

Bhakti Religion and Tantric Magic in Mughal India:
Kacchvāhās, Rāmānandīs, and Nāths, circa 1500-1750

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ABSTRACT

Bhakti Religion and Tantric Magic in Mughal India: Kacchvāhās, Rāmānandīs, and Nāths, circa 1500-1750

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This dissertation sheds new light on the nature and development of Hindu devotional religiosity (*bhakti*) by drawing attention to *bhakti*'s understudied historical relationships with Tantra, Yoga, and Sufism. Specifically, this thesis explains the phenomenal rise of *bhakti* in early modern north India as a process of identity and community formation fundamentally connected to Sufi-inflected critiques of tantric and yogic religiosity. With the advent of the Mughal Empire in the sixteenth century, new alliances—most notably Akbar's with the Kacchvāhā royal clan of Amer—led to the development of a joint Mughal-Rajput court culture and religio-political idiom in which Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* institutional forms became key symbols of power and deportment, and thus *bhakti* communities became beneficiaries of extensive patronage. Through a study of the life and works of the important but little-known *bhakti* poet-saint Agradās, this thesis offers insight into how these *bhakti* communities competed for patronage and followers. If the rise of *bhakti* was inseparable from Mughal socio-political developments, it was also contingent upon the successful formation of a new *bhakti* identity. This thesis centers on the Rāmānandī community at Galta, comparing them with the Nāth *yogīs* to show the development of this *bhakti* identity, one defined especially in opposition to the “other” of the tantric *yogī* and Śākta. It also contributes a broad study of early modern *bhakti* poetry and hagiography demonstrating the rise of new, Sufi-inflected, exclusivist *bhakti* attitudes that stigmatized key aspects of tantric and yogic religiosity, and that therein prefigured orientalist-colonialist depictions of *bhakti* as “religion” and Tantra as “magic.”

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Notes on Transliteration

Following the standard system for transliterating the *devanāgarī* syllabary into the Roman alphabet, I have chosen to use diacritics for titles, personal names, and key terms; however, I have not transliterated common forms of location names (e.g., Vrindavan and Galta instead of Vṛndāvan and Galtā) or certain familiar terms or names like Krishna (instead of Kṛṣṇa).

When translating and discussing primary source materials, I have elected to insert the original text, in transliteration, in the main body only when the translations are my own. This usually equates to instances of primary source material that have never before been translated.

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Chapter One

Introduction: Mughals, Rajputs, and the Rise of Vaiṣṇava *Bhakti*

The defining feature of the Hindu religious world in early modern north India¹ was the emergence and expansion of a diverse set of new devotional (*bhakti*) communities united by their focus on an all-immersing selfless love for, and an unmediated personal relationship with, the Divine. This thesis's central concern will be to understand the rise of this *bhakti* religion in north India, circa 1500-1750 CE, to articulate what about this *bhakti* was new and why it was so successful at this particular time, and to explain how *bhakti* communities defined it and themselves in relation to other religious approaches and communities.

Since the early twentieth century, the history of *bhakti* has generally been told in terms of “the *bhakti* movement.”² As typically conceived, “the *bhakti* movement” was “a transformatory avalanche in terms of emotional devotion and social reform” that began in

¹ In using the term “early modern” to describe India, circa 1500-1750 CE, I follow John Richards, who states in a classic essay: “For South Asian history I believe it makes a good deal of sense to use the term *early modern* instead of *Mughal India*, or *late medieval India*, or *late precolonial India* for the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries. To do so would lessen the extent to which India is seen as exceptional, unique, exotic, and somehow detached from world history. I am convinced that we must contextualize South Asian culture, civilization, and society in this way to better understand the more specific unfolding of Indian history in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries.” John F. Richards, “Early Modern India and World History,” *Journal of World History* 8.2 (1997): 197-198. Richards identifies South Asia as being linked to all of the following six large-scale processes that he sees as the distinguishing marks of the early modern world: 1) the creation of global sea passages linking the world through a transportation network; 2) the rise of a truly global world economy in which long-distance commerce connected economies on every continent; 3) the growth of large, stable, efficient states with largely unprecedented power and political unification; 4) the doubling of the world population; 5) the intensified use of land to expand production; and 6) the diffusion of new technologies including crop cultivation, gunpowder, and printing. While I adopt the term “early modern,” it is an imperfect one and we must keep in mind Daud Ali’s perceptive critical observation that, “The arguments for ‘early modernism’ or ‘early modernity’ in South Asia ... have often relied, rather ironically, on the very tropes of the ‘medieval’ once used to consign the Mughal Empire itself to a backward ‘medieval period’.” At this level, early modern historiography has not so much rectified images of medieval stagnation as simply pushed back their boundaries to pre-Mughal times.” Daud Ali, “The Historiography of the Medieval in South Asia,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Series 3*, 22.1 (2012): 12.

² On the trope of the “*bhakti* movement,” see John S. Hawley, “Introduction: The Bhakti Movement—Says Who?” *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 11.3 (2007): 209-25.

Tamil south India between the sixth and ninth centuries CE with the Śaiva Nāyaṇārs and Vaiṣṇava Āḷvārs and gradually swept its way across the subcontinent and into the north as a single, coherent movement.³ This relatively recent term and the narrative commonly linked to it are misleading at best in that they posit an illusory historical continuity and coherence to the development of *bhakti* while glossing over significant qualitative differences in the form and style of *bhakti* practiced in various regions.⁴ In the forthcoming pages, “*bhakti* movement” does not refer to any such single, coherent, India-wide spread of emotional devotional religion. Rather, I adopt it as a convenient if imperfect term denoting the historical fact, beginning especially in the sixteenth century, of the rise of a variety of *bhakti* communities in north India linked by the following four key features. First and foremost, these communities were united by a distinctive focus on unmediated, personal devotion to the Divine (as opposed to ritual, knowledge, or the practice of yoga or asceticism). This devotion took place in the context of a loving relationship with the Divine in which caste, class, or gender typically had no place. Furthermore, this was a *bhakti* that found its most characteristic expression (a) in the context of spiritual fellowship (*satsaṅg*) with other devotees (*bhaktas*), (b) in the medium of song,⁵ (c) in

³ After originating in the Tamil south, *bhakti* is typically described as having made its way northward (often in decayed form) into Karnataka and Andhra, then traveling to Maharashtra and Gujarat, and finally entering into north India and Bengal. Prema Nandakumar, “The Bhakti Movement in South India,” in *Theistic Vedānta*, ed. R. Balasubramian (New Delhi: Centre for Studies in Civilizations, 2003), 794; 857.

⁴ The narrative of the “*bhakti* movement” and the conceptions of *bhakti* associated with it are especially problematic in that their origins lie in a complex mixture of colonial Christian motivations, Orientalist scholarship, and twentieth-century Indian nationalist agendas which sought to create a sense of national identity by propagating the notion of a shared pan-Indian *bhakti* religious heritage.

⁵ It is John S. Hawley who has most insightfully and articulately hit on this point. He highlights the importance of “the term *bhajan* (Sanskrit *bhajana*), which is in form the action noun that implies the doing of *bhakti* and which therefore completes the circle between the divine *bhagavān* [God] and the *bhaktas* [devotees] of this world. It is most significant that this [term] ... has a distinctly musical connotation, for *bhajan* means devotional song, the act of singing to God. It is in a specifically musical context, then, that the circle of believers comes to be completed, or rather, charged with life. Indeed, the association between *bhakti* and *bhajan* is sometimes so close that it is virtually impossible to distinguish the two. [For Hindus] the act of making contact with God and participating in a

the idiom of passionate love or painful separation, and/or (d) in the remembrance and articulation of the Name(s) of God. Second, the new devotional communities of Mughal India⁶ were alike in their production and performance of devotional works (composed in vernacular languages) remembering the deeds of God (especially Krishna and Rām) and exemplary *bhaktas*, as well as, third, their performance and collection of the songs attributed to renowned *bhakti* poet-saints like Kabīr, Raidās, Mīrābāī, and Sūrdās. Finally, these *bhakti* authors and communities of early modern north India, despite their many differences, almost all seem to have come together in their clear opposition to tantric paradigms of religiosity. It is this last point about the relationship of *bhakti* to tantric religion to which scholars have drawn all too little attention and which I therefore intend to highlight in what follows.

The religious landscape of early modern north India saw the rise of a “vulgate Vaishnava”⁷ devotional tradition at both the elite and popular levels, a phenomenon that often occurred at the expense of tantric Śaiva and Śākta religion. In the new social and political context—to be explored in the pages below—that facilitated this change, there was an increasingly noticeable tension between the *bhakti* approach of self-surrendering, loving devotion to God and the self-asserting, power-seeking perspective of tantric religiosity. A new

divine interaction has something intrinsically to do with the realm of song.” John Stratton Hawley, “The Music in Faith and Morality,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 52.2 (1984): 244-245.

⁶ In addition to “early modern north India,” I regularly employ this phrase “Mughal India” (with the understanding that this Mughal India was “early modern”) in order to highlight the fact that most of the processes and communities I discuss took shape and flourished within the north Indian territorial and cultural sphere under Mughal imperial control and were fundamentally influenced by that fact.

⁷ The term “vulgate Vaiṣṇavism” was coined by John S. Hawley in order to refer to a catholic Vaiṣṇava religiosity that may include, but extends beyond and does not necessitate affiliation with a Vaiṣṇava *saṃpradāy* (sect) or worship focused on one of the (*saguṇ*) forms of Vishnu. In other words, the sphere of vulgate Vaiṣṇavism also includes devotees with no clear institutional affiliation and even those with a preference for a (*nirguṇ*) conception of God as being without form or attributes. These different devotees come together in the category of vulgate Vaiṣṇavism through a shared set of *bhakti* values articulated in a Vaiṣṇava idiom; i.e., using the imagery, themes, and, most importantly, names of Rām and Krishna.

and distinctive *bhakti* self-identity was emerging in early modern north India, one that positioned itself in opposition to several other religious modes, but was perhaps most importantly defined against the “other” of the *tāntrika*. Indeed, the great rise and spread of *bhakti* communities at this time was closely intertwined with the construction and performance of a new exclusivist *bhakti* identity that depended on the successful stigmatization and subordination of key aspects of tantric religiosity.

~ *Rāmānandīs and Nāths* ~

In order to explore the development of *bhakti* identity and community in early modern north India, we focus our attentions on the Rāmānandī *sampradāy* (sect) at Galta in eastern Rajasthan. This Vaiṣṇava monastic community was pivotal in furthering a catholic vision of *bhakti* that would, in many ways, serve as a foundation for mainstream modern-day Hinduism. The early Rāmānandīs at Galta were an incredibly diverse array of practitioners, and in studying them we will gain important insights into how a new *bhakti* identity emerged out of the tangled threads of devotion, yoga, tantra, and asceticism. As the Rāmānandī community demonstrates, while yoga and asceticism remained important dimensions of the devotional life for many in the sixteenth century, at this time a number of *bhaktas* began to conceive their religious approach as quite apart from the tantric asceticism and magic represented most strikingly and pervasively by the Nāth *yogīs*. The Nāths were an amorphous confederation of tantric *yogīs* linked by their roots in Śaiva (Kaula) and Siddha tradition and a perspective oriented toward the attainment of *siddhis* (magical abilities), worldly power, and bodily immortality. In seeing how devotional communities like the Rāmānandīs simultaneously borrowed from, critiqued, and satirized the Nāths, we can see the ways in which certain

dimensions of tantric tradition were marginalized (while others were appropriated) in the early modern period and how the rise of *bhakti* was implicated in this process. By comparing and contrasting the Nāth *yogīs* and the Rāmānandī *bhaktas*, this study seeks to bridge a gap between Tantra and Bhakti in the field of South Asian religious studies, highlighting the crucial historical relationship between and intermixing of these different brands of religiosity.

~*Bhakti and Tantra in South Asian Religious Studies*~

Bhakti is most often translated as “devotion,” a word with a wide-range of (often Protestant Christian) connotations. If *bhakti* has, on one hand, been vaguely characterized as a mode of personal devotion, on the other hand, it is often (rather inaccurately) described as a social movement seeking egalitarian social change while protesting empty and excessive ritual, blind adherence to orthodoxy, and caste discrimination.⁸ In either case, scholarly categorizations of *bhakti* almost always invoke a distinction between *nirguṇ* and *saguṇ* modes and traditions of *bhakti*. We will be referencing these terms frequently in the forthcoming pages, so it is worth taking a brief moment to understand their meaning.

The term *nirguṇ* refers to the concept of a Divine without (*nir-*) attributes (*guṇ*) or form, ultimately inconceivable, and accessible mainly through an individual’s cultivation of purified perception and inner experience. *Nirguṇ bhakti* poets and communities tend to be lower-caste, socially-inclusive, and anti-brahmanical in orientation. The term *saguṇ*, then, denotes the notion of a Divine in form and with (*sa-*) attributes (*guṇ*), accessible within the realm of

⁸ For a discussion of the *bhakti* traditions’ ambivalent position on caste and a critique of *bhakti* as a “movement” of and for social egalitarianism, see Patton Burchett, “*Bhakti* Rhetoric in the Hagiography of ‘Untouchable’ Saints: Discerning *Bhakti*’s Ambivalence on Caste and Brahminhood,” *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 13.2 (2009): 115-141. If *bhakti* has a social ideology, it certainly should not be conceived as a unitary presence inherent in *bhakti* songs, poetry, and hagiographical stories, but rather as a *range* constructed variously by different readers and listeners in their encounters with the many forms and expressions of *bhakti*.

sensory experience. *Saguṇ* traditions typically identify with caste-based Hinduism and Purāṇic deities and tend to be more accommodating to orthodox ritual practices and brahminical social customs. This *nirguṇ/saguṇ* distinction has heuristic value; however, as John S. Hawley and Tyler Williams have demonstrated, there was normally no clear cut division between *nirguṇ* and *saguṇ* conceptions and approaches, and while the distinction did become increasingly more meaningful over the course of the early modern period, *bhakti* poets and communities did not typically identify themselves as exclusively one or the other.⁹

As Krishna Sharma has pointed out, our modern-day conceptions of *bhakti* as “devotion” (whether *nirguṇ* or *saguṇ*) are heavily influenced—and distorted—by the Protestant Christian disposition of the Orientalist scholars (European Indologists, British colonial officials, etc.) who provided the initial conceptualization of *bhakti* as a category of Hindu religion.¹⁰ In recent years, a number of scholars have sought to counter this bias and expand our conceptions of *bhakti* beyond “devotion to a personal god” by bringing attention to the etymology of the word *bhakti* and the crucial associations its root *bhaji-* has with notions of “sharing” and “participation.” As Hawley writes, “*bhakti* means devotion not in the sense of cool, measured veneration, but as active participation: the word *bhakti* derives from a Sanskrit root meaning ‘to share’.”¹¹

In the view of Karen Pechilis Prentiss, “Academic discussions of *bhakti* that focus on the image of God, including monotheism and *nirguṇa* and *saguṇa*, and those that focus on social

⁹ John S. Hawley, *Three Bhakti Voices: Mirabai, Surdas, and Kabir in Their Times and Ours* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 70-86; Tyler Williams, *Bhakti Kavya Main Nirgun-Sagun Vibhajan Ka Aitihasik Adhyayan (A Historical Study of the Nirgun-Sagun Division in Bhakti Poetry)*, MPhil dissertation (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru University, 2007).

¹⁰ Krishna Sharma, *Bhakti and the Bhakti Movement: A New Perspective: A Study in the History of Ideas* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1987).

¹¹ John Stratton Hawley, “The Music in Faith and Morality,” 244.

movements, including reform, revolution, and revival, tend to obstruct scholarly recognition of the pattern of concern with embodiment common to *bhakti*'s proponents and interpreters."¹² She argues that the most fundamental thesis of *bhakti* is that an embodied "engagement with (or participation in) God should inform all of one's activities" and experiences in life.¹³ For Prentiss, the agency and presence of the *bhakti* poets in their vernacular works is a crucial feature of *bhakti* religiosity in general: devotees actively engage in distinctive personal relationships with the divine that are colored by their own language, geographical and socio-historical setting, personal experience, etc. and which involve an emotional commitment through which "they are making God theirs."¹⁴

Christian Novetzke has also argued for a re-conceptualization of *bhakti*, but employs a different tactic. Novetzke suggests that it is more productive to speak of *bhakti* as "a locus for the creation of publics," and states that "all manifestations of *bhakti* are performances" that take part in and help to form "publics of reception,"¹⁵ i.e., social entities created through the reflexive circulation of discourse among strangers. In this conception, the individual is "the essential node of creation and transmission," but *bhakti* only really manifests itself when "ideas, materials, and memories circulate among individuals" and thereby form publics of reception.¹⁶ Here *bhakti* seems to be a shared flow of sentiment and memory circulating

¹² Karen Pechilis Prentiss, *The Embodiment of Bhakti* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 153-154.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁵ Christian Novetzke, "Bhakti and Its Public," *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 11.3 (2007), 255.

¹⁶ Christian Novetzke, *History, Bhakti, and Public Memory: Namdev in Religious and Secular Traditions* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2009), 22.

between poet-performer, audience, and God that generates an interactive devotional community or public.

The work of Hawley, Prentiss, and Novetzke, among others, represents a shift in focus that has allowed scholars to highlight networks of interrelation and community among devotees, dimensions of memory, performance, and emotional involvement in devotional participation, and the role of region-specific languages, sacred sites, and saints in the embodied life of devotion, all of which are crucial components of *bhakti* religiosity but were not really part of earlier Orientalist (Protestant-biased) conceptions of *bhakti* simply as devotion to a personal god. This has certainly been a positive development in our understanding of the nature of *bhakti*; nevertheless, conceptions of *bhakti* have consistently continued to neglect tantric, yogic, and ascetic dimensions of its history and practice, fostering lines of separation that, historically speaking, simply did not exist—at least not before the early modern period—between *bhakti* and other “categories” of religiosity.

While there are exceptions,¹⁷ generally speaking, scholars of *bhakti* have not adequately considered the interpenetrations of asceticism, devotion, yoga, and tantric practice and this has led to conceptions of *bhakti* that make all too little room for those aspects and elements of *bhakti* that might seem more at home in other of the subfields and scholarly categories of

¹⁷ The work of Rachel McDermott, June McDaniel, and Edward C. Dimock, Jr. especially come to mind as scholarship that has offered sophisticated discussions of the interrelations of *bhakti*, tantra, and yoga. This is largely due to the Bengali context of their work, where these threads remained more interwoven after the early modern period than in most other parts of north India, where they unraveled into more distinctive, exclusive, and oppositionary religious categories. In a recent essay, McDaniel writes, “Bhakti and yoga are often opposed in Indian thought—one emphasizes the emotions, the other suppresses them (as it is popularly phrased, *bhakti* focuses upon the heart, while yoga works on the mind and body). But if we examine the *bhakti* traditions of West Bengal, yoga holds an important place. ... Yogic practice in West Bengal is heavily involved with both tantra and *bhakti*.” June McDaniel, “The Role of Yoga in Some Bengali *Bhakti* Traditions: Shaktism, Gaudiya Vaisnavism, Baul, and Sahajiyā Dharma,” *Journal of Hindu Studies* 5 (2012): 53–54. See also: McDermott, *Mother of My Heart, Daughter of My Dreams: Kālī and Umā in the Devotional Poetry of Bengal* (2001); McDaniel, *The Madness of the Saints: Ecstatic Religion in Bengal* (1989); Dimock, *The Place of the Hidden Moon: Erotic Mysticism in the Vaiṣṇava-sahajiyā Cult of Bengal* (1966).

South Asian Religious Studies. Some of this is understandable considering that scholars of *bhakti* in north India tend to be specialists of the early modern and modern periods, the time when a version of Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* had blossomed that, at least superficially, was largely unconcerned with things tantric, yogic, and ascetic. Even so, too few have stopped to properly consider (a) the place of tantric, yogic, and ascetic traditions in this early modern *bhakti* practice, (b) the historically unique character of this *bhakti* in its exclusivism and typical disregard for tantra, yoga, and asceticism, or (c) the ways in which the rise and success of the *bhakti* identity that emerged in early modern north India was dependent upon the construction and rejection of a caricatured tantric “Other.” This last point is especially significant because it means that the inattention of scholarship on Bhakti to tantric, yogic, and ascetic modes may largely be explained by the fact that early modern *bhakti* traditions themselves began to conceive their identity and practice in more exclusive, insulated terms that opposed and marginalized dimensions of these religious modes that had previously regularly interpenetrated with devotional practice. Nevertheless, the point is that our overall conception of *bhakti* has been skewed by this specifically early modern development and in order to properly understand the history of both the *bhakti* tradition and the modern-day scholarly category of *bhakti*, we must come to a better understanding of *bhakti*’s relationship with asceticism, yoga, and most especially, tantric religiosity.

* * *

Following from what has been said above, it would seem that most scholars—using categories molded during the later, more sectarian development of the Hindu tradition, or inherited from Orientalist scholars—continue to see *bhakti*, tantra, and yoga as rather distinct entities, particularly in the case of *bhakti*. Reading back into the past with our modern

categories, the *bhakta* is typically conceived in stark contrast to the *tāntrika* or *yogī*. In bringing together the Rāmānandīs and Nāth *yogīs* for comparative study, this thesis productively complicates, deconstructs, and re-conceptualizes the identity of the *bhakta* and the scholarly categories of Bhakti, Tantra, and Yoga. At the same time, we will see that in sixteenth and seventeenth century north India, the kind of embodied participation that *bhakti* was becoming, and the kinds of publics that it was generating, were fundamentally different from, and even formed in conscious opposition to, the tantric paradigms structuring religious attitude, practice, and community that had been dominant throughout India’s medieval period. A historical change was taking place and a new *bhakti* identity was emerging, formed and performed in *bhakti* authors’ critiques of, most especially, tantric *yogīs*. It is certainly true that unorthodox, transgressive ascetics had almost always been marginalized by the religious mainstream in South Asia—the skull-carrying, cremation ground-frequenting Kāpālīka is often mocked in Sanskrit dramas¹⁸—but the critique of these tantric ascetics seems to take on a new and *bhakti*-centered tenor for the first time in early modern north India. So why did this happen at this particular time? And what exactly was new and distinctive about this early modern *bhakti* identity? These are big questions that we will explore over the course of this work, but at this juncture we can say that much of the timing of this historical development and much of the nature of this new devotional identity had to do with the increasingly powerful presence of Muslims, especially Sufis, in north India after the thirteenth century.

¹⁸ The Kāpālīkas, or “skull-bearers,” a group of ascetic Śaiva devotees who probably first existed in India around the fifth century CE, are best-known for their public transgression of mainstream values and purity restrictions, antinomian behavior which created a very real hostility between them and the Brāhmaṇic orthodoxy. Numerous Sanskrit sources describe the Kāpālīkas—in fact, by the seventh century Sanskrit literary references to Kāpālīkas had become fairly commonplace—typically portraying them as charlatan ascetics who wander about with a skull begging bowl, drinking liquor, and covered in the ashes of the dead. The Kāpālīkas worshipped Bhairava, the fearful and terrifying form of Śiva, and their worship took the form of propitiatory sacrifices as well as reenactments of his mythological exploits.

~ *Sufism and Bhakti* ~

If scholarship on *bhakti* has all too rarely taken tantric religiosity into full consideration, until quite recently, it can also be faulted for its generally inadequate treatment of the role and influence of Islam. As Aditya Behl has stated, in representations of *bhakti* in history, “The greatest gap or silence is the role of Islam and Islamic religiosity in the formation of the *bhakti* movement.”¹⁹ Sufism played a vital role in the early modern *bhakti* movement; however, when not altogether occluded from historical narratives of *bhakti*, its influence has usually been spoken of in vague and simplistic terms that fail to explain specifically how Hindu *bhakti* communities may have drawn on Sufi conceptions and traditions. There should be no doubt that the rise of *bhakti* in early modern north India was, as Behl writes, “an intensely interactive and plural affair, with genealogies that have to include Islam in an historically complex way.”²⁰

The work of scholars such as Behl, Francesca Orsini, and Thomas de Bruijn, among others, has begun to respond to this need and has highlighted Sufi literature’s critical interconnections with, and influences upon, *bhakti* literature. Drawing on and extending this scholarship, this study aims to show how *bhakti* reformers made use of Islamic literary and hagiographical tropes and were indebted to Sufi conceptions regarding the proper relationship between humans and the Divine. As we will see, Indian Sufi hagiographies and *premākhyān* (“love story”) literature display specific religious perspectives and literary strategies—even particular metaphors and narrative motifs—that *bhakti* authors adopt in their own writings and that marginalize tantric-yogic perspectives while exalting selfless love and humble

¹⁹ Aditya Behl, “Presence and Absence in *Bhakti*: An Afterword,” *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 11.3 (2007): 319.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 322.

devotion. Particularly when we compare Sufi and *bhakti* hagiographical literatures (which both include stories of confrontations with *yogīs*), it becomes clear that *bhakti* authors followed the model of their Sufi counterparts in their critiques of tantric *yogīs*, articulating notions of a proper devotional “religion” in distinction to an unapproved tantric “magic.”

In seeking to illuminate aspects of the Sufi contribution to north India’s *bhakti* movement, this work hopes to draw attention to a critical point that has not been adequately emphasized in scholarship on Indian history. The fact is that the advent and eventual dominance of Muslim rule in north India was just as disruptive (to existing Indian religious and political paradigms) and just as profoundly generative (of new forms of Indian thought and practice) as when the British came to dominate India in the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Bearing this in mind, the forthcoming pages aim to demonstrate that it was largely in response to and productive interaction with this new Islamic presence that many of the unique features of north India’s *bhakti* movement emerged.

~ *Religion and Magic* ~

We have seen that the multi-faceted relationship—the newly emerging clash—between *bhakti* and tantric religiosity is one that should be critical in our understanding of historical events and processes in the early modern north Indian Hindu religious landscape. Focusing on this development, in many ways, the history of this period might be told as the history of the rise of a new understanding of—and a new distinction between—something akin to Religion and Magic. In other words, as *bhakti* rose to preeminence, forging strong relationships with state power as well as with the mass populace, it seems to have increasingly taken on the tenor of the Abrahamic conception of “religion” while certain tantric religious forms were

marginalized and took on the pejorative tenor of “magic.”

In their poetry and hagiography, early modern *bhaktas* made polemical distinctions—between their religious approach and that of other groups they wished to define themselves against—that parallel in striking ways those of standard Western dichotomies between religion and magic. In traditional distinctions between magic and religion, magic is usually considered heterodox, illicit, and, often, immoral, while religion is orthodox, socially approved, and ethically oriented. Furthermore, magic is characterized as being concerned with power and individual worldly desires, while religion is community-oriented and concerned with the transcendent. Probably the most fundamental element of the classic Western dichotomy between “religion” and “magic” is that magic is manipulative and coercive, involving rituals and techniques that rely on man as the source of power, while religion is supplicative and submissive, relying on God as the sole source of real power. In all of these respects, there are clear parallels between the representations of Bhakti and Religion, on one hand, and Tantra and Magic, on the other.

Nevertheless, discourse on magic and religion has typically not been a matter of substantive, accurate description so much as a form of polemic.²¹ In addition to those real differences between *bhakti* and tantric religiosity that might correlate to those between the ideal categories of religion and magic, we also see that the polemic of *bhakti* poets and hagiographers closely parallels the standard Western discourse in which utter dependence on and submissive devotion to an all-powerful personal God are authorized as “true religion”

²¹ Each of the features of the tradition religion-magic dichotomy have been critiqued, showing that in practice religion and magic represent opposite ends of a spectrum of religious thought and practice that often blur into one another to the point of being indistinguishable. As Sarah Johnston says, the most characteristic feature of magic, is that it is nearly always “used as a term of opprobrium, to marginalize and condemn individuals or groups whose religious practices [are], by the standards of the accusers, ‘abnormal’.” Sarah Johnston, “Describing the Undefinable: New Books on Magic and Old Problems of Definition,” *History of Religions* 43 (2004): 51.

while unapproved approaches and attitudes, especially those that in any way diminish the omnipotence of God, are marginalized as “magic.” It seems that this polemic did its job, for, as Hugh Urban writes, “In most vernacular languages today, the term *tantra* is typically associated with a whole range of intense associations, usually relating to the darker realms of the magical, the immoral (sometimes the illegal), and the occult.”²² Indeed, David White has noted that “the great majority of modern-day Hindus overwhelmingly reject – or dissemble with regard to – the tantric legacy of their own traditions, generally identifying *tāntrikas* (a modern usage) with evil charlatans practicing the dark arts.”²³ While typically it has been assumed that such conceptions are products of colonial and Orientalist influence, in fact notions of “Tantra” as black magic and mumbo-jumbo may have their roots more in the rhetoric of the *bhakti* poets and hagiographers than anywhere else. “Tantra,” as popularly conceived in India today, might be considered the invention of early modern *bhakti* authors, a necessary “magical” foil for the success of their own “religion.”

