

# The Gender Politics of *Viraha*: On Questions of Self and the Other

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## Abstract

*Viraha* in high literature is constituted on the idea of separation, or “loss,” the pining to get back to the primordial relationship with the supreme. This sacred “emotion” is operationalized through de-transcendentalization of divinity in a novel affective economy in both Bhakti and Sufi traditions. Though this new devotional sect sets forth a direct communion with the divine, the absolute other, the mainstream Bhakti traditions introduce the symbol of Radha and the High Sufi theology envisions an ideal Beauty realized in the body of the unique Woman as the medium or intermediary to the path of attaining the divine. This female other is considered to be the source of psycho-sexual plenitude necessary for the experience of union with the divine. Alongside this proposition, the new norm gets new dimension with the feminization of worship, i.e., the male devotee taking up the role of the female. Thus, the gendered phenomena takes on a new impetus in this mode of expression characterized as the female voice. Such an inversion of gender envisages a new Female Body which obliterates the flesh-bodied woman. Through a new presence, woman becomes absent in this symbolism through denial of their sexual difference.

**Keywords:** Sexual Difference, Female Voice, Gendered Devotional Practices

Bhakti and Sufi literatures are considered to be the experiential endeavors to register divine presence in the mundane world. Imagining divinity and defining the divine touch through human relationships remains a challenging task for the poets of these traditions. For weaving this extraordinary experience into human emotions, the poets resort to a mixed metaphor by reconfiguring the notion of love in the model of sacred and profane expressions. The entry of sacred love is through the profane sphere, i.e., the mundane world and their actors. *Viraha* is the chief emotion or the vehicle through which Bhakti and Sufi ideologies have been founded. With the prominence of the theme of *viraha*, the notion of love has undergone waves of change. The convergence of these two genres is evident in their emphasis on the potent force of love which manifests in the dual plane of presence/absence of the beloved; and these heightened feelings can only be realized in the separation from the beloved. The female figure is central here and it is the epitome of the *viraha* emotion. The privileging of woman gets crystallized through the bodily and psychological transformations of the notion of the feminine which has given a distinctive feature to this combined tradition of the East. The Bhakti and Sufi poets



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regard themselves as the female devotee, irrespective of gender in their longing for the divine.

This paper deals with how the discourse of *viraha* – built upon the tropes of loss/separation by the mainstream theological traditions – has systematically made use of the female body. It critically examines the registers of femininity, culled out from the given hierarchical set-up of social-emotional transactions that inform this discourse. I have employed the theoretical insights from the French Poststructuralist Feminist School, predominantly the works of three stalwarts, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, and Helene Cixous, to understand the entry of the female/feminine principle in the intellectual constellations of high Bhakti and Sufi traditions to articulate the purest form of love. Though coming from different strands, their writings have confronted the psychogenesis of the western philosophical tradition, in reconceptualizing the divine through the female body. I shall investigate the configurational principles of erotic devotional tradition of high Bhakti and Sufi traditions guided by these theoretical flashpoints.

### **French Feminism: Self, Other, and the Divine**

French feminism came into the spotlight as one of the prominent philosophical traditions in its confrontation of the interpretation of divine love and female sexuality during the high tide of the psychoanalytic tradition of the western world. This engagement made them critically re-evaluate the founding principles of western monotheistic theology. They argue that the emergence of monotheism at a specific historical juncture marks the absence of “woman” from the signifying system of theology (Walton 88). The critique of phallogocentrism, where phallus has been privileged as a prime signifier in both philosophy and psychoanalysis, created the moment for interrogating the relation of self with the female other, thus setting up the feminist theological discourse on the question of the “divine.” In the poststructuralist feminist paradigm, the trope “woman” has been used to make the point of the unrepresentability of the other on the theoretical postulation of “sexual difference.” But the limitation of representing the other does not restrict the relation with the other. With the idea of an infinite nature of divinity, these thinkers propose an infinite relationship dynamic with the self and the absolute alterity. In their articulation, they do not resort to symbolization, most specifically in any particular human form.

