

Origins of Sahaja

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The origins of the word Sahaja are buried in the mists of time. By the time Kabir began using the word in his Hindi songs/poems in the fifteenth century, Sahaja had been in use amongst the mystics of northern India for at least seven hundred years, and possibly longer.

Sahajiya Buddhists

The earliest use of Sahaja was most likely by the Sahajiya Buddhists who emerged in Bengal in eastern India somewhere between the eighth and tenth centuries. Saraha, Kanha, Bhusuka, Lui, Tilo, and others are known today only through their dohas and caryas (short songs), written in a now defunct language, Apabrahmsa, and in old Bengali. Whilst most of their songs are short, there is one longer description of Sahaja by Saraha, which is worth reproducing in full:

In Sahaja there is no duality; it is perfect like the sky.
The intuition of this ultimate truth destroys all attachment and it shines through the darkness of attachment like a full moon in the night.
Sahaja cannot be heard with the ears, neither can it be seen with the eyes;

It is not affected by air nor burnt by fire;
It is not wet in intense rain, it neither increases nor decreases,
It neither exists nor does it die out with the decay of the body;
The Sahaja bliss is only oneness of emotions – it is oneness in all.

Our mind and the vital wind are unsteady like the horse;
But in the Sahaja-nature both of them remain steady.
When the mind thus ceases to function and all other ties are torn aside, all the differences in the nature of things vanish; and at that time there is neither the Brahman nor the Sudra. Sahaja cannot be realized in any of its particular aspects – it is an intuition of the whole, the one underlying reality pervading and permeating all diversity.

As the truth of the lotus can never be found either in the stalk or in the leaves, or in the petals or in the smell of the lotus, or in the filament, - it lies rather in the totality of all these parts, - so also Sahaja is the totality which can only be realized in a perfectly non-dual state of mind.

From it originate all, in it all merge again, - but it itself is free from all existence and non-existence – it never originates at all.

Saraha was a Buddhist monk who became a wandering yogi and achieved his enlightenment (self-realisation) by understanding that life was to be enjoyed. Furthermore, he came to understand that enlightenment was available in one's current life. These were radical concepts for a Buddhist monk of that time (about eighth century CE). He understood that the inborn spirit could, in the correct circumstances, be spontaneously awakened. Possibly following earlier tradition, he referred to this as Sahaja, and he and his fellow yogis became known as the Sahajiya Buddhists.

It would seem that Sahaja as a word was unknown in Sanskrit at that time, and it is significant that its usage begins amongst the outcastes speaking the language of the common people, namely Apabrahmsa. One academic has detected the words ‘saha’ and ‘ja’ possibly in use in Sanskrit as separate words in the classical period, but not in combination. (Davidson 2002).

One of the classic texts associated with the Sahajiya Buddhists is the *Hevajra Tantra*. The surviving text is composed of two parts and 750 slokas. In part one, section eight, the four kinds of Joy (ecstasy) are described:

From Joy there is some bliss, from Perfect Joy yet more. From the Joy of Cessation comes a passionless state. The Joy of *Sahaja* is finality.

The first comes by desire for contact, the second by desire for bliss, the third from the passing of passion, and by this means the fourth [*Sahaja*] is realized.

Perfect Joy is samsara [mystic union]. The Joy of Cessation is nirvana. Then there is a plain Joy between the two. *Sahaja* is free of them all. For there is neither desire nor absence of desire, nor a middle to be obtained.

In *Sahaja* there is neither insight nor skillful means, compared to the realization of correct reality. *Sahaja* cannot be explained by something else, nor is it found in anything. It is to be known intuitively by oneself, as a result of merit and through service and attendance on the teacher (*guru*). (I.viii.32-36)

A few verses further on, we read that

The whole world is of the nature of Sahaja –
for Sahaja is the quintessence [*svarupa*] of all;
This quintessence is nirvana to those who possess the perfectly
pure *Citta* [mind]. (I.viii.44)

Kahnu, a contemporary of Saraha, says of Sahaja

Say, how can Sahaja be explained?
(For) neither body nor speech nor mind can enter into it.
In vain does the Guru preach to the disciple, for, how can he
explain that which transcends the capacity of all verbal means?

