass a thousand and it is possible that he may continue to write.

The two sections of their work that I will compare are the first one hundred poems written by Sarkar in *Prabhāt Saṅgiita: Songs of the New Dawn. Volume 1* and the first one hundred twenty-five poems of Lozowick which appear in his second volume of poetry titled *Gasping for Air in a Vacuum: Poems and Prayers to Yogi Ramsuratkumar*. Each group of work employs distinctive literary approaches, some of which may be attributed to their respective ideologies of monistic theism and qualified non-dualism.

P. R. Sarkar, whose spiritual name is Shrii Shrii Ānandamūrti, the Image of Bliss, was a Bengali-speaking Bihari who founded the international socio-spiritual organization Ananda Marga. He began producing poems in 1982 and completed 5018 of them in only eight years.

Sarkar wrote most of his poems in his native Bengali, though some of them were rendered in English, Sanskrit, Hindi, Urdu, Magahi, Maethili, and Angika.¹ A number of the poems were composed with their own tunes and in these cases they are presented with musical and dance accompaniment at Ananda Marga functions. The entire body of poetry and songs is called Prabhát Saṁgiita. Though the majority of the poems remain untranslated, at the request of Sarkar the first one hundred poems were translated into English and published in 1993. Since Sarkar's death there are some individuals within his organization who assert that none of the poems should be translated into other languages because it diminishes their sacredness.² In 2007 a Prabhát Saṁgiita Academy was established near Ydrefors, Sweden at one of their organization's training centers.

Sarkar's ideology is a form of Śaivite tantrism, a monistic theism of Śiva/ Śakti in which the emphasis is placed on Śiva. Sarkar's themes and literary images are decidedly universal, cosmic and ecstatic in character. They include the longing of the individual aspirant for supreme consciousness in its *nirguṇa*, or unmanifested, state; the manifestation of supreme consciousness onto the mundane level, the nature of that consciousness as it interacts with tantric practitioners, and the aspirant's ultimate awakening from slumber and surrender to the divine, often to the accompaniment of a flood of cosmic effulgence.

Supreme consciousness is described as “the real friend,” the poems or songs as “a fountain of effulgence” being sung “in the kingdom of divine light, beyond the threshold of darkness.”³ Sarkar uses the phrase “*ajānā pathik*,” or “the unknown traveler,” as a metaphor for cosmic consciousness, while describing the action of its universal *śakti* as “*māyā mukure*,” a “magic mirror.” Poem number sixteen mentions *ajānā pathik* directly. It reads:

Deep in dream,
The air heavy with moisture,
The Unknown Traveller has come.
On the strings of the lyre
Beyond all limitations
He sang the song of consciousness.
How affectionate His look!
How compassionate His smile!
Shattering all bondages,
The unknown has become known today.⁴

In the following excerpt from poem number thirty-nine the unknown traveler is addressed without being directly named.

You have come, passing through countless towns and cities
Filling innumerable voices with melody and song.
You have come, piercing through countless galaxies
Dancing dances of innumerable rhythms.⁵

Sarkar's frequent use of the phrase “the unknown traveler,” sometimes written as “the ancient unknown traveler,”⁶ rises to the level of a leitmotif in his poetry. It creates an awe-inspiring image of mystery and power. The repetition of the phrase has an effect akin to that of a mantra because the constant association of *ajānā pathik* with cosmic consciousness welds the two concepts together in a reader's mind. Jan Gonda has defined mantra as a means of concentrating intentional thought in such a way that it brings the user in touch with “the essence of divinity which is present in the mantra.”⁷ While visiting one of Sarkar's organizational centers in Germany I observed that among his disciples the mere mention of *ajānā pathik* tends to reduce conversations to hushed tones.⁸ Sarkar's *ajānā pathik* creates a mood similar to that which the reknowned Bāul *fakir* Lālan employed in one of his songs. Lālan describes the divine as speaking but not present, near but unseen, and ultimately unknown.⁹

On *māyā mukure* Sarkar says in poem number ten:

In Your magic mirror, what we think, what we do,
Oh Lord, You know all
The pulsation of life, the evolution of the ages,
You listen, you hear all the secrets
By hiding from You, what can we do?
By making you unmindful, what can we think?
You are in all manifestations, and in all actions
In the sweetness of silence.¹⁰

An excerpt from Sarkar's thirteenth poem displays the often ecstatic quality of his language.

