

Unit 25

Radhasoami Satsang

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Learning Objectives

After you have studied this unit you should be able to:

- Provide salient features of Sant Mat;
- Describe the Life teachings of the patron guru;
- Give details about the teachings and techniques of Radhasoami Satsang; and
- Outline the teachings of other Radhasoami Sects.

25.1 Introduction

It would be better if we began our presentation of the Radhasoami Satsang with a given background in spirituality to provide us the right perspective regarding Sant mat the approach that we will be talking about. Spirituality is the area which we are concerned with and not specifically religion which covers a wide canons of rituals and litanies. Thus we must make a distinction between religion and spirituality because Sant mat is concerned with inner practices of a spiritual nature and it is not specifically a religion through it has its religious side to it. On the other hand religion is a body of data which has many facts, rites, rituals and beliefs which impact upon the followers of that religion. Religion follows domestic prayer rituals, has festivals, an ordained priesthood, and is either converted into or born into. Sant mat is based on spirituality and there are spiritual practices to elevate spirituality. There are few rituals but they are different in that they are inner practices and do not have outer but inner significance.

It is clear then that there is a relationship of 'inner' and 'outer' between spirituality and religion. In our case spirituality is the inner core, the esoteric side of religion and Sant mat is at the core of religion. The place of Sant mat is not conflictual with any religion or any specific religion, it is simply the practice of spirituality which has come down to us over untold ages and has been reformulated according to various saints and mystics many of whom set up movements to popularize the Sant mat. Others remained in small groups or communities not preaching and proselytizing to the masses but pursuing their spiritual interests quietly

and out of the public eye. So we can now locate Sant mat as part of the ancient traditions of spirituality typified by a master and his disciples all of whom are ultimate allegiance to the master and their co disciples and often live as a community.

Attached to these spiritual movements are other institutions like educational institutions and hospitals. The disciples are encouraged to serve the master and the movement in any possible way including complete surrender of body mind and soul to the master. It can then be seen that is type of movement is such that total allegiance is what is expected as is the case of secret societies. The guru/masters word is law and it cannot be contravened by any disciple. Again there is a minimum amount of various types of dhyān or meditation which has to be performed by the disciples. An important aspect of such spiritual communities is that there is a great emphasis on “Satsangh” or “Sangat”, that is the company of the followers or disciples. This is to socialize the disciples into talking about the wonders and achievements possible with the help of Sant Mat meditations. Satsangh also has the meaning of the discourse of the guru listening to which is one of the ways of ascending the hierarchical ladder of Sant Mat spirituality. The food to be taken too is strictly vegetarian and there has to be an abstinence from meat alcohol and narcotic drugs.

Thus what we are talking about here is a total lifestyle. We will concentrate upon the Radhasoami Math or Satsang in Beas, Punjab. There are two other Radhasoami Satsangs both in Agra U.P. at Soami Bagh and Dayal Bagh respectively. As for Soami Bagh Radhasoami Satsang it does not believe in proselytizing and as such it is of limited numbers. Again relative to Beas the Dayal Bagh group is limited in numbers. However, as regards the spiritual lifestyle and practices there is a great deal of similarity although they are not identical by any means. So then we speak of Radhasoami (Beas) we will be shedding the light on the Radhasoami movement as a whole although as we noted there are differences and divergences also in these groups.

25.2 Sant Mat: Some Aspects

Radhasoami (Beas) has been described as Sant Mat which can be translated as the Path of the Masters. A path which has to be followed and trodden upon by the disciples of the Master and the Master has to be a living person. The emphasis on the living master is most important in Sant Mat. We can then say along with Maharaj Charan Singh that Radhasoami Satsang Beas is a way of God realization while living in the body the effects of which impact upon the daily life of the aspirant in a most positive way. Radhasoami Satsang provides practical training in spirituality. Charan Singh notes that the Satsang is not a religion because it does not have any fixed outward signs and symptoms like priesthood and temples, dogmas and rituals. This is true in a limited sense only since belief patterns, dhyān, darshan, initiation (diksha) and so on do have a reflection of dogma and rituals. But clearly this is not so reified as in the major religions of the world. The method consists of turning the attention inward while at the same time taking care of all the various responsibilities that are to do with living in the world—that is responsibilities towards family, relatives, friends, community and so on. The Sant Mat points out that all misery in the world and all the sorrow and pain of living is because there is a separation of mind intellect and the supreme self or God. It is pointed out by Radhasoami Satsang teachings that the world of matter is not the real home or abode but simply a passage that is undergone on earth. It follows correctly and logically within this belief system that unless the separation from the Supreme is bridged completely sorrow and misery cannot abate,

let alone be eliminated. As noted earlier it is not at all necessary to search for this spiritual union anywhere apart from the human body itself. In this teaching then the body itself is regarded as sacred and the true place of worship. It is the temple of God.

Another principle is that the teachings of the Saints are similar all over world and time and space do not make a difference to these teachings. It is held that these teachings are universal in applicability and have been used since time immemorial. Not only this the teachings are held to be true for all time including the future.

Sant Mat Methods

At this point we would like to introduce the methods which are used by the Radhasoami Satsang to help elevate the spirit.

First is the repetition of the name of the Supreme and this practice is known as *Simran*. As ever the idea of repeating the names of God is to make the vibration of the body come in close synchronization with the ultimate vibration of God and therefore create an all around benefit to the devotee.

The next technique that is taught is meditation on the form of the Master who is in fact the reflection and representative of God on earth, as believed by his disciples. The meditation on the form of the Master also means that the radiant quality of the Master when meditated upon creates great spiritual waves and uplifting currents in the mind of the meditator and thus creates a feeling of bliss and happiness for the disciple.

The third technique is listening to the “unstruck sound” or word that creates spiritual alignment as this spiritual current is moving through the body all the time. This sound has a melodic aspect to it and washes away the impurities within the mind and intellect and spiritualizes them with the help of meditation on this current the soul of man rises higher and higher until the whole of it is absorbed by the Supreme or God.