Simone de Beauvoir, in her book *The Second Sex*, critiqued Emmanuel Levinas’s construction of the concept of the “feminine” on three grounds: the Levinasean feminine is deprived of consciousness, his disregard for the reciprocity of the subject and object relationship, and “feminine” being characterized as “mystery” (Beauvoir xiv). Luce Irigaray, in her book *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* celebrated for its simmering rhetorical quality, mocked the complete disconnect on the part of the self and the other in the Levinasean idea of the “autistic transcendence” (50). This criticism came in the context of portraying the beloved or the other as one impeding

the path to transcendence as Levinas furnishes the complete dynamics of the ethical relation with the other in his book *Totality and Infinity*. Irigaray attributes this refusal on man's part to not acknowledge woman's autonomous entity and not being respectful to each other's "irreducible nonsubstantiality" (51). In unpacking the constituents of love, these criss-cross from nostalgia to the great comforts of home, where the deployment of the female other is to aid the man's love of self. This act of self-love through the mediation of the female body has other functions. As Irigaray notes: "the male version of love of self often takes the form or sounds the note of nostalgia for a maternal-feminine that has been forever lost" (52).

Irigaray argues for a different economy of relation of self to the other for a different order of love as the traditional act of love denies women of language. The traditional genealogy of the divine is about the divinity of father-son mediated through a virgin mother, leaving no space for the divinity of mother-daughter. She said that the love for self in the case of women has been discouraged or held in suspicion in the philosophical and psychoanalytic traditions. Women have been fetishized or idolized so far, and thus reduced to a "thing." This operation is at work to turn her into a mystery, always waiting to be unraveled, putting a seductive power on the "invisible." To break out of the ritual of serving themselves as man's self-realization, Irigaray argues for the importance of self-love on the part of women. She thinks that as women start loving themselves, this self-love would be *icon*-like, where it will illuminate a texture, a threshold, a gaze, a body, and flesh, speaking of which would mean that the men would struggle more to reach her beyond the aid of hands and tools (53). The love thus constructed is not for attaining the whole of the womb or going back to the origin but to reach all the available frontiers of contact. Irigaray specifically mentions that the configuration of love among women would be a destabilizing force in the heterosexual ethos of love-economy and thus opens up the space of infinity.

Irigaray cautions about man's propensity of doubling the world or creating it through symbols as they dominate the world of the symbolic. On the other hand, women's expressive forms, like chatting, gossiping, and singing, bears the mark of an affective economy without any objectification. This makes a space for an "immediate relationship to nature or to God" (97). Irigaray here, too, establishes that women, primarily, who do not invent any intermediary figures, can claim to forge a direct relationship with the divine.

Julia Kristeva traced the genealogy of love as an ideological move in the western tradition, starting from Judaic theology. She dwelled extensively on the representation of Shulamite woman in Jewish theology and conceptualized the Shulamite woman's search for a lover, who is in a play of transcendence/absence with her, as the condition of "Love," through which her subjecthood is in a constant process of evolving in the framework of a "quest." This dynamic on her part in this play with the beloved becomes the signifier of her access to the world of signification.

Kristeva denotes the characteristics of this yearning female self: “limpid, intense, divided, quick, upright, suffering, hoping, the wife – a woman” (110). Kristeva argues that on account of her love the woman “becomes the first subject in the modern sense of the term, divided, sick and yet sovereign” (111). The traits of “woman in love,” as enumerated by Kristeva, resonate with Radha as imagined in the high Bhakti theology. In unraveling the invocation of the erotic relationship with the divine in the theological work of Song of Songs, the mystic song tradition of the Christian Church, Kristeva marked it as an important landmark of cultural moment which was in a transition period of instituting monotheism in the ethos of the father’s laws in the existent field of the culture of mother goddess. This mother goddess tradition is a derivative of pluralistic psycho-social structures. Alongside this tectonic shift, Kristeva points to the gradual seeping in of the predominant heterosexual desire as the centerpiece of this new eros. Overall, the tradition of male lover and the paternal divine is set as the matrix of love dynamics. Kristeva names it as the “masculine divine” (168). The apparent celebration of bodily drives gets undermined, almost takes the form of a pathological character in the female cult of Marian. The Marian cult is brought forth by “homologizing Mary with Jesus” (168). When her cult got transported to the Eastern Church, Mary got changed into a “little girl in the arms of her son, who henceforth becomes her father” (169). Kristeva says this triad has encapsulated “three feminine functions (daughter-wife-mother)” within a totality where they vanish as specific corporeality while retaining their psychological functions (169). The vanishing of specific corporealities happens through the emptying of their feminine roles and through re-inscription of the father’s word on the body, i.e., Virginity (170).