I have only laughed, I have only danced,

I have only sung,
I have fallen in love with the moonlight,
Whatever I have seen, heard or attained
I have embedded them all
In the jewel-box of my mind.
If they are lost in a cruel tempest
I have left a message with Him
In whom everything is lost.¹¹

Poem 38 reads:

He has come murmuring in my heart,
Overflowing with sweet nectar.
The invisible Lord has appeared in my mind,
Flooding my whole being with effulgence.
With what an enchanting appearance He has come!
With what an exhilarating smile He is laughing!
His effulgence has painted rainbow colors
On the clouds of my pain.
All the songs, all the rhythms,
All the melodies of the universe
Are simply to welcome Him.

Lee Lozowick, whose spiritual name is Lee Khepa Bāul, is an American who founded a spiritual community called Hohm Sahaj Mandir, the Hohm Innate Divinity Temple. It is an international group with branches in Germany, Canada, Mexico, and France. The word “*kṣepa*” in Lozowick’s title is a Bāul honorific meaning “divinely mad.” The community of artists, musicians, writers, and actors refer to themselves as Western Bāuls.¹² They orient themselves towards living a life of surrendered devotion to the divine in the lineage of Swami Papa Ramdas (1884-1963) and South Indian bhakti saint Yogi Ramsuratkumar (1918-2001). Lozowick began writing English language poetry to the Yogi in 1981 but he did not start sending it to him until several years after that.¹³ Over time their relationship developed into one similar to that between Jalaluddin Rumi and Shams-i-Tabrīz. Lozowick’s two volumes of poetry, *Death of a Dishonest Man* and *Gaspings for Air in a Vacuum*, contain more than a thousand poems.¹⁴

Lozowick’s poems are characterized by praise and awe of the divine, and the longing for supreme consciousness in the form of his *īṣṭa deva*, Yogi Ramsuratkumar. The Yogi, who was known as the “God-child of Tiruvaṅṅāmalai,”¹⁵ was an ecstatic who seemed constantly absorbed in

the divine. He referred to himself as a beggar who didn't know anything and had nothing to teach. This is apparently only how he appeared to be. To those to whom he cared to reveal himself he called the divine "Father in Heaven" and said "My Father alone exists! All one, perfect unity, past, present, future! Everything perfect! My Father alone!"¹⁶ The longing in Lozowick's and Sarkar's poems is a result of *viraha*, the pain of separation from the divine.¹⁷ A. K. Ramanujan observes that without separation bhakti cannot be produced.¹⁸

The spiritual philosophy Lozowick espouses may be described as Viṣiṣṭādvaita,¹⁹ but he utilizes the phrase "Enlightened Duality" to describe it. M. Young, Lozowick's biographer, attributes this to his emphasis on the worship of a personal god.²⁰ While both the monistic theism of Sarkar and Lozowick's qualified non-dualism advocate surrender to the divine and a devotional orientation, a major difference lies in their conception of what should happen to a tantric practitioner in the advanced stages of spiritual work. Sarkar's system emphasizes merger into cosmic consciousness except for those bodhisattva-like individuals who would like to dedicate lifetime after lifetime to social service.²¹ Lozowick's system concentrates on surrendered service to the divine. He believes that what the universal divinity has to offer spiritual aspirants is "Just This," the world of spirit manifested as the mundane.²² This difference in their philosophical orientations affects the poetry of Lozowick as compared to that of Sarkar from the outset. In an excerpt from Lee's poetry dated 18 July 1998, poem number four, his philosophical orientation is clear. He addresses the Beggar King, saying:

Thank You for giving Your little beggar
the sometimes illusion of being
other than You
so he can love You and Worship You
in Your Beauty, Madness and Wonder.
You are Yogi Ramsuratkumar
and this is another form of You
(called lee lozowick, Your son)
offering You Yourself
in the form of prayer, Praise,
adoration and laughter.²³