With the help of these techniques the soul is able to free itself of bondage, misery, sorrow and attachment to worldly objects and man is able to live in the world without blemish and with detachment. This is in fact one of the signs that the meditations are being effective on the disciple.

Box 25.1 Initiation and Meditation

As regards the diet of the Radhasoami Satsangi the prescribed food has to be lacto vegetarian, and to lead to a moral responsible life. There is to be no usage of tobacco or narcotics in the life of a satsangi. The satsangi is not required to give up life in an active occupation and must work for a living. Further the Radhasoami initiation is a secret and personal experience and must not be revealed to anyone. Further we find that the spiritual revelations during meditation experiences are also to be kept secret and not to be shared with anyone as this can set up competition among the disciples and is also a good to personal variety or even personal depression if the meditation practices are not going well. This could well mean that the spiritual ascent of the disciples breaking this rule could be stymied.

There is yet another significant fact about Sant mat and this is that the master and his group of satsangis are against accepting money for any Sant mat activities. A true saint according to Sant mat perception never accepts money from anyone including the disciples. This is a correct principle since the acceptance of money from a disciple or anyone else means the loss of objectivity in personal dealings.

25.3 Patron Guru and Founding Masters

The patron guru or first and founding master of Radhasoami Satsang was called Shiv Dayal Singh or “Soami ji” to his disciples. He was the first one to introduce the “new” spiritual discipline in Agra in the year 1861, in north India. This new spiritual method was known as “Surat Shabd Yoga” or the yoga of the sound current. Through Surat Shabd Yoga the spirit is able to concentrate all its energies for spiritual life and for spiritual liberation. In fact it is the means of leaving bondage and reaching out beyond sorrow and misery. The meditation techniques of Surat Shabd Yoga have to be awakened by a living master and only then do they become proactive and effective in meditation and be of real help to the disciple. Thus the initiation by the living master is the key to the beginning of spiritual life and is able to go beyond the negative forces of Kal which rule the lower regions of the mind and drag down the senses of mankind. Thus the contribution of “Soami ji” is recognised as the founder of Radhasoami Satsang by all the branches of the Radhasoami movement.

Now before we go on to tell about the Radhasoami Beas masters, that is the masters who are recognized by the largest branch of the Radhasoami faith let us dwell a bit on the meaning of the name itself. According to the masters Radhasoami is divided into two names that is Radha and Soami. Note that the second word is “Soami” and not “Swami” although it is sometimes spelt that way. Radha is the name given to the atman or soul and soami is the name given to the Lord. So the Radhasoami teachings are those of a way a path to the realization of the Supreme and which involve a method or methods by which this can be done. Turning now to a description of the Radhasoami masters we find that all branches of Radhasoami sect owe allegiance to and recognize Soamiji Maharaj as the founder master of the Radhasoami sect. After Soamiji Maharaj the different sects in Agra and Beas have their own lineage of masters. We are concerned with Radhasoami (Beas) as it is by far the largest sect having an estimated 2 million followers in India and the world over. To continue Soamiji Maharaj was the first and universally recognised master of the Radhasoami's. He was the first to begin the teachings of the faith that is known as the Radhasoami today. The parental name of Soamiji Maharaj happened to be Seth Shivdayal Singh, and it was only after he had declared his mission that his followers began to call him Soamiji Maharaj. The mother and father of Shivdayal Singh were pious and godfearing and were the close devotees of the master Tulsi Sahib, who hailed from Hathras in India. He was born on 25 August 1818 in Panni street in Agra and was an unusual child who was interested in the spiritual from very early childhood and it was on seeing this unusual trait of Shivdayal Singh that Tulsi of Hathras initiated him into Sant Mat at the tender age of six years itself. This is highly unusual because Santon ki Shiksha is usually initiated at a much more mature age when the devotee can put in time and effort at the spiritual practices that the initiation into Sant Mat requires if any spiritual progress is to take place. Shiv Dayal Singh as we said was an unusual and spiritually archived child hence this early age of initiation to Sant Mat by Tulsi Sahib of Hathras.

Tulsi Sahib and Shiv Dayal

Tulsi Sahib had seen something very different in Shiv Dayal and had initiated him because of this perception. Shiv Dayal practiced the Surat Shabd yoga (which we will discuss in a later part) for well over 15 years and became a great spiritual adept and later he had the urge to share his gyan with all those willing to follow the instructions that were required to do so. The Satsang was started on Vasant Panchami in the spring of the year 1861 when he was in his forties and he continued to head the Satsang for 17

years until his death on June 5, 1878 in Panni Street where he had been born almost 60 years ago. Soamiji had named his approach to spirituality as 'Satnaam Anaami' at first but on the suggestion of a close follower he decided to call it "Radhasoami" and ever since then the spiritual approach has/ had the same name. Radhasoami philosophy has influenced and sparked off movements which have taken its philosophy whole or in part. Soamiji described his approach to spirituality in books which he wrote in two parts called "Saar Vachan Chhand Band" and the second part was called "Sar Vachan Vartik".

Soamiji's discourses have also been published. He was a true saint and never accepted anything for personal use; rather he spent what he had for the cause. Soamiji Maharaj was then a mystic of the first water and was an embodiment of the highest principles of self-realization. To him the soul of man could be compared to Radha, and the goal of Radha is to be fused into her lord or Soami the endless eternal reality. The two names combined give us Radhasoami. At this point we must clarify that this Radha is not the Radha of the Indian tradition of Radha and Krishna which is a different from the Radha of Radhasoami. Soamiji insisted that his followers should desist from alcohol narcotics and be vegetarian as these substances create obstacles in the way to spiritual practices and meditation by exciting the senses and confusing the mind. Hence, they are taboo in the Radhasoami faith.