In summary, this study seeks to contribute to an improved historical understanding of the nature and development of *bhakti* religiosity, focusing on the great rise of *bhakti* in early modern north India as a process of identity and community formation that was fundamentally linked to, among other things, a Sufi-inflected critique of tantric religiosity prefiguring orientalist-colonialist depictions of Bhakti (as “religion”) and Tantra (as “magic”).

Let us now map out the road ahead.

²² Hugh Urban, *Tantra: Sex, Secrecy, Politics, and Power in the Study of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 38.

²³ David Gordon White, “Tantra,” in *Brill’s Encyclopedia of Hinduism, Volume III*, ed. Knut A. Jacobsen (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 577.

~ *Plan of the Work* ~

The remainder of this introductory chapter seeks to provide the relevant historical context for understanding the rise of *bhakti* in early modern north India and the significance of that event. In order to see the full picture, we look back to the medieval period in South Asia, when tantric religiosity ruled the day. After gaining a sense of the distinctive features of tantric religious thought and practice, we will undertake a short survey of India's medieval tantric tradition, with attention to how this religious form became so pervasive from the seventh to thirteenth century and what caused its dominance to come to an end.

Moving from the medieval age to our period of central concern, the early modern era, we then sketch out the historical context of Mughal India in which *bhakti* rose to prominence. To provide a more textured understanding of the socio-political context of *bhakti*'s ascent, we will conduct a brief, focused study of the Kacchvāhā rulers of Amer in Rajasthan. The Kacchvāhās exemplify the crucial influence that Rajput courts had on *bhakti*'s institutional and literary development in the context of their interaction with Mughal imperial power and literary culture. While this royal family has received some scholarly attention, it has not been adequately emphasized how north India's *bhakti* movement was shaped in fundamental ways by the political ties, patronage, and personal religious leanings of, specifically, the Kacchvāhā clan. Through an examination of this royal family and the ways they provided other Rajput courts with a *bhakti*-centered model for political success, we will see how new forms of courtliness and statehood initiated under the Mughal emperor Akbar were linked to the emergence of *bhakti* communities and *bhakti* literature.

In Chapter Two, our discussion turns to the early Rāmānandī devotional community at Galtā, with whom the Kacchvāhās maintained a close relationship. Examining the historical

origins of the Rāmānandīs and the remembered lives of Krishnadās Payahārī—the founder of the community at Galtā—and his two primary disciples, Kīlhadev and Agradās, we will gain insight into several key dimensions of *bhakti* and the *bhakti* movement in early modern north India. As we will see, there were two different but related *bhakti* paths among the early Rāmānandīs, one more yogic and *tapas* (asceticism)-oriented, the other more devotional, literary, and *rasa*-oriented. An analysis of these two Rāmānandī paths demonstrates that the religiosity of the *bhakta* often had more elements of asceticism, tantra, and yoga than we have ordinarily supposed, while at the same time it shows how a new understanding of *bhakti* was emerging in early modern north India and these once rather tightly interwoven threads of religious practice were beginning to unravel into increasingly distinct strands of religious identity.

In Chapter Three, we will compare and contrast the yogic-ascetic stream of the Rāmānandīs with the tantric Nāth *yogīs* in order to explore the ways in which the distinctive *bhakti* religious identity that was emerging in early modern north India was coming into tension and conflict with certain aspects of the tantric tradition. Our investigation into the similarities and differences between tantric Nāth ascetics and yoga-practicing Rāmānandī *bhaktas* will lead us deep into the topic of yoga and force us to question and refine the category of “the *yogī*” itself. In contrast to many scholarly claims, the yogic practice of the Nāths was considerably different from that of the Rāmānandīs and was an expression of their tantric Kaula and *siddha* heritage. As reflected in the Rāmānandīs’ and Nāths’ respective attitudes towards the *siddhis* in yogic practice, the early modern period in north India witnessed a widening gap between devotional and tantric conceptions of and approaches to the Divine.

Indeed, in many ways, at this time we see the construction of a new *bhakti* identity constructed against the foil of attitudes and practices associated with the tantric *yogī*.

In Chapter Four, we will examine the formation of early modern *bhakti* identity through a case study of the life and compositions of a particular Rāmānandī figure: Agradās, the great sixteenth century poet-devotee and founder of the Rām-*rasik* tradition. In addition to founding the Rām-*rasik* tradition, Agradās seems to have authored at least thirteen of his own works and is closely linked to two of the earliest and most important *bhakti* literary-hagiographical sources available to us today, the *Bhaktamāl* of Nābhādās (a disciple of Agradās) and the *parcais* of Anantadās (a grand-disciple of Agradās). Despite his clear historical importance, beyond R.S. McGregor's short, seven-page essay (1983) on Agradās's *Dhyān-Maṅjarī*, and a few other mentions scattered here and there, to date virtually no scholarship exists on Agradās or the literature attributed to him. Using never-before discussed manuscripts collected in the archives of north India, I will demonstrate that the writings of Agradās teach us much regarding how *bhakti* communities in Mughal India went about defining their identities and competing with others for patronage, prestige, and power. Agradās inaugurated a vernacular literary project within the Rāmānandī community whose goals were to praise the deeds of great devotee-saints and spread the saving message of *bhakti* in a manner that would simultaneously attract the respect of brahmanical orthodoxy, the financial support of elites, and the allegiance of devotee-followers of even the lowest social classes. As we will see, Agradās represented an important perspective within the Rāmānandī community and within the early modern north Indian *bhakti* movement as a whole, a *saguṇ*-centered devotional vision that was institution-friendly and literature-producing, and that

borrowed elements of tantric practice while simultaneously positioning itself in deliberate opposition to key tantric attitudes and perspectives.

In Chapter Five, we move our focus away from the Rāmānandīs in order to conduct a broader investigation of the attitude that north Indian *bhakti* poets held toward *yogīs*, tantra, and mantra. How did *bhakti* authors understand tantric religion and what role did their depictions of tantric healers, ascetics, and *yogīs* have in the institutional and popular growth of *bhakti* during the early modern period? In this chapter, we will survey and analyze references to Nāths, Śāktas, *yogīs*, yoga, tantra, and mantra scattered throughout the poetry of major *bhakti* saints. Discussing poet-saints who cover the spectrum in terms of sectarian affiliation, theological outlook, caste background, and geographical location, we will see how a diverse array of *bhaktas* tended to come together as one in positioning themselves against the “two-fold tantric Other” of the *yogī* and Śākta. In looking at the ways in which *bhaktas* contrasted themselves with tantric *yogīs* and Śāktas, we will achieve a better grasp of exactly what *bhakti* meant to devotees in early modern north India and how it was perceived as different from other modes of religiosity.

In Chapter Six, our gaze shifts from *bhakti* poetry to *bhakti* hagiography in order to discuss a key distinction between “miracle” and “magic” found in both Sufi and early modern *bhakti* hagiographical literature. This chapter analyzes stories of spiritual competitions, or “miracle battles,” in which devotee-saints triumph over tantric *yogī*-magicians through the gift of miracles from God (or from their devotion to God), powers revealed as much stronger than any magic derived from individual practices of ascetic *tapas* or tantric yoga. As we will see, the Sufi stories follow much the same pattern as those in the Hindu *bhakti* literature yet precede them chronologically by centuries, a fact that becomes even more intriguing when we note

that the distinction between “magic” and “religion,” one relatively common in all the three Abrahamic monotheist faiths, does not seem to exist in India—at least not in the same form it does in north Indian *bhakti* poetry and hagiography—until after the Muslim presence. In examining this miracle/magic distinction and the conceptions of God and appropriate religious behavior linked to it in these hagiographies, we will thus see an important potential area of Sufi influence on north India’s *bhakti* movement while also adding further evidence to the argument that a marginalization and “magicalization” of tantric religion occurred alongside the rise of *bhakti* in early modern north India.

In Chapter Seven, the final chapter of the work, we summarize the preceding pages and offer some brief concluding thoughts. In particular, we suggest that modern Indian conceptions of Bhakti and Tantra are not simply the products of British colonial influence and imported Protestant-biased Orientalist understandings of “religion” and “magic;” rather, they actually have important continuities with the attitudes and values expressed in the compositions of early modern *bhakti* authors. In many ways, we can say that modern-day notions of tantric magic and *bhakti* religion were the invention of Mughal India’s *bhakti* movement.

~ *Tantra and Bhakti in Medieval India* ~

At its core, this thesis is about the rise of *bhakti* in early modern north India, but in order to understand how this rise occurred and why it constituted such a major historical change, we must first look back to India’s medieval period, a time we might characterize as the “Tantric Age.” From roughly the seventh through the thirteenth century South Asia was

dominated by tantric religious and political paradigms. Before proceeding to a brief historical survey of the medieval tantric tradition in India, a bit of background information is in order.

In the field of South Asian religious studies, the term *tantra* and the brand of religious practice to which it refers are notoriously difficult to define. “Tantra” probably derives from the Sanskrit root *tan-* meaning to stretch, spread, weave, and metaphorically, to lay out, explain, or espouse. This term was first used in the Vedas to refer to (a) a loom, or the warp and woof, and (b) the “weaving” of poetic speech. By the period of the *Mahābhārata* (500 BCE–500 CE) it refers to “any rule, theory, or scientific work” and specifically comes to refer to a particular type of discourse or treatise.²⁴ A vast body of Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain scriptures calling themselves “Tantras” were composed between the fifth and ninth centuries.²⁵ While the authors of the tantric scriptures (a class of texts including Tantras, Āgamas, and Saṃhitās)²⁶ typically admit the authority of the Vedas as direct revelation (*śruti*) as well as the later Veda-based texts of secondary revelation (*smṛti*), they regard the Tantras—which claimed to come from the mouths of the deities themselves—as “an additional and more specialized revelation (*viśeṣaśāstra*) which offers a more powerful soteriology” in the form of ritual

²⁴ Urban, *Tantra*, 25–26.

²⁵ Alexis Sanderson, “Śaivism and the Tantric Traditions,” in *The World's Religions*, ed. Stewart Sutherland (London: Routledge, 1988), 663. According to Csaba Kiss, the topics that usually make up a tantric text are “mantras, construction of *maṇḍalas*, *nyāsa*, *dhyāna*, *pūjā*, *dīkṣā*, *yoga*, fearsome and erotic practices, results (*phala*) of rites, supernatural powers (*siddhi*), rules of conduct, (e.g. *kulācāra*), praise of deities, and the legendary history of the school.” Csaba Kiss, *Matsyendranāth's Compendium: A critical edition and annotated translation of Matsyendrasaṃhitā 1–13 and 55 with analysis* (D.Phil. Thesis, Balliol College, Oxford University, 2009), 7.

²⁶ The term Saṃhitā usually refers to scriptures of tantric Vaiṣṇavism, especially of the Pāñcarātra school, while the term Āgama is commonly used as a synonym for Tantra, particularly in the Śaiva context. Flood notes that, “Abhinavagupta uses the term to refer to the tantric revelation in general as the ‘one revelation’ (*ekāgama*).” Gavin Flood, *The Tantric Body: The Secret Tradition of Hindu Religion* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 9. Brunner explains that the Tantras and Āgamas are not divine revelation received by seers and sages, but are actually considered to be teachings authored by God. “The Āgamas [and Tantras] on that account are fully authoritative, as no other scripture (including the Vedas) could be.” Helene Brunner, “Jñāna and Kriyā: Relation between Theory and Practice in the Śaivāgamas,” in *Ritual and Speculation in Early Tantrism: Studies in Honor of Andre Padoux*, ed. Teun Goudriaan (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 5.

technologies held “to consubstantiate [the initiate] with the deity in a transforming infusion of divine power.”²⁷

It is critical to note that the authors of the Tantras clearly did not seem to have regarded themselves as belonging to a distinct “Tantric” tradition, school, or movement, nor did they ever give a clear or consistent definition of an entity called “Tantra.” It is not until the modern period and the classificatory zeal of the imperial West that such an entity emerges and we see the substantive noun “Tantrism” used to describe a singular, monolithic class of religion, a term that takes birth in the late-nineteenth century Orientalist work of the British Indologist Monier Monier-Williams. Despite its late and Western origins, the notion of “Tantra” as a particular genre of South Asian religiosity has proved heuristically useful and seems here to stay. Nevertheless, “Tantra” is an especially problematic term and, in many instances, I have opted to use the phrases “tantric tradition” and “tantric religiosity” in its place. As Hugh Urban has remarked, “Tantra is a highly variable and shifting category, whose meaning may differ depending on the particular historical moment, cultural milieu, and political context. We might say that Tantra serves as a kind of Rorschach test or psychological mirror for the changing moral and sexual attitudes of the past two hundred years.”²⁸ With this in mind, to attempt an overarching definition of “Tantra” is not nearly as important (or productive) as it is to explain what we mean by the term *here*, and exactly how we will be using it in the forthcoming pages. In the context of this study, when referring to “tantra,” “tantric traditions,” or “tantric religiosity,” I mean religious thought and practice fundamentally informed by what we can call a “tantric worldview,” a perspective whose central notion is, in

²⁷ Sanderson, “Śaivism and the Tantric Traditions,” 660.

²⁸ Urban, *Tantra*, 7.

the words of David White, “that human practitioners can empower, and even deify, themselves to manipulate and dominate the entire spectrum of beings and energies that make up the tantric universe,” a dynamic, sexualized cosmos understood as “a continuum, arising out of and returning to the body or self of the divine, the one that proliferates into the many on multiple registers.”²⁹ Put differently, *tantric* religious thought and practice is structured by *tantric* paradigms in which the Divine is conceived first and foremost as power, an amoral source of infinite power (*śakti*) that can be accessed and harnessed in a variety of ways (e.g., transgression, sacrifice, mantra, meditation, yoga), especially through distinctly tantric ritual techniques that extend the self or body “to become coterminous with the divine body.”³⁰

The earliest extant tantric Śaiva text that we know of is the *Niśvāsattattvasaṃhitā* (c. 450–550 CE).³¹ While many scholars have come to associate Tantra first and foremost with transgressive practices, whether in the form of sexual rites or blood sacrifice, this tantric text has nothing to with these things. Rather, the text’s central innovation is that liberation is gained through tantric initiation (*dīkṣā*). In the tantric initiation ritual, through the power of non-Vedic mantras the guru destroys the previous karma of the initiate, purifying his soul (*ātman*) of all impurities and stains (*mala*) and allowing him to identify with and realize the incredible powers of the Divine. Tantric initiation is the starting point and foundation for all tantric practice, but it is not sufficient.³² In most tantric systems, regular ritual action is

²⁹ David Gordon White, “Tantra,” in *Brill’s Encyclopedia of Hinduism, Volume III*, ed. Knut A. Jacobsen (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 574.

³⁰ Flood, *The Tantric Body*, 12.

³¹ For more on this important text, see Dominic Goodall and Harunaga Isaacson, “Workshop on the *Niśvāsattattvasaṃhitā*: The Earliest Surviving Śaiva Tantra?” *Newsletter of the NGMCP* 3 (2007): 4–6.

³² Helene Brunner explains the basic four-fold classification of initiates in the Śaiva Āgamas: “From bottom to top, we find: (1) the *samayin*, who has only received a simple form of initiation called *samayadīkṣā* ... that is but a first step to the next; (2) the *putraka*, who has been given the main *dīkṣā*, called *nirvāṇadīkṣā*, and has no other goal than

required to maintain that purity and power and to ensure liberation (*mokṣa*). The daily ritual practice of the tantric initiate involves the systematic use of mantras and visualization to purify and empower a subtle body understood to have homological connections to the rest of the entire cosmos and to be, at its core, inherently divine, i.e., suffused with the same energy and pure consciousness as the Divine.

Tantric ritual most differentiated itself from mundane brahmanical Śrauta and Smārta rites (i.e., those of *śruti* and *smṛti*) in offering a method for divinizing the body and infusing oneself with divine power through consubstantiation with the deity.³³ As Alexis Sanderson has pointed out, this method is remarkably uniform across tantric traditions, as all forms of tantric religion share a single ritual system whose deeper structural unity is not significantly affected by differences such as the choice of deity invoked and the character of the visualizations, mantras, and *maṇḍalas* used.³⁴ The general ritual structure found in the praxis of all tantric traditions consists most fundamentally of: “purificatory ablutions (*snāna*), the purification of the elements within the body (*bhūtaśuddhi* or *dehaśuddhi*), the divinization of body through imposing mantras upon it (*nyāsa*), internal worship of the deity (*antara/mānasa-yāga*) performed purely in the imagination, followed by external (*bahya-yāga*) with offerings of

liberation; (3) the *sādhaka*, who has received a slightly modified form of *nirvāṇadīkṣā*, followed by a particular consecration, the *sādhakābhiṣeka* ... that opens for him the way of powers and enjoyments, since it gives him the right to practise, in view of obtention of *siddhis*, a special discipline, centred on a chosen deity, and characterized by immense *japas* of this deity’s particular *mantra*; (4) finally the *ācārya*, or guru (sometimes also called *deśika*), who, after the *nirvāṇadīkṣā*, has gone through the consecration, the *ācāryābhiṣeka*, that places him at the head of a definite group of Śaivas and gives him the privilege and power to give *dīkṣās*, perform Installations (*pratiṣṭhās*) and comment on Āgamas.” Helene Brunner, “The Place of Yoga in the Śaivāgamas,” in *Pandit N.R. Bhatt Felicitation Volume*, eds. P.S. Filliozat, et al. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1994), 431-432.

³³ Alexis Sanderson, “Śaivism and Brahmanism in the Early Medieval Period” (Fourteenth Gonda Lecture, presented for Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences in Amsterdam, November, 2006), 3; Sanderson, “Śaivism and the Tantric Traditions,” 660.

³⁴ Sanderson, “Śaivism and Brahmanism in the Early Medieval Period,” 2-3.

flowers, incense and so on to the deity.”³⁵ Gavin Flood writes that the notion “that to worship a god one must become a god is a notable feature of all tantric traditions.” He asserts that “[t]he empowering of the body, which means its divinization, is arguably the most important quality in tantric traditions. ... [T]he ritual construction of the body as the deity through the use of magical phrases or mantras is prototypically tantric.”³⁶ The empowerment offered through this distinctly tantric technique would make it quite popular in the medieval social and political context.

For our purposes, it is important to note that devotion, or *bhakti*, was not at all absent from this tantric ritual process, as it was often key in developing the closeness necessary for the practitioner to identify with the deity; however, this *bhakti* occurred within a tantric paradigm in which it was ordinarily subordinated to ritual actions, techniques of self-empowerment, or the quest for liberating knowledge (*jñāna*). Alberta Ferrario’s ongoing research suggests that *bhakti* in the pre-twelfth century Śaiva tantric traditions was ordinarily conceived of as attitudes and actions of reverence, obedience, faith, and service, but not as a cultivation or expression of emotion, passion, or love. Furthermore, in Śaiva doctrine, *bhakti* was typically not considered a means to salvation, but rather a sign of the descent of Śiva’s grace (*śaktipāta*) upon a person, which was a prerequisite for initiation.³⁷ Non-initiate lay persons whose religious life centered more on devotion may have had a considerably different

³⁵ Flood, *The Tantric Body*, 106.

³⁶ Flood, *The Tantric Body*, 11.

³⁷ Alberta Ferrario, “The Place of Devotion in Tantric Śaivism: Reflections on ‘Tantra’ and ‘Bhakti,’” Paper delivered at the American Academy of Religion (AAR) Annual Meeting, San Francisco, November 20, 2011. Ferrario explains that even the occasional mentions of passionate, emotional *bhakti* in the literature of tantric communities—for example, Utpaladeva’s *Śivastotrāvalī*—seem to conceive *bhakti* as an experience equivalent to (or concomitant with) the end goal of liberation, but not as a means to that goal.

opinion of *bhakti*, but as we will see below, in the medieval period even their devotion occurred within a fundamentally tantric paradigm.

* * *

With the collapse of the Gupta dynasty in the mid-sixth century and the end of relative stability it had provided, India saw the emergence of multiple competing regional centers, which led to a culture of militarism and frequent warfare. In this feudal environment, warlords (often from lower castes) “[s]eeking legitimacy and identity, began to increase their patronage of literature and to strategize their support for religion, searching for religious counselors that could bolster their political and military agendas.”³⁸ These aspiring rulers turned especially to the emerging tantric tradition and its rituals of empowerment. If rulers turned to *tāntrikas*, we can also say that *tāntrikas* turned to them, adapting to meet their needs. Within the tantric tradition, a new cadre of religious specialists developed who could ritually consecrate power-seeking warlords with tantric *mantras*, “transforming them into divine kings and their conquered territories into equally consecrated *maṇḍalas* of royal power.”³⁹ In return, these newly made kings sponsored the construction of temples for tantric communities and promoted their interests throughout the kingdom. Indeed, the early medieval period was “the great era of Hindu temple building”⁴⁰ and all of its temples were constructed according to tantric principles and with some element of tantric imagery.⁴¹

³⁸ Ronald Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 26.

³⁹ White, “Tantra,” 578.

⁴⁰ Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*, 177.

⁴¹ White, “Tantra,” 579. White states that, “[F]reestanding temples did not begin to appear on the South and Southeast Asian landscape until the tantric period. ... Regardless of their sectarian affiliation, all medieval temples were constructed according to tantric principles. ... In fact, the sole technical and theoretical guides to South Asian temple construction are tantric works.”

The king displayed his identification with the deity and expressed his power as a god-king (*devarāja*) in the symbolic form of the royal temple, which typically “lay at the center of a *maṇḍala*-like network of temples” that brought other local deities and religious sites in the kingdom into the royal orbit.⁴² These temples served as key centers of popular tantric devotional religiosity during the medieval period. While first-level tantric initiation (as a *samayin*) was probably quite common, and may have even been conducted in mass ceremonies, clearly not all people chose to take full tantric initiation or practice its somewhat demanding and time-consuming daily rites. In fact, many (if not most) religious people would not have been initiated. The religious life of this uninitiated Hindu lay population was devotional at its core, but theirs was a *bhakti* centered around temple and ritual worship, one quite different from the sort of *bhakti* that blossomed forth in early modern north India.

Indira Peterson, for example, has shown that Tamil *bhakti* in the early medieval period had close links to tantric temple life and ritual worship as laid out in the Āgamas. Often claimed as one of the progenitors of an India-wide *bhakti* movement, the sixty-three Śaiva devotee-saints of medieval southern (Tamil) India known as the Nāyaṇārs “dedicated nearly every one of their hymns to a temple of Śiva. Together, Appar, Campantar, and Cuntarar sang hymns to Śiva as the god of shrines situated in 274 sacred places.”⁴³ In the early *bhakti* hymns of the *Tēvāram*, these Śaiva *bhakti* saints regularly praise the Āgamas and refer their devotion to Śiva to his wisdom and grace as manifested in these tantric scriptures.⁴⁴

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Indira Peterson, *Poems to Śiva: The Hymns of the Tamil Saints* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 12.

⁴⁴ For example, Appar sings, “My tongue will continue to utter the Āgamas in the presence of its companion (the mind)” (129.1); Campantar states, “They are praising the Lord of Tiruvārriyūr who is the wealth of the Āgamas” (3.57.10); and Cuntarar says, “Indeed he is the mother, giving grace to one who preserves the wisdom of the Āgamas” (7.96.6) and “He is the language of the Āgamic scriptures for the sake of the world” (7.84.8). Translated

David White has stated that brahmanical, temple-based “forms of Tantra blended easily with medieval Hindu devotionism (*bhakti*), such that the two became indistinguishable.”⁴⁵ Indeed, in this period, it would seem that any stark division between Śaiva “Tantra” and Śaiva “Bhakti” is somewhat artificial. While popular medieval devotion had different emphases than the religious life of tantric initiates, it nevertheless tended to occur within the frame of the larger “tantric worldview” we have discussed. In the medieval world, it was probably a numerical minority that took initiation as tantric *putrakas* or *sādhakas* and performed the detailed individual ritual practices we often associate with tantric religiosity; however, this was a visible and highly respected minority who served as the ideal of a tantric paradigm that, infused in royal ideology and expressed in a network of temples across regional kingdoms, permeated the Hindu religious attitudes and practices of the day.⁴⁶

* * *

As Ronald Davidson has persuasively argued, institutional tantric religion rose up as a form of religion sacralizing and embodying “the structure, aesthetics, and ideology of medieval Indian feudalism.”⁴⁷ Indeed, a “wealth of historical data – textual, inscriptional,

and discussed in Judith G. Martin, “The Function of Mythic Figures in the Tirumantiram,” Ph.D. Thesis (McMaster University, 1983), 114-115.

⁴⁵ White, “Tantra,” 575.

⁴⁶ To further clarify, by “tantric paradigm,” I mean a mode of perception in which distinctly tantric models of kingship, tantric notions of initiation and mantra use, tantric understandings of the universe and the Divine, and tantric ritual practices for divinizing the body and empowering the self were all fundamental elements of mainstream conceptions of religiosity and power.

⁴⁷ Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*, 115. Davidson argues that the central sustaining metaphor of the tantric traditions is the practitioner’s assumption of kingship and exercise of dominion. He lays out a number of interesting parallels between the tantric practitioner and the figure of the king: The tantric initiate obtains consecration (*abhiṣeka*) from his preceptor while the prince obtains coronation (*abhiṣeka*) from his priest; the *tāntrika* thereby perceives himself as a divinity holding dominion over a circle (*maṇḍala*) of other divinities of different families (*kula*) while the king sees himself as divinized and given dominion over a circle of vassals (*maṇḍala*) of different lineages (*kula*); the tantric initiate learns/receives empowering mantras and employs them

artistic, and architectural – supports the thesis that between the 7th and 12th centuries ... many if not most of the royal houses of the Hindu world ... embraced Tantra ... [and] the paradigm of feudal lordship became the model for *all* of Hindu tantric practice.”⁴⁸ The research of Alexis Sanderson has shown that it was specifically tantric Śaivism that, from the sixth century, rose to pre-eminence in South Asia and beyond as the principal beneficiary of royal patronage, a fact demonstrated by the epigraphical record of pious donations, by the preponderance of Śaiva temples at this time, and by abundant evidence that Śaivism’s Vaiṣṇava, Buddhist, and Jain competitors developed liturgical systems during this period closely paralleling that of the Śaivas.⁴⁹ Much like Davidson, Sanderson states that the main reason for Tantric Śaivism’s success was its appeal to royal patrons. It extended and adapted its repertoire to include a body of rituals legitimating, empowering, and promoting the key elements of the social and political developments characterizing early medieval India.⁵⁰ In this, Śaivism “achieved a transregional organization and a consequent standardization of its rituals and doctrines; and

for a variety of uses while the king possesses counselors (*mantrin*) who give him confidential counsel (*guhyamantrin*) authorizing him to engage in various forms of royal behavior (122).

⁴⁸ White, “Tantra,” 579. Dominic Goodall notes that inscriptions record the tantric Śaiva initiation of three major kings in the second half of the seventh century, and “during its first half the Buddhist philosopher Dharmakīrti (c. 600-660) goes to the trouble of attacking the Tantric practice of initiation as a means to liberation.” As he states, “These facts reveal that Tantric Śaivism of this relatively public and strongly soteriological variety was not merely present in the seventh century but well established.” Dominic Goodall, *The Parāṅkhyatantra: A Scripture of the Śaiva Siddhānta* (Pondicherry: Institut Français de Pondichery, 2004), xlvi.

⁴⁹ Sanderson, “Śaivism and Brahmanism in the Early Medieval Period,” 4. Sanderson writes that, “The ritual systems taught in the Śaiva and Pāñcarātrika Saṃhitās resemble each other so closely ... that they have the appearance of two dialects of a single ‘Tantric’ language. ... I have found evidence ... that all three of the early Pāñcarātrika Saṃhitās known as the ‘three jewels’ were written under the influence of Tantric Śaiva models. ... Since the Pāñcarātra existed in some form throughout the Christian era, I venture the hypothesis that its surviving scriptures are the result of a late process of tantricization under Śaiva influence. We may think, perhaps, in the case of both Buddhist and Vaiṣṇava Tantrism, of a process of acculturation to Śaiva norms.” Alexis Sanderson, “History through Textual Criticism in the study of Śaivism, the Pāñcarātra and the Buddhist Yoginītantras,” in *Les Sources et le temps. Sources and Time: A Colloquium, Pondicherry, 11-13 January 1997*, ed. François Grimal (Pondicherry: Institut Français de Pondichéry, 2001), 38-39, n. 50.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

this transregional uniformity ... heightened its appeal to kings by enabling it more easily to be perceived as a transcendent means of legitimation, empowerment, and the integration of regional traditions, as an essential part of a pan-Indian socio-religious order that each kingdom sought to exemplify.”⁵¹

In the new tantric conception of kingship, the power of the king was endowed at coronation or initiation ceremonies conducted by tantric priests, and this power was closely bound to his identification with violent and erotic goddesses worshipped as the retinue of Śiva.⁵² Indeed, in discussing the rise of Śaivism in this period, it is critical to understand that, as Sanderson puts it, “a Śaiva may well be a worshipper not of Śiva but of the Goddess (Devī)” who, though “commonly represented as the consort of Śiva and, theologically, as that god’s

⁵¹ Alexis Sanderson, “The Śaiva Age: The Rise and Dominance of Śaivism during the Early Medieval Period,” in *Genesis and Development of Tantrism*, ed. Shingo Einoo (Tokyo: University of Tokyo, 2009), 303.