Their colleague, Bhusuka says of Sahaja

The great tree of Sahaja is shining in the three worlds;
Everything being of the nature of void, what will bind what?
As water mixing with water makes no difference, so also, the
jewel of the mind enters the sky in unity of emotion

and

The clouds of compassion are shining always
after pressing down the duality of existence and non-
existence.
The wonderful has risen up in the sky,
Behold, Bhusuka, the Sahaja-nature!
On seeing and hearing it all, all the senses are destroyed and
the mind revels in solitude.

The concept of Sahaja is shared in the following centuries
with other outcast mystics. The siddhi, Indrabhuti (11th
century) begins his commentary, the

Sahajasiddhipaddhati, with a lineage list that indicates that he was the receptor of a teaching on *Sahaja* that began with a princess and her five hundred ‘ladies in waiting’ receiving awakening into the nature of *sahaja* from a risi in the forest monastery of Ratnalamkara. He describes Sahaja in a similar way to the earlier Sahajiyas:

The peace of *sahaja* is all pervasive, always arising and self-existent. It is continuously inexhaustible, and is the rejection of conceptual evaluation. Present both internally and externally, it is not born from either the internal or the external. The category of synthesis [*yuganaddhapadartha*] through its presence in all that is moving and stable [*caracara*], is truly present at all times. (1b4-2a1)

The Naths and the bhakta saints

The Nath yogis, who emerge in the caves of northern India in the 11th century, had some knowledge of Sahaja, though when this concept was added to their knowledge base is unclear, as so many of their texts are presented as dialogues between their founder, Gorakhnath, and his guru, the legendary Matsyendranath, as in this exchange from the *Gorakhbodh*:

Gorakhnath: Had there been no night, where would the day have come from? Without the day, where would the night merge? ...

Matsyendranath: Without night, the day would have merged into Sahaj; had there been no day, the night would have passed into (Sahaj). (v.29-30)

In the later Upanishads there are verses that associate the awakening of the Kundalini with the Sahaja state. In the *Varaha Upanishad*:

The knowledge coming from the arousing of Kundalini and *[the associated]* state of actionlessness brings about automatically the Sahaja Samadhi. (2.77)

The householder, or bhakti, saints with connections to the Nath yogis, also used the concept of Sahaja in their songs. Namdev in one of his Hindi songs composed when living in the Punjab (early 14th century), states that

I do not sit or move or wander.
I never starve, I never eat.
I do not live, I never die.
I am ever joyful, neither coming nor going.

Dwelling in the skies [*Sahasrara chakra*]
I have made my home in the Sahaja.
My heart is rapt in the music within.
Rare is the yogi who hears it.

I gather no leaves for ritual offerings.
There is no god in the temple. [*ie. there is no need for ritual*]

I am at Hari's feet
never to be born again
Says Namdev.

Kabir

Widely regarded as the greatest of the North Indian bhakti saints, Kabir (c.1440-1518) has left many references to Sahaja in his songs. Here he follows earlier practitioners:

Where there is neither sea nor rains,
Nor sun nor shade;
Where there is neither creation
Nor dissolution;
Where prevails neither life nor death,
Nor pain nor pleasure;
Beyond the states of Sunn and trance;
Beyond words, O friend,
Is that unique state of Sahaj.
It can be neither weighted
Nor exhausted,
Is neither heavy nor light;
It has no upper regions
Nor lower ones;
It knows not the dawn of day
Nor the gloom of night;
Where there is neither wind
Nor water nor fire,
There abides the perfect Master.
It is inaccessible,
It is, and it will ever be;
Attain it through the Master's grace.
Sayeth Kabir: I surrender myself
At the feet of my master,
I remain absorbed
In his true company.