A most remarkable aspect of Soamiji Maharaj was that he was not interested in spreading the knowledge he was discoursing on and initiating members into. He went to the extent of forbidding any propaganda through the newspapers to attract disciples who he believed would come through their own interests and their individual karma. Apart from a high moral life Soamiji Maharaj insisted on a practice of 2 hours of meditation. Each devotee was expected to practice 2 hours of Surat Shabd Yoga. In short it was a pretty rigorous type of discipline which was expected from his followers. Despite these rigorous requirements by the 1850's there were several followers of Soamiji Maharaj. This group of followers expanded over the years and the popularity and acceptability of his teachings reached many thousands of devotees by his death in 1878.

Action and Reflection 25.1

Outline what led to the formation of individual Radhasoami Satsangs?
Ask Radhasoami members why all Radhasoami satsangs recognize Soamiji as Patron guru.

This was however, an event which led to the formation of several splits in Soamiji's movement and this was because he did not name or appoint a successor before his death in 1878. Once he had died there was for several years a kind of chaos because no successor had been appointed. Under these circumstances the disciples close to him each began to run a Satsang and be the head of that particular split group. There were six aspirants for succession and they led the Radhasomi faith. This split remains and it is because of this that the movement spread beyond the limits of Agra and became a national and later international movement in the field of spirituality, although there were variations in the teachings to an extent.

25.4 Formation of Individual Satsangs

Individual Satsangs were formed by close disciples of Soamiji Maharaj including Radhaji his wife, Rai Saligram, Partap Singh and other followers. A prominent disciple, Jaimal Singh however, went to Beas in Punjab and

established a Satsang there on the banks of the river. This Satsang became the one which flourished the most and is the most well known of all Radhasoami Satsang's today. The followers of the Beas Radhasoami Satsang are the most numerous and are more than the total of all the Radhasoami Satsangs across the world. It is without doubt the most popular of all the Satsangs. The founder of this Beas Satsang was Jaimal Singhji Maharaj as has been mentioned. Jaimal Singh was also known as Babaji Maharaj. The Beas Satsang was established by him in 1891 that is more than ten years after the death of Soamiji in 1878. This Satsang is now an autonomous body with no specific links with other branches of Radhasoamis. Jaimal Singh was a Punjabi Sikh who was much taken up and inspired by the teachings and the discourse of Soamiji Maharaj and had become his follower and disciple.

Some years after Soamiji had taken Maha Samadhi in 1878 and had named so successor he set up the dera or camp three miles east of Beas village, close to Baba Bakala town on the northern banks of Beas river. That area in which Babaji Maharaj settled down is now known, as it was then as Dera Baba Jaimal Singh. This is the contemporary center of Beas Radhasoamis. After the demise of Babaji Maharaj he was succeeded by Baba Sawan Singh who as the name suggests was also a Sikh like his guru. He was a native of Narangwal Village in the district of Ludhiana in Punjab. Again following the Maha Samadhi of Baba Sawan Singh he was succeeded by Baba Charan Singh. The headquarters of the sect was retained by these gurus as their headquarters for spiritual practices.

We find that Radhasoami Beas followers were greatly influenced by the bible of the Sikhs, the Granth Sahib. It goes however, to their credit that they do not try to bring in parallels with mainstream Sikhism. Nor is there any attempt to try and brings up compassion with their movement and that of Sikhisms 10 gurus.

Babaji Maharaj

When Babaji Maharaj established his dera in Beas he had built a tiny Shanty about 9 sq. ft. in area. At present in that same area is a large and beautiful colony which is calm, quiet and peaceful and a perfect place for Surat Shabd yoga.

Now Babaji Maharaj died in 1903 and it was Maharaj Sawan Singh ji who was now the Successor. Sawan Singh has as his priority the propagating the philosophy and teachings of the math. He was utterly successful in his efforts and started to draw as international following from Europe, North America, Africa and Asia itself. During the gurudom of Sawan Singh the Beas Ashram prospered greatly and over 1903-1948 the Dera grew all round both spiritually and materially in terms of devotees and the buildings. The boundaries of the ashram spread to thousands of square yards. At first on the property of the Dera there were tiny rooms which later transformed under Sawan's leadership into a beautiful and well laid out colony.

Sawan Singh and Charan Singh

Sawan Singh after a most fruitful time passed away in 1948. He was over 90 years old. In his will he gave his personal and private property to his family and the religious property he was responsible for to his successor who was called Sardar Bahadur Jagat Singh ji.

This guru died after 4 years in the seat in 1951 and named Maharaj Charan Singh as the master. Maharaj Charan Singh himself died in 1990 but dictated two days before he died that his nephew Gurinder Singh

Dhillon would succeed him, and today he is the guru of the Radhasoami sect Beas.

The objectives which were followed by all the Beas gurus include spreading of spiritual knowledge as per the Radhasoami faith of Beas. They also arranged discourses to fulfill this purpose. Further a day and night kitchen or Langar was run by the organization to give free meals to the visiting mendicants and the followers. The Satsang was also made possible to the production, publication, as well as distribution of Radhasoami literature. Finally, the objective was to run a hospital near the Dera. A word about Radhasoamis in the West should close this section on the gurus of Radhasoami Beas. The Radhasoami sect prospered most in the U.S. and this country is known for its religious catholicity. We find that in 1933 Sawan Singh ji gave one Harvey Meyers authority to represent the faith in the US. James Replogle was asked to do the initiations in the Midwest and East, while Meyers retained the West Coast. Meyers had been a devotee of both Sawan Singh and Jagat Singh his successor. In 1951 when Charan Singh took over the seat the Radhasoami following in the US expanded very rapidly. Under his two forbear gurus the US initiates were in hundreds in Charan Singh's time they rose over 10,000 in number. Today there is a Board of Trustees which looks after the work in the US.