⁵² The importance of these goddesses in tantric religiosity is linked to an aspect of the tantric tradition’s origins that we have so far neglected in this brief sketch. A significant part of what is distinct about tantric traditions comes from the transgressive cremation-ground practices of *yoginī* cults and Kāpālika ascetics who sought access to supernormal enjoyments and magical powers most especially through the ritual production, offering, and consumption of sexual fluids. These cults typically worshipped Bhairava-Śiva, together with his consort, the Goddess, who was considered the leader of a horde of dangerous, powerful, and blood-thirsty female deities known as *yoginīs*. After adopting the trademark Kāpālika observance, a male practitioner could be initiated into the clan (*kula*) of one of multiple (often eight) Mother-Goddesses from whom these (often sixty-four) *yoginīs* emanated. Initiated male practitioners—who termed themselves Virile Heroes (*Vīras*) or Perfected Beings (*Siddhas*)—would intoxicate themselves and invoke the *yoginīs* with offerings of various “impure” bodily substances. Summoned from their heavenly realm by these offerings (most especially sexual fluids), the semi-divine *yoginīs* revealed (incarnated) themselves as their human female counterparts, thus providing the male initiate with direct access to their supernatural power. This seems to have been accomplished primarily through the consumption of the inherently powerful substance of the *yoginī*’s female sexual discharge. Beginning in the ninth century, the Kaula “reformation,” often linked to the figure of Matsyendranāth, opened up tantric practice to the wider community of married householders by decontaminating the earlier *yoginī* cults mainly through (a) abandoning their purity-threatening external signifiers (wearing ashes, carrying skull bowl, etc.) and practices of public transgression (visiting cremation grounds, etc.) and (b) creating a new emphasis on the salvation-giving mystical experience of divine consciousness accessed during and through their erotic-esoteric rituals. Kaula Tantra shifted its focus to the “subtle body” of the practitioner, visualized as the temple of the deities he was to worship and identify with in blissful enlightened consciousness. Later, Abhinavagupta (c. 950-1050) and the tantric theologians of Kashmir—whose metaphysics and liturgical prescriptions would become the standard as far away as the Tamil south—would expand the tantric “reformation” by further aestheticizing Kaula practice, formulating a respectable metaphysical system, and condensing and simplifying tantric ritual liturgy, eliminating certain elements as superfluous while emphasizing the intensity of immersion in the mystical ritual experience. See Sanderson, “Śaivism and the Tantric Traditions,” 679-82.

inherent power (*śakti*),” was nevertheless often the focal point of worship, if not as the Supreme power then in the form of various tutelary goddesses.⁵³ In many ways, the emergence of Tantric Śaivism actually constituted the “emergence of a public cultus of powerful martial goddesses among the ruling houses of South Asia in the early medieval period. These tutelary goddesses, who were often identified with the great Goddess Durgā or with a group of Mother goddesses ... were at bottom royal *kuladevīs*, goddesses of land and clan that cemented alliances between ruling families.”⁵⁴ While the king may have identified with the “high god” Śiva, White states that, “Śiva remained at the sacred center precisely in order to afford the king who identified with [him] a modicum of transcendence over the alliances and ties to the land that his tutelary goddesses provided. But it was the latter group that ratified and energized the pragmatic religious life of the kingdom as a whole.”⁵⁵ Śaivism and Śāktism thus grew up together and complemented each other in both philosophical and practical terms.

In addition to the more orthodox, institutional forms of tantric religion that emerged from the sixth century onward in the militaristic and opportunistic feudal environment that was medieval India, there was also an important non-institutional stream of tantric *yogīs* and *siddhas* that came out of this very same context. These were orthodoxy-transgressing ascetics who focused more on magical powers and bodily immortality than liberation and who served and were patronized by the royal court, but were probably most influential in rural village settings. Davidson describes these medieval tantric ascetics: “Frequenting both cemeteries and

⁵³ Sanderson, “Śaivism and the Tantric Traditions,” 660.

⁵⁴ White, *Kiss of the Yoginī: “Tantric Sex” in its South Asian Contexts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 127.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

the palaces of the new lords of the land, they practiced every form of magic, from love potions to ritual slaughter. With a political awareness as to the prerequisites of royal patronage, *siddhas* acted as the kings' agents, engaged in secret signs and elaborate disguises, and provided their royal patrons with sacred entertainment through sophisticated temple song and dance."⁵⁶ In many ways, the emergence of these tantric *siddhas* was "the logical consequence of a civilization whose medieval expression [was] a concern for (and sometimes obsession with) status, hierarchy, political power, religious authority, and personal indulgence. Accordingly, the goal of turning into a *siddha* frequently [became] the aspiration of those excluded from status and hierarchy, either by birth or by accident."⁵⁷

These two major streams of tantric tradition—on one hand, the institutional forms connected to tantric priests and kings, and, on the other, the generally non-institutional tantric religiosity of ascetic tantric *yogīs* and *siddhas*—both emerged out of, were molded to, and operated within the same wider socio-political context. They clearly had contact with and influenced each other, yet in many ways they remained disconnected streams. This becomes clear especially when the political order changes and state power no longer broadly authorizes and legitimates tantric forms of religiosity. Indeed, with the spread of Muslim rule across north India from the twelfth century, we see the rapid decline of the relationship between king and *tāntrika* (whether as brahmin priest or *siddha* advisor-magician), causing a major change in the religious landscape. As White writes, "The rise and fall of Hindu Tantra as a religious 'mainstream' is directly linked to the rise and fall of its royal patrons. In north and central India, Hindu Tantra thrived as the royal cultus under the Kalacuri, Somavamshi,

⁵⁶ Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*, 234.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 187.

Chandella, Calukya, and other dynastic lines, until their lands fell into the hands of Muslim rulers in the 12th century.”⁵⁸

By the beginning of the thirteenth century, the Delhi Sultanate had been established, and nearly all of north India had come under the military control of Muslim Turks from Central Asia. As most Hindu kingdoms fell to these Turks, north Indian society underwent a major transformation. Shandip Saha explains, “The fall of Hindu kingdoms to Muslim rulers had a profound and lasting impact upon the religious culture of North India. The exodus of Kṣatriyas into the countryside and the increased state patronage of Sūfīs and members of the Muslim clergy (*ulamā*) by the rulers of the Sultanate resulted in a decline of state patronage for Brāhmaṇical learning in the major pilgrimage centers clustered around the Gangetic plain.”⁵⁹ In this new Muslim-dominated political context, the infrastructure of institutional tantric religion collapsed, and the sphere of tantric religion underwent a transformation and contraction into one constituted primarily by the non-institutional tantric stream of itinerant *yogīs*, warrior ascetics, village priests, and tantric healers and shamans. Indeed, even as formerly state-sponsored institutional tantric forms withered, this period saw the rise and flourishing of the tantric Nāth *yogīs*, who had roots partly in the medieval *siddha* tradition.

⁵⁸ White, “Tantra,” 577. White states that, “For so long as [the] relationship between kings and tantric specialists remained in force, Tantra persisted as a sanctioned religious force in India, with the ceremonial life of the kingdom being conducted in a tantric mode. When that relationship was dissolved, as Hindu kings were overthrown or reduced to vassal status by Muslim rulers (or, from the 16th cent. forward, increasingly opted for a devotional religious style), Tantra disappeared.” Here White does not mean that all tantric religiosity disappeared, but that “Tantra” as a structured, recognizable tradition—one that had been held together as such by royal patronage and participation in an overarching politico-religious ideology—disappeared.

⁵⁹ Shandip Saha, “The Movement of *Bhakti* along a North-West Axis: Tracing the History of the Puṣṭimārg between the Sixteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 11.3 (2007): 300-301. Saha writes that, “The resulting void in religious leadership within Hindu society came to be filled by non-Brāhmaṇical castes. In pilgrimage centers like Banaras, for example, state patronage of Hindu religious and educational institutions was replaced at the local level by wealthy Vaiśya communities, while other forms of religious leadership in North India came from the Sants, whose dissent against Brāhmaṇical Hinduism was voiced from among their lower-caste membership of weavers, cobblers, tailors, and goldsmiths” (300-301).

Tantric ritual techniques would persist in and beyond the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (sometimes in new Sufi and *bhakti* contexts), and with tantric *yogīs* now as their primary representative, the tantric worldview would also persevere; however, in the early modern period, tantric paradigms of thought and behavior—no longer having the socio-political context and state support that had sustained them—would increasingly find themselves marginalized and subordinated to religious practices and perspectives that were more congenial to the new social environment and its increasingly prevalent Islamic (especially Sufi) worldviews. It was in this interactive, pluralistic socio-religious context, in the fifteenth century, that the age of the great *bhakti*-poet saints of north India seems to have begun with low-caste Sants such as Nāmdev,⁶⁰ the tailor from Maharashtra, a devotee of Krishna as Viṭṭhal and a master of devotional song/performance; Kabīr, the iconoclastic weaver from Banaras whose fierce rhetoric criticized Muslims and Hindus alike for getting lost in egoistic concerns and ritual and doctrinal details and not truly loving God; and Raidās, the “untouchable” leatherworker who was a model of humility in his devotion to a *nirguṇ* God that cherished the troubled and lowly as much as anyone.

While the fifteenth and early-sixteenth century have been characterized as “the twilight of the Delhi Sultanate,” in fact, as Francesca Orsini notes, this was “a period of considerable regional political, cultural and religious dynamism” and “the beginning of the widespread vernacular literary production in north India. After all, this is the time when the powerful voices of Kabir, Nanak, Surdas and other early saint-poets emerged, when the

⁶⁰ According to most sources, Nāmdev flourished in the early-fourteenth century in Maharashtra and was perhaps the founding figure of north India’s “*bhakti* movement.” Some scholars have asserted, however, that Nāmdev lived around the end of the fourteenth and beginning of the fifteenth century, dates that would still probably make him the first north Indian *bhakti* poet-saint (coming just before, but perhaps overlapping with Kabīr), but that would add a bit more coherence to the chronological emergence of the particular brand of religiosity in question here.

sophisticated Hindavi Sufi romances of Qutban, Manjhan and Jayasi were written, when Vishnudas of Gwalior retold the epics in the vernacular, and when singers and songs circulated intensely among courtly and religious milieux.”⁶¹ Orsini explains that in the fifteenth century circulation and trade across north India was “easy and intense” and that “while north India was not a homogenous region in political terms, it seems to have been a fairly well-connected cultural and linguistic region” in which “locally produced songs and tales ... could travel and be understood” across the region in the generally intelligible spoken vernacular of “Hindavi.”⁶² Thus, it is beginning in this period—the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries—that we see the emergence of the conditions that allowed for the rise and spread of *bhakti* throughout north India. Nevertheless, not until the rule of Akbar, beginning in 1556, did *bhakti* communities, institutions, and literature really start to flourish in north India, something that happened in large part due to the patronage of the Mughal emperors and nobles, as well as that of Hindu Rajputs.

~ *The Mughal-Rajput Context of North India’s Bhakti Movement* ~

Before proceeding to a study of the *bhakti* sources and communities themselves, it is critical that we have a sense of the Mughal-Rajput socio-political context that allowed *bhakti* institutions and literature to flourish in early modern north India. Under, the third Mughal Emperor Jalāl ud-Dīn Muhammad Akbar (r. 1556-1605), or “Akbar the Great,” the Mughal empire became the largest, most complex, and most bureaucratically sophisticated political entity that India had ever seen. The religious policies, political alliances, and administrative

⁶¹ Francesca Orsini, “How to Do Multilingual Literary History? Lessons from Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-century North India.” *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 49.2 (2012): 227.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 228-229.

structures developed during Akbar's rule were crucial in facilitating the successful growth of Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* traditions. Akbar and his allies constructed "a new corporate and inclusivist ideology of service to emperor and state" that successfully drew together a disparate range of ethnic groups in the leadership and administration of the Mughal empire.⁶³ The Rajputs—subimperial Hindu kings from across northern and eastern India as well as the Deccan who served as Mughal officials—played an especially vital role in these political and administrative innovations, but also in the formation of a joint Mughal-Rajput court culture whose cosmopolitan codes and symbols of virtue, deportment, and aesthetic sophistication contributed to, and were intertwined with, the rise of Vaiṣṇava *bhakti*.

To properly sketch out the politics, court culture, and socio-religious environment of the Mughal empire would be a massive undertaking, covering vast areas of scholarship that cannot all be addressed in depth here. In order to productively limit the scope of our investigation into these matters, we will focus our attentions upon one particularly important Rajput clan, the Kacchvāhās of Amer, and their involvement in the Mughal policies, practices of rule, and literary-aesthetic understandings that provided fertile conditions for the spread of *bhakti* traditions in early modern north India. As we will see, the Kacchvāhās critically influenced, contributed to, and participated in new Mughal forms of courtliness and statehood that were intimately linked to the emergence of *bhakti* communities and their literature.

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⁶³ Rosalind O'Hanlon, "Kingdom, Household and Body: History, Gender and Imperial Service under Akbar," *Modern Asian Studies* 41.5 (2007): 889. For a brief review of (and references to) major scholarship on the construction and consolidation of Mughal power under Akbar and how he and his allies so successfully generated a "corporate and inclusivist ideology of service to emperor and state," see O'Hanlon, "Kingdom, Household and Body," 889-893.

The Kacchvāhā clan of eastern Rajasthan (or Dhundhār) traces its lineage back to Rām, the divine hero of the *Rāmāyaṇa* himself, through his son Kush. As Rām’s line stretches back to none other than the sun (Sūrya), the Kacchvāhā Rajputs consider themselves *sūrya-vamśī*, or “progeny of the sun.”⁶⁴ Despite such grand ancestral claims, the truth of the matter is that up until the middle of the sixteenth century, the Kacchvāhās were just one royal *kṣatriya* family among a host of others in north India, meriting no special distinction in the annals of history. Threatened by the expanding Marwar and Mewar states and plagued internally by feuds over succession to the throne, in 1562 this minor local power forged a marital alliance with the new Mughal emperor Akbar that would change its fortunes in an unexpectedly powerful way, profoundly influencing the history of north India in the process. The story of the Kacchvāhās, their relationship with the Mughal empire, and their impact on *bhakti* religious formations must necessarily be told in parallel with the story of the rise of the new religious communities at Galtā and Vrindāvan, which served as two of the most important institutional locations for the spread of *bhakti* across Mughal India.

In the early sixteenth century, the Kacchvāhā ruler Pṛthvīrāj is reputed to have shifted his allegiance from the tantric Nāth *yogīs* to the Rāmānandī *bhakti* community, becoming a disciple of the Rāmānandī devotee-ascetic Krishnadās Payahārī and the chief patron of the monastic community he founded in nearby Galtā. Pṛthvīrāj adopted an image of Sītā-Rām brought by Payahārī as the Kacchvāhā’s dynastic deity, thereby inaugurating a close, centuries-long relationship with the Rāmānandīs at Galtā. Pṛthvīrāj’s move was emblematic of a trend we see beginning in this period in which rulers across north India increasingly allied

⁶⁴ Jadunath Sarkar, *A History of Jaipur* (Jaipur: Orient Longman Limited, 1984), 20. The Sisodiya clan of Mewar in Rajasthan claim descent from Kush’s twin-brother Lava and thus also consider themselves *sūrya-vamśī*.

themselves with Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* communities and their institutional forms and symbols while moving away from those of tantric Śaivism and Śāktism. As Catherine Asher and Cynthia Talbot have written, “Although elite Hindus in previous centuries had primarily focused on Shiva as the object of their worship ... the situation changed from c. 1500 onward, after a wave of devotion toward Vishnu became more widespread.”⁶⁵ William Pinch similarly states, “the major Rajput clans underwent what might be deemed a kind of ‘conversion’ process, from Shaiva and Shakta cult affiliations in the early 1500s to more ‘orthoprax’ Krishna and Rama devotion by 1800, and that this occurred in tandem with participation in the overarching framework of the Mughal imperium.”⁶⁶

There is plentiful evidence for this broad shift toward Vaiṣṇava *bhakti*,⁶⁷ however, there are two important caveats: First, this was a *shift*, not an erasure; tantric Śaivism and Śāktism in

⁶⁵ Catherine Asher and Cynthia Talbot, *India before Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 108.

⁶⁶ William Pinch, “Mughal Vaishnavas: Rajputs and Religion in Early Modern India, 1450-1800,” forthcoming.

⁶⁷ Just to name some of the relevant literature: Charlotte Vaudeville demonstrates that Śaivism and Śāktism dominated Braj prior to its takeover by Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* in the sixteenth century. Charlotte Vaudeville, “Braj, Lost and Found,” *Indo-Iranian Journal* 18 (1976): 204-208. Kathleen Erndl discusses evidence for the predominance of Śāktism in Panjab prior the emergence of devotional Vaiṣṇavism there in the seventeenth century. Kathleen Erndl, *Victory to the Mother: The Hindu Goddess of Northwest India in Myth, Ritual, and Symbol* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 43. Heidi Pauwels draws attention to the move by the Bundelā rulers of Orchha from Śākta-centered religious practice to that of Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* in the sixteenth century. Heidi Pauwels, “The Saint, the Warlord, and the Emperor: Discourses of Braj Bhakti and Bundelā Loyalty,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 52 (2009): 210-211, 223. Much of the work of Ann and Dan Gold speaks to the “devotionalization” of the Nāth *yogīs* of Rajasthan who, prior to north India’s *bhakti* movement, seem to have held considerably more tantric sensibilities. In a historical study of new, devotional types of temple construction, Pika Ghosh documents the rise of Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* in seventeenth and eighteenth century Bengal and its challenge to brahmanical tantric institutions and goddess cults. Pika Ghosh, *Temple to Love: Architecture and Devotion in Seventeenth-Century Bengal* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005). Patricia Dold shows how already in the sixteenth century Śāktas in Bengal and Assam were on the defensive, writing apologetic works seeking to demonstrate the compatibility of their tantric traditions with the rising Vaiṣṇava devotional movements of Śaṅkaradeva (c. 1449-1568) and Caitanya (c. 1485-1533). Patricia Aileen Dold, “Tantra as a religious category in the *Mahābhāgavata Purāṇa*,” *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 38.2 (2009): 221-245. Rachel McDermott shows how the influence of *bhakti* in Bengal led to a radical change in (and softening of) Bengali Śākta worship in the eighteenth century in which the dangerous, bloodthirsty tantric deity became a compassionate, loving mother. Rachel Fell McDermott, *Mother of My Heart, Daughter of My Dreams: Kālī and Umā in the Devotional Poetry of Bengal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). John S. Hawley notes that in the *Sampradāyapradīpa* (circa 1550-1650), a text of the Vallabha *bhakti sampradāy*, Bilvamāṅgal states that he has been waiting 700 years for this moment to finally

no way disappeared, rather, generally speaking their role (especially their public presence) diminished and they became subordinate to the ideologies, institutions, and symbols of devotional Vaiṣṇavism. Second, this shift was not a universal fact, but was incomplete and uneven, occurring at different times in different locations and in a few places not occurring at all.⁶⁸ In any case, rulers did not typically consider the matter an either/or choice between tantric Śaiva-Śākta religion and Vaiṣṇava *bhakti*. Since the power and appeal of sacrifice-demanding clan-goddesses and the reputations of charismatic tantric *yogīs* were typically quite localized in nature, rulers often continued to give them a measure of local support that was meant to complement the cosmopolitanism of Vaiṣṇava *bhakti*, which increasingly came to serve as the more public face of Hindu kingdoms, able to link rulers into a larger empire-wide network of shared values and symbols of authority, purity, and virtue.⁶⁹ As we will see in the coming chapters, *bhakti* poets and communities did not view their own devotion in such strategic, political terms and were often far less accommodating to the religiosity of Śāktas and

see people's attraction to the worship of Śiva come to an end so they could return to the path of devotion to Vishnu. John Stratton Hawley, "The four *sampradāys*: ordering the religious past in Mughal North India," *South Asian History and Culture* 2.2 (2011): 165. Strong oral traditions (discussed in Chapter Two) from Galtā, Panjab, and the Kullu Valley (western Himalayas) each record the defeat of tantric Nāth *yogīs* and the subsequent conversion of the local ruler and/or populace to Vaiṣṇava devotional sensibilities. In addition to the numerous critiques of *yogīs* and *tantra-mantra* in *bhakti* poetry (discussed in Chapter Five) sectarian hagiographical sources like Anantadās's *parcaīs* (late sixteenth century) and Priyādās's *Bhaktirasabodhinī* (1712) also speak to this trend, depicting *bhaktas* (Pīpā) and their families (Raidās) converting from Śākta worship to Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* or painting the *bhakta*'s enemies (Mīrābāī's in-laws) as Śāktas.

⁶⁸ In some instances, tantric Śaivism and Śāktism maintained a central place, but in a modified and "devotionalized" form that clearly reflected the rise and influence of *bhakti* attitudes and approaches.

⁶⁹ Mahesh Sharma's work, for example, shows how rulers of the western Himalayan kingdom of Chambā in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries attained "consent-to-rule" from subjects in their core area by appropriating and supporting local symbols and sacred centers linked to goddesses and Nāth *yogīs*, while simultaneously legitimating their authority and fostering "an association with the subcontinental cosmos" by publicly adopting and formally associating themselves with devotional Vaiṣṇavism. Mahesh Sharma, *Western Himalayan Temple Records: State, Pilgrimage, Ritual and Legality in Chambā* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 72-76; 135-137. It seems that even the Kacchvāhās, major patrons of *bhakti* who looked primarily to Govindadev (Krishna) and Sītā-Rām, also continued to place themselves under the protection of their tutelary goddess Jamvai-mātā and the protectress of the royal territory, Śilā-devī.

tantric *yogīs*.⁷⁰ The politics of rule, however, necessitated a degree of accommodation to all forms of religion, even if Hindu kings were increasingly finding it most strategically advantageous to express their virtue and power through formal association with and patronage of devotional Vaiṣṇavism.

Why this broad shift to Vaiṣṇava *bhakti*? As Keith Thomas has stated, “We are still, I think, very much in the dark, historians and anthropologists alike, as to the precise mechanism by which collective beliefs change over long periods of time. But no satisfactory future interpretation of the process will be able to ignore the fact that beliefs derive much of their prestige from their social relevance. ... if we are understand why the beliefs are held or rejected, we must examine their relationship to the society in which they operate.”⁷¹ It was a constellation of factors, all of which are not yet fully understood, that led to Vaiṣṇava *bhakti*’s new popularity in early modern north India. As we will explore in the pages below, the influence of devotionally inclined Rajputs like the Kacchvāhās was certainly one major factor. Yet, just as tantric religiosity emerged in and was a reflection of a certain feudal political environment, *bhakti*’s rise at this time and place also must have been related to a resonance between Mughal imperial ideology with its “patrimonial-bureaucratic” political structure and the structure and ideology of Vaiṣṇava devotion. The second half of the sixteenth century witnessed the birth of a new and “powerful dynastic ideology ... given dramatic public expression in the ceremonial of the imperial court” that “glorified Akbar as the living

⁷⁰ The sixteenth century poet and Krishna devotee, Harirām Vyās, for instance, is in a number of poems quite critical of warlords and rulers who see *bhakti* as a “trendy status symbol for the socially upwardly mobile,” even advising *bhaktas* to give up the company of kings as they are lechers who make you forget God. Heidi Pauwels, “The Saint, the Warlord, and the Emperor: Discourses of Braj Bhakti and Bundelā Loyalty,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 52 (2009): 221–222; 217–218.

⁷¹ Keith Thomas, “An Anthropology of Religion and Magic, II,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 6.1 (1975): 102.

embodiment of the Empire itself, and focus for the direct personal devotion of the imperial nobility.”⁷² There are fascinating parallels between the devotion, loyalty, and service that Mughal officials gave to the emperor and that offered by Vaiṣṇava *bhaktas* to God. Kumkum Chatterjee has highlighted several of these, writing:

[T]he intensely personal, unquestioning bhakti that underlay the phenomenon of Vaishnava devotionalism in northern India during this period, constituted a parallel, at least at the conceptual level, with the cult of devoted imperial service and devotion referred to above. The daily rituals associated with sectarian temples in the Braj area, such as the ceremonial awakening of the deity, the ceremonial and staged ‘darshan’ or viewing of the deity by devotees at specific times during the day, and so on, also share striking parallels with royal rituals and ceremonies associated with the Mughals. The royal custom of giving darshan to gathered subjects at a jharoka or window—a custom that was discontinued only at the time of Aurangzeb—was certainly one of them. Imperial culture thus shared important and interesting commonalities with Vaishnavism.⁷³

As John Richards has demonstrated, Akbar and his advisers established “a degree of paramount spiritual authority for the Emperor unprecedented in previous Indo-Muslim experience,” a glorification of the Emperor that “provided a basis for more intense, emotive ties with imperial nobility.”⁷⁴ This new Mughal system “succeeded by transforming the values of high-status warrior-aristocrats” like the Rajputs, engendering a “shift from personal, lineage, or sectarian pride—that of the ‘free’ warrior chief—to a more impersonal, imperial pride—that of the ‘slave’ warrior-administrator.”⁷⁵ Intriguingly, this shift would seem to mirror that from tantric paradigms of assertiveness and personal empowerment to devotional paradigms of humble submission and loyalty. Within the Mughal imperial culture, honor came

⁷² O’Hanlon, “Kingdom, Household and Body,” 889.

⁷³ Chatterjee, “Cultural Flows and Cosmopolitanism in Mughal India,” 157-158.

⁷⁴ John F. Richards, “The Formulation of Imperial Authority under Akbar and Jahangir,” in *The Mughal State, 1526-1750*, eds. Muzaffar Alam and Sajay Subrahmanyam (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 128-129.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 129.

to be understood in terms of unconditional service and obedience to the empire/emperor, while advancement and promotion meant a “movement nearer to the person of the Emperor.”⁷⁶ Again, this conception of honor as selfless service and obedience, in conjunction with a desire to be near the presence of the emperor, is striking in how closely it mirrors the values of Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* and the relationship between the devotee and the Divine. Indeed, Norman Ziegler has noted that Rajput bardic traditions often equated Akbar with Rām.⁷⁷ In certain key respects, then, it is no wonder that Hindu rulers increasingly forged relationships with Vaiṣṇava devotional institutions during the Mughal period.

One of the most important of the relationships between rulers and *bhakti* communities in early modern north India was that between the Kacchvāhās and the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas of Vrindavan in Braj. In the early sixteenth century, at the same time that a new *bhakti* monastic community was beginning in Galtā, a profoundly influential *bhakti* center was also developing in the region of Braj. This area had long been known as the mythical land of Krishna’s youth, but largely due to the efforts of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas, was now beginning to transform from a sparsely inhabited semi-wilderness into a major pilgrimage site and the home of several important devotional communities.

Sent by their guru Caitanya (1486-1533), the charismatic brahmin who began a movement of enthusiastic Krishna devotion in Bengal, Rūpa and Sanātana Gosvāmī arrived in

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ziegler explains that Rajputs had little difficulty accepting Mughal authority because the Mughals appeared like them in assigning status and rank primarily “in terms of power to protect and to give sustenance and rewards.” He writes, “What is significant about this scheme of [Rajput] values and ideas for understanding Rajput-Mughal relations is the fact that the Emperor (*Patsah*) was also included. In the chronicles, he is likened to Rama, the Ksatriya hero of the Hindu epic, the *Ramayana*. Service on the part of a Hindu Rajput for the Thakur (God) or for the Thakur (raja) was thus no different from service for the Patsah or one of his subordinates.” Norman P. Ziegler, “Marvari Historical Chronicles: Sources for the Social and Cultural History of Rajasthan,” *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 13 (1976): 241.