Sarkar's ideology can be seen in his poetry as well. In poem number eighty-five he says:

In the call of the ever-new
My rhythm rushes, dancing towards the distant blue sky
Today our song is the onward march
Our life is the laughing call
It is useless to sit idle, or look behind in vain
The One whom I am seeking
Calls me with the melody of the ever-new.
My mind merges in the Cosmic Mind
My life merges in the Cosmic life
In one melody, in the call of the ever-new.²⁴

An excerpt from his poem number fifty-one reads:

In all directions the sweetness of mind
Rushes towards infinity, rushes, rushes.
The flower of my heart and the flame of my mind -
He took away my all,
He took away my all, my all, my all.²⁵

It may appear that the philosophy of Viṣiṣṭādvaita or Enlightened Dualism lends itself more naturally to devotional pursuits. Yet the expression of bhakti is also present in monistic theism, though perhaps its presence should be described as a temporary condition.

Lozowick often employs a Sanskrit poetic form called “*nindāstuti*” in which praise masquerades as criticism. In analyzing the basis of *nindāstuti* the Sanskrit literary theorist G. Parathasaradhy Rao says that there are several literary forms which depend on words or phrases having secondary functions or meanings.²⁶ These are referred to as *lakṣana*. Among those in Rao's field there is agreement that *vyājastuti*, and its sub-branch *nindāstuti*, are varieties of *lakṣana* that involve censure or praise.²⁷ Lozowick's use of the term “beggar” is an illustration of both *lakṣana* and *nindāstuti*.

A beggar is an individual who is unsuccessful from the worldly viewpoint and relies on petitioning the public for material things. The secondary meaning of the word, in the metaphoric sense that Lozowick uses it, is that of a successful petitioner of the divine for blessings of a spiritual nature. Here the word “successful” implies *vairāgya*, or detachment, towards the mundane and attachment to the divine.²⁸ The concept of beggary also includes the principles of surrender to

the divine, what Lozowick refers to as “spiritual slavery,” and the idea of *aparigraha*, the symbolic and literal conservation of resources.²⁹ The fact that Lozowick calls Yogi Ramsuratkumar a king of beggars indicates that he felt the Yogi was perfectly surrendered. The word “king” acts as a type of “signifier” which helps to illuminate the secondary and esoteric spiritual significance of the signified word “beggar” to indicate a spiritual luminary rather than a destitute individual. Among the Bengali Bāuls the word “beggar” has the same significance as it does for the Western Bāuls.³⁰ However, the esoteric significance of the word is not commonly recognized outside of Bāul circles. In an excerpt from the third poem dated 16 April 1998 Lozowick says to the Yogi:

It is You who have done all this,
You who have brought us here,
You who we must Blame
and You who we must Praise.
Your son is not shy in such Matters,
as You well know, Father,
so Blame You lee will,
but without shame or regret,
and Praise You lee will,
but without constraint or inflation.
This disturbing and dangerous state
of affairs is Your fault
oh dirty Beggar, and how
grateful we are
for the tirelessness of Your efforts
on our behalf.³¹

In bhakti poetry *nindāstuti* functions as an indication of extreme love for the supreme, an excess of longing for the divine. It implies a certain intimacy or familiarity with the divine object of longing. As a literary and spiritual device it fortifies one-pointed concentration on deity by startling the mind with unusual images and associations in relation to the divine. Some of Lozowick’s literary images incorporate the epithets that Yogi Ramsuratkumar used for himself: a “dirty Beggar,” a “dirty Sinner” and a “Madman.”³² The Bāuls regard “madness” to be a metaphor for those totally lost in the love of the divine.³³ In an excerpt from poem number two on the 3 September 1999 Lozowick says:

To be the son of One Who is-not,
to be the son of One who was Murdered
by His own Father, one must
be murdered in his turn, also becoming no-one.
You have done this, oh Madman,
though it is not entirely evident yet,
but a deed done it surely is.
You have made lee Your true heart-son,
not by an act of language, not by the gift of life,
but by the fact of murder.
The death of lee lozowick, as he always was,
was the birth of lee, the son of Yogi Ramsuratkumar.
This bad poet and little sinner is not.
There is no-one here. He has done away
with the illusions of separation and independence.
He has slain His admirer
and made an Adorer, an obedient servant,
a Wild Heretic and apprentice Madman.³⁴