Gurinder Singh

The current master Gurinder Singh has done a lot for streamlining administration of the Satsangs and Seva. He has improved the Satsang in an all round manner. It is Gurinder Singh who has fixed the age for discipleship and initiation to the age of 25. The initiation instructions which had been printed have been greatly revised. Gurinder Singh ji also edits newsletters and has built many new centers for the Satsang world wide. He travels all over the globe to spread the teachings of the Radhasoami. This has added greatly to the already monumental popularity of Radhasoami Satsang (Beas).

The Spiritual Background

We now turn to that part of the overall underpinning which is common to the various different but similar sects of the Radhasoami faith. These have both borrowed form and been inspired by the medieval saints and mystics both Hindu and Muslim (like Tulsi, Dadu, Kabir etc) and are Sufi in their interpretations. Today some of the sects are trying to change the original terminology of the Radhasoami faith in order to reach out to a wider audience but here we will retain the original conceptualization as far as possible. However, we will also point out in the new terminology what the actual equivalents are. For example many times "God" is used instead of "Radhasoami Dayal" which is a wrong way of conceptualizing the latter as "God" is a specifically Christian usage and does not fit in with the social and mystical approach of the Radhasoami.

It is also to be noted that many discourses of the Radhasoami gurus were and are couched in commentaries or explanations of one or several of the complets or dohas of one or more of the mystic saints of medieval India and even Persia, like Shams-e-Tabre and Jalal-ud-din Rumi. As such the commentaries though similar are quite capable of emphasizing one or other of the aspects of the couplet though the general overall perspective remains the same or similar. This is definitely one important aspect of the Radhasoami teaching. The idea is that man is not the final destination but that part of the man, the soul has to seek union with the Supreme soul. It is pointed out that the body is comprised of specifically five elements which are earth, water, air, fire and ether. At the time of death or pralaya we find that these elements revert back to their original source.

Thus the earth part is absorbed into the soil as various chemicals bones ashes and so on and the water air fire and ether also rejoin the parent bodies of these elements in the environment. The mind of man goes to Niranjana or Kaal. Each of the elements which is released during death experiences a release as it rejoins its parent body and similarly it is pointed out that when atman is released from the cycles of transmigration it will experience a great sense of happiness, bliss, relief and contentment as it is going back to Radhasoami Dham to unite there in the presence of Radhasoami Dayal. Thus the whole purpose of creation is paradoxically to go back to the creator. The whole play on the cosmic scale and the human scale is to reunite the soul of man blissfully with the oversoul.

Box 25.2 The Inner Self

Many saints have expressed this return to paradise in many different ways. For example Jesus said "Know the Inner Self" and guru Nanak said and has opined that there must be a psychological or mental death before physical death obviates this. Now this does not mean that knowing the Father or knowing the self is some kind of mental illness or derangement. Nor does the "death before death" mean some kind of suicide. In fact what is being referenced to is the detachment of the mind and intellect from all the factors that keep it bounded. That is the death that the saints refer to in fact as liberation during the lifetime itself and such a saint is known as jivan. That is a mystic or saint who has realized Radhasoami Dham, the ultimate abode of the Supreme and has merged with it. Only such a person is in fact qualified to be a Sadguru because the spirit of a Sadguru like Soamiji is resting in the bosom of the Supreme. It is only because of this very important feature that they can teach, initiate, meditate and in turn liberate the souls of the devotees who have developed love devotion and have surrendered at the Holy Feet of Sadguru. Thus to die is man's ordinary fate and the elements go back to the elements. Yet the liberation of atman from transmigration is possible only by the compassion and Mercy of Sadguru.

Death of the type that is made of the purification of the mind from all gross desires and sensualities means that the atman has united with Parmatman. It is Sadguru who teaches this way of dying to the world and all its various attractions by teaching the method of meditation at the time of initiation. By initiating into the Naam and other meditations a new possibility opens up which is that man's liberated soul can truly enjoy being in the world without misery and sorrow. It remains diffused in the body mind and intellect but these have been purified by the penance of meditation, devotion and seva of the guru, by love of the guru and by keeping to the rules regarding vegetarian diet and the abstinence from all narcotics. Such a person is fit in fact to be a guru and is himself able to give the right instructions to bring about liberation in those who have entrusted themselves to his care. Just as Radhasoami Dayal is the power that is the father of all the creation so also he is the father of all mankind. Similarly, the guru in the Radhasoami tradition is in fact the father or parent of all his disciples and they are his children.

25.5 The Naam, Mythology and Cosmology

Now a word about 'Naam' or 'Word' which is so crucially important in the journey to Radhasoami Dham. What is this word and what makes it so important as a vehicle that will liberate the devotee when meditated upon. The word came into existence without any external agency. As has been said in the Bible, New Testament "In the beginning was the word, and the word was God, and the word is God".

Thus it is the naam or word which created everything from cosmic phenomena down to the smallest atom. According to Radhasoami philosophy the power of the word created many powers including God. Each of these has its own specific meanings and functions and the human soul has to go through these regions before it reaches the final goal of liberation. This power of the word has created for example the "nameless region" or the Anami Desh. It has also created Agam Desh or the inaccessible region. It has further created Alakh Desh or invisible region and so on. Each of those regions including Saach Khand are hierarchically arranged in an order of ascension from one to sixteen.

Now further the spiritual current coming from Anami Desh at Sach Khand and was called Satnaam. From Satnaam were created a further two regions called Bhanwar Gupha and Daswan Dwar and these regions had their own words and resonance to reach them. They in fact became the Naam which was suited for some types of meditation.