Braj in 1517 and 1519, respectively, “where they were to establish sites for Krishna’s worship and a literary foundation for the budding movement that came to be known as Gauḍīya Vaishnavism.”⁷⁸ Four other devotees joined Rūpa and Sanātana in Vrindavan, forming a group known as the “Six Gosvāmīs”⁷⁹ who “began to compose treatises in Sanskrit with the intention of providing the movement with a systematic theology based upon authoritative scriptures.”⁸⁰ In 1533, Rūpa built the initial temple of Govindadev, an image of Krishna that would soon take on special importance in relation to the Kacchvāhā family. By 1552, the area had developed into an important enough religious destination that Nārāyaṇ Bhaṭṭ saw fit to compose his *Vrajabhaktivilāsa*, the first detailed and systematic itinerary of all the sacred pilgrimage places of Braj.⁸¹

The early *bhakti* developments in Vrindavan and Galtā occurred in the waning years of the Delhi Sultanate—during the reigns of Sikander Lodi (r. 1488-1517) and his son Ibrahim Lodi (1517-26)—and in the earliest (pre-Akbar) years of the Mughal Empire. In fact, returning our narrative to the Kacchvāhā clan, we find Mahārājā Pṛthvīrāj, in March 1527, fighting under the banner of his father-in-law Rānā Saṅga (a.k.a. Rānā Singh)⁸² of Mewar against Bābur—the

⁷⁸ David Haberman, *Journey Through the Twelve Forests: An Encounter with Krishna* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 32.

⁷⁹ The other four members of the “Six Goswamis” are: Gopāl Bhaṭṭ, the supposed author of the *Haribhaktivilāsa*; Raghunāthdās; Raghunāth Bhaṭṭ; and Jīva Gosvāmī, the prolific nephew of Rūpa and Sanātana who succeeded them as the highest authority on matters of doctrine.

⁸⁰ Alan Entwistle, *Braj: Centre of Krishna Pilgrimage* (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1987), 146. According to Entwistle, the bulk of Rupa’s foundational theological works, including his incredibly influential treatises systematizing the experience of emotional Krishna devotion in terms of classical aesthetic (*rasa*) theory, were composed between 1533 and 1550 (p. 147).

⁸¹ Haberman, *Journey Through the Twelve Forests*, 33; 48.

⁸² Rānā Singh’s son, Bhojrāj, is said to have been the husband of the great *bhakti* poet Mīrābāī, who according to tradition refused to act a proper wife and daughter-in-law because she deemed Krishna her true lord and husband. The Rānā apparently tried to have her poisoned but she was unharmed due to her great devotion to Krishna; she eventually escaped and traveled to Vrindavan and, later, Dwarka.

founder of the Mughal Empire—at the Battle of Khānua. At this time, the Sisodiya clan of Mewar, ruling from the great fortress of Chittor, seems to have been the most powerful and prestigious Rajput kingdom in Rajasthan and to have united the other Rajputs together against the invading Mughals. Less than a year before, in April 1526, Babur had brought an end to the Lodi dynasty as he, descendent of the mighty Timur, had come from Central Asia and defeated the last Lodi sultan, Ibrahim, at the Battle of Panipat.⁸³ His subsequent victory in the aforementioned Battle of Khānua, which marked “the first time gunpowder triumphed over Rajput chivalry,”⁸⁴ proved equally critical in consolidating Babur’s control over north India and establishing the Mughal Empire.

Pr̥thvīrāj died just six months after the Battle of Khānua, and following his death a certain amount of turbulence and in-fighting seems to have ensued in Amer during the short reigns of the Kacchvāhās Pūraṇmal (r. 1527-34), Bhīm (r. 1534-37), and Ratan Singh (r. 1537-47). As we will see below, when Bhārmal (a.k.a. Bihārīmal), the fourth son of Pr̥thvīrāj, ascended the throne in 1547, it marked an important turning point in the history and fortunes of the Kacchvāhā clan. Seven years earlier, in 1540, the Afghan upstart Sher Shāh Sūrī had expelled Bābur’s son and successor, Humāyūn, from India and begun to rule from Delhi. In 1545, Sher Shāh was succeeded by his son, Islam Shāh Sūrī, with whom Bhārmal aligned himself upon taking the Kacchvāhā throne. In the first decade of his twenty-six year reign (1547-1573) in Amer, Bhārmal saw Humāyūn return to power in Delhi in 1555 (after Islam Shāh’s death), only to die one year later and be succeeded by his young son, Akbar, in 1556. With Akbar but thirteen years old, chaos broke out in the empire as old servants of Sher Shāh Sūrī’s dynasty

⁸³ Asher and Talbot, *India before Europe*, 116.

⁸⁴ Sarkar, *A History of Jaipur*, 32.

moved aggressively to take land from the Mughals. At this time, Rāja Bhārmal of the Kacchvāhās provided valuable assistance that saved the lives and liberty of the Mughal garrison under Majnun Khan Qaqshal. Akbar later sent for Bhārmal and rewarded him in Delhi for his loyalty.⁸⁵ It is with this event, and the inauguration of Akbar's reign as Mughal emperor, that a new chapter in our story begins.

When Akbar took control of the Mughal Empire in 1556, the Kacchvāhās were hardly a power to be reckoned with, even within Rajasthan.⁸⁶ At this historical moment, “there were a number of important Rajput principalities firmly established in the region, chief among them Mewar, Marwar, Jaisalmer, Bikaner, and Amer ... [but] Amer at that time was quite small and weak compared to other principalities.”⁸⁷ With his kingdom under threat of invasion and annexation by the stronger forces of Mirza Muhammad Sharfuddin Husain (Akbar's governor of Mewar), in 1562, Bhārmal appealed to Akbar for protection. The emperor was on pilgrimage from Agra to Ajmer (only about eighty miles from Amer), site of the tomb (*dargah*) of Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti, the famous founder of the Chistiyya Sufis, north India's most popular Sufi order, with whom Akbar was closely involved. As this important pilgrimage route went

⁸⁵ Abu Fazl's *Akbarnāma* (ii, 69-70) comments that, “The steadiness displayed by them [the Kacchvāhās] pleased the lofty glance of His Majesty and he made inquiries about the Rajah [Bhārmal] and told him ‘We will cherish you’.” Sarkar, *A History of Jaipur*, 34-35.

⁸⁶ As James Hastings points out, the use of the term “Rajasthan” can be slightly misleading. In the 16th-century, “the collection of principalities in the region of Rajasthan was culturally homogenous with the adjacent regions of Gujarat and Sindh, and had no distinctive collective identity that distinguished it from them. Only later, at the close of the eighteenth century, did they become identified with the unifying force of the ruling caste and referred to as ‘Rajasthan’ or ‘Rajputana’ (‘the land/place of the Rajputs’), a term first used in 1800 CE by the European military adventurer George Thomas in his *Military Memoirs*.” Beyond the term itself, prior to the latter sixteenth-century “there was a sense of many small principalities but not such a strong sense of Rajasthan as a distinct region. That idea of a distinct region was solidified when the Mughals designated much of the area of present-day Rajasthan as a *subah*, the *subah* of Ajmer, in 1594 CE.” James Hastings, “Poets, Sants, and Warriors: The Dadu Panth, Religious Change, and Identity Formation in Jaipur State, circa 1562-1860 CE,” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 2002), 48-49.

⁸⁷ Hastings, “Poets, Sants, and Warriors,” 52.

directly through Kacchvāhā lands, Bhārmal found it an opportune time to request an audience with the emperor and at their meeting, hoping to forge a defensive alliance, he offered Akbar his eldest daughter (sometimes popularly known as Jodhābāī)⁸⁸ in marriage. Impressed by the Kacchvāhās' previous show of loyalty to Akbar and his father, Humāyūn, among other considerations, Akbar consented and the two were married circa February 6, 1562. Officially known as Mariam-uz-Zamānī, Akbar's first Rajput bride would become the mother of his heir, Salim, the future Jahāngīr.

The historical implications of this Mughal-Kacchvāhā alliance were huge. While the giving of Hindu princesses in marriage to Muslim kings had long been in practice, this particular case “introduced in its effect a complete revolution in the policy of the Muslim monarchy in India” because for the first time such a marriage served as the basis for bringing Hindus—in this case Rajputs, particularly of the Kacchvāhā lineage—into the court and the ruling apparatus of the empire.⁸⁹ After the wedding, Bhārmal's eldest son, Bhagvantdās, and grandson, Mān Singh (the son of Bhagvantdās), were presented to Akbar and enrolled as nobles in the permanent service of the empire.⁹⁰ “[I]n return for the retention of their ancestral lands, their Hindu beliefs and clan standing, [they] would swear allegiance to the emperor and provide specified numbers of cavalry for service in the imperial forces.”⁹¹ These two men

⁸⁸ The maiden name of the eldest daughter of Rāja Bhārmal was Hira Kunwar (a.k.a. Harkah). When she became the first Rajput wife of Akbar, she was given the title Mariam-uz-Zamānī (“Mary of the Age”), but today she is often popularly known as Jodhā Bāī. There is, however, no evidence that the name “Jodhā Bāī” was ever used during her lifetime; rather, it seems to have been first used in eighteenth-century historical writings. Confusion and controversy have resulted—particularly in the wake of the release of the Bollywood film “Jodhaa Akbar” in 2008—from the fact that the wife of Jahangir, Princess Manmati of Jodhpur, has also been addressed as “Jodha Bai.” See “Fact, myth blend in re-look at Akbar-Jodhabai,” *The Times of India*; 10 December 2005.

⁸⁹ Sarkar, *A History of Jaipur*, 37.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁹¹ John Keay, *India: A History* (New York: Grove Press, 2000), 313.

became not only trusted military leaders and governors for the empire, but also close friends and allies of Akbar.⁹²

The Kacchvāhās would acquire great power, influence, security, and wealth through their imperial service, but what made this alliance worthwhile for Akbar? The Rajputs had developed a reputation as heroic and loyal warriors and Akbar knew that he could make good use of them in his campaigns to expand and secure the empire, not to mention that some of his nearest and most troublesome foes (particularly the states of Marwar and Mewar) were in Rajasthan, so having an ally there would stabilize the region while also allowing for ease of communication with Gujarat, which Akbar hoped to annex for its valuable coastal ports. The success of his relationship with the Kacchvāhās of Amer would lead Akbar to make similar alliances with other Rajput kingdoms such as Bikaner and Jaisalmer (in 1570), and later Jodhpur; however, it was always the Kacchvāhās of Amer who held by far the most, and the most important, positions in the Mughal military and administrative systems.⁹³ In fact, research by Omkar Nath Upadhyay indicates that at Akbar's death in 1605 CE nearly seventy percent of the Rajputs within the nobility of the Mughal court were Kacchvāhās.⁹⁴

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Following the alliance between Akbar and the Kacchvāhās, almost immediately we see changes in Mughal policy that had substantial positive effects on Hindu religious life. In the same year as that history-changing marriage, Akbar issued a decree forbidding the forced conversion to Islam of prisoners of war. The very next year, in 1563, he abolished the levying

⁹² Hastings, "Poets, Sants, and Warriors," 63.

⁹³ Satish Chandra, *Mughal Religious Policies: The Rajputs and the Deccan* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing, 1993), 23; 32.

⁹⁴ Hastings, "Poets, Sants, and Warriors," 64, n. 74.

of pilgrimage taxes on Hindus visiting sacred places, and in 1564, in the face of orthodox opposition, he abolished the *jizya*, the tax—customary under Islamic law—levied upon non-Muslims.⁹⁵ While these actions were taken partly as a result of Akbar’s increasingly open-minded personal religious views, and partly from the shrewd Mughal political insight that “in a country where the majority of the population was non-Muslims, it was unwise to rule for the benefit of a few of their coreligionists,”⁹⁶ we should not discount the likely influence that Akbar’s close relations with the Kacchvāhās had on these decisions. The importance of this relationship becomes especially evident in the historical records of 1565, when Akbar made a land grant to the officiating priest of the Govindadev temple in Vrindavan.⁹⁷ This Mughal revenue grant seems to be the first ever awarded to a Hindu priest for support of a temple and, importantly, it was made on behalf of the Kacchvāhā ruler Rāja Bhārmal.⁹⁸

By 1580, the Mughals had become intimately involved in the religious affairs of Braj, having awarded *jāgīr* grants to at least seven temples in the region. Contemporary records indicate that Vaiṣṇavas from several different sects in Braj “quite regularly petitioned and lobbied the imperial darbar for the settlement of grievances as well as for additional land and other material grants,” while “imperial *farmans* suggest that the Mughal establishment played a direct role in appointing and confirming the offices of temple *adhikaris* and *sevaks*” of the

⁹⁵ Haberman, *Journey Through the Twelve Forests*, 34.

⁹⁶ Rafat M. Bilgrami, *Religious and Quasi-Religious Developments of the Mughal Period (1556-1707)* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers 1984), xix.

⁹⁷ Haberman, *Journey Through the Twelve Forests*, 35.

⁹⁸ Monika Horstmann, *In Favour of Govinddevjī: Historical documents relating to a deity of Vrindaban and Eastern Rajasthan* (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts & Manohar Publishers, 1999), 2.

Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas.⁹⁹ In addition to the Gauḍīyas, the Vallabha Sampradāy (Puṣṭi Mārg) in Braj was also a major beneficiary of Mughal patronage, receiving eight land grants in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the first one issued in 1577.¹⁰⁰ So what was it about Braj and the Krishna-worshipping Vaiṣṇavas there that merited such attention from the Mughals? While a popular local myth holds that Akbar visited Vrindavan in 1573,¹⁰¹ there is no solid non-sectarian evidence of this event (Jahāngīr, however, clearly did visit in 1620), nor that Akbar held any particular predilection for Krishna, even if plentiful evidence demonstrates that other Hindu religious traditions intrigued him greatly.¹⁰² Nevertheless, even if Akbar did not visit Vrindavan, he certainly passed by it on numerous occasions for it was in the very heart of his empire. Indeed, the well-kept and well-defended Mughal highway connecting the imperial establishments at Agra and Delhi passed directly through Braj and helped make it into such a major place of pilgrimage. Kumkum Chatterjee has suggested that the Mughals may have seen their “cordial relationships with the Braj-based Gaudiya [Bengali] Vaishnavas to be a factor that might assist them in” their determined efforts to consolidate

⁹⁹ Kumkum Chatterjee, “Cultural Flows and Cosmopolitanism in Mughal India: The Bishnupur Kingdom,” *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 46.2 (2009): 156.

¹⁰⁰ Edwin A. Richardson, “Mughal and Rajput Patronage of the Bhakti Sect of the Maharajas, the Vallabha Sampradaya, 1640-1760 A.D.” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Arizona, 1979), 32; 35-37. The Puṣṭi Mārg community claims the brahmin Vallabha as its founder, though it was his son Viṭṭahlnāth who seems to have truly established and expanded its institutional presence, a presence centered especially at the Śrī Nāthjī temple in Govardhan. One of the early grants to Vallabha’s sampradāy was issued by Akbar’s mother, Hamida Banu Begum, demonstrating that Mughal patronage of Vaiṣṇava institutions was not limited specifically to the patronage of Akbar. Asher and Talbot, *India Before Europe*, 137-138.

¹⁰¹ Haberman, *Journey Through the Twelve Forests*, 35.

¹⁰² John Richards explains that, “By 1583, Akbar had apparently rejected public prayer and other formal aspects of orthodox ritual Islam in what seems to have been a steady process of religious questioning.” He began publicly worshipping the sun four times a day, with prostrations and recitations of Sanskrit names, held religious debates and “interviews with famed holy men of all sects,” avoided indulgence in meat, sex, and alcohol, and in accordance with Hindu yogic-ascetic belief, even “had the crown of his head (the tenth opening of his body) tonsured to allow his soul to escape freely at the moment of death.” John F. Richards, “The Formulation of Imperial Authority under Akbar and Jahangir,” in *The Mughal State, 1526-1750*, eds. Muzaffar Alam and Sajay Subrahmanyam (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 151.

their “control over the eastern regions of the subcontinent.”¹⁰³ Furthermore, as a pilgrimage center, Vrindavan was a center of trade and economic activity, and thus its success meant increased commercial traffic that translated into revenue for the empire.¹⁰⁴

Braj’s location near the heart of Mughal power, its economic value, and its potential strategic role in achieving Mughal goals in Bengal all made it an attractive site to support,¹⁰⁵ but Akbar’s choice to make Vrindavan *the* major place at which to demonstrate his liberal, tolerant religious patronage also must have been influenced by the religious leanings of the Kacchvāhās, who had developed close ties with the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas there. In the years since their initial alliance (in 1562), the relationship between Akbar and the Kacchvāhās had become considerably tighter. A number of Akbar’s children had died after birth and he fretted intensely over the fact that he was without heir, so when Salīm was born in 1569 from his Kacchvāhā wife (the sister of Bhagvantdās), he was incredibly thankful and was brought even closer to the Kacchvāhās. Furthermore, in 1584, Bhagvantdās cemented the uniquely strong position of the Kacchvāhās at the Mughal court when he married his daughter Man Bhawati (Man Kanwar) to Prince Salīm (Jahāngīr), a union that produced Jahāngīr’s first son, the prince

¹⁰³ Chatterjee, “Cultural Flows and Cosmopolitanism in Mughal India,” 157.

¹⁰⁴ Norbert Peabody, “In Whose Turban Does the Lord Reside?: The Objectification of Charisma and the Fetishism of Objects in the Hindu Kingdom of Kota,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 33.4 (1991): 750-751; Nalini Thakur, “The Building of Govindadeva,” in *Govindadeva: A Dialogue in Stone*, ed. Margaret Case (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi Centre for the Arts, 1996), 13.

¹⁰⁵ Mughal patronage of Vaiṣṇavas in Braj, as elsewhere, also served to appease and gain the trust of Hindus, who from time to time came into conflict with Muslims. Edwin Richardson cites a specific incident in Mathura in 1577 in which a brahmin was executed by the local *qazi* for cursing the Prophet and building an “idol temple” using materials intended for the construction of a mosque; he asserts that it was no coincidence that Akbar’s first grant to the nearby Vallabha Sampradāy occurred just a few months after this potentially rebellion-inciting event. This incident is recorded in al-Badāunī’s *Munktaḥab al-Tawārīkh* and discussed in Richardson, “Mughal and Rajput Patronage of the Bhakti Sect of the Maharajas,” 40-42.

Khusrau, in 1587.¹⁰⁶ Meanwhile, Mān Singh had quickly become one of Akbar's most important and trusted leaders.¹⁰⁷ In fact, "So close was the relationship between the Muslim monarch and his significant Hindu subject that Akbar, out of fondness, referred to Man Singh as *farzand* (son)."¹⁰⁸

The Kacchvāhās may have had a uniquely close relationship with Mughal power under Akbar, but we have not yet made clear how this would have translated into patronage for the burgeoning Krishna devotional center of Braj. After all, the Kacchvāhās trace their roots back not to Krishna, but to Rām, and they adopted a *murti* of Sītā-Rām as their dynastic deity in the early sixteenth century. Nevertheless, it seems that the emergence of Vrindavan as a Krishnaite religious center under Caitanya's "Six Gosvāmīs" was an event that sent waves across the religious landscape of the time and the Kacchvāhā rulers had been caught up in this current. Indeed, Rāja Bhārmal's son and successor, Bhagwantdās (r. 1573-1589), a close friend and ally of Akbar, was allegedly initiated into Caitanya's Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava sect.¹⁰⁹ As Monika Horstmann notes, "He is reported to have built the Satī Burj, a tower erected in memory of his mother, at the Viśrām Ghāṭ at Mathura, ... he built the Haridev temple at Govardhan," and he was likely quite influential in his son Mān Singh's decision to construct a magnificent new

¹⁰⁶ In 1608, Jahāngīr married another Kacchvāhā princess, Man Singh's granddaughter Kolia Kumari. Catherine Glynn, "A Rājasthānī Princely Album: Rājput Patronage of Mughal-Style Painting," *Artibus Asiae* 60/2 (2000): 231.

¹⁰⁷ There is no doubt the Mughals were in Mān Singh's debt, for as perhaps their greatest military commander, "No less than one half of the conquests of Akbar's reign were [made] possible mainly due to [his] matchless valour," and at great sacrifice, for nine out of ten of Mān Singh's sons gave their lives in imperial military operations. Harish Chandra Tikkiwal, *Jaipur and the Later Mughals* (Jaipur: University of Rajasthan, 1974), 5-6.

¹⁰⁸ Glynn, "A Rājasthānī Princely Album," 231.

¹⁰⁹ Entwistle, *Braj: Centre of Krishna Pilgrimage*, 160.

temple on the site of the first Govindadev temple in Vrindavan.¹¹⁰ Begun in 1576 and completed in 1590, the new Govindadev temple was the largest built in north India since the twelfth century and was made from the red sandstone preferred by Mughals for their imperial construction projects, combining Hindu and Muslim architectural styles.¹¹¹ Mān Singh's temple represented "the centerpiece in the [Mughal] royal patronage of Braj"¹¹² and simultaneously served as "the symbol of Kacchavāhā glory."¹¹³

David Haberman writes that "The development of Braj was clearly inspired by charismatic Vaishnava leaders such as Chaitanya, Vallabha, and others, and was carried out by their diligent followers; but much of the early success in the physical development of Braj was insured by imperial patronage resulting from political compromise which recognized the vital service important Hindu officers were rendering the Mughal emperor Akbar."¹¹⁴ This is certainly true, but as we have seen, it was not just any Hindu officers who Akbar sought to recognize and reward in the giving of land grants to temples in Vrindavan; it was specifically and especially the Kacchvāhās. As Horstmann notes, "The Kacchavāhā munificence is visible everywhere in Braj. The Kacchavāhās' attachment to the sacred land of Kṛṣṇa became, in acts of political and religious symbolism, converted into a visible inventory, and the grants which

¹¹⁰ Horstmann, *In Favour of Govinddevjī*, 2. It is worth noting that it was not only the rulers of the Kacchvāhā clan in Amer who offered patronage towards *bhakti* institutions at this time. For instance, a Kacchvāhā chief by the name of Raysal Darbari is accredited with founding the temple of Gopīnāth in Vrindavan. Entwistle, *Braj: Centre of Krishna Pilgrimage*, 160.

¹¹¹ Asher and Talbot, *India before Europe*, 149.

¹¹² Haberman, *Journey Through the Twelve Forests*, 36.

¹¹³ Horstmann, *In Favour of Govinddevjī*, 7. In 1633, Shah Jahān put the Kacchvāhās in direct charge of Govindadev (after which the administration of grants to the temple became vested in the Kacchvāhā chancery) and their close link with that divine image endures still today. Housed in Vrindavan until the reign of Aurangzeb, at that time fear of the image's destruction led devotees to remove it to the safety of Rajasthan where it was eventually housed by Sawai Jai Singh II in the Govindadev temple of Jaipur's royal palace, where it presently stands.

¹¹⁴ Haberman, *Journey Through the Twelve Forests*, 36.

the family made perpetuated their dynastic presence.”¹¹⁵ The Kacchvāhās thus furthered their own interests, legitimacy and public image at the same time that they contributed to the growth of *bhakti* as an institutional form of religion across north India. Without the powerful presence of the Kacchvāhās in the Mughal court, Vrindavan may not have received the measure of patronage it did, and without that patronage Vrindavan would likely not have become as vibrant a *bhakti* religious center as it did, nor attained its importance so quickly.

Kacchvāhā and Mughal patronage was, of course, not limited to Braj. The burgeoning *bhakti* community at Galta also received significant attention and patronage during Akbar’s reign. Galta was situated just miles from the Kacchvāhā court at Amer and lay just above the imperial road to Agra and Akbar’s capital at Fatehpur Sikri; thus, its location alone made it an important and attractive site for patronage. Horstmann confirms a revenue grant made by Akbar to the Galta Rāmānandīs which gives “a glimpse of the prominent position that Galta had attained” by the start of the seventeenth century.¹¹⁶ We know that since the early decades of the sixteenth century, when Pṛthvīrāj became the disciple of Krishnadās Payahārī, the Kacchvāhās had supported the Rāmānandīs at Galta. Unfortunately, the documentary record for relations between Galta and the Kacchvāhās is quite sparse until the time of Sawāī Jai Singh II (r. 1700-43). However, Priyādās’s *Bhaktirasabodhinī* (1712) speaks to this important relationship in telling a story in which Rāja Mān Singh visits Galta in order to pay homage to the great Rāmānandī *rasik bhakta* Agradās (a disciple of Payahārī) and another in which Man Singh meets and “abases himself before” Kīlhadev (Payahārī’s successor).¹¹⁷ Furthermore, we

¹¹⁵ Horstmann, *In Favour of Govinddevjī*, 7.

¹¹⁶ Horstmann, “The Rāmānandīs of Galtā,” 156.

¹¹⁷ Pinch, “History, Devotion and the Search for Nabhadas of Galta,” 392-93.

know that Kīlhadev (the *mahant* of Galta for roughly the second half of the sixteenth century) had two Hanumān temples¹¹⁸ built in Galta prior to 1600, which likely would have required Kacchvāhā financial support, while Nārāyaṇdās, the mid-seventeenth century abbot, oversaw the building of the two great temples of Gopāl-jī and Raghunāth-jī in Galta, along with Galta's water architecture and gardens.¹¹⁹ These latter construction projects, huge in scope, took place during the reign of Mirza Jai Singh I (r. 1622-1667)¹²⁰ in Amer and it is almost certain that they were funded by Kacchvāhā patronage with the aim of making the Galta complex "part of the symbolic apparatus of regnal power."¹²¹

* * *

In many respects, *bhakti* spread across north India as a popular movement, a devotional religion of the common people that eschewed elitism, priestly mediation, and ritual excess; nevertheless, we can see that in their institutional forms, which became increasingly

¹¹⁸ As Horstmann points out, and as we discuss in depth in Chapter Two, it is significant that the earliest two temples in Galta were dedicated to Hanuman, who—as both the god of *yogīs* and fighting *sādhus* as well as the ideal of pure *bhakti* devotion to Rām—represented an integration of the yogic and *bhakti* streams existing within Galta's early monastic community. Horstmann, "Rāmānandīs of Galtā," 156.

¹¹⁹ Horstmann, "The Rāmānandīs of Galtā" 155-57.

¹²⁰ That Jai Singh I was given the honorific title of *mirza* is extremely significant, for it was usually reserved for male members of the Timurid royal line. That Shah Jahān would bestow this honor upon a Hindu Rajput symbolizes Jai Singh's great importance in the military and the administration of the Mughal empire. Glynn, "A Rājasthānī Princely Album," 233-34. The title awarded to Jai Singh also alludes to the continued importance of the Kacchvāhās after the reigns of Akbar and Jahāngīr. While our focus is on developments during the foundational period of Akbar's rule, it is important to mention that the succession of Jahāngīr to the Mughal throne did not alter the firmly established alliance with the Kacchvāhās nor did it really affect imperial religious policy. As Asher and Talbot state, "In both his own attitudes and in the state's practices, Jahangir for the most part continued along the lines set by Akbar. Jahangir not only maintained earlier grants given to temples, mosques, and religious leaders of all kinds, but he even increased their number considerably." Similarly, when Jahāngīr was succeeded by his son, Shah Jahān, in 1627, there were no major breaks in previous policies. While Shah Jahān (r. 1627-58) took a much more traditional posture toward Islam, seeking to be seen as a devout Muslim in his public persona and curtailing the construction of new Hindu and Jain temples, he nevertheless "maintained the sponsorship of religious institutions and people that his father and grandfather instituted; here, there was no change in policy." Asher and Talbot, *India before Europe*, 225-227.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 157.

prominent beginning in the second half of the sixteenth century, *bhakti* communities relied upon the patronage of nobles, princes and emperors. In this context the Kacchvāhās played a key role, for they influenced the Mughal court's patronage of Vaiṣṇava devotional communities, they patronized these communities themselves, and—in the profile and success they achieved working within the Mughal empire—they served as models of behavior for other aspiring Rajputs who, partly through them, came to see Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* as an essential element in the projection of royal virtue and power. Particularly influential in this regard was Mān Singh.

In a variety of ways, Mān Singh (r. 1589-1614) was truly critical to the Mughal project under Akbar. Battling and subduing other Rajput rulers, he helped the Mughals gain fuller control over Rajasthan; his military victories in Gujarat secured a vital transportation route connecting the Mughal heartland with the ports of the Arabian Sea; and he served as the governor of three administrative provinces (Kabul, Bihar, and Bengal), proving essential to the consolidation of Mughal rule in eastern India. By 1605, he had earned the highest rank of any noble besides the emperor's own sons. Mān Singh patronized the construction of Hindu temples all over the empire, including Rajasthan, Braj, Banaras, Bihar, and Orissa. While most of his patronage went to Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* institutions, he mirrored the political savvy and active religious accommodation of Akbar in also patronizing some Śaiva and Śākta temples, as well as a mosque and a Sufi shrine. In terms of the Mughal architectural landscape, Mān Singh's influence was not simply in sponsoring temples, but specifically devotional temples that were newly formatted to provide space in which crowds could assemble multiple times a day for *darśan* of—i.e., “visual communion” with—the divine image. His patronage was thus instrumental in accommodating the popular shift from individual to congregational worship

that was occurring with the rise of *bhakti*.¹²² Furthermore, through the temples he sponsored, Mān Singh led the way in developing a distinctly Mughal-Rajput religio-aesthetic idiom, for his temples displayed Mughal presence and power even as they asserted a Rajput identity and Vaiṣṇava devotional values.¹²³

A contemporary poet praised Mān Singh as “the maintainer of Akbar’s prestige,” almost certainly “alluding in part to his role in spreading imperial Mughal taste.”¹²⁴ It was not only his patronage of architecture that expressed and extended Mughal prestige, but also his sponsorship of painting and written literature. Indeed, “the earliest known examples of the Rajput school of painting come from a garden house in Bairat believed to have been built for Man Singh in 1587 CE.”¹²⁵

Mughal court culture was heavily Persianate and had imbibed Islamic traditions that placed great value in books, honoring them as marks of culture and repositories of knowledge. In this milieu, manuscripts became an index of wealth and sophistication. As Tyler Williams explains, in Mughal-Rajput court culture, “written manuscripts formed a type of currency in the rhetoric of kingship and nobility, and also served as a material currency of monetary wealth. A manuscript held value both as a symbol of participation in the elite culture of the

¹²² Asher and Talbot, *India before Europe*, 148-149.