Helene Cixous, on the other hand, considers writing as the medium for communication with the other and the divine. She regards writing as an infinite way of relating to the yearning of the other. This marks female writing as it would eventually put women in a position to relate with the “loss” (21) and the severance of the “maternal” (22) from the world of signification. Writing creates the potentialities of reaffirming the ties with the maternal, and thus the idea of “lack” turns into a positive lack. Cixous’s idea of writing as the attempt to form selfhood to make a way out of women’s subjugation is obvious in the works of the female writers of the *Viraha* genre. Medieval Bhakti poet-devotee Mirabai differs from her male counterparts, as for them it has predominantly soteriological purposes, whereas for Mirabai, it is an individual journey. She salvages her oppressed social self as a woman by reconstituting her autonomous subjectivity in the name of her immortal Giridhar, her lover Krishna. Rabiya, the first mystic of the Islamic literary world, through her empty imagery, i.e., devoid of any qualitative principles, finds meaning of her existence only in the supreme One.

### **“Female Voice”: On Gendered Economy of Devotional Practices**

The mainstream Bhakti traditions introduce the symbol of Radha and the Sufi

theology envisions an ideal Beauty realized in the body of the unique Woman as the medium or intermediary to the path of attaining the divine. This other calls for a refashioning of the norm of emotional exchange. This female other is considered to be the source of psycho-sexual plenitude necessary for the experience of union with the divine. Alongside this proposition, the new norm gets a new dimension with the feminization of worship, i.e., the male devotee taking up the role of the female. Thus, the gendered dimension gets a new impetus in this mode of expression characterized as the “female voice” (Sangari 1990). Male poets switching to feminine roles have characteristically marked the high *viraha* genre from prevalent literary traditions and the trait is claimed to have brought in differences in expressions between the practitioners of mainstream *viraha* writers and the female ritual songs. Folklorist Dineshchandra Sen, while comparing the treatment of the human-divine relationship in Vaishnavite literature, remarked that in the hands of men, these songs have always been transported to a spiritual elevation where Krishna is garbed as God, whereas in women’s songs this love possesses mundane qualities. For instance, Radha is fierce in her admonitions of Krishna’s betrayal and unhesitatingly opens her heart to this forbidden love (Sen 12). The notion of “femaleness” was preached and followed invariably by all the sects of Bhakti, where the devotees are said to be female, irrespective of their gender identities, pining for a male God. An argument can be made that for the *nirguna Bhakti*, the divine is emptied of all qualities, but when it comes down to defining the “female voice,” the markers and idioms are etched from the existent social reality, a hierarchical arena where women’s roles are fixed in its social expectations. This helps in building up the essence of the “femaleness.” Cultural theorist Kumkum Sangari writes on the genealogy of the female voice and its implication in the Bhakti tradition in her two-part essay titled “Mirabai and the Spiritual Economy of Bhakti.” Sangari points out that the “feminization of worship” (1467) foregrounds the modalities and idealities of “femaleness” or the “feminine” which becomes available to the practitioners in this genre. While making this ideological push in the Bhakti tradition, the concept of gender undergoes a redefinition for envisioning a universal norm for its adherents. This formulation of gender happens from a metaphysical point of view and the symbolism associated with it is fashioned on two points: a perpetual search for an origin which is related to attaining salvation and the marking of the devotee’s “heart” (1469) as the place of Bhakti. This is a place which is not supposed to be tinged with any specific properties, but the ideal construction is in its “femaleness” (1469).

The ability of the male devotees to assume the place of the feminine voice points to an understanding of the gender phenomenon as a socially constructed site. But this illuminative thought comes up to mask the implicit power-relations in the gender roles. Moreover, the male devotee’s desire to shed off masculinity and immerse himself in the socially disempowered position of women becomes the tenor of ultimate subalternity. Sangari says that this is an example of the most powerful

construction of subalternity as it deals with the “inward understanding of a socially constructed vulnerability” (1471) but it does not stop here. It is put forward to get to the depth of female sexuality, though unfortunately the reference point is the existing social relations and the male sexuality pleasure principle in relation to its female counterpart. The notion of female sexuality is seen in its mysterious, nebulous sensuousness alongside the beauty in its vulnerability.

The female voice or femininity upheld in male devotional practices is seen as the key feature that brings forth the frailties and perils that flow at the subterranean level of human existence. And the source of this vulnerability is the separated status of the self from its desired home which is the supreme divine. So, the sense of self as the undivided unity comes out as another major argument because unity with God only ensures the cessation of rebirth or desire. In this economy of divinity and the poet-devotee, the female voice is merely the mode; it is not an earnest effort to understand the other, i.e., the women in their bodied-existence.