Following Yogi Ramsuratkumar's lead Lozowick also calls the Yogi a "Mad Sinner," a "crazy Beggar," and a "crazy Sinner."³⁵ But he relentlessly testifies to the blessings which Yogi Ramsuratkumar's name confers.³⁶ In an excerpt from poem number two on the 13 April 1998 Lozowick says:

Oh Father, Yogi Ramsuratkumar,
the world is dry, parched,
in the midst of a most devastating drought.
And this is lee, Your wild Heretic
and Your dark storm cloud,
raining Your name down
upon the cracked, sun-dried surface,
which is hungry and thirsty
for the life-bringing water
that is Your Benediction,
and that is Your Father's Blessing.³⁷

For insights into the word "Sinner" as a metaphor it is useful to look to the Muslim world and the history of the divinely-intoxicated Sufi saint Hussain Mansour Hallaj (858-922). In the tenth century Hallaj was put to death in Iran for the "sin" of declaring himself to be divine. In the twentieth century Yogi Ramsuratkumar declared the universe to be a unified divinity and acted accordingly.

In contrast to the names he refers to Yogi Ramsuratkumar by, Lozowick refers to himself as a “little beggar,” a “little sinner,” “Your wild Heretic,” “Your arrogant Fool,” “Your bad Poet,” “Your apprentice beggar” and above all, as the “true heart-son” of the Beggar King.³⁸ These last two images are ubiquitous in Lozowick’s poetry and function as mantric leitmotifs in the same way that Sarkar’s *ajānā pathik* does. The use of some of Lozowick’s other phrases, such as the “bad Poet,” also qualify as leitmotifs but they do not have a mantric quality.

When we consider the works of the classical poet masters Nammālvār, the Vīraśaiva saints, and Rāmprasād together with the contemporary tantric poets Sarkar and Lozowick several characteristics stand out. In the Vīraśaiva poet Basavaṇṇa, in Rāmprasād, and in Sarkar there is the intense longing for liberation and knowledge of the divine.³⁹ In Nammālvār, Rāmprasād, and Lozowick; and to a lesser degree in Basavaṇṇa there is the abundant use of *nindāstuti* as a form of praise. Regarding the struggle for liberation, Basavaṇṇa has a tone of desperation, futility, and bitterness in many of his poems which is not present in Sarkar’s work.⁴⁰ Sarkar always gives the impression of being relentlessly hopeful or optimistic. Basavaṇṇa makes *nindāstuti*-like accusations against Śiva similar to Rāmprasād’s complaints about the divine Mother and Lozowick’s heaping blame on the “dirty Beggar.”⁴¹ But this particular poetic form is absent in the translated works of Sarkar.

Nindāstuti is wonderfully on display in the poetry of Rāmprasād where a special class of *nindāstuti* drips with adoration just behind the surface of his accusations. He calls the divine Mother “pitiless,” “cruel,” “cold,” “crazy” and shameless.⁴² But his central theme is reliance on the name of the divine Mother. Lozowick’s poems have irony but little of Rāmprasād’s rage. Overall his poems have greater sweetness of tone than Rāmprasād’s. Perhaps this is because Yogi Ramsuratkumar was still embodied at the time Lozowick was writing the majority of his poems. In Nammālvār the poetic themes are about the dual, all-inclusive nature of the divine; the world as *līlā*; and the relationship to the divine through separation, possession and absorption. His Viṣṇu is called “a thief, a cheat,” “childish,” “self-seeking,” and “wrong” not to mention cruel and sneaky.⁴³

In all of the poetry considered the relationship with the divine is familiar in tone and thoroughly devotional. Nammālvār, Basavaṇṇa, and Rāmprasād approach the divine almost as if he or she were a family member, while Lozowick assumes such a relationship directly with his extensive Father-Son images.⁴⁴ Sarkar strikes a more cosmic or distant tone, but the sense of *viraha* or longing for the divine is as intense and one-pointed in his poetry as it is in the devotional expression of the other bhakti poets.