In other words we find that there is an elaborate mythology and cosmology of the ascent of the spirit to the ultimate goal and destination. Which each region that is described such as Bhanwar Gupha and Daswan Dwar has a name or mantra for it is only the Sadguru or his close disciples who can tell about it as we are not talking primarily in terms of physical structures but conglomerations of the consciousness. The sixteen created regions each has a mantra attached to it and there are many sects in India which do not go beyond the first few conglomerations of consciousness and establish a religion on that basis. This is called a cosmology, a mythology, or a philosophy of Sant Mat because this has to be taken on trust and becomes a fact to the disciple after he puts in many years of meditation on the Shabad itself. Even then this is a somewhat esoteric part of Radhasoami faith and it is only recently that mention has been made of it as it is liable to be misunderstood or simply be difficult to understand. Shabad or naam or word the Radhasoami faith declares is the very source of the world and is ultimately the reason for its ending. In the meanwhile it is Shabad itself which keeps creation going round. It has been pointed out that Shabad created two areas of consciousness the Trikuti (Brahma) and Sahasradal Kanwal. Radhasoami faith now links up the cosmology with the human body and points out that these are six ganglions or chakras in the human body from the back of the eyes to the top of the head, right up to the region of the paramatman. Again similar ganglions or chakras are present from the bottom of the feet up to the eyes themselves. It is felt by the Radhasoami that it is not very necessary to give vast and detailed descriptions of the six chakras in the bottom part of the body because the journey they are undertaking is of the six chakras from the back of the eyes to the Anami Desh. However, they do point out that those gurus and disciples who concentrate upon the lower chakras will obviously remain at a lower elevation, and can go at the most to Brahmas level. The disciples then get lodged during life or at the time of death at one or other of these lower ganglions or chakras. Radhasoami faith points out that at the onset of human beings death the atman begins to withdraw itself from the nails of the hand and the feet and starts traveling upwards towards the head. At this juncture it needs to be pointed out and indicated that Radhasoami faith talks of two types of death.

Two Types of Death

One type of death is the ordinary death in which the soul gradually withdraws and leaves the body by itself. This may be called automatic or unconscious death. The second type of death is a conscious death in which the satsangi retracts the soul through the practice of meditation and leaves the body. The satsangi is prostrate like a dead person but the

breathing and critical life functions go on happening. When this conscious meditational death occurs we find that the yoga practitioner or satsangi retracts his soul to begin the ascension within the body itself and reaches at first the Guda ganglion or Chakra also known as the rectal plexus. This is the chakra which is associated with Lord Ganesh who is the emblem and dispenser of all material comforts wealth and prosperity, the reason for this God being the first to be worshipped in any prayer. Ganesh Puja begins all other rites and rituals. At this center there is a four petalled lotus and this chakra contains the element of earth. Next the travelling soul reaches the Indri chakra or genital plexus. This chakra comprises of the element of water and is associated with the liquid. The master and mistress of this centre are Brahma and Savitri and this is the centre of creation, and it is Brahma who creates this world. There is in this region a six petalled lotus and this is what it is represented by in popular yogic descriptions. The soul traveller then goes further upward and reaches the centre of the Nabhi chakra or the navel centre, and this centre is represented by the element of fire. The God Vishnu and his consort Laxmi is the ruler of this centre. They are the ones responsible for the continuation of the world. This centre is represented by an eight- petalled lotus. The soul then reaches the Hridaya chakra or the Heart Centre. This is the chakra where Lord Shiva and his consort Parvati reside. They are the rulers of the Heart Centre. The onus of the ultimate destruction of the whole world vests with lord Shiva and Parvati and this centre is associated with the element of air. The soul traveller then enters into the throat centre or the Kanth Chakra. The ruling deity of this Chakra is called Adi Bhawani the mother of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh. Here, is a lotus with two petals. A sound is heard from this throat centre. While the person is still alive and the Eka Mai or Adi Bhiwani do not interfere with it.

Box 25.3 The 'Tisra Til'

However, the 'Tisra Til' behind the eyes is where the Radhasoami journey begins inwardly speaking. The idea behind this is that sitting in the fifth stage it is better to go on to the tenth stage rather than start from the first stage itself. Thus Radhasoami begin their ascent in meditation from the point where the ordinary mortal ends his journey. In this brief exposition of some of the methodology and philosophy of Radhasoami faith we would not have failed to notice that there is a great deal of logic and consistency in the approach. There is every awareness and understanding of traditional yoga as well as their relatively recent Sant Mat disclosures.

Till now we have been presenting the viewpoint of Radhasoami Satsang of Beas. This is not an objectionable procedure because it is the largest Branch of the various Radhasoami sects. Further, the differences between the sects is not very much and it has so far served us well. However, it would be more representative if we were to present the viewpoint of another Radhasoami sect as this would give us a better understanding of the Radhasoamis. It would also help us understand that there are several Masters among the Radhasoami sect as a whole but their followers are not the same numbers and that a choice exists for a would be devotee to choose which sect he or she would like to affiliate with. This would depend on several factors because the smaller branches numerically have the advantage that their guru is more available to them whereas in the larger sects numerically we find that the Master may be less available to devotees due to organizational duties which often call for extensive travelling. This means that the darshan or fact to face presence of the master is not available for long periods and available for only some parts of the year, say, on important festivals. Thus the Dera itself, the base of the sect may

not have the Master with them all through the year. This is because the Master at Beas for example travels throughout the world on his mission to spread the faith.

25.6 Other Radhasoami Sects

So, let us see how the Radhasoami faith is described by Dera Baba Bagga Singh sect of the Radhasoami Faith. While at Beas the Master is Gurinder Singh ji Maharaj in Dera Baba Bagga Singh the living master is Baba Kehar Singh ji. Again the lineage that is accepted of the Radhasoami Gurus is not the same as in the other branches each of which have their own lineage or family tree so far as gurus and their succession is concerned.

The Bagga Singh sect of the Radhasoami begins its exposition on spirituality by pointing out rightly that man in this world is in search for happiness in various different ways. Some people try to find happiness in material pursuits and others in spirituality. For some the route to spirituality is in self abnegation, asceticism, and self control which for others is in the pursuit of pleasure. However, the goal of these various different paths is happiness itself.