¹²³ As Catherine Asher states, “Rāja Mān Singh can be considered an innovator of Mughal taste, not simply an imitator.” In an article demonstrating the dual Mughal and Rajput messages Mān Singh articulated in his architectural patronage, Asher explains that the Govindadev temple he patronized in Vrindavan “anticipates trends yet to develop in imperial Mughal architecture.” Catherine B. Asher, “The Architecture of Rāja Mān Singh: A Study of Sub-Imperial Patronage,” in *The Powers of Art: Patronage in Indian Culture*, ed. Barbara Stoler Miller (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992): 185.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 183.

¹²⁵ Hastings, “Poets, Sants, and Warriors,” 64-65.

empire, as well as an object that could be assigned a specific monetary value.”¹²⁶ Mān Singh is known to have collected manuscripts and patronized written works in Sanskrit, Brajbhāṣā, and Rajasthani. Under his rule, a new interest in book/manuscript culture emerged at the Kacchvāhā court that would grow further under Mirza Jai Singh (r. 1621-1667), who established the library at Amer and was a great patron and collector of literature.

This new Mughal-Rajput literary culture and patronage milieu was vital in spurring the production of written works among *bhakti* communities who sought to gain prestige, power, and financial support (a topic we explore further in Chapter Four). Indeed, a number of scholars have observed that, beginning in the sixteenth century, there was an explosion of *written* vernacular literary activity in north India, particularly in *bhakti* religious communities. This sudden move to writing was a remarkable occurrence in that, prior to this point, “almost all vernacular songs and poetry, religious and secular alike ... had been circulating through oral transmission,”¹²⁷ and was almost certainly connected to the value placed on written manuscripts in the newly developing Mughal-Rajput cultural context.¹²⁸ Among *bhakti* communities, Williams’ research indicates that manuscripts of devotional compositions came to be thought of as possessing a certain metaphysical power, therefore producing and donating them was a practice believed to generate spiritual merit, while the power they

¹²⁶ Tyler Williams, “Libraries in Early Modern India,” Unpublished seminar paper (Columbia University, 2008), 57-58.

¹²⁷ Hastings, 16.

¹²⁸ The earliest Hindu books were written on palm leaves, that, Milo Beach explains, were “long and horizontal in format,” with their pages “pierced and threaded onto cords tied between wooden covers. ... Islamic books, on the other hand, were on paper, bound along a spine, and often encased in leather covers. ... While paper was plentiful in India after about 1400, so entrenched were traditional attitudes that Hindu artists and craftsmen only slowly took advantage of the freedom that the new materials allowed, to vary the size and shape from the severely restricted palm-leaf format. And even then the folios were seldom bound. Kept in stacks, the loose paper pages were wrapped in cloth and tied in bundles.” Milo Cleveland Beach, *The New Cambridge History of India I, Vol. 3: Mughal and Rajput Painting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 1-2.

contained made them valuable objects in exchanges with the ruling elite as well as with laity and other monastic communities.¹²⁹ In addition to these emerging conceptions of written text among *bhakti* communities, the conditions of relative social stability, peace and prosperity in the Mughal and Kacchvāhā heartlands must also have been a key factor engendering the production and circulation of *bhakti* literature.¹³⁰

* * *

In the preceding pages, through the lens of the Kacchvāhā clan, we have seen the ways in which the rise of Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* in early modern north India occurred within a new and distinctly Mughal-Rajput cultural and political context. The Kacchvāhās patronized literature, architecture, and painting in accordance with protocols of Mughal court culture and thereby made a public claim to be men of cultivation and power. As we have seen, the Kacchvāhās did

¹²⁹ Williams, “Libraries in Early Modern India,” 57-58. In regard to the increasing importance of books, manuscripts, and writing during the Mughal period, Nile Green suggests that “the intensification and expansion of bureaucratic forms of writing [under the Mughals] contributed to the detachment of book-learning from its wider pedagogical contexts and so to a gradual relocation and identification of knowledge in and with books.” Using Green’s research and insights on the role of books among Muslim religious circles, we might argue that despite the explosion of written texts among *bhakti* communities, in early modern India, knowledge continued to be “located primarily in persons rather than in written texts, which “were not considered independent sources of knowledge, but were appendages to the personal pedagogical relationships through which knowledge was transferred. ... Correspondingly, those in search of knowledge looked for a master rather than a bookshop or library.” Nile Green, “The Uses of Books in a Late Mughal Takiyya: Persianate Knowledge Between Person and Paper,” *Modern Asian Studies* 44.2 (2009): 24; 3.

¹³⁰ As James Hastings writes, “[F]rom the time of Akbar, there was no attempt by the Emperor or his administration to meddle in internal affairs of the loyal Rajput states, with the exception of succession disputes, as long as they provided no threat to Mughal hegemony. ... There was no political turmoil and no war to contend with, for the wars were always fought somewhere else; and succession, supervised by the Mughal Emperors, was for the most part orderly. ... For religious communities in Amer in the late sixteenth and most of the seventeenth century, there was relatively more freedom to experiment and to express their spirituality, a good deal of patronage, and not much need for a high degree of organization.” Hastings, “Poets, Sants, and Warriors,” 66-7. With this in mind, it is striking to note how many of our earliest extant *bhakti* sources—those from the Dādū Panth, the Rāmānandīs, and the Krishnaite communities of Braj—come out of regions of Kacchvāhā (or Mughal-Kacchvāhā) control or influence: the Fatehpur Manuscript (1582) (primarily *Sūrdās pads*); the vast literature of the Dādū Panth, including Jan Gopāl’s *Janma Līlā*, the *Sarvāṅgīs* of Rajabdas (1620) and Gopāldās (1627), the *Pañc-vāṇī* collections (of the *bhakti* poetry of Dādū, Kabīr, Nāmdev, Raidās, and Hardās) [the earliest manuscript of which dates to 1614], and Rāghavdās’s *Bhaktamāl* (1660); the writings of the early Rāmānandīs including Agradās’s *Dhyān Mañjarī* (and twelve other compositions) [c. 1570-90], Nābhādās’s *Bhaktamāl* (c. 1600), and Anantadās’s *parcāīs* (c. 1580-1610); and the works of Nandadās, Harirām Vyās, and others in Braj.

not simply imitate Mughal court culture, but played a key role in carving out a Mughal idiom in which Rajputs could articulate an empowered self-identity closely associated with Vaiṣṇava *bhakti*. Allison Busch has highlighted the fact that, “Courtliness in India was in part an imitative behavior, which is to say that courts responded to what other courts were doing, particularly those that were higher in status.”¹³¹ This is certainly the case when we look at the Kacchvāhās, whose rise to wealth and power under Mughal rule made their behavior a model to be emulated by other regional Hindu rulers. The implications this had for the growth of devotional Vaiṣṇavism were significant. To take just one example, let us look to the city of Orchha in the late sixteenth century, where the Bundelā ruler Madhukar Shah seems to have severed his kingdom’s affiliation with tantric goddess worship and adopted Vaiṣṇava *bhakti*. As Heidi Pauwels explains, Madhukar’s decision “may well have represented a desire to partake in a new prestigious form of religion. Bhakti had become associated with other successful Rajput rulers in Rajasthan, such as Mān Singh Kacchvāhā, and thus may have been perceived as setting a trend for the socially and politically upwardly mobile elsewhere, like Madhukar in Orchha.”¹³² Again stressing the Vaiṣṇava-*bhakti*-linked model of success that the Kacchvāhās had become, Pauwels goes on to say that “Madhukar’s bhakti could ... be viewed as a way of carving out a different, more progressive identity for himself,” one “inspired by the success of other upwardly mobile Rajputs, in particular the Kacchvahas. Indeed, Madhukar’s case illustrates how bhakti could, among other things, be used by local warlords with high aspirations to strengthen their claims and legitimate their positions.”¹³³

¹³¹ Allison Busch, *Poetry of Kings: The Classical Hindi Literature of Mughal India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 167.

¹³² Pauwels, “The Saint, the Warlord, and the Emperor,” 210-211.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 223.

In focusing on the Kacchvāhās, my intention has not been to reduce all the complex array of social and historical forces that engendered the *bhakti* movement in north India to functions of Kacchvāhā influence, but rather simply to highlight the particularly important role played by this Rajput clan as a way to understanding a larger historical context in which new forms of courtliness and statehood initiated under the Mughal emperor Akbar allowed for the emergence of a *bhakti*-centered model for the expression of Rajput/Hindu virtue and power. Having now gained a general understanding of the Mughal-Rajput socio-political context in which *bhakti* rose to prominence, in the next chapter we turn to a study of the early Rāmānandī *bhakti* community at Galta. Tied to the Kacchvāhās seemingly from the beginning, the early Galta Rāmānandīs offer a number of key insights into the nature of early modern *bhakti* and its changing relationship with tantric religious traditions.

Chapter Two

Two Hanumāns in One: *Bhakti* Identity among the Early Rāmānandīs of Galta

As you make your way on the winding stone path leading down the mountainside away from Jaipur and into the narrow valley that cradles the five-hundred year-old Vaiṣṇava monastic community of Galta-jī, you will pass a small and rather curious shrine dedicated to none other than the tantric god Bhairava, that is, Śiva in his most terrifying, violent and transgressive form.¹³⁴ This tiny shrine, the Albelā Bhairav Bābā Temple, houses an ancient natural image of Bhairava—a large smooth stone, now covered in orange paint. If Bhairava’s presence at the entry to the Vaiṣṇava stronghold of Galta does not itself raise eyebrows, when the temple priest describes the unique characteristics of this particular Bhairava, your interest will surely be piqued. While it is not uncommon to worship Bhairava with alcohol or animal sacrifice, this image would never allow its purity to be sullied with such things and instead receives a daily offering of *tulsi*, the sacred basil plant linked specifically to Vishnu. Skulls, snakes, fearsome weapons and the other staples of Bhairava’s iconography are nowhere to be seen, for this Bhairava is vegetarian, supremely peaceful, and known most especially as the friend, partner, and devotee-protector of the monkey-god Hanumān.¹³⁵ As we will see in the

¹³⁴ Bhairava Śiva is typically represented as a fearsome ascetic, standing nearly naked with gaping fanged mouth, eyes filled with rage, and disheveled matted dreadlocks. He wears a garland of skulls, and live serpents coil around his arms and ankles. Accompanied by a dog, Bhairava holds a skull, a trident, a sword, and a noose. He is associated especially with a myth in which Śiva cuts off one of Brahmā’s heads (with the nail of his thumb!) in order to punish Brahmā for his arrogance. Having committed the sin of killing a brahmin, Śiva as Bhairava is condemned to wander about, begging for alms and carrying Brahmā’s skull, which remains attached to the palm of his hand until he finally expiates his sin.

¹³⁵ While the “Vaiṣṇavization” of Bhairava at this small shrine is striking and unusual, there are good reasons for finding Hanumān and Bhairava just on the outskirts of the Galta community. As Philip Lutgendorf explains, “In many rural areas, Hanuman has long been worshiped as a protective deity who polices the boundaries of human habitation against the incursions of malevolent spiritual forces—a role he sometimes shares with other gods,

pages below, in many ways this “Vaiṣṇavized” Bhairava *mūrti* supplies a fitting introduction to Galta, the site of a Rāmānandī community that played a major role in the *bhakti* movement’s domestication, devotionalization and, in numerous instances, supplanting of tantric Śaiva and Śākta traditions. Indeed, this curious Bhairava shrine may offer us insights into the Rāmānandī community begun by Krishnadās Payahārī in the early sixteenth century, a community that exalted Vaiṣṇava devotion above all else, but one that, while opposing and competing against the Nāth *yogīs*, at the same time maintained close links—seen especially in the mediating figure of Hanumān—with certain aspects of the practice and lifestyle of these Śaiva tantric ascetics.

This chapter, then, focuses on the Rāmānandī *sampradāy* (sect/community), particularly the lineage of Krishnadās Payahārī at Galta outside modern-day Jaipur, in order to analyze several developments that were characteristic of the early modern north Indian religious sphere. As a “*bhakti* movement” spread across Mughal India, a major expansion and blossoming of Vaiṣṇava devotional forms occurred, in many places at the expense of Śaiva-Śākta religion, a phenomenon that took place at the level of both royal patronage and popular practice. Linked to this trend of “Vaiṣṇavization” was an increasingly noticeable confrontation between the perspective of tantric-yogic asceticism and that of selfless devotion to a personal God. In the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, while yoga and asceticism remained crucial dimensions of the devotional life for many, a number of other *bhaktas* began to conceive their religious behavior as quite apart from that of *yogīs*, ascetics, and, most especially, *tāntrikas*. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with the growth of

notably Bhairava, his fellow club-wielding avatara of Rudra/Shiva. Both deities are often found on the outskirts of villages in Rajasthan.” Philip Lutgendorf, *Hanuman’s Tale: The Messages of a Divine Monkey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 238-39.

sedentary *bhakti* communities focused on monastery and temple life and the production of written literature, this trajectory only continued and intensified.

Our aim in this chapter and the next is to contextualize and describe the initial emergence of a new, early modern *bhakti* identity and to improve our understanding of the relationships between *bhakti*, tantric religiosity, and yoga in north India during this period. We will deconstruct and reconstruct categories of *bhakta*, *tāntrika*, and *yogī*, shifting their boundaries and shedding light on their areas of overlap and interaction as well as their key points of tension and difference. This chapter seeks answers to a few more concrete questions, deceptively simple in appearance: Who were the early Rāmānandīs? What was the nature of the *bhakti* they practiced? And what was their relationship with tantric ascetics like the Nāth *yogīs*? I address these questions through an examination of the early Rāmānandī community at Galta and its historical roots, thereby laying the critical groundwork for a discussion of the initial emergence of a new, self-conscious *bhakti* identity defined in significant part against tantric *yogīs*.

We begin this chapter by examining the remembered life of Payahārī, particularly his relations with the Nāth *yogīs*, in order to demonstrate Vaiṣṇavism's confrontation with and, in many instances, supplanting of Śaivism and Śāktism in north India, while also providing perspective on the *bhakti* movement's complex relationship with the separate but interrelated traditions of Tantra and Yoga. The next section demonstrates how, in hagiographical descriptions of Payahārī, Kīlhadev, Agradās and their disciples, we see clear evidence of the existence of two different but related *bhakti* paths among the Rāmānandīs, one more yogic and *tapas*-oriented, the other more devotional, literary, and *rasa*-oriented. This will lead us into a critical discussion of the scholarly category of *bhakti* in which we consider how the case of the

early Rāmānandī *bhaktas* suggests revisions to our modern-day conceptions of the term. After exploring the historical roots and heritage of the Rāmānandīs at Galta, we conclude the chapter with a look at how the figure of Hanumān helps us better understand the character of the early Rāmānandī community.

~ Payahārī and Tārānāth at Galta ~

A tale from sixteenth century Rajasthan sets the stage for our examination of Vaiṣṇava *bhakti*'s early modern confrontation with Śaiva-Śākta religion. The story begins in Amer with the Kacchvāhā ruler Mahārāj Pṛthvīrāj (r. 1503-1527).¹³⁶ Pṛthvīrāj seems to have initially been a follower and patron of the Nāth yogīs. He is said to have been a disciple of the Nāth yogī Tārānāth,¹³⁷ who resided in the strategic location of Galta. Tucked away in a narrow valley in

¹³⁶ The version of the legend that follows was related to me by several different *sādhūs* during personal visits to Galta in 2007-08 and has been confirmed and slightly supplemented with accounts from several Hindi sources, including an 1889 CE account by Sukhsāraṇ and the account given by Rūpkaḷā in his early-twentieth century commentary on Nābhādās's *Bhaktamāl*. See Sant Sukhsāraṇjī, *Nāmprīt-Bhagatmālā* (Jodhpur: Rajasthani Shodh Saṁsthān, 2000) and Nābhājī, *Śrī Bhaktamāl, with the Bhaktīrasabodhini Commentary of Prīya Dās: Exposition in Modern Hindi* by Sītārāmsāraṇ Bhagavānprasād Rūpkaḷā (Lucknow: Tejkumar Book Depot Limited, 2009), 305. For another scholarly narration of this popular story, see William Pinch, *Warrior Ascetics and Indian Empires* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 18-19.

¹³⁷ Several scholars identify Pṛthvīrāj's Nāth guru as Caturānāth, rather than Tārānāth. See Madhukāntā Śarmā and Govind Shaṅkar Śarmā, "Rāmānand Sampradāy and Rājasthān," in *Religious Movements in Rajasthan: Ideas and Antiquities*, ed. S.N. Dube (Jaipur: Centre for Rajasthan Studies, Rajasthan University, 1996), 230; as well as Motīlāl Menāriyā, *Rājasthān kā Pingal Sāhitya* (Jodhpur: Rājasthānī Granthāgār, 2006), 49. Both G.S. Ghurye and G.N. Bahura state that this Caturānāth was in fact the disciple of Tārānāth, but supply no evidence. See G.S. Ghurye, *Indian Sadhus* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1964), 166; Gopal Narayan Bahura, *Literary Heritage of the Rulers of Amber and Jaipur* (City Palace, Jaipur: Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum, 1976), 25. On the ethnographic side of the issue, it is interesting to note that while today at Galta, Payahārī's Nāth competitor is always remembered as Tārānāth, the situation is quite different in the small village behind Āmer palace, where, somewhat hidden, stands the *samādhi* of Caturānāth. The people there report that it was this Caturānāth who was the guru of Pṛthvīrāj and that after he was defeated at Galta by Payahārī he came there to Āmer village to die and be buried. Bahura seems to find a compromise position, stating that Pṛthvīrāj's guru was Tārānāth, but that the king also interacted with Tārānāth's disciple, Caturānāth. He writes that it was Tārānāth who was defeated by Payahārī (not in magical competition, but in theological debate) and that afterwards Tārānāth left the area altogether while his disciple Caturānāth then shifted from Galta to Āmer village (Bahura, *Literary Heritage*, 25). In order to find the *samādhi* of Tārānāth, one must venture behind Mānsāgar Dam, where tucked away behind the Saṅkaṭ Mochan Hanumān jī Mandir sits the Śrī Mahādev Nāth temple complex. This place houses not only Tārānāth's *samādhi*, but also that of

the (once) densely forested hills just outside present-day Jaipur, a hot and arid region not far from Rajasthan's Thar Desert, Galta offered not only privacy, protection, and scenic beauty, but also a natural source of fresh running water in the form of an underground spring. According to legend, this natural spring is none other than the holy Gaṅgā (Ganges River) herself come down from the heavens in response to the great *tapas* and devotion of the legendary ṛṣi Gālav, the namesake and ancient mythical inhabitant of Galta. Tradition has it that one of Pṛthvīrāj's queens, Bālānbāī, was a disciple of a Rāmānandī guru by the name of Krishnadās Payahārī,¹³⁸ but faced constant pressure from her husband, the king, to abandon her guru and become a disciple of Tārānāth. When Bālānbāī reported this situation to her guru, Krishnadās Payahārī immediately made his way to Galta where he chose a spot, sat down and began meditating.¹³⁹ Noticing the stranger in their midst, some of the Nāth yogīs approached Payahārī, challenged his presence there, and demanded that he leave. Payahārī stood up, wrapped his *dhūnī* (an ascetic's sacred fire) in a bundle of clothing, and moved to another place nearby where he set the still-burning fire on the ground and sat back down. Miraculously, the clothes in which he had wrapped the *dhūnī* did not catch fire. Seeing this, the Nāths realized that Payahārī possessed great power and went directly to their guru, Tārānāth, to tell him about the visitor. In the confrontation that ensued, Tārānāth, using his yogic powers, took the form of a tiger and began growling ferociously in the direction of

one Rūpanāth, a.k.a. Rūpa Singh, son of Pṛthvīrāj, who is said to have become a Nāth yogī. Special thanks goes to Véronique Bouillier for first making me aware of both of the above Jaipur-area Nāth sites and their traditions.

¹³⁸ According to our earliest sources, both Nābhādās's *Bhaktamāl* and Anantadās's *Pīpā-paracāī*, Krishnadās Payahārī was a disciple of Anantānand, who was a disciple of none other than Rāmānand himself. Anantānand is to be clearly distinguished from Anantadās, the later author of various *bhakti paracāīs*, including the *Pīpā-paracāī* to which I just referred.

¹³⁹ Most oral traditions I have encountered say that Payahārī came to Galta from the great Rajasthani *tīrtha* of Pushkar, where for some time he had been engaged in severe asceticism.

Payahārī, seeking to frighten him away. Unperturbed, Payahārī began to feed the tiger the flesh of his very own leg, but unsatisfied, the fearsome beast inched closer and continued to roar, seemingly intent on killing and eating Payahārī. Several more times Payahārī offered up his own flesh, but each time the tiger devoured it and continued growling and moving closer.¹⁴⁰ Finally, with the tiger about to pounce upon him, Payahārī exclaimed, “What a jackass (*gadhā*) you are!”¹⁴¹ At the precise moment he said these words, Tārānāth was transformed from a tiger into a donkey and his *kānpḥaṭa* earrings (*mudrā*) fell out of his ears onto the ground in front of Payahārī.¹⁴² Having sent the cowardly donkey off into the surrounding forest, Payahārī entered a nearby cave and began to meditate.

It was Mahārāj Pṛthvīrāj’s habit that he would not eat before taking *darśan* of his guru, Tārānāth. Searching for him at Galta, Pṛthvīrāj came upon Payahārī in his cave and inquired as

¹⁴⁰ Some Hindi scholars discuss Payahārī’s feeding of the tiger from the flesh of his own leg as a separate incident from the encounter with Tārānāth, one intended to show the extent of his self-effacing generosity and hospitality to guests. For a version in which Payahārī invites the tiger in as a guest, but because he has no food to give, feeds it the flesh from his own leg, see *Kalyāṇ-Sant-Ank*, 635.

¹⁴¹ In the Indian popular imagination, the donkey (*gadhā*) is known for its constant grazing, seemingly eating all the time and never getting full. Furthermore, like the English “jackass,” the word *gadhā* is also a term of derision for a stupid person, a fool.

¹⁴² Nāth *yogīs* are often called *Kānpḥaṭas* because of their split (*phaṭa*) ears (*kān*) and huge earrings. In the final stage of their initiation ceremony, the guru splits the central hollows/cartilage of both ears with a knife or razor; the slits are plugged with *nīm* wood and, after they have healed, large rings (*mudrā*) are inserted. These earrings are a major symbol of faith and power for Nāths. Some explain that splitting the ears opens a *nadi* (mystic channel) that assists in their acquisition of yogic power (Briggs 1938, 6). This cutting of the ears marks full initiation from the lower rank of “Aughar” and “is said to allow a yogi to bring his senses under control.” Ann Gold and M.N. Nath, *A Carnival of Parting: The Tales of King Bharthari and King Gopi Chand as sung and told by Madhu Natisar Nath of Ghatiyali, Rajasthan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 41. One Nāth *yogī* explained to Dan and Ann Gold that “the [ear] cartilages were the site of a nexus of bodily senses; thus, boring holes through the cartilages would bring the senses under control and give inner peace” and that there was constant tension in wearing the earrings for if they “should ever tear through the ear and fall to the ground” the *yogī* would lose all of his power. Ann Gold and Daniel Gold, “The Fate of the Householder Nath,” *History of Religions* 24:2 (1984): 127. In some versions of the Galta legend, Payahārī causes the earrings of *all* the Nāth *yogīs* at Galta to fall out and gather into a pile before him. James Mallinson notes that while many kinds of ascetics wore earrings, only the Nāths came to be known for wearing them through the cartilages (not the lobes) of their ears; however, Nāths did not adopt this distinctive identity marker until the late eighteenth century. He also notes that the label “Kānpḥaṭa Yogī” is considered derogatory and eschewed by Nāths themselves, who prefer the designation “Darśanī Yogī.” James Mallinson, “Nāth Sampradāya,” in *Brill’s Encyclopedia of Hinduism, Volume III*, ed. Knut A. Jacobsen (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 418-419.

to the whereabouts of his missing guru. Payahārī said to the king, “Your guru has become a donkey and is out grazing grass,” and explained what had happened. Incredulous at first, when Pṛthvīrāj saw his guru’s earrings lying on the ground, he realized that Payahārī was speaking the truth. Putting the dust of Payahārī’s feet on his forehead, he bowed before him, saying “Prabhu, forgive my guru’s crime. Restore him to his earlier form!” Payahārī replied, “I will make him human again, but only on these two conditions: that the Nāths must leave this place and go somewhere else, and that every day they must bring me wood so I can keep my *dhūnī* continuously burning.” Once Tārānāth had been restored to his human form, both he and the king accepted Payahārī’s conditions. Mahārāj Pṛthvīrāj became Payahārī’s disciple and Galta thereafter became an important Rāmānandī center.¹⁴³

Regardless of the historical fact or fiction of the confrontation between Payahārī and Tārānāth, this story reflects a change of genuine historical significance in the early sixteenth century. At that time the *bhakti* community that would come to be known as the Rāmānandīs defeated the Nāths at Galta, whether through debate¹⁴⁴ or physical force, and took control of that strategic location. Moreover, Mahārāj Pṛthvīrāj and the Kacchvāhās shifted their patronage and allegiance from the Nāth *yogīs* to Krishnadās Payahārī and the Rāmānandī *bhaktas*. Pṛthvīrāj adopted the two images that Payahārī had brought with him to Galta—Nṛsiṃha and Sītārām (which became the dynastic deity of the Kacchvāhās)—and installed

¹⁴³ Still today one can visit the cave in Galta to see Payahārī’s continuously burning *dhūnī* and the place where he is said to have meditated and performed *tapas*.

¹⁴⁴ G.N. Bahura, for instance, writes that Tārānāth “had a discussion with Kṛṣṇadāsa Payohārī to preach the supremacy of his sect but was ultimately defeated by the Rāmānandī sage” and then left Galta. Bahura, *Literary Heritage*, 25. Similarly, Motīlāl Menāriyā states that Payahārī defeated Pṛthvīrāj’s Nāth guru (whom he identifies as Caturānāth, not Tārānāth) in *śāstrārth*, i.e., doctrinal debate, and thus obtained the *gaddī* of Galta. Menāriyā, *Rājasthān kā Pingal Sāhitya*, 49.

them both in Amer,¹⁴⁵ thus inaugurating a period of over three-hundred years in which the Kacchvāhās would remain closely affiliated with Vaiṣṇava *bhakti*. Nābhādās's *Bhaktamāl* (c. 1600 CE) corroborates this picture of Pṛthvīrāj, extolling him as a great patron of Vaiṣṇavas.¹⁴⁶

* * *

This early sixteenth-century episode in Galta is indicative of the beginning of an important broader trend in north India. It points toward the expanding sphere of Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* religiosity and its historical confrontation with, and gradual social and political marginalization of, the sphere of Śaiva tantric asceticism and magic represented most prominently by the ubiquitous Nāth *yogīs*. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries references to the Nāths—or, more accurately, to an amorphous group of *yogīs* who would later come to be known as Nāths, but were not yet called by that name—began to appear in a wide array of Indian literary sources attesting that they had come to possess real social influence.¹⁴⁷ These proto-Nāth *yogīs* had roots especially in an unorthodox and non-institutional stream of the tantric Śaivism that had been India's pre-eminent religious form since the sixth century.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ Monika Horstmann, "The Rāmānandīs of Galta (Jaipur, Rajasthan)," in *Multiple Histories: Culture and Society in the Study of Rajasthan*, ed. Lawrence Babb et al. (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2002), 145-46.

¹⁴⁶ *Chappay* 116. Nābhājī, *Śrī Bhaktamāl* [Rūpkaḷā edition], 724.