Recommending Sahaja to other mystics, he sings:

O Sadhu! Sahaj samadh is the best.
Since the day when I met with my Lord, there has been no end
to the sport of our love.
I shut not my eyes, I close not my ears, I do not mortify my
body;
I see with eyes open and smile, and behold His beauty
everywhere:

Nanak

Nanak (1469-1539) was a contemporary of Kabir, and became the founding guru of the Sikh tradition. There are many references to Sahaja in Guru Nanak's writings, preserved in the Sikh holy book, the *Guru Granth*. In one set of verses in praise of Ram, in the section known as *Raga Asa*, Nanak says:

The Primal Lord showed me the way
Wherever I turn I see Him.
Says Nanak, abandon not the worship of Hari,
By the gentle path of *Sahaja*, you will attain Him.

And later in the same piece Nanak describes his mystical union with his Lord:

My mind and body rejoiced in Him.
He gives life to the world, He is bountiful, O Rama!
He is the giver of life to the world,
He is the Bountiful Lord.
I have dyed my mind with the colours of Hari's Name,
By the gentle way of Sahaj He blended me with Him.

The *Siddha Goshta* is based on a dialogue said to have taken place between Guru Nanak and a band of yogis who came to visit him. Discursing on the need for absolute devotion to the Divine Lord, achievable only through the guru's instructions, Nanak comments:

In the calm of sahaja's cave you can discover the True One.
Says Nanak, the True One loves the truthful.

And again, later in the discourse:

Know that in every heart that beats
The Lord of life has His mansion.
It is through the guru's teaching
We merge in the Formless One.
By the gentle path of Sahaja
Attain God, Purest of the Pure.
A disciple who serves his guru and no other
Will succeed, says Nanak, that is sure.

This need for guidance through the guru is emphasized elsewhere in the *Guru Granth* in occasional mentions in a number of longer pieces:

How to find the gentle path of sahaj and peace, save by
guidance of the guru? (*Sri Raga*)

The guru's teaching brings stability to the mind,
Man meditates in sahaja's tranquility. (*Raga Gujri*)

When a man meets the true guru, his doubts are dispelled and
his mind ceases its wanderings;
Drops of nectar pour down on him like rain.
His ears catch strains of sahaja's celestial music

And his mind is lit up with knowledge divine. (*Raga Suhi*)

Dadu and Rajasthan

Dadu Dayal was a saint from Rajasthan in northern India. "Dadu" means brother, and "Dayal" means "the compassionate one". He lived in the second half of the sixteenth century (1544-1603). His songs are in a Hindi dialect known as Braj Bhasa, being a mixture of Hindi and Rajasthani. Like the earlier Kabir, Dadu came from one of the many low artisan castes that may have converted to Islam. He lived in the Jaipur region of Rajasthan, most probably as a pinjari, a cotton carder. He married and had a family of two sons and two daughters. He gathered around himself a group of followers, which became known as the *Dadu-panth*. This organization has continued in Rajasthan to the present-day, and has been a major source of early manuscripts containing songs by the North Indian saints.

Dadu clearly experienced the bliss of Sahaja, and alludes to it in his songs. In his song, 'Touching the touchstone', Dadu refers to the Sahaja state several times:

When by touching the touchstone we have become dispensers
of happiness, the false idea that there are two will have been
driven away.

O brother, we have become one, when, united in
bewilderment (Mohan),

The true word has entered our minds.

When we have found the secret of Malayagiri [*a range of
mountains in western India*]

All such errors as family and caste will have been driven away.

When the Hari-water has been found close by, then drop mixing with drop will have merged in Sahaja.

When all the various disparities and errors have vanished, says Dadu, one will be united within a single body.

Touching the touchstone avail yourself of gold (liberation), of the happiness-giving sahaja surati.

