

## Harassing the Sanskrit Heroine



*imperfect translations of thumri*

har · ass · ing  
the sanskrit heroine

imperfect translations of thumri

cynthia lee

los angeles  
2009

*thumri*

why[ ]beloved

quarreling[  
riverbank don't[

]wrist[

please[  
bindadin says

grab[ ]shame

i will[ ]i will go[

delicate

bone  
blackened

snap.  
virgin

twists her

mouth

whistling fist

red.



]wrist[

a delicate bandage a bone a twiggy little snap. oh slim white stab  
of a waist unwrapped. blackened sweet. a virgin chocolate bar  
crinkles her glittery skirt but such a disapproving purse.  
disapproving she twists her bittermelon mouth splitting shut. oh.  
oh oh no. white hot mirchi stops dead in her tracks. cut red. a  
rough and ready grab, a wolf whistling fist, an iron bangle tapping  
her curved rear.





~~In *bandha* the main motif is exactly that of Krishna, as male protagonists, harassing the maidens of Braj while on their way to work. But unlike *bhāmī* primarily depicts the longing of the heroine for her absent lover. Although broadly speaking, the two each come one similar in context, each text does have its own poetic motivation. The smallness of the variations between thematically is to be provided an impetus to identify rather than gloss over the differences of each individual text. In the present paper, a ~~discussion~~ the Sanskrit literary model which classifies the ~~main~~ heroine types of Indian art will help contextualize the ~~relevant~~ ~~as found in the lyrics of *bhāmī*. In the aesthetic theories referred to in the *śāstra* of *śāstra*, ~~the heroine is~~ ~~described as a woman whose husband or lover has been unfaithful~~ ~~(*śāstra*) or a woman disappointed by her lover's breaking~~~~~~

**krishna, harassing the sanskrit heroine**

Darn, Krishna, this talk!  
Tricky, this walk. Kick it up a touch, dearie  
Keep a pucker Mira keep it wanton – What? Heinous!  
Don't tease today - Now please stay a-

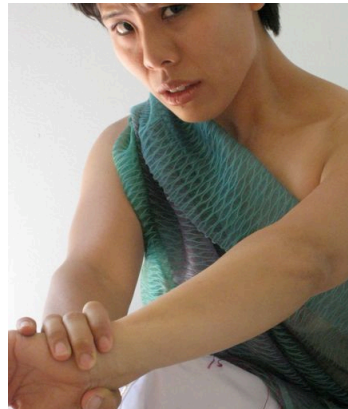
way - Don't treat me freak me AHHH!  
Wretched peacock, go down! HEEE HAAWW!!  
Get a draught! Drink it down ev-  
ery drop -- Dammit that gets me

**HOT!**





I said no you wait I said no.



you and your damn flute.

## Notes

*thumri* is based on the lyrics of the classical kathak thumri, “kahe rukata,” attributed to Bindadin Maharaj. Its compositional technique of writing by erasure is inspired by Anne Carson’s translations of Sappho.

*Jwrist*], which imaginatively lifts off of a single word from the thumri, “kahe rukata,” takes stylistic inspiration from Harryette Mullen’s *Trimnings* and Gertrude Stein’s *Tender Buttons*.

“During the course of my fieldwork I came across the line *mori bahiya jani chuvo* (‘do not touch my arms’) in a thumri performed by a middle-class married singer in Benares; this same line is shown in a published collection of earlier thumris as *bala jobana jina chuo* (‘do not touch my ripening breasts’)...A further example involves the phrase *sunī sejariya* (‘[my] bed is empty’) being altered to *sunī nagariya* (‘the town is empty’).”  
-Lalita Du Perron, “Thumri: A Discussion of the Female Voice of Hindustani Music.”

The crossed-out text is taken from an academic article by Lalita DuPerron entitled “Thumri: The Role of Aesthetic Theory in the Interpretation and Performance of a Modern Genre,” published in *The SOAS Literary Review* (2), July 2000.

The poem, *krishna, harassing the sanskrit heroine*, draws on postmodern language poet Charles Bernstein’s “homophonic translation” technique, where one translates according to sound rather than meaning. It is based on the following rhythmic composition, which was composed by Daniel Scholnick as a variation on a traditional Jaipur kathak composition:

dha traka dhin ta  
traka dhin ta kitataka ta tiri  
kitataka tirikita taka ta gena  
dha ti dha ge dha ti dha ge

na dha ti dha gena dha  
traka dhin ta ka dha ti ta  
gena dha – dha ti dha ge  
na dha – dha ti dha gena

dha

**All photography by Shyamala Moorty.**