### **Hawley’s Analysis**

J Stratton Hawley, a renowned scholar who has extensively worked on the Bhakti tradition, raises two points about the complete absence of the Mother Goddess or the maternal aspects in the entire tract of the Krishna narrative and the transformation of the divine Woman into a human woman in the guise of devotees pining for Krishna (Hawley 179). By applying the psychoanalytic concept of “displacement,” (he uses the term “psychogenesis”), Hawley finds the reason for substituting the powerful and independent figure of the woman with that of a woman longing for men in a bid to attain their place in the world of symbols or the world of Law – a Lacanian take obviously. This “achievement” happens at the cost of a separation from the mother figure. Different gender identity and the state of adulthood cause this double separation from the mother. The displaced glory of the mother gets shifted with the establishment of a male lover “as omnipotent, eternally full of appetite and eternally fascinating to the women who surround him” (177). This sheer omnipotence stirs the pangs which, in the end, lead to a disease, a mental ailment, only to be cured by the male lover personified in the figure of Krishna. Hawley is terse in his terming *viraha* as the “game” (177). Part of the strategy of this game is to earn victory over women by tying their longing with the immortal male divinity. Hawley continues to weave his argument of this story of supremacy by using the register of longing. At this point, he employs Indologist Martha Selby’s readings of Caraka Samhita, a first century CE medical text on Obstetrics. In an attempt to glorify the fullness of a pregnant woman, the figure of a woman, emaciated in its longing for her male lover is pitted against the former in the text. Thus, it portrays the *virahini* woman as empty. In the following description of the binary view of qualities, the *virahini* falls into a somewhat inferior category. But they become equal in their state of temporary infirmity, as both of them are waiting for their male progeny or male lover (178). This is really striking, as the writer of the medical text imagined the foetus only as male. The whole argument makes the woman a simple carrier of

the foetus, stripping her of her agentive/subject position. She, too, along with the author, is pining for the male child and, by that token, the fulfillment of the familial needs of male legacy.

Hawley contends that *Viraha* as a genre practiced by the mainstream literary tradition is set up “to depict the struggles and longing of women in love” (125). For women, love has different shades and mostly these are tinged with her attachment to her surroundings. So, it is often seen that the songs of *viraha* in the women’s tradition often express the wish that their family members – brothers and fathers – would come soon to take them to their natal places, from which they have been separated through marriage. Therefore, when a poet-devotee like Mirabai composes poems, she differs in her expressions of longing from those of Surdas. Her poems are built on the “women’s role” (181) rather than on creating uneven standards for men and women in relation to the divine, i.e., Krishna.

### **The Absence of “Mother”**

Hawley’s enquiry of “Why men revel in the weakness and mostly the sickness of love meant for women?” (179) invites further curiosities, as in to know if the male devotee-poet revels in its real materiality or in the skin of real women. The formulation of *viraha* as a game, specifically “a man’s game of trying on women’s clothes and women’s feelings” (180), has foregrounded the love goddess in its discourse and thus demon goddesses who are popular among women folk remain on the fringe. The immense popularity of the goddess Sitala among rural women of Bengal gave rise to the genre called Tushu and Vadu songs in Bangla folk literature. Seasons like summer and the monsoon belong especially to this goddess whose visitation is seen simultaneously as an affliction and grace. The demonic cult of the female deity Manasa is the other most favored goddess among women in this region. She is worshipped to ensure the regeneration and fertility of the human clan and here lies her maternal grace. There is a complete absence of the “maternal” facets of Goddesses like Manasa or Sitala in the cult of Radha and a resistance to portray Radha as a divine Mother. Wendy Doniger writes from the source of Brahmaivaivarta Purana, “the mythology of Radha, who is almost never said to be a mother; when, on one rare occasion, she does give birth (to an egg), she kicks it away in anger, and her husband curses her to be barren evermore” (132).

The French Feminist Trio and Gayatri Spivak write about the configuration principles, through which the Virgin Mary and the Woman beloved are imagined for building up an ideal feminine in the service of the male divine in western tradition (Spivak 60). This normative idea impedes an ethical communication between self and the other. If the cult of Mary demands a sex-less, body-less persona for her deification, in *viraha* tradition we see the reverse technique. The image of Radha engrafts the ultimate beauty descriptions which verges on the almost impossible. In the treatises on erotic desire, Radha is a “lotus-woman (Padmini),” whose perennial beauty is

sketched as: “moderate in her desire, without anger or conceit, needing little food or sleep” (Schomer 110).