Later in the song Dadu reminds the listener that

Through samjami (yogic self-control) he will become one who always imparts sanctity, no impurity will stick to his soul.

The lotus (ie. *Sahasrara*) of this person will bloom, the Brahma-knowledge will blossom.

Concluding the song, Dadu proclaims

No difference between night and day is visible, sahajai occurs spontaneously.

Dadu, behold his sight, o servant, addicted to this liquor!

Dadu was well aware of the essential nature of Sahaja:

Where there is no two, there is Sahaja, there joy and sorrow become one. Sahaj neither lives nor dies; it is the state of complete nirvana ...

Amidst all duality hold your consciousness in the vacuity of Sahaja, and drink nectar when you have attained the final state of arrest and then there is no fear of death or of the flux of time.

Dadu also knew that the Sahaja state was only revealed to a few:

One's self is a tender plant wherein blooms the flower of Sahaja; The true guru teaches how to achieve it in a natural way, but very rare are the persons who can understand it.

Sundardas (1596-1689) was a disciple of Dadu Dayal, and perhaps the best known of the early Dadu-panth. He was sent to live in Dadu's household at the age of six. Although Dadu died soon after, he most probably gave realisation to the young child before his death. Sundardas clearly experienced Sahaja:

Rare is the person who feels thirsty for drinking the juice of meditation on the name 'Rama'.

We then become the residents of the supreme region which is at the top of the brain.

There exists the lake of ambrosial juice.

As for the ambrosial juice it is exceedingly dear, though it can be available throughout the year.

One who drinks that becomes immortal.

In one song Sundardas gives details of his Sahaja lineage:

That perfectly pure Sahaja is in everything and with that Sahaja all religious people gather together.

Sankara began his sadhana in this Sahaja,

Sukdeva, Sanaka and others also followed this Sahaja way.

Devotees like Soja, Pipa, Sena and Dhana all have drunk of this Sahaja-bliss in the natural way.

Raidas was also a sadhaka of Sahaja, and Guru Dadu also realised infinite bliss in this Sahaja path.

Sankara (also known as Shankacharya) we have met earlier (probably 7th century). Sukadev, the son of Vyas, and Sanaka were semi-mythical sages from before the Kali yuga period. Several earlier Rajasthani saints are mentioned: Sojha was a householder who, along with his wife Sojhi, abandoned their children to become ascetics; King Pipaji (1383-1453) gave up his throne to follow a religious life; Sena (or Sai'n) (c.1500) was a barber in the court of the Bandhogarh king Rajaram who became the king's guru. Raidas (or Ravidas) (c.1450-1525), was a disciple of Ramanand, and a close associate of Kabir.

Bengal

It is in Bengal that the knowledge of Sahaja is transmitted down the centuries, from Saraha and the Sahajiya Buddhists, to the people of Bengal. (Das Gupta 1969). A key component of that transmission has been Chaitanya (1486-1533) and the Krishna devotional tradition of Vaishnavism. (Dimock 1966; Hayes 2000; Bhattacharjee 2000). Other parts of that transmission include the Islamised forms of yoga practiced by the Sufis (Hatley 2007; Ernst 2003; Ernst 2005); and the songs of the Bauls, the itinerant mystical singers of Bengal (Dasgupta 1994; Datta 1978; Capwell 1974). These multiple and interchanging transmissions flow on to the Bengali mystics of the modern era, notably Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) (Dimock 1959).

Ramana Maharshi

The South Indian saint, Ramana Maharshi (1879-1950) made his home on the sacred hill of Arunachala. He gave realization to a number of sadhus and disciples. His conversations with followers and visitors were in several South Indian languages. Those from the period 1935-1939 were summarized and written down by a disciple.

In answer to the questions of a sannyasi visitor one day in April 1937, Ramana Maharshi made the following statement about samadhi:

1. Holding on to Reality is *samadhi*.
2. Holding on to samadhi with effort is *savikalpa samadhi*.
3. Merging in Reality and remaining unaware of the world is *nirvikalpa samadhi*.
4. Merging in ignorance and remaining unaware of the world is sleep.
5. Remaining in the primal, pure, natural state without effort is *sahaja nirvikalpa samadhi*.