- 1 Shrii Prabhát Ranjan Sarkar, *Prabhát Saṁgiita: Songs of the New Dawn. Vol. 1* (Calcutta: Ánanda Marga Pracárika Saṁgha, 1993), publisher's note. The system of diacritics Ananda Marga uses in its publications was invented by Sarkar. He chose a simplified Sanskrit transliteration that uses the accent mark almost exclusively.
- 2 From <<http://anandamargaforum.wordpress.com/2009/07/18/is-this-proper-to-do/>>. accessed 9 April 2010. The phrase “*ajānā pathik*” appears to be of particular concern. Since Sarkar's demise his organization has split into several factions. Two of them support the organizational use of either Hindi or Bengali, while a third is unaligned to either language.
- 3 Sarkar, *Prabhát Saṁgiita*, “real friend” 1, see also “unfailing friend” 28; “fountain of effulgence” 1-2, “threshold of darkness” 3.
- 4 Sarkar, *Prabhát Saṁgiita*, 19. On the “unknown traveler,” see also p. 13.
- 5 Sarkar, *Prabhát Saṁgiita*, 55.
- 6 Sarkar, *Prabhát Saṁgiita*, 6.
- 7 Jan Gonda, “The Indian Mantra,” *Oriens: Journal of the International Society for Oriental Research* XVI (1963), 255.
- 8 Observations at an Ananda Marga center, Weisenauer Weg 4, 55129 Mainz, Germany in 1984.
- 9 The song titled “Ké Kātha Koyré” (Who Talks) was tape recorded in Calcutta, 1971. Deben Bhattacharya, *The Mirror of the Sky: Songs of the Bāuls of Bengal* (Prescott, Ariz.: Hohm Press, 1999), 221-25.
- 10 Sarkar, *Prabhát Saṁgiita*, 11.
- 11 Sarkar, *Prabhát Saṁgiita*, 14.
- 12 Helen Crovetto, “Embodied Knowledge and Divinity: The Hohm Community as Western-style Bāuls,” *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 10, no. 1 (August 2006): 69-95.
- 13 Hohm Community, *Hohm Sahaj Mandir Study Manual: A Handbook for Practitioners of Every Spiritual and/ or Transformational Path. Vol. 1* (Prescott, Ariz.: Hohm Press, 1996), 221.
- 14 Lee Lozowick, *Death of a Dishonest Man: Poems and Prayers to Yogi Ramsuratkumar* (Prescott, Ariz.: Hohm Press, 1998) and Lee Lozowick, *Gaspings for Air in a Vacuum: Poems and Prayers to Yogi Ramsuratkumar* (Prescott, Ariz.: Hohm Press, 2004).
- 15 Tiruvaṅṅāmalai is a pilgrimage town in Tamil Nadu where legend has it that Śiva created an infinite pillar of fire at Aruṅācala mountain.
- 16 M. Young, *Yogi Ramsuratkumar: Under the Punnai Tree* (Prescott, AZ: Hohm Press, 2003), xix. Lozowick also refers to the unmanifested form of the divine as “Father” or “Father in Heaven,” see Lozowick, *Gaspings for Air in a Vacuum*, 203, 245, 247.
- 17 Mary Young, one of Lozowick's senior disciples, also identifies *viraha* as one of the primary themes in his poetry. She defines *viraha* as love-in-separation. Mary Young, personal communication, 20 August 2010. See poems number 62 and 78 in Sarkar, *Prabhát Saṁgiita*, 86 and 102 respectively for examples of the expression of *viraha* in his poetry.
- 18 Nammālvār, *Hymns for the Drowning: Poems for Viṣṇu*, trans. A. K. Ramanujan (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1993), 157.
- 19 Viṣiṣṭādvaita (qualified non-dualism) is the theology of Rāmānujā (1017-1137), which advocates both *prapatti* (surrender to the divine) and *bhakti*. Rāmānuja refuted Śaṅkara's (7th-8th century) doctrine of *Māyā*, the world as illusion.
- 20 Lee Lozowick and M. Young, *Enlightened Duality: Essays on Art, Beauty, Life and Reality As It Is* (Prescott, Ariz.: Hohm Press, 2009), 12.
- 21 See Chapter 1 of Shrii Shrii Ánandamūrti, *Ánanda Sútram* (Calcutta: Ananda Marga Publications, 1996).
- 22 See Lozowick and Young, *Enlightened Duality*, 527-28 for quotes of Lozowick discussing “Just This.”
- 23 Lozowick, *Gaspings for Air in a Vacuum*, 227.
- 24 Sarkar, *Prabhát Saṁgiita*, 107.
- 25 Sarkar, *Prabhát Saṁgiita*, 75.
- 26 G. Parathasaradhy Rao, *Alankāraratnākara of Sobhākaramitra* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1992), 104-118, 277. These forms are *aprustutaprasāmsa*, *vyājastuti*, and *atiśayokti*; utilizing no exaggeration, some exaggeration, and extreme exaggeration respectively.
- 27 Rao, *Alankāraratnākara of Sobhākaramitra*, 112. Abhinavagupta recognized the form in his *Dhvanyāloka Locana* (113).
- 28 Crovetto, “Embodied Knowledge and Divinity,” *Nova Religio*, 82.
- 29 Lozowick and Young, *Enlightened Duality*, 177, 564.
- 30 Additionally Bengali Bāuls practice begging for donations in exchange for their musical performances. Crovetto, “Embodied Knowledge and Divinity,” *Nova Religio*, 81.
- 31 Lozowick, *Gaspings for Air in a Vacuum*, 201-02.
- 32 Lee Lozowick, *The Alchemy of Love and Sex* (Prescott, Arizona: Hohm Press, 1996), 280 and Lozowick, *Gaspings for Air in a Vacuum*, “dirty Beggar” 201-02, 220, 231 and madman 234, 248, 359.
- 33 Young, personal communication, 20 August 2010.
- 34 Lozowick, *Gaspings for Air in a Vacuum*, 362.
- 35 Lozowick, *Gaspings for Air in a Vacuum*, “Mad Sinner” 234, “crazy Beggar” 225, “crazy Sinner” 220.