Radha in the Chandidasa tradition is the embodiment of pure love. She never appears alone and the Radha Sampradayas, the community of worshippers of Radha, commemorates her in relation to the lord Krishna, “We speak of a Radha cult only in synecdoche, for convenience, Radha is not to be compared with the autonomous Durga, a goddess ever virgin and lonely in her power” (Hein 120). The sacred figure of Radha, not to be portrayed as an autonomous goddess, harkens back to the historical evolution of Radhaite theology. Charlotte Vaudeville undertook a detailed study of Radha’s emergence amidst the presence of powerful goddesses like Kali and Durga by sifting through the debates on Puranic commentaries. In different texts which had some imprints from the tantric ethos, Krishna Gopala or the cult of child god Krishna enjoyed protection under the care of a great Goddess, both as Durga and Kali. But during the 16<sup>th</sup> century in eastern India, under the active intervention by the Goswamis, who being Brahmins, became the interpreters of the Puranas, and intermingled tantric and the Bhagavata streams by excluding the horrid-faced Kali from the pantheon. Vaudville attributes this neo-Vaishnava synthesis to the rise of golden-skinned Durga, and the emergence of Radha as Krishna’s consort (12).

### **The Image of Woman in Sufism: The Creative Feminine**

The concept of the Virgin-Mother resounds in the high Sufi theology in the figure of Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad. In the high Sufi tradition, Fatima causes the birth of holy Imams and she has been named the Fatima-Creator (Corbin 1998). Ibn Al Arabi (1165-1240 AD), a medieval philosopher from Spain, furnished a systematic notion on the Sufi imagery, a medium to relate one’s self to the divine. Ibn Arabi belongs to the school of Theosophy of Light, the sect that considers intellectual understanding of existence and mystical experience interdependent on each other. The stress on the direct experience with the divine, who creates through knowledge, inaugurates the role of feminine in the creation of mystic revelation. This woman embodies the ideal Beauty which has a creative force in evoking love in man and thus transports him beyond the tactile world. Ibn Arabi makes sure that this Woman of theophanic light is not only a conjectural image, because, for him, abstraction happens only through the experiential world. Corbin mentions a story where Arabi had a glimpse of that light in the guise of a woman. The incident occurred when Arabi was doing the ritual of moving around the holy Ka’aba. To avoid the crowd, he came down to the sand and continued the circumambulation. He was in a peaceful demeanor but also in a state of perplexity about his heart’s longings. He started reciting some extempore lines loudly and the following narration states what he experienced:

No sooner had I recited these verses then I felt on my shoulder the touch of a hand softer than silk. I turned around and found myself in the presence of a young girl, a princess from among the daughters of the Greeks. Never



had I seen a woman more **beautiful** of face, **softer** of speech, more **tender** of heart, more **spiritual** in her ideas, more **subtle** in her symbolic allusions. She surpassed all the people of her time in refinement of mind and cultivation, in beauty and in knowledge.” (Corbin xvii, emphasis mine)

Through the example of this story, Arabi specifies the qualities of the image of the Woman that induces light and knowledge and allows man to attain the divine. He names this vision as the mystic Sophia. The image of the woman, as a blend of beauty and finer qualities, is constructed from socially accepted gender specific attributes.

### **The Beauty as Woman: Padmavati, Laily Majnu and Yusuf Zulekha**

The portrayal of love in Sufi texts has developed alongside the philosophical tensions of the Bhakti ideas of profane and sacred love. Here, profane love refers to engagements between mortal human beings, while the sacred love would be envisioned only in terms of the human soul’s pining for God’s grace. The Sufi doctrine posited love at the core of spiritual upliftment. That is to say that only through the path of love can God be attained. But the excessive love has been seen as a sign of madness in Sufi thought. The ultimate decimation of Majnu to the entity of a mad human being reverberates this vulnerability.

Michael Dols’ book *Majnun: The Madman in Medieval Islamic Society* begins with the popular Shakespearean quote on madness that it too follows a method (325). It hints towards the organizing principles of a romantic tale in the Arabic tradition, similar to the tradition of western heroic poetry. The common point of meeting for these two genres is the emphasis on “chaste love” and this chastity is expected of both the lover and the beloved. Therefore, when the Arabic traditions reached South Asia through Persian sophistications, it still retained the primary values of the portrayal of love that got molded into the Sufi doctrine.