It is pointed out that not knowing the source of happiness or ignorance is the biggest problem which confuses people and make them come back to sphere one even after years of effort on whatever chosen path, whether it is the worship of idols, travelling long distances on pilgrimage or to try the retreat into a forest on a cave.

Sadguru and Naam

This lack of success says Kehar Singh ji of Dera Baba Bagga Singh is because we are seeking in the wrong place. The would be follower is trying to find realization in the outside world whereas the Supreme self or God, or the Radhasoami is in the mind body and intellect of man and not in the social world at large. It is imperative then that we look within ourselves to find God, or Radhasoami so that we can begin to approximate this vibration and holiness and the further we travel within the happier and more peaceful we will be. In other words, there has to be a coming together of the devotee and the deity if there is to be true realization.

It is next pointed out that this union with Radhasoami cannot be learnt by one in a method of trial and error but must be learnt from someone who has mastered the art and science of soul—in short a Sadguru or perfected Master. Only under the guidance of such a true Guru can the quest for realization really bear fruit. It is the Sadguru who gives the “Naam” and it is the power of the Sadguru on which the novice disciple leans upon heavily until he or she is strong enough to be more steady. However, the dependence on the guru in fact has to be strong enough to be called surrender at the feet of the guru to be successful. There are three aspects of realization of happiness and to realize oneness with Radhasoami Dham. These are the

- 1) Sadguru
- 2) Shabd
- 3) Radhasoami

These three forms are interrelated and we find that it is Sadguru who is the key catalyst to making a devotee or followers commence the journey. However, a person will not seek out a living master unless he or she is herself quite miserable and has tried several paths unsuccessfully. It is only when an individual is buffeted about by the misery and travails of the world that a desire arises within a person to find a way out of all the pain

and the sorrow. It is then alone that he goes to the Sadguru and prostrates at his feet and finds solace. The Sadguru and some of his chosen disciples then explain to the novice the true meaning of Sant Mat and how the spiritual practices prescribed are a journey to Radhasoami Dham the ultimate or God. When the disciple is ready and has understood he is initiated by the Sadguru or anyone who he has authorized to initiate into the spiritual practices of Radhasoami faith the main of which in Bagga Singh Radhasoamis is the Shabd-guru or the Word-God.

Aspects of the Sadguru

It is the belief in the Radhasoami Math that the Master is the physical embodiment of Radhasoami Dayal the final and total vibration in the Universe. The Sadguru is the physical representative and replica of the Shabd-Brahm which is Radhasoami. As such the guru is also known as the Perfect Master. It must be made clear at this point that Sadguru or Perfect Master does not necessarily refer to some physical trait or the shape and size of the body of the Sadguru. This is a reflection on the perfection of spirituality found in the person of the Sadguru.

Perfection of spiritual union with Radhasoami is what makes a master. Thus Shiv Dayal Singh ji or Soami ji as he was called lived only 60 years yet he was destined to be the common founder guru of all the Radhasoami sects and it was only after his death in 1878 that different disciples set up their own branches and began announcing their own gurus over time. As we know the most successful of the disciples of Soami ji Maharaj was Jaimal Singh who set up Dera Baba Jaimal Singh near the river Beas. Thus for his entire career as Radhasoami Master Soami ji's authority was unquestioned. However, the confusion arose partly because he had not named a successor before his death.

It is said in Sant Mat that the Master himself comes to the individual who is keen to distance himself or herself from the travails of the world. There is a saying that if man does not go to Mahommed, then Mahommed will come to man. This in general defines the situation so far as the guru shishya relationship is concerned. This is a tie which leads ultimately to union with Radhasoami Dayal the ultimate vibrational deity whose emanations of power light and sound are all over the universe. The Sadguru then does not promise immediate release from all worldly bondage and unhappiness. Rather the Karma of the devotee has reached a stage of refinement and of purity that he encounters someone or something that leads him to the Master who will explain the Sant Mat and initiate him into the spiritual practices. The pursuit of this meditation regularly and substantially leads to spiritual evolution. It must be pointed out here that unhappiness cannot be converted into happiness overnight and that spiritual elevation is a long process. To hope then for union with the Radhasoami Dayal in a few weeks, months or years is then a futile hope for most devotees. For most devotees, and according to the doctrine of Karma it takes several lifetimes to reach Radhasoami Dayal. The emphasis on Sadguru as the vehicle of spiritual release is very great indeed. In fact it is a point that cannot be overemphasized. Without Sadguru there is no Sant Mat, and without sadguru there is no liberation.

This point is stressed time and again in the discourses and the writings of all Radhasoami faith sects. However, is not enough to have found and initiated by a master there must be unflinching faith that he is the replica in human form of the ultimate reality which is Radhasoami Dayal. Thus faith in the master is a key concept in Sant Mat discourses and writings. It is this faith in the veracity and reality of the Master being the true representative of Radhasoami Dayal that is really very important for without

this there can be hardly and progress in meditation and other spiritual practices. This is only when faith awakens in a disciple that he is able to hook or latch onto the spiritual current or flow of the master and is then lifted upwards from region to region (spiritual) until he reaches the final destination Radhasoami Dayal. Thus without a real and true faith in the master no real spiritual progress is possible. This is being posited because there are some misguided devotees who think that being initiated means automatic liberation. This is not so.