¹⁴⁷ While their social influence is beyond doubt, that the Nāths exercised widespread or significant *political* influence is a matter of debate, with scholars such as David White and Véronique Bouillier arguing that they did, while scholars such as James Mallinson point out that the reliable historical evidence we have at hand speaks to only a few isolated incidents of Nāths exercising political power in Rajasthan and the Himalayas. Dateable evidence aside, a host of oral traditions in Rajasthan, Nepal, and Kullu suggest—at least in memory, and at least in these specific areas—a close relationship between *yogīs* and kings.

¹⁴⁸ As we have seen, tantric Śaivism, closely intertwined with Śāktism, was the dominant religion (and religio-political paradigm) of India from roughly the sixth to thirteenth century, though tantric forms of Buddhism, Vaiṣṇavism and Jainism—each drawing on Śaiva models—were also prevalent. The disparate proto-Nāth *yogī* lineages emerging from the thirteenth century on, as we will explore in more detail, all seem to have had common links to the Kaula tradition of tantric Śaiva-Śākta *sādhakas* and the tradition of the *siddhas*, semi-divine humans known for their antinomian behavior and mastery of esoteric methods which gained them immortality and wondrous supernormal powers.

Complementing the role of orthodox tantric priests in temples and palaces, *siddhas* and tantric *yogīs* of the early medieval period were experts in magic and bodily power who frequented both cemeteries and royal courts, acting as village healers and shamans while also serving as the agents, counselors, and bards of kings.¹⁴⁹ Heirs to this tradition of heterodox, non-sectarian *siddhas* and *yogīs*, and with close links to the tantric tradition of Kaula Śaivism as well, the proto-Nāths seem to have first come to prominence in about the thirteenth century, especially in the Deccan region. In the wake of the changes brought on by Muslim invasion, they developed an influential presence throughout much of the subcontinent, not as an organized, coherent “Nāth” community but as disparate *yogī* lineages following different local traditions. With Muslim rule spreading, institutional forms of tantric religion dying out, and other forms of the tantric tradition retreating into esoteric, (often “brahminized”) private cults that were otherworldly in focus, the proto-Nāth *yogīs* emerged as leading providers of a path offering real, pragmatic and accessible power in the world. Thus, as David Gordon White reiterates, “For the masses, as well as for kings whose concerns were often more this-worldly than those of Brahman metaphysicians, the Nāths and many of their fellow Siddhas became the supernatural power brokers” of the day.¹⁵⁰ However, as we move into the sixteenth century and the early modern period, the role of the proto-Nāth *yogīs* was being challenged, for the Hindu religious world of north India was changing in major ways with the emergence of Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* communities like the Rāmānandīs.

¹⁴⁹ Ronald Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 234.

¹⁵⁰ David Gordon White, *The Alchemical Body: Siddha Traditions in Medieval India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 7.

The Payahārī legend at Galta can be understood to mark the historical emergence of an increasingly close relationship between *bhakti* communities and royal power, showing a shift in state opinion about what form of religion was considered most socio-politically advantageous to support and patronize. For many Hindu rulers in north India, in the changed circumstances of the sixteenth century, tantric models and legitimations of kingship—with the niches and opportunities they had created for both orthodox Śaiva-Śākta brahmins and nonorthodox *siddhas* and *yogīs*—no longer promised the political dividends they once had. As we saw in detail in Chapter One, from the instrumental perspective of the state, patronage of *bhakti* was starting to make more and more sense.¹⁵¹ While in an earlier period, tantric magicians and *yogīs* may have been key advisors to and agents of Hindu kings, with “the *bhakti* movement” in north India and, linked to it, the socio-political changes brought on by the Delhi Sultanate and, even more so, the Mughal empire, it was the Vaiṣṇava gods Krishna and Rām—and devotion to them—that came to be considered most powerful in realizing the this-worldly goals of the Hindu king and state.¹⁵² In the historical memory of the Indian people, it seems that these shifts in the religio-political landscape were catalyzed especially by the efforts of charismatic devotee-saints like Krishnadās Payahārī and those in his Rāmānandī lineage.

¹⁵¹ See Pinch, *Warrior Ascetics*, 20.

¹⁵² A piece of early-nineteenth century Nāth-related history, at first glance, might seem to challenge the points above. Mahārāja Mān Singh (r. 1803-1842) of Marwar in western Rajasthan obtained the Jodhpur throne with the help of a Nāth *yogī*, Ayas Dev Nāth, and thereafter resolved to rule Marwar in accordance with the advice of the Nāths, who consequently enjoyed nearly forty years of unprecedented wealth and power in his kingdom. While the incident certainly shows that the Nāths were still a vital religious community at the end of the early modern period in north India, all in all Mahārāja Mān Singh’s story seems something of a “last hoorah” for the Nāths, the very uniqueness of it in the post-1500 history of north India making it the exception that proves the rule that *bhakti* was the new order in the Hindu political world.

~ *Payahārī and Vaiṣṇava Conversions in the Kullu Valley* ~

Interestingly, the story from Galta is not the only time we hear Krishnadās Payahārī's name in connection with a major conversion to Vaiṣṇavism. Local tradition in the Kullu Valley of the lower Himalayan range strongly links Payahārī to Rājā Jagat Singh's conversion from Śaiva-Śākta religion to Rām *bhakti*. Jagat Singh is usually recognised as the most powerful king in the entire history of Kullu and tradition remembers his most remarkable deed as the installation of the *mūrti* of Raghunāthjī (brought from Ayodhya) and the introduction of Vaiṣṇavism in Kullu.¹⁵³ As archaeological evidence makes clear, prior to Jagat Singh's reign, Śaivism was the state religion in Kullu.¹⁵⁴ Hardayal Singh writes that before Jagat Singh, the goddess had been worshipped in Kullu and kings had paid great respect to the Nāth *yogīs*, so much so that they would not take anything for themselves until they had paid a visit to these Śaiva tantric ascetics and offered them homage, food, and gifts.¹⁵⁵ Indeed, local oral tradition has it that Rājā Jagat Singh's guru was initially none other than Tārānāth, the same *yogī* who played a starring role as the loser in the story of the confrontation with Payahārī at Galta.¹⁵⁶ All this changed, however, when Jagat Singh converted to Vaiṣṇavism through the influence of Krishnadās Payahārī. There are several versions of the story, but the core legend is that Jagat Singh, seeking help to absolve himself of a great sin (his Nāth guru's tantric powers having

¹⁵³ Tobdan, *Kullu: A Study in History (From the Earliest to AD 1900)* (Delhi: Book India Publishing Co., 2000), 18. It is said that Jagat Singh inaugurated the annual Dussehra festival, the centerpiece of Kullu's cultural life and one of the largest Dussehra festivals in all of India today. Raghunāth is the chief deity who presides over this major annual event in Kullu.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁵⁵ Part II, Section 38 of Hardayal Singh, *Majmua Tawarikh Riyaste Kohistan-Panjab, Part III, Kullu* (1885); translated in Tobdan, *Kullu*, 83.

¹⁵⁶ Personal conversation with Kamal Kishore Sharma "Kaushik," a Kullu *rājapurohit*, scholar, and family member of the overseers of Raghunāth Mandir (Kullu, July 15, 2011).

proved ineffective in this task), approached Payahārī, who was meditating in a nearby mountain cave. Payahārī advised the king that he should have the image of Raghunāthjī brought from Ayodhya and should abdicate the state to Rām (Raghunāthjī) and thereafter rule the kingdom as merely the agent of the Lord.¹⁵⁷ Legends aside, Tobdan cites two inscriptions, one from 1650 CE and one from 1656 CE, that confirm that Jagat Singh introduced Vaiṣṇavism as the state religion, consigned his kingdom to Rāma, and then acted as a tutelary ruler, as did his successors.¹⁵⁸

Jagat Singh ruled Kullu from 1637 to 1672 CE and thus he surely could not actually have been in contact with Kṛṣṇadās Payahārī, who founded the Vaiṣṇava monastic community at Galta in the early 1500s. Nevertheless, to this day, carefully guarded and worshipped in the

¹⁵⁷ Tobdan gives a more detailed telling that relies upon two different versions of a no longer extant text, the Kullu royal family genealogy, the *Vaṁśāvalī*, that records the history of Kullu and its rulers' lives. For more information on the *Vaṁśāvalī*, see Tobdan, *Kullu*, 5, and J. Hutchinson and J. Ph. Vogel, *History of the Panjab Hill States, Vol. II* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1994), 413-15. Hutchinson and Vogel state that while parts of the *Vaṁśāvalī* are very open to suspicion, the section dealing with the Singh or Badani dynasty in Kullu, beginning circa 1500 CE, "is corroborated by copper-plate deeds and inscriptions, as well as references in the Tibetan records, Mughal histories, and the *Vansavalis* of neighboring Hill States" (415). Tobdan's account is as follows: "A *brahmin* named Durgadatt resided in Pirdi village. Once his relations, bearing grudge against him made a false complaint to the Raja that he owned one *patha* of pearls. The Raja ordered the Brahmin to produce it before him, but the poor Brahmin plainly denied having any pearls. But when the Raja's men pressed him too hard, he submitted to the orders and promised to do so on the return of the Raja from his pilgrimage to Manikaran. On Raja's return journey, when the Brahmin saw him approaching the village, he shut the members of his family in a room, and put the house on fire. He himself took a sharp knife and then cutting flesh from his body piece by piece, threw it into the fire chanting the words: "Take, O Raja, take this pearl!", with each piece. Eventually the Brahmin pushed his own residual body into the blazing fire, turning it into ashes. When the Raja was back in his palace from Manikaran, he was amazed to see worms in his meal in place of rice, and red blood in place of water. He became frightened at the ghastly sight. The Brahmin's murder was the root cause. The Raja searched for ways and means of exonerating himself. At that time Kishan Dass Pedhar [Kṛṣṇadās Payahārī], a *vairagi* (saint), a renowned pious man, lived in village Brahmin in Kothi Naggar. The saint advised the king to arrange to bring the image of Raghunathji from Ayodhya, assign the rule of Kullu to Raghunathji and adopt Vaishnavism as state religion. The pious act will absolve the king of all his sins. The *raja* agreed and executed the advice fully. Damodar Dass, a pupil of the *Vairagi*, took upon himself the responsibility of the holy task. The *Vamsavali* gives the details as to how the image was brought to Kullu. The king abdicated the rule of the kingdom to Raghunathji and he himself became a tutelary ruler and his successors followed him" (51-52). It is interesting to note that while Nābhādās does not list a Damodardās as a disciple of Payahārī, the hagiographer Rāghavdās, in his *Bhaktamāl* of 1660 CE (*chappay* 158), mentions a Damodardās as a disciple of Kīlha, Payahārī's disciple.

¹⁵⁸ Tobdan, *Kullu*, 52.

royal palace at Kullu are footwear and a tattered garment allegedly belonging to Payahārī.¹⁵⁹ Furthermore, not far from Kullu, in the mountain village of Jhiri, just a couple kilometers outside of Naggar, is the cave where Payahārī is said to have resided as well as a temple dedicated to him that also claims to have some of his earthly possessions in its safekeeping. Despite the chronological impossibility of Payahārī and Jagat Singh meeting, the tradition linking these two figures is clearly strong, and it is not merely local. In fact, it was significant enough that Priyādās, dwelling in Vrindavan, included a story about Payahārī and the Kullu king in his *Bhaktirasabodhinī* (1712 CE) a commentary on Nābhādās's *Bhaktamāl*.¹⁶⁰ In commenting on Nābhādās's verses about Payahārī, Priyādās writes that the rājā of Kullu was witness to the fact that Payahārī never asked for anything in return from those he blessed ("those whose head Payahārī put his hands upon, he never spread his hands beneath theirs"). According to Priyādās, the king came to take Payahārī's *darśan* in a mountain cave and Payahārī filled him with such *bhakti* that his only desire was to do service to Hari and the saints.¹⁶¹ In fact, the king's devotion was so strong that when his own son mistakenly ate a

¹⁵⁹ Personal conversation with Danvender Singh, priest in Kullu's Raghunāth Temple (Kullu, July 15, 2011).

¹⁶⁰ Kavitt 199-120. Nābhājī, *Śrī Bhaktamāl*, with the *Bhaktirasabodhini commentary of Prīya Dās*, 303-304.

¹⁶¹ In their commentary on Priyādās's verses, Gaṇeśdās Bhaktamālī and Rāmāyanī Śrīrameśvardās offer a far more detailed, alternate version—presumably based on some oral tradition—of this mountain encounter between Payahārī and the Kullu king. In their telling, Payahārī settled down in a mountain cave in the Kullu valley, unbeknownst to the people living in the area. A local cowherd noticed that his cow kept disappearing each day and then returning. The cow was in fact visiting Payahārī's cave and giving him milk to live on each day, a miraculous gift from God for the saint's great *tapas* and devotion. One day the cowherd decided to follow the cow. He ended up at Payahārī's cave and was astonished to find the saint there. Taking his *darśan*, he knelt down at Payahārī's feet and thanked God for the blessing of meeting him. Impressed with his devotion, Payahārī offered to give the cowherd a boon. The man, however, steadfastly refused Payahārī's repeated offer of a gift, saying that he did not need anything and only wanted to serve him. Finally, when Payahārī persisted in his request, the cowherd asked that Payahārī help the king of Kullu get his kingdom back, as it had been taken from him, causing much sorrow to all. The cowherd brought the king to the cave where he prostrated himself before Payahārī. Pleased, Payahārī blessed the king and told him to climb to the top of the mountain and to look out in all four directions. He would defeat his enemies, Payahārī assured the king, and as far as he could see from the mountaintop, that land would become his kingdom. The king attacked his enemies and things occurred just as Payahārī had promised. Once the kingdom was back in his hands, the Kullu rājā returned to see Payahārī who

sweet that was to be offered to God, he took up his sword to kill the boy and those around had to rush to his rescue. Priyādās explains that this young Kullu prince later became a great devotee unequalled in the honor of the saints. Precisely how and why Payahārī was linked to a king in mid-seventeenth century Kullu—a place and time quite removed from his early-sixteenth century community in eastern Rajasthan—is something of a mystery, but this connection suggests a powerful and pervasive collective memory of Payahārī as a charismatic figure pivotal in effecting Vaiṣṇava *bhakti*'s supplanting of Śaivism and Śāktism in early modern north India.¹⁶²

~ *Vaiṣṇava-Nāth Encounters in Panjab* ~

The memory of Krishnadās Payahārī's influence as a Vaiṣṇava saint and missionary is one that extends even beyond Galta and the Kullu Valley. A fascinating tale links Payahārī, through his supposed disciple Bhagvān-jī, to the defeat of Nāth yogīs in the hills of Panjab and to the subsequent spread of Vaiṣṇavism in that area. According to the tradition of Piṇḍorī Dhām, a major Rāmānandī center in the Gurdaspur district of the Panjab, the young Bhagvān-jī met Krishnadās Payahārī at Galta while traveling on pilgrimage. Payahārī is said to have

then ordered him to serve the saints and devote himself to Bhagvān. From that point onward the king intently worshipped Hari and the saints. See Nābhājī, *Śrī Bhaktamāl. Uttarārḍh Pratham Khaṇḍ, Śrī Priyādāsī kṛta Kavittamayī Bhaktiras-bodhinī ṭīkā sahit. Bhāṣāṭīkāṅkār Gaṇeśdās Bhaktamālī and Vyākhyākār Rāmāyaṇī Śrīrameśvardās* (Vṛndāvan: Śrīrāmānand Pustakālay, Sudāmā Kuṭī, 2008), 138-39.

¹⁶² Another, separate story links Krishnadās Payahārī to Kullu, a tale that seems meant to explain the presence/influx of married Vaiṣṇava ascetics (*vairāgīs*) in the Kullu valley beginning in the mid-seventeenth century. Apparently, Rāmānandīs today tell a legend about Payahārī visiting Kullu with a group of four hundred celibate ascetics. When the king asked how he could serve them, Payahārī requested *lakḍī*, wood, for his men; however, the king instead came the next day with four hundred *laḍkīs*, girls. Payahārī's ascetics married the girls, thus founding the *vairāgī* castes of the Kullu valley, but he refused to do so himself, vanishing into a cave near Naggar from which some locals still today await his emergence. Personal email communication from James Mallinson; November 23, 2010.

converted him to Vaiṣṇavism and made him his disciple.¹⁶³ Goswamy and Grewal suggest that, “it was probably with an eye on spreading the doctrine of Vaishnavism to the Punjab Hills which then owed almost exclusive allegiance to Shaivism or Shaktism that Shri Krishnadas Payahari induced Bhagwanji to make the district of Gurdaspur as the base of his activity.”¹⁶⁴ Indeed, the Pindori *gaddī* founded by Bhagvān-jī seems to have served just this historical role, for evidence shows that he and his successors at Pindori and its offshoots successfully spread the Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* message in the previously Śaiva-Śākta dominated Panjabi hills, winning the allegiance of numerous hill chiefs, including the rulers of the states of Nurpur, Guler, Chamba, Jaswan, Mankot, Bandralta, and Jammu.¹⁶⁵

According to tradition, after being initiated by Payahārī, Bhagvān-jī returned to the Panjabi hills where he encountered a group of Nāth *yogīs* residing in the dense forests of Pindori near the Beas River. Defeating them in a battle of miraculous powers, Bhagvān-jī forced the *yogīs* to flee the site where he then established the Rāmānandī community that stands there still today as one of the fifty-two Vaiṣṇava *dvārās* (“gateways” to the Lord; i.e., recognized initiatory centers/lineages).¹⁶⁶ Not only is Bhagvān-jī remembered as the disciple of Payahārī in these tales, but the story itself also bears striking similarities to Payahārī’s own legend in Galta. As in that episode, there is here a “miracle battle” with Nāth *yogīs* in which

¹⁶³ Prītam Jyāī, *Darbār Śrī Piṇḍorī Dhām kā Saṃkṣipt Itihās* (Gurdāspur, Panjāb: Darbār Śrī Piṇḍorī Dhām, 1968), 17.

¹⁶⁴ B.N. Goswamy and J.S. Grewal, *The Mughal and Sikh Rulers and the Vaishnavas of Pindori: A Historical Interpretation of 52 Persian Documents* (Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1969), 7.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 7-8. Also, see Karuna Goswamy, “Religion and Art in the Punjab Hills: A Study in Relationship, c. 1600-1850,” in *Five Punjabi Centuries: Polity, Economy, Society and Culture, c. 1500-1900*, ed. Indu Banga (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 1997), 552. In fact, Arik Moran, a scholar researching Vaiṣṇavism in the Kullu Valley, states confidently that Rāmānandī ascetics from Piṇḍorī were present in the Kullu Valley prior to Jagat Singh’s reign, the suggestion being that they may have actually been responsible for Jagat Singh’s conversion (Personal email communication; June 7, 2011).

¹⁶⁶ Jyāī, *Darbār Śrī Piṇḍorī Dhām*, 18; Goswamy and Grewal, *The Mughal and Sikh Rulers*, 1, 6.

the Vaiṣṇava *bhakta* triumphs over the Śaiva *tāntrikas*, forces them to leave, and establishes his *bhakti* community directly on the site where they had been.¹⁶⁷

Nevertheless, for several reasons Bhagvān-jī's link to Payahārī seems historically implausible. First and foremost, Nābhādās's *Bhaktamāl* does not list Bhagvān-jī as a disciple of Krishnadās Payahārī. Furthermore, there is the problem of dates. Bhagvān-jī's exact dates are difficult to determine, but can be roughly estimated. According to tradition, he was born in 1493 CE (1550 VS) in Kahnuwan, Panjab, and lived until 1619 CE (1676 VS).¹⁶⁸ One of the most important legends about Bhagvān-jī links him and his main disciple, Nārāyaṇ (fl. 1635-55 CE),¹⁶⁹ to the Mughal emperor Jahāngīr, who ruled from 1605 to 1627 CE. Jahāngīr is said to have often come to the Panjabi hills for sport, and on one occasion he heard about the celebrated *vairāgī* Bhagvān-jī and decided to visit him. Arriving at Pindori, however, he found not

¹⁶⁷ Arik Moran suggests, interestingly, that the narrative pattern of stories such as these from Galta, Kullu, and Piṇḍorī potentially illustrates an historical reality in which a charismatic holy man or miracle-working itinerant ascetic sometimes gained a king's favor, upon which the king provided him (i.e., his sect/community) with royal patronage (often establishing a temple dedicated to the *sādhu*'s or sect's patron deity), and the ascetic settled down and/or was joined by sedentary temple priests who then saw to the extension of their power base in the kingdom. Arik Moran, "Devotional Vaishnavism in the West Himalayas: Ramanandi Bairagis in Kullu, c. 1500-1900," unpublished essay (2011).

¹⁶⁸ Jyāī, *Darbār Śrī Piṇḍorī Dhām*, 4, 11. Ghurye posits that Bhagvān-jī founded Piṇḍorī around 1572 CE. Ghurye, *Indian Sadhus*, 166.

¹⁶⁹ Bhagvān-jī and his chief disciple Nārāyaṇ are said to have been inseparable. They are often depicted together and regularly mentioned in the same breath, Piṇḍorī usually even being referred to as "the *gaddī* of Bhagvān-Nārāyaṇ." Nārāyaṇ-jī (fl. 1635-55 CE) was Bhagvān's successor at Piṇḍorī and we can be far more confident of his dates. Various manuscripts preserved at Bathu, a daughter-shrine of Piṇḍorī located in the former hill state of Guler, proclaim themselves to be records of the teachings of Nārāyaṇ-jī himself, written down in his presence by a disciple named Śyām Gujrātī. These manuscripts, viewed by Goswamy and Grewal, have colophons of 1695 VS (1638 CE), 1700 VS (1643 CE), and 1705 VS (1648 CE), giving us evidence of Nārāyaṇ-jī's probable floruit, 1635-55 CE. Furthermore, one manuscript in the collection clearly records Nārāyaṇ-jī's death as 1716 VS (1659 CE). According to Goswamy and Grewal, the manuscript "must be accurate because this entry mentions several small details which ring authentic and which can only contemporaneously have been recorded." Goswamy & Grewal, *The Mughal and Sikh Rulers*, 11. It is worth noting that among Nārāyaṇ's disciples was a fascinating figure named Bigham Bairagi, who, after taking initiation from Nārāyaṇ-jī sometime in the latter seventeenth century, became a part of the cosmopolitan Persian literary scene, writing an acclaimed *masnavī* which included stories on divine sages, Sufi shaykhs, and *bhakti* saints such as Nāmdev and Bāba Lāl. Francesca Orsini and Stefano Pello briefly discuss this identity-bending, Persian-writing Rāmānandī in their "Bhakti in Persian," a paper presented at the 21st European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies (Bonn, University of Bonn, 26-29 July, 2010).

Bhagvān-jī, but his disciple Nārāyaṇ-jī, who was then undergoing a penance of complete silence and refused to speak to Jahāngīr. Annoyed by Nārāyaṇ-jī's apparent arrogance, the emperor decided to subject him to a test. He administered seven cups of an intoxicant to the ascetic, but miraculously they had no ill effects on him whatsoever. When Bhagvān-jī arrived, he explained Nārāyaṇ's vow of silence to Jahāngīr who was so impressed that he conferred a substantial land grant upon Pindori and later, as an act of reverence, also sponsored the building of Bhagvān-jī's *samādhi*.¹⁷⁰ The veracity of this tradition linking Bhagvān and Nārāyaṇ to Jahāngīr is given support by Jahāngīr's own memoirs, in which he discusses and expresses admiration for a Hindu ascetic (under a vow of silence) in the Panjabi hills whom he had subjected to a severe ordeal.¹⁷¹

While the traditional date for Bhagvān-jī's death (1619 CE) makes good sense in light of his disciple Nārāyaṇ's floruit as well as the evidence linking him to Jahāngīr (r. 1605-27 CE),

¹⁷⁰ According to the *Gazetteer of the Gurdaspur District, 1891-92*, the deed of this grant "is still preserved at the daughter shrine of Damtal and there is no doubt that the tomb and grant were due to the munificence of the Emperor." See Goswamy and Grewal, *The Mughal and Sikh Rulers*, 62, fn. 9, as well as Jyāī, *Darbār Śrī Piṇḍorī Dhām*, 75. Goswamy and Grewal state that, "The prosperity of the *gaddi* may in fact be said to date from then because quite clearly this was only the beginning of the munificent and reverential attitude which was adopted towards the *gaddi* by subsequent rulers. The earlier documents having been lost, and our having to rely mostly upon allusions to them in the surviving documents, it becomes difficult to ascertain the precise nature and extent of the grants conferred upon the *gaddi* by the great Mughal Emperors, but when we get to the eighteenth century, the eminence of the *gaddi* and the consideration due to it are taken for granted by ruler after ruler and official after official in these documents." Goswamy and Grewal, *The Mughal and Sikh Rulers*, 9-10.

¹⁷¹ *The Jahangirnama: Memoirs of Jahangir, Emperor of India*, trans. Wheeler M. Thackston (New York: Oxford University Press in association with the Freer Gallery of Art and the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, 1999), 375-76. Jahāngīr writes: "At this time it was reported that a *sanyasi moni* lived in the vicinity, and he had totally given up all voluntary motion. I ordered him brought to me so that I could investigate. Hindu ascetics and hermits are called *sarbnysasi*, which means abandoning everything. With constant use the word has become *sanyasi*. There are many degrees among them and several groups with the rank of *sanyasi*. One of them is the *moni*, who give up personal decision and surrender themselves. They absolutely do not let their tongues speak, and if they stand for ten days and nights in the same place they don't even move their feet backwards or forwards. In general they make no voluntary movement and are like inanimate objects. When they brought him into my presence, an investigation was made. An amazing rigidity could be seen in him. It occurred to me that in a state of drunkenness or unconsciousness some external movement might happen. He was therefore given several bowls of double-distilled spirits to drink. He was in such control of himself that he didn't even change an iota and stood just as rigidly as before until he lost consciousness and was carried away like a corpse. God was merciful that no mortal injury was done to him. He certainly had a strange, powerful rigidity of its kind."

Bhagvān's birth date (1493 CE) seems excessively early, giving him a suspiciously long lifespan of 126 years. It seems likely that this date was at some point invented in order to connect him to the prestige and charisma of the famed Vaiṣṇava missionary saint Krishnadās Payāhārī. As mentioned earlier, Nābhādās does not list Bhagvān as a disciple of Payahārī; however, he does list a figure named Bhagvān as one of the disciples of Agradās, the direct disciple of Payahārī (and Nābhā's own guru). While Pindori tradition is firm in claiming Payahārī as Bhagvān-jī's guru, in a number of Rāmānandī written sources and at all of the Rāmānandī sites I have visited in Rajasthan, Bhagvān-jī, the founder of Piṇḍorī Dhām, is always remembered as Agradās's disciple, a scenario that fits far better with all of our available evidence.

Before turning our attention away from Bhagvān-jī, we must note one more crucial feature of the traditions about his life. While we have discussed how Bhagvān-jī defeated a group of Nāth yogīs residing at Pindori in order to establish the Rāmānandī center there, the full story of Bhagvān and the Pindori community suggests a much closer and more complex relationship between the Nāths and the Rāmānandī Vaiṣṇava ascetics. Bhagvān-jī's birth is in fact attributed to a blessing given to his elderly father Totārām by none other than Tārānāth, the very same Nāth yogī said to have battled Payahārī in Galta.¹⁷² In fact, Richard Burghart states that it was Tārānāth who led the group of Nāth yogīs that Bhagvān-jī defeated at Pindori, the implication seemingly being that after his defeat at the hands of Payahārī at Galta, Tārānāth shifted locations to Pindori, only to then be ousted once again, this time by Payahārī's supposed disciple.¹⁷³ This is of course extremely unlikely; however, historical factuality is rather irrelevant here, for what is noteworthy is the very existence of so many

¹⁷² Goswamy and Grewal, *The Mughal and Sikh Rulers*, 5.

¹⁷³ Richard Burghart, "The Founding of the Ramanandi Sect," *Ethnohistory* 25/2 (1978): 127.

collective memories linking these Rāmānandī and Nāth figures together in such interesting, intersecting and overlapping ways.

Even if Tārānāth later became Bhagvān-jī's enemy, Vaiṣṇava tradition in the Panjabi hills firmly maintains that it was this particular Nāth *yogī* who helped bring about Bhagvān's birth and even named him.¹⁷⁴ This connection with the Nāths lingers on in a variety of ways. For one, we should note that Bhagvān-jī's other main disciple, in fact his senior-most disciple, Maheśdās, was actually a Nāth *yogī* who was known as Maheśnāth before being converted to Vaiṣṇavism by Bhagvān-jī.¹⁷⁵ Furthermore, still today in the town of Bhagvān-jī's birth, Kahnuwan, lies a Nāth *yogī* worship site with a constantly burning *dhūnī* and small tombs over the remains of Bhagvān's parents.¹⁷⁶ Most interesting of all, whenever a new *mahant* is installed at Pindori, a Nāth *topi* (headpiece) is received from the *yogī* establishment in Jakhbar and placed upon the head of the incoming Vaiṣṇava *mahant*. As Goswamy and Grewal explain, "The ritual is of such importance that without it the ceremony is deemed to be incomplete. This *topi* is an unusual conical kind of headgear not at all common to Vaishnava establishments and can be seen in all the paintings of the *mahants* of Pindori that have survived."¹⁷⁷ An old wall painting in the cave of Krishnadās Payahārī at Galta, one widely reproduced in all the Rāmānandī centers of Rajasthan, depicts Tārānāth standing in a worshipful and submissive pose next to Payahārī and wearing exactly this type of conical headgear (see Figure 1).