Since all these texts have followed the Sufi symbol of love as a virtue that leads to the attainment of the Supreme, the exquisite beauty of female protagonists is not for their own embellishments. Rather, this beauty is a virtue because it excites the men of the stories, who are tied to the mundane world, about God’s grand design. The romance saga of Padmavati surpasses the other two texts, *Laily Majnu* and *Yusuf Zulekha*, in communicating this spiritual mystery in its fullness. We find all the important male characters losing their consciousness from a single glance of Padmavati. Her beauty is astoundingly described in minute detail. Every part of her body is brought under scrutiny. Separate chapters have been allocated to describe the tale of her beauty and this is the principle composition structure of all Sufi romance texts. The awestruck poet begins with the declaration:

*How can I describe the beauty of Padmavati, My Lord/ She is incomparable in the three worlds/ Her hair flows to the full length/ Her body giddily fragrant/ It would drive you blind.* [ Padmavati rup ki kohimu maharaj/tulona dibare

nahi trijogoto majh/apado lombito kesh kosturi sourav/moha andhokarmoy  
drishti porabhov. (Ahsan 67)

The section where the Shah, the emperor of Delhi, the contender of the crown against Padmavati's husband King Ratansen, was moved to a temporary loss of sense, is quite dramatic. The poet writes:

Having a glimpse of the face just for once  
The Sultan fell down all on a sudden  
Shah bewildered, wriggled with the pain  
All present there went for a toss  
He was lifted to the bed-chamber  
Shah was out of his senses for a moment  
As if the image stands right before him  
[Mohoschit Sultan pore okosshyat/shinghashone pori shah kore chotfot/  
hahakar kori shobe ki hoilo sonkot/shoyon korailo niya shojjar opor/dondo  
ek ocheton chilo dillishwar/shei murti dekhe jeno noyan gochor]. (162)

A similar type of hyperbolic description is found in narrating Laily's physical attributes:

Moon-shaped face, the enchantress of the world  
Her red lips are like glowing hibiscus  
The eye-brows is shaped in its perfect lines  
Her angry glance can make the yogis hurt  
The mirror relishes her scintillating hair  
She belongs to Padmini beauty, cultured and well-dressed  
[purno shoshi jini much jogoto mohini/jiniya bandhuli ful odhor rongima/  
rotipoti-dhonu jinni bhurur vongima/noyan kottakkho bane hanilo toposhi/  
chachor chamor jinni monohor kesh/jati e padmini bala sucharu subesh].  
(Sharif 92)

Laily's beloved Majnu perceives the divine through her beauty. Majnu, even as a little child, shows his liking for everything beautiful. The poet writes how Majnu used to stop crying once he was taken into the arms of beautiful ladies. Zulekha's story also highlights the same importance of beauty as the memory of the divine, but in a different manner. In the romantic tale of Yusuf-Zulekha, both the protagonists have been portrayed as emblems of ultimate Beauty. But the beauty of Zulekha does more harm as she becomes forgetful of her duties towards God. She is shown stripped of her beauty, youthfulness, and independent life, in contrast to her dream person Yusuf, who is also endowed with indescribable beauty. His beauty is not enough to remind his beloved, the sensual Zulekha, of her ideal duty, as her idolatry hinders her vision of truth, which is quite contrary to the power of woman's beauty that reminds man of the ultimate truth/God.

## Conclusion

The invention of the other happens in the light of one's self. The inauguration of Radha and her relation to the divine is (re)invented on the dynamics of the spiritual economy fashioned in the hierarchical structure of social conventions of gender roles in the mainstream *viraha* traditions. Radha appears first in these narratives as a derivative entity, replenishing the "lack/need" of the male divine principle and eventually she is subsumed to be the "voice" of her creators for the sake of Krishna's return. On the other hand, the unsullied and ascetic body, immersed in the service of the divine, is the goal of high Sufi tradition. The notion of Beauty here acts as a cleanser, a remover of the defilements of any sort. The restricted social movements of women, their existence within social codes of behavior that expect them to be docile and demure, are deemed as guards that keep her perennially beautiful. Woman, as the preserver of beauty, has been ideologically justified in the myth of Beauty as the touch of the divine – a Beauty which incites the sense of separation from the supreme and reminds the male devotee to go back to the original spring of Beauty. Therefore, the somewhat easy reversal of gender roles espoused by these traditions have been contested by the feminist philosophers and their suspicion is expressed for the erasure of the sexual difference in classical mystic tradition. Female body and the ideal Woman is conceived as an immaculate idea and the invisibilization of the flesh-bodied woman subject to the burden of time is a volatile outcome of uneven ascetic economy.

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