Box 25.4 “ All Things Must Change”

Sant Mat tells us that this world and all worlds are destined to perish at some point in time. Everything keeps on changing and the Buddha himself pointed out that “All things must change” is an eternal truth, and in this situation the only solution is surrender to the Sadguru. This concept of surrender is another very important one along with that of faith. Only if there is faith can there be the possibility of surrender to the feet of Sadguru. The benefit of surrender to the Sadguru is beneficial only if it is not just a matter of verbalizing it. The devotee has to feel from within that the one thing that matters is to be one with the guru because to be one with the guru is to be one with the Radhasoami Dayal. True surrender is accompanied by love and devotion or bhakti. As a matter of fact Sant Mat is of bhakti and of sufi orientation and Soami ji of Agra was very fond of quoting Persian couplets to explain the concepts and knowledge of Sant Mat. He also composed poetry in Persian. He looked also like a sufi saint with his long beard, aquiline face, prominent straight nose, and piercing eyes. Thus, Sant Mat has elements of both the bhakti and sufi orientations.

Sant Mat holds that the only permanent fact in the Universe is the Word or Naam. All the rest is of a short duration and temporary. Only Sadguru and the Naam are the true help of the suffering souls and it is through the Grace of the guru that re-birth can be circumvented otherwise it is a case of endless transmigrations, moving from death to death without end. In a world of instability the only stability is in the feet of the Sadguru. There is a story that is told by the Bagga Singh Radhasoamis regarding the situation that we have been talking about. A child goes holding the hand of his father to a fair. He enjoys looking at the various displays and the games that are going on and enjoys himself. In the midst of his celebration he gets separated from his father due to the milling crowds. He loses his grip on his fathers hand and is pushed away. The child begins to weep and shout for his father “Father, father, I want my father”. It is at that point that the child understands that the happiness he experienced in the fair was due to the firm clasp of his father (Sadguru) and not just the fun and frolic of the fair. Only the firm clasp of Sadguru’s word can give happiness nothing else.

25.7 Further Teachings of Radhasoami Sect

Before we go on to explore more teachings of the Radhasoamis we need to point out a few home truths. This is rather significant at this point because from what we have been discussing it would appear that the devotees have to leave the world and go into seclusion away from the eyes of the world and away from all responsibility of family life. This is simply not a requirement for all the devotees. Most of the devotees live a responsible life and must be monogamous or celibate. Further the disciples must earn their own livelihood and not live in a state of dependence. For reasons similar to that of regulated sexuality the Radhasoami faith is strictly vegetarian and no narcotics are allowed to any disciple. However,

we many indicate that Satsang or company of fellow disciples and also listening to the discourses of the Sadguru are very important for meditation to be successful. That is disciples lives worships and works around the guidance of the Sadguru himself.

Radhasoami Satsang Beas has explained the yoga that raises the currents of spirituality beyond Trikuti centre onto the Radhasoami centre as being accessible through the Surat-shabd yoga. This yoga is the yoga of the spirit current of the yogi linking up in meditation with the unstruck sound (Anhad Naad) of the eternal thereby attaining it beneficially. For the novice or the junior initiate this would be a difficult exercise but with yoga practice this would become easier and the ability to focus on the internal manifestation of the soundless sound of eternity or Radhasoami could be contacted beneficially.

Surat Shabd Yoga

The Surat shabd yoga of Sant Mat has as its goal the ability of the individual consciousness or the atman to contact the higher spiritual realms by means of the life-sound. The Radhasoami's point out that this life current is known by various nomenclatures in the scriptures including shabd, logos, naam, bani or audible life stream. The soul has to unite with the naam and hence the name of this yoga is Surat Shabd yoga. Surat means soul and shabd means holy word or naam. When due to yogic practice the two unite we have the practice of Surat Shabd yoga.

Action and Reflection 25.2

Contact and ask some members of the Radhasoami's to tell you the meaning of Surat-Shabd yoga. Note down your findings in your notebook.

Thus Surat Shabd yoga means that the soul of the individual is being united with the Divine soul through concentration on the divine sound. Now those individuals who could master this yoga and were capable of travelling in this current to the highest of spheres, indeed to Radhasoami Dham were given the title of Puran Sant, Sadguru Perfect Master and so on. Such terms describe individuals who have freed the soul from its gross entrapping and are in fact free beings. They imply that the person is a spiritual adept in dhyana and is there by able to guide individuals souls through the various existential planes of awareness and consciousness to the highest realm also known as the nameless abode or "Anaami Lok", which is the source of all possible type of existence sensate or insensate. It is the ultimate destination for the spirit of man and Surat Shabd yoga is the method and practice to get to this goal which is a spiritual one. Thus in Radhasoami Math Shabd is the power that sustains the Universe and is responsible for the creations and installation of all spiritual powers.

The Shabd is also called the unstruck Music of the spheres because at each stage of spiritual ascension we find that there is a different type of sound and music. We have mentioned this in the earlier section that at each sphere or ganglion there is a different sound which is spirituality strengthening and uplifting.

It may be noted however, that the sound stream to be usefully and beneficially contacted has to be done through the means of a realized master. It is the power or shakti which the master passes on to the disciple which allows the initiate to focus for any reasonable time on the sound current. It is also the power of the master which helps the disciple progress spiritually and to avoid distressing hallucinations and depressing thoughts or exciting thoughts which distract from meditation. The method is there but it is ineffectual unless the master directs the disciple in the

inner spheres and protects him from the negative forces or thoughts which interfere with Surat Shabd yoga. Thus Surat Shabd yoga is a journey back to the source of creation with the help of an adept who has already diffused his soul into it and become a worthy and venerable master. The lesson repeats itself: nothing is possible without grace of a realized master. This because the Master puts us in touch with life-current which moves and flows within the body audible from birth to the end of the body.

Thus, Surat Shabd yoga is a meditational method which is followed by Sant Mat and several related traditions. In Sanskrit 'Surat' means soul and Shabd means 'Word'. Thus, Surat Shabd yoga means the attempt to yoke the spirit with the word and then to rise into the eddies of the sound current. The aim then is to realise oneself in practice. Radhasoami do not tell us very specifically the length and duration of the journey to the sacred centre of the Universe but it is clear that very few individuals would be able to master the ascension into the ultimate sphere in a short while. Thus there is no specific time limit to this ascent. Naturally, this will depend upon how much effort is made by each of the novices and how serious is the involvement in the Surat Shabd yoga. It is clear with Sant Mat's belief in Karma and rebirth that Surat Shabd yoga will improve the Karmas of the individuals and enable them to move toward a final spiritual victory over time. Time is thus an essential factor in the realization of oneness with the ultimate father.