The elderly visitor then asked about *nirvikalpa samadhi* and *sahaja samadhi*, to which Ramana Maharshi replied:

When we have tendencies that we are trying to give up, that is to say when we are still imperfect and have to make conscious efforts to keep the mind one-pointed or free from thought, the thoughtless state which we thus attain is *nirvikalpa samadhi*. When, through practice, we are always in that state, not going

into *samadhi* and coming out again, that is the *sahaja* state. In the *sahaja* state one sees only the Self and one sees the world as a form assumed by the Self.

Later a disciple asked the question, “what is *samadhi*?” to which the Bhagawan replied:

In yoga the term is used to indicate some kind of trance and there are various kinds of *samadhi*. But the *samadhi* I speak to you about is different. It is *sahaja samadhi*. In this state you remain calm and composed during activity. You realise that you are moved by the deeper self within and are unaffected by what you do or say or think. You have no worries, anxieties or cares, for you realise that there is nothing that belongs to you as ego and that everything is being done by something with which you are in conscious union.

[*Teachings*/ed.Osborne:225-227]

Shri Mataji Nirmala Devi and Sahaja Yoga

The Marathi-speaking saint, Shri Mataji Nirmala Devi (1923-2011) developed the Sahaja Yoga meditation method which is based on awakening the Kundalini in many individuals thus achieving mass self-realisation. Consequently, Shri Mataji’s primary definition of Sahaja is straight-forward and understandable by those not previously exposed to yoga philosophy, as shown in this extract from an interview with ORF TV in Vienna, Austria in 1988:

Interviewer: Okay. Yes, I would ask you to tell me first, to give me a definition of what you are working on.

Shri Mataji: Sahaja Yoga.

Interviewer: Yes, what is it? I mean, what is the main idea of it?

Shri Mataji: Sahaja, Saha means with, Ja means born. Born with you. That is spontaneous. Yoga means Union with the Divine. Now, many people in the modern times won't believe there's anything like Divine. But supposing I say, "There is," with an open mind of a scientist you must accept it as a hypothesis to begin with. Now, we have the Divine power, very subtle power everywhere, but we can't feel it. With our human awareness we cannot feel it. With human awareness we also don't know the absolute truth, we live in a relative world. So there has to be a breakthrough. And the breakthrough has to take place in our evolutionary process. And Sahaja Yoga is the method which gives you that breakthrough.

Interviewer: How does it do this?

Shri Mataji: Now, within us is placed – is a energy which we call as Kundalini in Sanskrit language, which is a residual energy in the triangular bone called as Sacrum also means sacred bone, so maybe the Greeks knew about it. It rises like a primule in a seed, passes through six centers and pierces through the last one here {points to top of the head] and gives you what we call as the Self Realization or real baptism – real. That's what it is. And then, on your central nervous system – on your central nervous system you can feel the existence of this all pervading power. You can feel all around you there's cool breeze. And you can feel on your fingertips your own centers which are subtle and the centers of another person,

which Jung has described that one has to be collectively conscious. It's a happening that has to take (place) within ourselves. It is not mental, it's not physical, it's not emotional – it's beyond that. (1988-0609)

In a Press Conference in London in 1999, Shri Mataji defined Sahaja Yoga within the context of the samadhi states:

I cannot enjoy unless and until I become thoughtlessly aware. Also, in our Patanjali yoga it is written down as *Nirvichara Samadhi*. But he has made four stages of the whole thing, is that first is this *Sarvichar*. *Sarvichar* means “with thoughts” and then without thoughts, but in Sahaja Yoga it is not so. It is so quick that you become thoughtlessly aware first, and then you become doubtlessly aware. (1999-0708)

(Melbourne, 2012)