- 36 Lozowick, *Gasping for Air in a Vacuum*, 220, 224-25, 230.
- 37 Lozowick, *Gasping for Air in a Vacuum*, 196.
- 38 Lozowick, *Gasping for Air in a Vacuum*, “little beggar” 203, 225, 227; “little sinner” 223, 240; “Your wild Heretic” 202, 228, 229, 231; “Your arrogant Fool” 221; “Your bad Poet” 224, 230, 335 among others and “Your apprentice beggar” 249.
- 39 Vīraśaiva saints, *Speaking of Śiva*, trans. and introduction A. K. Ramanujan (London: Penguin Books, 1973), 67-9, 89.
89. Rāmprasād Sen, *Grace and Mercy in Her Wild Hair: Selected Poems to the Mother Goddess*, trans. Leonard Nathan and Clinton Seely (Prescott, Arizona: Hohm Press, 1999), 7-11. Sarkar, *Prabhāt Saṅgīta*, 50, 64, 86, 91, 95, 111.
- 40 Vīraśaiva saints, *Speaking of Śiva*, 75, 77, 79, 81.
- 41 Vīraśaiva saints, *Speaking of Śiva*, Śiva as merciless and heartless 71.
- 42 Sen, *Grace and Mercy in Her Wild Hair*, “pitiless” 41, 43; “cruel” 21, 27; “cold” 21; and “crazy” 32, 41. and shameless 40.
- 43 Nammālvār, *Hymns for the Drowning: Poems for Viṣṇu*, trans. A. K. Ramanujan (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1993), “a thief, a cheat” 76, “childish” 23, “self-seeking” 69, “wrong” 24, cruel 61, and sneaky 76.
- 44 Lozowick, *Gasping for Air in a Vacuum*, 222, 224, 227, 231 to cite just a few.