¹⁷⁴ Jyāī, *Darbār Śrī Piṇḍorī Dhām*, 11.

¹⁷⁵ Goswamy and Grewal *The Mughal and Sikh Rulers*, 10; Jyāī, *Darbār Śrī Piṇḍorī Dhām*, 31-34.

¹⁷⁶ Goswamy and Grewal, *The Mughal and Sikh Rulers*, 5-6.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

Figure 1 - Payahārī with Disciples, Tārānāth, & Prithvīrāj



Krishnadās Payahārī (center) with his two main disciples Kīlhadev and Agradās (on left side) as well as Tārānāth and King Prithvīrāj of Amer (on right side).

**Photograph of painting at Raivāsā monastery (Rajasthan); taken by Patton Burchett, July 11, 2009.

~ *Clarifying Rāmānandī and Nāth Identities* ~

The evidence above makes it abundantly clear that in sixteenth and seventeenth-century north India the relationship between Nāths and Rāmānandīs—or more broadly even, that between Śaiva *tāntrikas* and Vaiṣṇava *bhaktas*—was a complex one not simply characterized by hostile confrontation. In the traditions discussed above from Galta, Kullu, and Pindori, we have seen well-established narratives about an historical turn away from Śaiva-Śākta religiosity, especially that of the Nāth *yogīs*, and toward Vaiṣṇava *bhakti*. Each of these traditions links itself to the figure of Krishnadās Payahārī and highlights the significant role the Rāmānandīs played in the great expansion of Vaiṣṇavism that occurred in the early modern period. However, the Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* that was becoming so prominent was by no means a unified entity—even among the Rāmānandīs—rather, it had multiple forms and styles, some of which had a significant degree of overlap with ascetic streams of the very Śaiva-Śākta tantric forms that they were increasingly supplanting as the favored state religion of Hindu rulers throughout north India. What, then, was the nature of this sixteenth century *bhakti*? It is time that we seek a fuller, more precise and nuanced understanding of the practices, perspectives and identities of early modern *bhaktas* like Payahārī and the religious world they inhabited.

In this regard, it is important to note that the tales about Krishnadās Payahārī (and Bhagvān-jī) from Galta, Kullu, and Pindori are all oral traditions whose antiquity is difficult to determine. Each of the stories speaks to a real historical shift from Śaiva-Śākta religion to Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* that was taking place in certain Hindu kingdoms of Rajasthan, the lower Himalayan range, and Panjab; however, some of these traditions—particularly the legends about Payahārī’s and Bhagvān-jī’s confrontations with Nāth *yogīs*—give a rather misleading

and anachronistic view of the specifics of the religious world and sectarian situation of the sixteenth century. In the verses on Krishnadās Payahārī in their respective *Bhaktamāls*, both Nābhādās (c. 1600) and Rāghavdās (1660)—our earliest hagiographical sources on Payahārī—confirm elements of the legend at Galta in mentioning that he fed his own flesh to a tiger (or lion) and that he was the guru of Pṛthvīrāj; yet, neither they nor Priyādās, in his commentary on the *Bhaktamāl*, ever mention any sort of confrontation between Payahārī and any Nāth yogīs. While the oral tradition is quite strong and while the legend does seem to speak to a certain historical reality, our available sources suggest that the tale of the magical battle between Payahārī and the Nāth yogī is one that was not significant in the early historical memory of Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* communities, and did not take written form until at least the mid-eighteenth century, if not considerably later. Furthermore, tales that specifically construct themselves as being about “Rāmānandīs” and “Nāths” can hardly date before the mid-eighteenth century because it was not until then that these labels were used as community designators. As James Mallinson has shown, the term “Nāth” first came to refer to a distinctive yogī lineage around 1700 CE and only much later (perhaps as late as the early nineteenth century) came to describe an organized *sampradāy*.¹⁷⁸ Similarly, the term “Rāmānandī” does

¹⁷⁸ Mallinson states, “The earliest example that I have found of the word ‘Nātha’ being used to describe a *sampradāya* of yogis is in a manuscript from Jodhpur of a text called the *Ādeśapadavyākhyā*. The manuscript appears to have been written in the early part of the nineteenth century, when the Nāthas had a brief period of influence over the Jodhpur court. The c. 1700 *Siddhasiddhāntapaddhati* mentions *nātha* as one of five yogi lineages (5.43).” James Mallinson, “*Siddhi and Mahāsiddhi in Early Haṭhayoga*,” in *Yoga Powers*, ed. Knut Jacobsen (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 331, n. 20. Mallinson points out that the word *nāth* in pre-eighteenth century sources is no indicator whatsoever of links to the proto-Nāth community, noting that while the names of some early Nāth gurus did bear the suffix *-nātha*, other suffixes were also common (e.g., *-pāda*, *-pā*, *-deva*, and *-āī*) and furthermore, many religious figures with no connection to the Nāth *sampradāy* whatsoever have names with the suffix *-nātha* (e.g., Viṭṭhalnāth of the Vallabha *sampradāya*, Krishna as Gopīnāth and Jagannāth, the Jain saint Ādināth, etc.). Mallinson, “Nāth Sampradāya,” 411.

not seem to have been used as a self-designation prior to the 1730s.¹⁷⁹ It seems quite likely, then, that the oral traditions about Rāmānandīs pitted against Nāths are rather late in origin (perhaps mid-eighteenth century) and reflect a heightened sectarianism that was at only a fledgling state in the sixteenth century.

This is not to say that there was not genuine tension and conflict between *bhaktas* and tantric *yogīs* in the sixteenth century; as the textual evidence in *bhakti* hagiography and poetry (discussed in Chapters Five and Six) demonstrates, there certainly was. But the differences between these groups at that point in time were much more subtle, the boundaries more porous, and any sense of sectarian identity far more fluid than they came to be in the eighteenth century. In other words, the tales specifically identifying Nāth *yogīs* as the losers in confrontations with Rāmānandī *bhaktas* most likely emerged in a religious world whose sectarian boundaries were far more firm (circa eighteenth century) than the actual religious world in which these stories are set (circa sixteenth century). Thus, we should read them not as evidence of the historical situation in the sixteenth century but as later manifestations of a process of confrontation, competition, and conflict (between *bhaktas* and tantric *yogīs*, as well as between various *bhakti* groups)—a process of community identity formation—that was only just beginning in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century.

* * *

In order to understand this emerging *bhakti* identity and to properly articulate the actual similarities and differences among the Rāmānandīs and Nāth *yogīs* of early modern

¹⁷⁹ Monika Horstmann, “The Rāmānandīs of Galtā (Jaipur, Rajasthan)” in *Multiple Histories: Culture and Society in the Study of Rajasthan*, eds. Lawrence Babb et al. (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2002), 145. For the sake of convenience, I refer to the sixteenth and seventeenth century proto-Rāmānandīs as “Rāmānandīs,” though that they do not seem to have referred to themselves as such, and were not designated by others as such, until the eighteenth century.

north India, I now turn our attention to an analysis of the descriptions of Krishnadās Payahārī and his two main disciples, Kīlhadev and Agradās, found in Nābhādās's *Bhaktamāl*. As Heidi Pauwels has written:

For generations devotees have mined [Nābhādās's *Bhaktamāl*] for inspiration, and scholars for information. Its importance is clear from the prolific tradition of commentaries and imitations it has generated and keeps generating. Gleaning information from Nābhādās's *Bhakt-māl* has become the first step in writing about any of the medieval North Indian *bhaktas*, and it is perceived to be the earliest and most authoritative source of evidence on the life of any given saint.¹⁸⁰

Nābhādās was a Galta-dwelling Rāmānandī and grand-disciple (through Agradās) of Payahārī himself. Moving from oral tradition to his (roughly) dateable text, we find ourselves on somewhat firmer ground for gaining an accurate sense of the fissures between and areas of overlap among the spheres of *bhakti*, tantric religiosity, and yoga in sixteenth and seventeenth century north India. In this venture, we will also make use of the *Bhaktamāl* of Rāghavdās, a member of the Dādu Panth who wrote in 1660 CE, also in Rajasthan.¹⁸¹ As we will see, hagiographical descriptions of the Galta Rāmānandīs belie any easy distinction between *bhaktas* and *yogīs* and allow us to see the identity of the early modern devotee in clearer terms. While *bhakti* is always paramount in the verses on Payahārī, Kīlhadev, Agradās and their disciples, in them we also find impressive evidence of the growth of two separate but related *bhakti* paths, one more yogic, martial, *nirguṇ*, and *tapas*-oriented, the other more devotional, literary, *saguṇ*, and *rasa*-oriented. Nevertheless, even in its more yogic and ascetic guise, early

¹⁸⁰ Heidi Pauwels, *In Praise of Holy Men: Hagiographic Poems by and about Harirām Vyās* (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 2002), 15. For a recent, in-depth study of the *Bhaktamāl* and its commentarial tradition, see James P. Hare's "Garland of Devotees: Nābhādās' *Bhaktamāl* and Modern Hinduism" (PhD Thesis, Columbia University, 2011).

¹⁸¹ There are some debates surrounding the dating of Rāghav's *Bhaktamāl*, with 1713 CE and 1720 CE also having been posited, but the weight of the evidence is heavily on the side of the 1660 CE date, especially as Monika Horstmann has astutely pointed out that only this year correlates with the weekday and lunar timing in Rāghav's colophon. Monika Horstmann, "The Flow of Grace: Food and Feast in the Hagiography and History of the Dādūpanth," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 150:2(2000): 515, fn. 9.

modern Rāmānandī *bhakti* consistently displayed certain marked differences from the tantric approach of the Nāth yogīs.

~ *Krishnadās Payahārī: The Yogic Nature of Early Rāmānandī Bhakti* ~

According to our earliest sources, both Nābhādās's *Bhaktamāl* (c. 1600) and Anantadās's *Pīpā-paracāi* (1588), Krishnadās Payahārī was a disciple of Anantānand, who was a disciple of none other than Rāmānand himself.¹⁸² As we have seen, tradition states that in the early sixteenth century Payahārī traveled from Pushkar to Galta, where he defeated a group of Nāth yogīs and established a major Rāmānandī *bhakti* community supported by the patronage of the Kacchvāhā Rajputs in Amer. But just what kind of *bhakta* was this Payahārī? Nābhādās describes him in terms stressing his asceticism, renunciation, and yogic acumen. Payahārī is said to have lived only on milk (*payas*), hence his name, and is praised as a “great ascetic-sage” (*mahāmuni*) whose “seed” was turned upward (*ūrdharetā*), a reference specifically marking his mastery of *haṭha yoga*. Nābhā also notes his identity as a Dāhimā Brahmin and the powerful influence he had on major kings of India. He writes:

In the Kali age, Kṛṣṇadās was the paragon of renunciation; he had relinquished food and drank [only] milk.

He would not beg from him on whose head he laid his hand. He granted him the abode of release and rendered him fearless of sorrow.

He was a hoard of luster, power, worship, a great *muni* whose semen was directed upwards [*ūrdharetā*]. Kings who had conquered the earth served the lotus of his feet. He was the sun that had risen from a Dāhimā family. He gave happiness to the heart lotus of the *sants*.¹⁸³

¹⁸² Of the fifty-two Vaiṣṇava *dvārās* (initiatory lineages or “gateways to the Lord”) established—reputedly at an early eighteenth century conference held in Galta—thirty-six were founded by Rāmānandīs, and of those thirty-six clans founded by the supposed disciples of Rāmānand, twenty-seven came from Anantānand and his lineage.

¹⁸³ *Chappay* 38. Translated in Horstmann, “The Rāmānandīs of Galta,” 150-51. Horstmann follows the verse numbers in the Rūpkalā edition of the *Bhaktamāl*.

In the next *chappay*, Nābhādās lists Payahārī’s twenty-three disciples—including kings, women, householders and ascetics, Krishna devotees and Rām devotees, and *munis* and *rasiks*—a group reflecting the diversity and catholicity of the Rāmānandī community.¹⁸⁴ Towards the end of the *Bhaktamāl*, Nābhā dedicates another set of verses to Payahārī, this time linking him to Galta, highlighting his virtue, hospitality, and self-sacrifice, and stressing his ascetic self-discipline alongside his devotion to Rām.

In Galtā, oozing ambrosial excellencies, of virtuous conduct and firm ethics,
Kṛṣṇadās, who had conquered the Kali Age, invited a lion (or a tiger) whom he gave of
[his own] flesh to eat.
Keeping the laws of hospitality, he acquired public fame in the world. He was an
epitome of renunciation, he did not lust for gold and women.
Intoxicated with the lotus of Rām’s feet, he abided by it day and night.¹⁸⁵

In addition to these verses, we learn more about Payahārī in Nābhā’s verses on Pṛthvīrāj. Nābhā writes that, “Thanks to the teaching of Śrī Kṛṣṇadās [Payahārī], he [Pṛthvīrāj] became acquainted with the Supreme Truth. By the description of it as *nirguṇ* and *saguṇ* [Payahārī] destroyed the darkness of unknowing.”¹⁸⁶ The fact that Payahārī is praised for destroying ignorance by describing the ultimate Truth as both *nirguṇ* (without qualities) and *saguṇ* (with qualities) is noteworthy, for it suggests that at least by Nābhādās’s time this *nirguṇ/saguṇ* distinction was something of an issue, one on which not everyone agreed. Indeed, as we will see in more detail, the Nāth *yogīs*, as well the *bhakti* communities of Dādū

¹⁸⁴ In *chappay* 39, Nābhādās lists Payahārī’s twenty-three disciples, all of whom “crossed the ocean of existence” by his grace: Kīlha, Agar, Keval, Caraṇ, Nārāyaṇ, Sūraj, Puruṣoṃ, Pṛthu, Tipur, Padmanābh, Gopāl, Ṭek, Ṭīlā, Gadādhārī, Devā, Hem, Kalyān, Gaṅgā, Vishnudās, Kanhar, Raṅgā, Cāndan, and Sabīrī. Our next oldest source, the Dādūpanthī Rāghavdās’s *Bhaktamāl*, lists twenty-one of these disciples, but fails to mention Gadādhārī and Ṭek as Payahārī’s disciples (*chappay* 154, 69).

¹⁸⁵ *Kuṇḍaliyā* 213. Translated in Horstmann, “The Rāmānandīs of Galta,” 151.

¹⁸⁶ *Chappay* 116. Translated in Horstmann, “The Rāmānandīs of Galta,” 153.

and Nānak, acknowledged the Divine as *nirguṇ* only and this may have placed them in significant tension with the Rāmānandīs.

Payahārī does not seem to have been a prolific writer, but a short work called *Rāj-yog* is attributed to him that deals with the role of yoga in Rām *bhakti*, stressing meditation and the repetition of the Name of Rām, while also giving attention to the *saguṇ* form of Rām.¹⁸⁷ That Payahārī would have authored such a text seems entirely in character, for while Nābhā praises his devotion to the lotus feet of Rām, it is his yogic and ascetic qualities that stand out most.

The memory of Payahārī as an accomplished yoga-practicing *muni* is one that is documented well beyond Nābhādās's hagiographical masterpiece. Rāghavdās, of the Dādū Panth, in his *Bhaktamāl* of 1660 CE, also describes Payahārī. For the most part Rāghav simply translates Nābhā's Brajbhāṣā verses into Rajasthani in describing Payahārī; however, he does add two new *chands*, one of which again emphasizes Payahārī's links to yoga and asceticism:

*jñān anant dayo anātānand yaum pragatyaṁ kṛṣṇadās paihārī /
jog upāsyau jugati sū tejasī antaravṛti akyañcan dhārī /*

Anantānand gave him unending knowledge; that is how Krishnadās Payahārī came into his own.

He worshipped yoga and his resplendent yogic skill (discipline/technique) spread throughout the world [even as] he remained in strict poverty.¹⁸⁸

Monika Horstmann remarks that, "Kṛṣṇadās was a yogi whose yogic practice need not be imagined to have been totally different from that of the Nāths."¹⁸⁹ To what degree and how

¹⁸⁷ R.S. McGregor, "The Dhyān-Mañjarī of Agradās," in *Bhakti in Current Research, 1979-1982*, ed. Monika Thiel-Horstmann (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1983), 237. Bhagavati Prasad Singh describes this text, which he claims to have seen, in his *Rām-kāvya-dhārā: Anusandhān evaṁ Anucintan* (Allahabad: 1976), 27ff., 36ff. In my own research in the manuscript archives of Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, the only texts I have been able to find attributed to Payahārī are the *Dānlīlā* (which seems to be incorrectly attributed to him rather than Krishnadās of the Puṣṭi Mārg's "aṣṭachāp") and the *Sahasranāmāvalī*, a text which seems to be essentially just a list of different names of God. I found two manuscripts of this text attributed to Payahārī, one in Udaipur from the nineteenth century and another older one in Jodhpur, dated 1808 VS (1751 CE).

¹⁸⁸ *Chand* 152a. Translation mine. When not otherwise noted, translations are my own.

his yogic practice was similar to and distinct from the Nāths is a crucial question that we will return to shortly; however, at this juncture we should note the existence of a rather unique text on *haṭha yoga* written in 1737 CE in Vrindavan by a Rāmānandī by the name of Jayatrāma who proclaimed himself to be a spiritual descendant of none other than Krishnadās Payahārī.¹⁹⁰ James Mallinson discusses this text, called the *Jogpradīpakā*, describing it as “a manual of *haṭhayoga* written in 964 Braj Bhāṣā verses, using *dohā*, *sortḥā* and *caupāī* metres.”¹⁹¹ Yet it is certainly no ordinary *haṭha yoga* manual, for Śiva—credited as the original teacher of *haṭha yoga* in all other such manuals—is mentioned but a single time whereas Sītā and Rāma (Siyārām) are together presented as the chief deities of the text and on many occasions directions are given to visualize them as part of one’s yogic practice.¹⁹² Whether this means that Payahārī’s own yogic practice involved the visualization of Sītā-Rām cannot be determined based on the sources now available to us. There is certainly no conclusive evidence that it did.¹⁹³ Nevertheless, as I will explore further in the next chapter, Payahārī’s yoga did in fact differ from the yogic practice of the Nāths in significant ways, and

¹⁸⁹ Horstmann, “The Rāmānandīs of Galta,” 152.

¹⁹⁰ The very fact of a Rāmānandī—not a Gauḍīya, a Puṣṭi Margī, or Rādhā Vallabhī—writing in Vrindavan, that great center of Krishna devotion, and writing on *haṭha yoga* (not *bhakti*) is itself noteworthy and speaks to the diversity, shared spaces, and porousness of boundaries in the Hindu religious world of even early 18th century north India.

¹⁹¹ Mallinson, “Rāmānandī Tyāgīs and *Haṭhayoga*,” *Journal of Vaishnava Studies* 14/1 (Fall 2005): 112.

¹⁹² Ibid. Mallinson explains that “[T]he *dhyāna* taught at vv. 780-796 consists of instructions for the yogin to visualize an eight-petalled lotus in the heart within which are the sun and the moon. Within them are fires in which the yogin is to visualize Rām and Siyā shining forth. Similarly, in v. 527, in the description of the *ākaraṣaṇī mudrā*, the yogin is told to sit in *svastikāsana*, meditate on *piṇḍa-brahma*, use *prāṇayāma* to move *prāṇa* to the tenth door (the opening at the top of the skull) and visualize Siyā-Rām inside the thousand-petalled lotus” (112).

¹⁹³ Payahārī did present Rājā Prthvīrāj with the deity Sītārām-jī, in the form of a *śālagrām* stone, and the deity’s name could possibly allude to an amorous unity of Sītā and Rām suggestive of a *rasik* sensibility. Yugalpriyā’s *Rasik-prakāś-bhaktamāl* (v. 12) clearly describes Payahārī as a *rasik*, calling him a “worshipper of the tradition (*rīti*) of *ras*” and a “pledgeholder (*vratdhari*) of Sītā;” however, this late (1839 CE) sectarian text can hardly be trusted to give us an accurate historical depiction of the sixteenth-century Payahārī’s actual religiosity.

distinguishing the two will help us to better grasp the distinctions and connections between the early modern realms of *bhakti*, tantra, and yoga.

~ *Agradās & Kīlhadev: Two Streams of Rāmānandī Bhakti* ~

In order to further flesh out the nature of Rāmānandī *bhakti* and its relationship with tantra and yoga, we now turn to the hagiographical descriptions of Payahārī's main two disciples, Agradās and Kīlhadev. What do we know about the religious life and practice of these two Rāmānandīs? At the death of their guru Payahārī, Kīlhadev took over the Galta *gaddī* and Agradās is said to have traveled to Raivāsā, near modern-day Sīkar, where he founded the Rām-*rasik* tradition. Agra is associated with *rasik* devotional practice which, as we will see in much more detail in Chapter Four, typically involves a daily regimen of external rituals of worship and service as well as internal practices such as visualization, meditation, and role-playing (often as an intimate female friend and attendant of Sītā) aimed at bringing about full participation in the ultimate reality of Rām and Sītā's eternal *līlā*. The literary record tells us that Agra was also a prolific writer, the author of at least fifteen different works in addition to many scattered verses found in anthologies of *bhakti* poetry.

Our earliest description of Agradās comes from his disciple Nābhādās's *Bhaktamāl*.

Nābhā writes:

śrī agraḍās haribhajan bin kāl vṛthā nahim bitayau /
 sadācār jyom sant prāpt jaise kari āye /
 sevā sumiran dhyān caraṇarāghau cit lāye //
 prasidh bāg soṃ prīti suhath kṛt karat nirantar /
 rasanā nirmal nām mānhūṃ varṣat dhārādhar //
 śrī kṛṣṇadās kṛpā kari bhaktidatt mānavac kramakari aṭal diyau /
 śrī agraḍās haribhajan bin kāl vṛthā nahim bitayau //40

Agradās never spent a moment when he was not [absorbed] in doing *bhakti* to Hari.¹⁹⁴ He acted in accordance with the good conduct of the saints. In service, meditation, and remembrance, he kept his heart on the feet of Rāghav [Rām].¹⁹⁵ He loved his famous garden and worked on it endlessly with his own hands. The pure name of God fell from his tongue like rain from a cloud. Blessing him, Kṛṣṇadās [Payahārī] gave [Agra] the gift of *bhakti* and made him firm in heart, speech, and action. Agradās never spent a moment when he was not [absorbed] in doing *bhakti* to Hari.¹⁹⁶

Agra’s devotion and service to God are especially highlighted here, and there is an interesting mention of the “famous garden” Agra is said to have tended to with great love and dedication.

We will examine Agradās’s own writings in some detail in Chapter Four, but for now we can gain a bit more insight into his character from a few remarks Nābhādās makes in other sections of his *Bhaktamāl*. First and foremost, at the very beginning of the text, Nābhā explains that it was his guru Agra who ordered him to compose this work in praise of the devotees of God. In the fourth *dohā*, he states, “Guru Agradev gave the order: ‘Sing the glory of the *bhaktas*. There is no other way to cross the ocean of existence.’”¹⁹⁷ Nābhādās has been recognized as something of a revolutionary for raising the status of the *bhaktas*—the devotees—and equating them with God.¹⁹⁸ The famous opening line of the *Bhaktamāl* states, “*Bhaktas, bhakti, God, and*

¹⁹⁴ The word *bhajan* has come to take on the limited meaning of “devotional song” and is often translated in this way, but the word is actually a verbal noun indicating the doing of *bhakti*, which includes but exceeds devotional songs and chanting. Some scholars have translated *bhajan* as “worship,” but the connotations of that word are also not sufficient. While the performance of *bhakti* certainly involves devotional singing as one of its key components, it goes well beyond both that practice and those normally associated with *pūjā* (the word that “worship” usually translates), thus in most cases, as here, I have chosen to translate *bhajan* as “doing *bhakti*.”

¹⁹⁵ The word *sumiran*, translated here as “remembrance,” in the early modern *bhakti* context usually refers to remembering the Lord either in chanting the divine Name or in *rasik* (visualization) meditation practice.

¹⁹⁶ Chappay 40. In this and all other of my translations of Nābhā’s *Bhaktamāl*, I use the numbering and text of the oldest extant version of the work, that available in Jhā’s edition. Narendra Jhā, ed. *Bhaktamāl: Pāṭhānuśīlan evam Vīvecan* (Patna: Anupam Prakāśan, 1978).

¹⁹⁷ *Dohā* 4. *śrī guru agradev ājñā dāi bhaktan kau jasu gāy/ bhavsāgar ke taran kau nāhin ān upāy//*

¹⁹⁸ See especially William Pinch, “History, Devotion and the Search for Nabhadās of Galta,” in *Invoking the Past: The Uses of History in South Asia*, ed. Daud Ali (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 367–399; and Hare, “Garland of Devotees,” Chapter Two.

guru, though four in name, are one in essence.”¹⁹⁹ It seems, however, that the original inspiration for this idea was actually Agradās, who stressed that singing the praises of the devotees brings liberation. This is demonstrated again towards the end of the *Bhaktamāl* where Nābhā states, “Agra says, he who narrates the virtues of the followers [of God] gains the power of Sītā’s Lord (Rām).”²⁰⁰ It is clear from Nābhā’s verses that Agra was not simply a great *bhakta* of Rām and Sītā, but one who sought to spread his firm conviction that all true *bhaktas* are worthy of devotion and that by cherishing the memory of the great *bhakti* saints and following the model they set, one grows closer to the divine.

Nābhā’s description of Agradās becomes more meaningful when contrasted with his description of Payahārī’s other main disciple, Agra’s guru-brother, Kīlha. Kīlha is depicted in these words:

As Death did not destroy Gāṅgeya (Bhīṣma), so it could not subdue Kīlha.
 Day and night he stayed absorbed in the contemplation (*ciñtavanī*) of Rām’s feet.
 All beings bowed before him, he was a hero who partook of the bliss of doing *bhakti*.
 He was strong in the Sāṃkhya and Yoga doctrines, he held the experience [of the divine] in his hand like a cherry plum.
 Through the power (*bal*) of his practice (*karnī*), he abandoned his body and proceeded to the *brahmarandhra*.
 In the world the son of Sumerdev (Kīlha) is well-known; his pure fame spread over the earth.²⁰¹

While in Agradās’s description, (in the original Brajbhāṣā) it is the words *bhakti*, *haribhajan* (doing *bhakti* and singing to Hari/Vishnu), *sevā* (service), and *smaraṇ/sumiraṇ* (remembering

¹⁹⁹ Dohā 1a. *bhakta bhakti bhagvant guru catur nām vapu ek/*

²⁰⁰ Chappay 180:5. *agar anug gun baranate sītāpati tihi hoī bas/*

²⁰¹ Chappay 39 [in Jhā edition]. Translation based on Horstmann, “The Rāmānandīs of Galta,” 155, but with a few revisions of my own. I am grateful to Dalpat Rajpurohit for his assistance with this verse. The chief alteration I have made to Horstmann’s translation comes in 39:4, *brahmarandhra kari gaun bhaye hari tan karnī bal*, which she renders, “He proceeded to the *brahmarandhra*, by the grace of Hari subduing his body.”

God, especially God's names and deeds)²⁰² that stand out, here Kīlha is characterized most especially by his mastery of *yoga*, through which he was able to subdue his body and conquer death, choosing the time of his own passing by leaving through the *brahmarandhra* opening at the top of his skull.²⁰³ It is worth noting that Nābhā uses the word *bal* (power or strength) to describe Kīlha's yogic practice and that he compares Kīlha to Bhīṣma, the great warrior and yoga-practicing ascetic of the *Mahābhārata*, known for his ability to control the time of his own death. In Chapter 289 of Book 12 of the *Mahābhārata*, Bhīṣma expounds the practice of yoga, emphasizing its *bal* and the *bal* of its practitioners.²⁰⁴ As we will see, the yoga of Kīlha likely had its roots in this *tapas*-linked yoga tradition of the *Mahābhārata*. Ghurye writes that Kīlha "established the practice of 'yoga' as a necessary ingredient of Rama-devotion for the inmates and followers of his centre" and sectarian tradition associates him with the founding of the *tapasī śākhā*, the ascetic branch, of the Rāmānandī *sampradāy*.²⁰⁵

²⁰² In the context of *bhakti* literature, the "recollection" that is *smaraṇa* refers especially to recalling the narratives of Krishna or Rām in ritual retelling, recitation, and/or visualization. Tony Stewart states that *smaraṇa* begins with recalling the divine Name but ultimately "signals the process by which the stories of [God, e.g. Kṛṣṇa or Rām] are iterated and reiterated until they become wholly possessed of the devotee," who must come to fully embody the text. Tony Stewart, "Reading for Krishna's Pleasure: Gauḍīya Vaishnava Meditation, Literary Interiority, and the Phenomenology of Repetition," *Journal of Vaishnava Studies* 14.1 (Fall 2005): 263.

