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“No One Saves Like the Guru”: Devotion to the Guru in Digambar Hindi Literature.

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Devotion to the guru is a significant theme in both sant and bhakti literature of early modern north India. People in all the traditions composed and sang poems in praise of the saving power of the guru. It is not surprising, therefore, that this theme was also prominent in the vernacular Digambar Jain literature of the period.

The theme of the guru is an ancient one in the Jain traditions. *Guru-vandana* is one of the six daily rituals prescribed in both Digambar and Śvetāmbar texts from the early first millennium CE, as both junior monks and laypeople recited liturgical texts in praise of the living monks as gurus. In the medieval period, this veneration of the living guru resulted in a rich literature of devotion to the landed mendicant pontiffs known as *bhaṭṭāarakas*. Starting in the late-sixteenth century, however, we see the beginning of a significant shift in north Indian Digambar society. Educated laymen started to move away from the authority of the *bhaṭṭāarakas*, and literary production increasingly was by lay poets.

The compositions of these lay poets are at the center of this paper. The theme of the guru remained a prominent one in their *pads*. But in the absence of full-fledged naked monks, and with the growing suspicion of the clothed *bhaṭṭāarakas*, this devotion was no longer directed to living gurus. Instead, it became oriented in two directions. Some *pads* praise the Jinas as foundational, salvific gurus. Others praise the ideal of the true monk as an abstract image of the guru. But since there were no naked monks in north India, these *pads* in praise of the ideal

monk-guru developed another theme, a sort of *viraha bhakti*. After praising the ideals of a true monk-guru, the poets would plaintively ask, “when will I meet such a guru?” These *pads* helped keep alive in the Digambar imaginary an understanding of who a monk-guru should be, and so helped lay the ground for the lay acceptance of the revived naked monk tradition in the mid-twentieth century.

This paper allows us to see how the early modern Jain vernacular poets adapted themes common to all the literary communities of the time, and used them to express a distinctly Jain message.