Initiation by Living Master

Thus, initiation by a living master is the key to begin the spiritual journey in each life. This involves the regeneration of the naam and the living master enters into the Tisra til ganglion of the disciple. Along with sound current meditation is involved other spiritual exercises which include as we have mentioned in passing the sumiran or repetition of the holy words or mantra that is given at initiation to the disciple. It also involves dhyana which could be meditation or viewing of the inner master and bhajan or the listening to the inner sounds.

Radhasoami cosmology states that man or the initiate is an perfect replica of creation (macrocosm). As a result the microcosm comprises several bodies, each one which is made in such a way that it corresponds with some specific plane in the macrocosm. The initiates bodies develop over the cycles of time going from higher planes to those that are below; and conversely from those that are below to those that are above. These are the processes of involution and evolution respectively. These processes involve the revolution of Karma and transmigration to different states of consciousness Surat Shabd yoga then means that the initiate travels the microcosm and brings it into time with macrocosm with the help and guidance of a living Sadguru. Thus, the spiritual process goes on until there is perfect God-realization or the soul reaches Radhasoami Dham as the ultimate destination of the soul of man.

25.8 Ruhani Satsang

Surat Shabd yoga has had many teachers and many followers. However, in the case of those of the movements whose Sadgurus are no longer alive or did not name any successor and have only regents cannot be termed to be Surat Shabd yoga movements, either by themselves nor by those living Masters who teach this yoga. As such Sant Mat movements and Surat Shabd yoga require the presence of a living master. Let us now turn to a few related movements which have been influenced by Radhasoami Satsang the first of which is Ruhani Satsang. Sant Kirpal Singh the first guru of Ruhani Satsang notes that 'Naam' has been ubiquitous in religions

literature. According, to Ruhani Satsang 'Naam' is to be seen the same as Akhand Kirtan by Guru Granth Sahib
Music of the spheres by Pythagoras

- 1) Akash Bani/Sruti in the Vedas
- 2) Nada in the Upanishads
- 3) Logos/ word in New Testament
- 4) Tao in the philosophy of Lao Tze
- 5) Sraosha by Zooaster

There are similarities between Suarat Shabd yoga with the Quan Yin Method which is promoted by the Master Ching Hai. Again, there is the Master Path which is also similar to Surat Shabd yoga whose founder and the living master is Gary Olsen. According, to him several historical figures have featured in the Sant Mat movement. These include in their times according to him;

- a) Lao Tzu, b) Jesus, c) Pythagoras, d) Socrates, e) Kabir, f) The Sufi Masters Hafez and Rumi, g) The Ten Sikh Gurus, h) Tulsi Sahib, i) Radhasoami Masters, j) Offshoots of Radhasoami Masters like Sant Kirpal Singh. Thus, there have been living masters down the ages.

Ruhani Satsang is an offshoot of Radhasoami Satsang and Sant Kirpal Singh was its founder. He died in 1974 leaving his son Darshan Singh as the successor. The teachings of Radhasoami Math and Ruhani Satsang are similar. However, Ruhani Satsang requires that the initiates keep a record of the spiritual practices and experiences. On the other hand, Ruhani Satsang does not advocate the contemplation of the master during meditation like the Radhasoami Satsang which does not teach the keeping of a spiritual diary. For Kirpal Singh Ruhani Satsang is not an intellectual or philosophical system nor a system of ethics. It is rather a method by which the atman imprisoned in the body can be released so that it can join the oversoul. As in Radhasoami Math the Ruhani Satsang also advocates that the individual soul connects with the audible life stream or "Sound Current". This can only be done by an adept or master. As among the Radhasoamis vegetarianism and a simple moral life are advocated. Two hours minimum must be devoted to spiritual practice and a diary kept of all the spiritual progress and attainments as well as all pitfalls. In the movement of Kirpal Singh as is the case with Sant Mat and the Radhasoami movements we find that three factors are of the greatest importance:

- 1) Satguru
- 2) Shabd
- 3) Satsang

All three of these have been explained earlier and we need not go into it again.

Another similar movement to Radhasoami Satsang and Ruhani Satsang is Eckankar and this movement was greatly influenced by a book called "The Path of the Masters" by Juhian P. Johnson which was published in 1939. Johnson was an American who became a follower of Sawan Singh. Johnson was initiated in 1931 and joined Sawan Singh ji at Beas in 1932. Over 1933- 39 Johnson put down many of his experiences with the master in book form. Initially he helped Sawan Singh translate some his own work into English. He then wrote four further books on the wisdom of Sant Mat. His 1939 book "The Path of the Masters" outlined in detail the

“Santon-Ki-Shiksha” or teachings of the saints. This book was a beacon call to would be devotees and had remained the authoritative text for the same even up to 1955 both to Radhasoami (Beas) and Ruhani Satsang.

25.9 Conclusion

The Sant Mat is not a new approach to spirituality but rather it has come out into the open and available to any sincere adherent who wishes to meditate on reality. The world has indeed become a more accessible place over the centuries and this explains why more people today are aware of Sant Mat than ever before. However, it may be pointed out that a rendition of Sant Mat and Radhasoami Math which is part of this tradition, is not very easy because it is an experiential phenomenon that we are dealing with. It makes intellectual sense to read about the Sociology of the Satsang and to understand its philosophy but to really know what it is all about the aspirant would have to get initiated and to actually practice Surat Shabd yoga, dhyana, and bhajan under the guidance of a living master.

25.10 Further Reading

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