²⁰³ Mallinson states that the *brahmarandra* "usually refers to either the region at the top of the *Suṣumṇā nāḍī* or the *nāḍī* itself" and that it corresponds to the area on the top of the skull called the *daśamadvāra* or "tenth door," noting that it is also often identified with the *sahasrāra cakra*. James Mallinson, *The Khecarīvidyā of Ādinātha: A critical edition and annotated translation of an early text of haṭhayoga* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 205, n. 240.

²⁰⁴ As James Fitzgerald explains, the presentation of yoga in 12:289.11-56 "is dominated by the idea of strength, *bala* ... This *bala* is the power to break out of all forms of bondage (stanzas 11-23); it is the ability to enter at will into all other beings ..., the ability to withstand the power even of an angry Yamadeva, the Lord of the Dead, to make thousands of clones of oneself and act in diverse ways in each and every one of them, and to have complete control over all forms of bondage (stanzas 24-28); it is the fortitude to hold the mind fixed in difficult "Holding Meditations" (*dhāraṇās*, stanzas 29-41 and 54-55); it is the might to overcome various internal temptations and infirmities (such as lust and laziness) (stanzas 47-49); and it is the perseverance to adhere to the path of *yoga*, which is never easy (stanzas 50-53)." James L. Fitzgerald, "A Prescription for Yoga and Power in the *Mahābhārata*," in *Yoga in Practice*, ed. David G. White (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 48.

²⁰⁵ Ghurye, *Indian Sadhus*, 175.

In contrast to Agradās's significant literary output, Kīlha seems not to have composed more than a few poems. In my manuscript searches in the archives of Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, I have found only three extant *pads* attributed to Kīlha, one of which is not entirely legible in the manuscript. Here I translate the other two for the first time. In large part, these poems correspond to the image of Kīlha as austere *yogī* that we get from the hagiographical sources. Their content suggests that intense asceticism and detachment from the world were foundational elements of Kīlha's religious life. The first poem comes from the famous Fatehpur manuscript²⁰⁶ of 1582 CE, one of our very oldest sources of north Indian *bhakti* poetry.

Kīlha says:

[*Rāg Rāmāgarī*]
re man tū tū hī tū tū hī tū tū hī terā /
mai nāhī tan mai na koū kāhū karā (kerā?) /
māta nahī tāta nahī kalat bandh pherā (jherā?) /
gād nahī pāni nahī javar bandh gherā /
arath nahī mīt nahī grih sang ghorā /
kīlha kahai kīl nahī sakal gur merā /

Oh heart, you, only you, only you are yours and yours alone.

I am not this body, I am no one and no one's.²⁰⁷

No mother, no father, no wife (*kalatra*); you are bound to these troubles (but they are not yours).

No mud, no water, no millet [grain]; (yet) you are enclosed in (their) bondage.

No wealth, no friends, no home; these things make frightful company.

Kīlha says, Kīlha is nothing – the Guru is my everything.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁶ The Fatehpur manuscript consists mainly of the *pads* of Surdās (262 in total), but also includes 149 *pads* by other *bhakti* poets including Nāmdev (11), Kabīr (15), Raidās (8), and others such as Kīlha. G.N. Bahura explains that the Fatehpur manuscript appears to have been written in three sections, with the scribe of the first two remaining anonymous, but the scribe of the third having written the verses for the “son of Rāj-śrī Narharidāsji, who ... was most probably a *ṭhākur* of the Kachavāhā clan and occupied a *pattī* (share) in Fatehpur (Śekhāvaṭī) in the Sikar district” of east Rajasthan. G.N. Bahura, “Surdās kā Pada: The Fatehpur Manuscript of 1639 V.S. (1582 A.D.),” in *Bhakti in Current Research, 1979-1982*, ed. Monika Thiel-Horstmann (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1983), 21-22.

²⁰⁷ Or, “I am not this body, I am no one, and I do not do anything [i.e., I am not the action I do].”

²⁰⁸ *The Padas of Surdās (Fatehpur Manuscript)*, ed. Gopal Narayan Bahura (Jaipur: Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum, 1982), 192-193. Thanks goes to Dalpat Rajpurohit for his crucial assistance in transcribing and translating both of these Kīlha poems from the manuscripts.

The next *pad* comes from a manuscript dated 1715 VS (1658 CE) and is similarly dedicated to critiquing worldly possessions and sensual desires as major enemies in the spiritual quest.

[*Rāg Prabhātī*]

*re man ajāh to tripati tan dharaṇā
jugi jugi phirayau khaṇḍ khaṇḍ phirayau
pur pur phirayau phirayau gharāṇ
jahā jahā tahā tahā kanak kamini bhajyau
tin kiyaṇ tero gyan haraṇ
akal vimuk bhayā sang hī dīp gaī na miṭe janam maraṇ
jau jū bikhai bikhe mat (mast?) suṇo suṇo hit tau jyū supineh na taraṇ
kīlh kahai tere tab trividhi tākai caraṇ saraṇ*

Oh heart, this body holds to the three-fold(?) *māyā*.

You have wandered through birth after birth; you have wandered the whole world.

You have wandered and wandered through city after city, house after house.

Wherever you went, there you devoted yourself to gold and lustful women.

And they have stolen your knowledge.

You became opposed to wisdom, went along with the light (?), and (could) not erase the
(cycle of) birth and death.

As long as you are infatuated with sensual enjoyment—listen, listen for your
betterment—even in your dreams you cannot cross (the ocean of existence).

Kīlha says, the three worlds are yours when you make His [Rām's] feet your shelter.²⁰⁹

In both of these poems, Kīlha's strict ascetic outlook shines forth clearly, yet his austerity and rejection of the world are accompanied by a clear devotion which stresses that in turning *from* the world, one must turn *to* the Guru (i.e., to the feet of Rām).

While *bhakti*, yoga, and asceticism all merge together in the figure of Kīlha, the hagiographical tradition clearly remembers him especially as a death-conquering master of yoga. Adding to Nābhādās's description of Kīlhadev, Priyādās wrote in his influential commentary—the *Bhaktirasabodhini*—that at the time of his death Kīlha gathered together all the saints, and honoring all of them, he abandoned his body through the “tenth door,” the final *cakra* at the top of the head (also called the *brahmarandhra* or *brahmāṇḍ*). This story

²⁰⁹ Kīlha jī kī Pad (Vidya Bhuṣan Sangrah - Jaipur RORI), MSS no. 34 (102).

clearly suggests that Kīlha had achieved a level of yogic accomplishment in which he had gained the power to live as long as he wanted until consciously deciding to exit his body out the top of his head, the “gateway of Brahmā,” for final liberation. Rāghavdas’s *Bhaktamāl* alludes to this same perfection in yoga when it introduces what becomes a standard feature of Kīlha’s hagiography, that he was bitten three times by a snake but that each time the poison did not affect him.²¹⁰ The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (9th- 10th century) lists both of these abilities—the power to determine the time of one’s death at will, and the power to neutralize poison—as *siddhis* (extraordinary powers) acquired through the mastery of yoga and its various modes of concentration (*dhāraṇā*).²¹¹

If, then, our enduring image of Kīlhadev is that of the yoga-practicing ascetic, for Agradās we instead imagine the devoted gardener. As we will see in Chapter Four, the garden is a key feature of Agra’s hagiography and, whatever its factual basis may be, it seems to act as a metaphor for the loving care and fastidious attention he gave to God. Nābhā’s verse suggests that the pure devotion of Agradās’s *bhajans* and his repetition of the name of Rām were the water that nourished his garden. We will find that the image of Agra as a gardener is quite appropriate, for he sought to cultivate devotion in himself and others, to grow and tend to a devotional community through his dedicated service, offering the fruits (literal and metaphorical) of his labor to God.

In all of the earliest available sources, it is Agra’s devotion that is highlighted whereas it is Kīlha’s expertise at yoga—his conquering of death through austere mental and bodily practice—that is at the forefront. Both are *bhaktas*, but their styles of practice appear quite

²¹⁰ Chappay 155.

²¹¹ *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* XI.15.1-36.

separate. This distinction is also highlighted in the Rām-*rasik* oral tradition, which tells a story about a gathering of saints attended by both Kīlha and Agra. Kīlhadev proclaimed to the assembled *bhaktas* that, “With the help of one’s own power, through steadfast love, doing *bhakti*, God can be obtained.” Agradās responded with a slightly different perspective, saying, “All action is dependent on God, and believing this while acting, it is possible to obtain God.”²¹² In other words, while Kīlha stressed *bhakti* in combination with one’s own effort or power (*bal*), Agra stated that everything—all of our action—is dependent on God, and nothing comes from our own effort. While Kīlha is clearly first and foremost a devotee—he “partook of the bliss of performing *bhakti*” and “stayed absorbed in the contemplation of Rām’s feet day and night”—his *bhakti* seems to have maintained elements of a tantric-yogic reliance on the self and on the power(s) generated through one’s own ritual and ascetic practices. As we will see, a critique of this sort of tantric-yogic perspective—a multifaceted, devotion-based critique of Śaiva-Sākta outlooks and practices, one that tended to mirror earlier Sufi, and more broadly, Abrahamic, rhetorical attacks on “magic”—emerged as a sort of rallying point for many *bhakti* poets and reformers, a pole around which a common *bhakti* identity would come together, especially among the increasingly more “mainstream” forms of *bhakti* that reflected Agradās’s perspective of emotion, humility, and dedicated service far more than Kīlha’s yogic-ascetic *bhakti* approach.

In addition to their different styles of devotional practice, we have seen that we can also distinguish these two *bhaktas*, Agra and Kīlhadev, by their literary output. The production of vernacular written literature was a key feature of the “*bhakti* movement” in north India and a critical factor in its success. In many ways, this vernacular literature—primarily collections

²¹² Rathaur, *Revāsā kī Madhuropāsānā*, 24.

of *bhakti* poetry and hagiographies of *bhakti* poet-saints, but also theological treatises—was at the heart of the “*bhakti* movement” in so far as it was crucial in forming community identities, spreading coherent *bhakti* ideologies over wide geographical expanses, and, perhaps most importantly, providing a textual foundation for the traditions of performance—story telling, recitation, song, etc.—that so informed the community experience of devotees.²¹³ Not all *bhaktas* composed literature, however, and those who did definitely did not all do so to the same extent. Devotees’ chosen lifestyle and mode of practice—in addition, of course, to their natural temperaments and talents—certainly affected their degree of participation in the world of *bhakti* literary composition. Payahārī’s two main disciples illustrate this fact perfectly. While Agradās has at least fifteen works attributed to him, in addition to hundreds of *pads*, there seem to be only a few scattered *pads* attributed to Kīlha.

The evidence above strongly suggests that these two disciples of Krishnadās Payahārī at Galta represent the emergence of two separate but related streams of religious practice among Rāmānandīs in the mid-sixteenth century, one more focused on *tapas* and yoga, with closer links to an itinerant (and sometimes perhaps even militaristic-warrior) lifestyle, and the other centered on *rasik bhakti*, with closer links to a sedentary, temple/monastery-based life and the production of written literature. In the descriptions of some of the disciples of Agra and Kīlha, these distinctions become even clearer. For instance, Rāghavdās portrays Kīlha’s disciple Dvārakādās as a master of *haṭha-yoga*, whereas he depicts Agra’s disciple Nābhādās as a *rasik bhakta* devoted to the praise of the saints. About Nābhā he writes:

nābhai nabh setī kīnhaum khīr-nīr bhin bhin
granthan kau sār sarbaṅgī hari gāyau hai/

²¹³ In some *bhakti* communities (the Sikh Panth, Dādu Panth, and Kabīr Panth, for instance) definitive forms/compilations of this literature would actually become the focal point of devotional activities.

*bhakti bhagat bhagavant gur dhāri ur
 bic ra bakhāṇi sarvahī kauṃ sir nāyau hai/
 sat-jug tretā ar dvāpar kalū ke bhakt
 nāv kṛitamālā kīnī nīkau bhed pāyau hai/
 rāgho gur agar kūṃ arpi girā gaṅgajal
 pure patibrat bala rām yaum rījhāyau hai//160*

Nābhā made a bridge to heaven; [like a *haṃsa*] he separated milk (knowledge) from water (ignorance).

He sang the essence of the various forms of devotion to God described in the scriptures.

Having kept *bhakti*, *bhakta*, Bhagvān (God), and guru in his heart,
 He knew and praised all these and bowed his head to them.

The *bhaktas* of the Sat Yug, Tretā Yug, Dvāpar Yug and Kali Yug,
 He made a garland of their names; he knew the beauty of their subtle differences.

Rāghav says, he offered his words, pure as the water of the Ganges, to his guru Agra.
 Through the power of his complete *pativrat* (devotion of a wife to her husband) he attracted Rām.²¹⁴

In contrast, Rāghav describes Kīlha's disciple Dvārkādās in this way:

*haṭh-jog jamādik sādḥikai dvārikādās hari sauṃ milyau //ṭek
 kukas kī nadikā nīr maiṃ laḡī samādhī/
 prabhu pad suṃ rati acal yek ātma ārādhī/
 bām jāṃ ghar bit bandh kul jagat nīrāsā/
 kām kraudh mad moh karam kī kāṭī pāsā/
 gur kīlha karaṇ prasād taiṃ bhakti sakti bhram kauṃ gilyau/
 haṭh-jog jamādik sādḥikai dvārikādās hari suṃ mililyau//165*

Having mastered *haṭha-yoga* and conquered Death (Yama), Dvārkādās met Hari.

In the water of the Kukus River, he attained *samādhī* (meditative absorption).

He had immovable passion to the feet of Prabhu; he devoted himself to that one and only soul.

He was without passion for the things of this world: wife, son, home, wealth, brother, and family.

He cut the net of desire, anger, ego, attachment, and karma.

With the blessing of Guru Kīlha's compassion, he swallowed (*gilyau*) the confusion (*bhram*) regarding *bhakti* and *śakti*.

Having mastered *haṭha-yoga* and conquered Death (Yama), Dvārkādās met Hari.²¹⁵

²¹⁴ *Chand* 160. The use of the word *pativrat* could suggest a *rasik* sensibility; i.e., Nābhā's devotional practice may have involved visualizations in which he took on a feminine role in serving Rām and Sītā.

²¹⁵ *Chappay* 165.

Nābhādās also wrote verses on Dvārakādās (which Rāghav likely modeled his own on), stating that he “abandoned his body [through the practice of] *aṣṭāṅg jog*” and “cut the net of *māyā* with the sword of knowledge and the power of doing *bhakti*.”²¹⁶ While Nābhā thus depicts his contemporary Dvārakādās as an ascetic *bhakta* and an expert practitioner of yoga, in contrast, he says this about himself in the concluding verse of the *Bhaktamāl*: “Some have the power of yoga, some the power of vedic ritual, some the power of family/caste (*kul*) and some have the hope of [attaining fruits from good] action. [I don’t have any of these], only the *Bhaktamāl* (garland of devotees) and Agra dwell in the heart of Nārāyaṇādās (Nābhādās).”²¹⁷ The clear implication seems to be that, in contrast to saints like Payahārī, Kīlha, and Dvārakā—his Rāmānandī brethren—who combined *bhakti* with the bodily self-disciplines of *tapas* and yoga, he knows nothing of yoga and does not place hope of salvation in any sort of action, ritual or social standing, but only in cherishing God, guru, and the *bhaktas* in his heart.

Even in the disciples of Kīlha and Agra, then, we can see two rather distinctive kinds of devotee. While Nābhā, like his guru Agradās, seems to have been a *rasik* practitioner and devotee of Rām and Sītā, as well as a producer of literature (in addition to the *Bhaktamāl*, he is said to have authored two *Aṣṭayāms*—one in prose, one in verse—and several *pads* found in anthologies of *bhakti* poetry),²¹⁸ Dvārakādās appears to be like his guru Kīlha, a world-renouncing, *tapas* practicing, master of yoga. Agradās with his disciple Nābhādās, and Kīlhadev with his disciple Dvārakādās, are thus representative of what would later become the two main

²¹⁶ Chappay 174. *aṣṭāṅg jog tan tyagiyau dvārikādās jānai duni/ ... bal bhajan ke jñān khaḍag māyā hanī/*

²¹⁷ Dohā 193. *kāhū ke bal jagya jog kau kul karnī kī ās/ bhaktanām mālā agar ur basau narāyaṇādās//*

²¹⁸ Hare, “Garland of Devotees,” 43. Nābhādās’s authorship of two *Aṣṭayāms* is more evidence of a *rasik* orientation, since these texts describe in detail the activities of Rām and Sītā during the eight periods of the day, information vital to *rasik smaraṇa* (“recollection” practices).

branches of the Rāmānandī community: the *vairāgīs* (or *tyāgīs*), peripatetic yoga-practicing ascetics, and the *rasikas*, temple/monastery-dwelling ‘savorers’ of the sweet essence (*rasa*) of devotion. The point here, however, is only that these figures are **representative** of two distinctive styles of *bhakti* practice, **not** that these men or these two *bhakti* streams were entirely separate from one another, for in fact they were undoubtedly intertwined. Agradās, for instance, did not have disciples of only the *rasik bhakti* persuasion, but was also guru to disciples like Bhagvān-jī (who, as we saw earlier, is remembered in Panjab as an itinerant ascetic who bested a group of Nāth *yogīs* in a battle of supernormal powers) and Puraṇ, whom Rāghavdās describes as a cave-dwelling practitioner of *aṣṭāṅg-yoga* who worshipped the name of God, lived his life without desire for worldly things (gold or women), and started a community where meditators practiced *yama*, *niyama*, *prāṇayāma*, and *āsana* (the first four “limbs” of *aṣṭāṅg yoga*).²¹⁹ To drive home this point about the diversity of Rāmānandī devotees, we should note that Rāghavdās, after describing Puraṇ as a yoga-practicing ascetic, then penned verses on Khem, who was either a disciple of Kīlha or of Agra (Rāghav mentions both as having a disciple named Khem), and clearly depicted him as a *rasik bhakta*.²²⁰ Yoga and asceticism are not mentioned in the *chappay* on Khem, who is instead praised for knowing and meditating in his heart on only Sītā-Rām, for holding their form (*rūp*) dear to him, and for composing verses in the depths of love (*prem*).²²¹

From the hagiographical descriptions above, it should be plain that the proto-Rāmānandī community of the sixteenth and early seventeenth century embraced a wide range

²¹⁹ *Chappays* 166 & 167.

²²⁰ Rāghavdās names Kīlha and Agra’s disciples in *chappays* 158 & 159.

²²¹ Rāghavdās, *chappay* 169.

of devotional practices. In particular, the early Galta Rāmānandīs brought together aspects of yoga and asceticism—including a number of practices and lifestyle elements which they seem to have shared with the Nāth *yogīs*—with an emerging *bhakti* perspective that was coming into conflict with elements of the tantric outlook. We will explore this “Bhakti-Tantra” conflict shortly, in the context of the Rāmānandīs’ relationship with the Nāth *yogis*, but in order to properly contextualize our discussion, we must first refresh our understanding of *bhakti* and the *bhakta* more generally.

~ Re-Imagining the Bhakta ~

The insights that the hagiographical accounts above give us into the early Rāmānandī *bhaktas*’ religious lives raise some interesting questions about the nature of *bhakti* itself. In particular, the yogic-ascetic stream of the Galta community—which seems to have been its earliest stratum—challenges prevalent understandings of, and common assumptions about, *bhakti* as a distinct category of religiosity. The work we have drawn most heavily on thus far, Nābhādās’s *Bhaktamāl*, calls itself a “garland of devotees” and is a work explicitly dedicated to singing the praises of the great *bhaktas*; yet, as we have seen, Nābhā describes many of the members of his own devotional community as practicing a religious lifestyle that, while including *bhakti*, clearly seems to center most on asceticism (*tapas*) and yoga. If “death-conquering,” yoga-mastering, “paragons of renunciation” like Krishnadās Payahārī, Kīlhaddev, and Dvārakādās constitute exemplars of *bhakti*, then it would seem that our conception of *bhakti* needs some serious revision. If these are *bhaktas*, what then is *bhakti*?

Scholarly descriptions of *bhakti* draw on a vocabulary of devotion that ranges widely from veneration, worship, and submission to passionate emotion, participation, and

performance to embodiment, circulation, and memory. Nevertheless, all too rarely does the spectrum of this vocabulary include words that would reveal any yogic, ascetic, or tantric dimensions of *bhakti*. If yoga, tantra, and asceticism have largely been removed from our modern-day conception of *bhakti*, we should remember that for most of Indian history they were not really that separable. Gerard Colas has noted that, “Sanskrit literature from around the third century AD attests a tendency which stresses asceticism and yoga in association with devotion for Nārāyaṇa. ... The early Pāñcarātra and Vaikhānasa traditions promoted this yogico-ascetic-cum-devotional tendency.”²²² Even the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, frequently cited by scholars of Hinduism as marking the beginning of the tradition of emotional *bhakti*, is far from as *bhakti*-centric as it is often assumed to be. In that the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* seems to have set the stage—to a greater or lesser extent—for all the Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* traditions that followed, it is a particularly interesting example for illustrating the under-appreciated fact that, at least up to the sixteenth century (our initial period of concern), *bhakti*, yoga, tantra, and asceticism often went hand in hand.

The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (*BhP*) is a Sanskrit text composed in the ninth to tenth century, most likely in the Tamil region of south India,²²³ and in Thomas Hopkins’ words, it “is generally considered to be the first major systematic statement of emotional devotionism.”²²⁴ David

²²² Gerard Colas, “History of Vaiṣṇava Traditions: An Esquisse” in *The Blackwell Companion to Hinduism*, ed. Gavin Flood (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 233.

²²³ BhP XI.5.38-40 states “O great king, in the Kali age here and there men will be devoted to Lord Nārāyaṇa; but their number will be large in the Draviḍa territory, wherein flow the rivers Tāmaraparṇī, Kṛtamālā, Payaswinī, the most sacred Kāverī, Mahānandī and Pratīchī. O great king, men who drink their waters generally become pure-minded devotees of Lord Vāsudeva” (1511-12). Unless otherwise noted, all translations of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* are my own adaptations of the translations in *Srīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa (With Sanskrit text and English translation)*, trans. C.L. Goswami (Gorakhpur: Motilal Janan at the Gita Press, 1971).

²²⁴ Thomas J. Hopkins, “The Vaishṇava Bhakti Movement in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*: A Study of the Characteristics of the Vaishṇava Devotional Movement at the Time of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Based on Evidence Drawn from the Text of this Work” (Ph.D. Thesis, Yale University, 1962), 13.

Haberman states that the *BhP* “introduces passionate emotionalism into the world of intellectual Kṛṣṇa bhakti,” and cites Friedhelm Hardy’s influential argument²²⁵ that it was through the *BhP* that “the emotional religion of the southern Ālvārs became united with northern Vedānta philosophy and spread through the authority of a Sanskrit *purāṇa* to influence the developments of emotional Kṛṣṇa bhakti throughout India.”²²⁶ Despite all this talk of emotional devotion, when one actually reads through the text, particularly when one looks beyond the famous Book X dedicated to the *līlās* of Krishna, one finds that alongside mentions of impassioned *bhakti* are reference after reference to practices of yoga, asceticism, renunciation, and tantric ritual.

To take an example, the yogic practice attributed to Kīlhaddev of abandoning the body at the time of death (by leaving through the *brahmarandhra* opening at the top of the skull) is described in Book XI, Chapter 15, which states, “Having blocked his rectum with his heel and pushed up the vital air to his heart, chest, throat and crown of the head, forcing it upwards through the *brahmarandra* to Brahma, the sage should shed the body (whenever he likes).”²²⁷ Book II, Chapter 2 offers similar instructions, stating that the *muni* (sage), whenever he desires to give up his body, should control his breath, restrain his senses, and merge his Self into the Supreme Spirit.

First of all he should squat (on his seat) pressing the anus with his heels and then, overcoming languor, should draw the air upwards through the six places (where the six

²²⁵ Friedhelm Hardy, *Viraha-Bhakti: The Early History of Kṛṣṇa Devotion in South India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983). Hardy argues that it is in the thirteenth century, through the spreading influence and acceptance of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and the Tamil Ālvār poet-saints, that a transformation occurs in north India in the conception of *bhakti* from an intellectual *bhakti* of reverence and loyal service (seen in the *Bhagavad Gītā*) to an ecstatic, emotional, and intoxicating *bhakti*.

²²⁶ David Haberman, *The Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu of Rūpa Gosvāmin* (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 2003), xxx.

²²⁷ *BhP* XI.15.24.

mystical circles are located). The *muni* should draw the air located in the circle within the navel upwards into the heart, then raising it along the path of the up-breath [*udāna*], he should take it into the breast, then, joining [breath] with knowledge, he should bring it slowly to the root of the palate. Thereafter, having closed the seven passages (i.e., eyes, ears, nostrils, and mouth), he should bring it to the circle located at the middle of the eyebrows. Then, remaining [in this state] for twenty-four minutes, whose gaze is sharp, taking the breath up and piercing his cranial vault (*mūrdhan*), he will surge upward into the beyond.²²⁸

The text then gives an alternate set of instructions for the one who desires to “acquire the eight *siddhis* (supernormal powers)” and “to sport in the company of celestial beings” and “move freely within and outside of the three worlds.”²²⁹ Subject matter like this makes it clear that this text is not simply about *bhakti*, at least not *bhakti* in the way we are prone to conceive it today.

While it is true that *bhakti* and emotionality receive striking new emphasis in the *BhP*, as a whole the text articulates a *bhakti* that cannot be easily—if at all—separated from practices of renunciation, tantric worship, and yoga. Book III, Chapter 28, for instance, describes the practice of yoga—citing five of the standard eight limbs of Pātāñjala yoga—but frames this yoga as a preparatory practice for a visualization meditation meant to develop intense devotion to the Lord.²³⁰ Indeed, in Book XI, Chapter 14, Krishna states that nothing—not Yoga, Sāṅkhya, the study of sacred scriptures, asceticism nor renunciation—captivates Him as does

²²⁸ BhP II.2.19-21.

²²⁹ BhP II.2.22-23.

²³⁰ The text states that one should take a seat on the ground, controlling one’s posture (*āsana*) and keeping the body erect, practice breath-control (*prāṇāyāma*), withdrawal of the senses (*pratyāhāra*), concentration of the mind (*dhāraṇā*), and meditation (*dhyāna*), and that “when the mind is controlled and purified by [this practice of] yoga,” one should meditate on the form of the Lord (III.28.11-12). Then proceeds a detailed description of how each minute aspect of the Lord should be visualized in the sage’s heart, a meditation intended to develop his emotion for God, so much so that “his heart melts through *bhakti*, the hairs on his body stand erect through excessive joy, and he is constantly bathed in a stream of tears occasioned by intense love” (III.28.34). Here we have the emotional *bhakti* with which many have come to associate the *BhP*, yet the preparation for and means to that ecstatic experience of devotion are practices of Pātāñjala yoga and visualization techniques of tantric yoga.

intense *bhakti*, adding that righteousness, truth, mercy, knowledge and asceticism cannot purify a mind bereft of *bhakti*.²³¹ He says that “A man full of devotion to Me—who speaks in a voice choked with emotion, whose heart melts, who weeps incessantly and laughs, who sings unabashed at the top of his voice and dances—purifies the world.”²³² However, a close reading of the text suggests that the way in which one attains this level of emotional devotion is through practices of renunciation, contemplation, and yoga, for immediately following the above verses about the nature and importance of *bhakti*, Krishna says:

The mind of a man dwelling on the objects of sense gets attached to them. The mind of one contemplating on Me gets absorbed in Me alone. Therefore, giving up the thought of the unreal and worthless objects (of the world) as things seen in a dream or fancied, concentrate your mind—purified through devotion to Me—on Me alone. Abandoning from a distance the company of women as well as of men delighting in the company of women, and having conquered one’s mind, one should sit down in a secure and lonely place and unweariedly think of Me.²³³

After thus advocating renunciation and one-pointed mental concentration, Krishna explains how such “a seeker of liberation (*mumukṣu*)” should contemplate Him.²³⁴ The text describes posture, methods of breath control, and a detailed visualization meditation on the form of God within one’s own heart (envisioned as an upside-down lotus bud), continuing on to give a detailed account of the various powers (*siddhis*) attained through yogic concentration (*yoga-dhāraṇā*) on different forms of God.²³⁵

²³¹ BhP XI.14.20-22.

²³² BhP XI.14.24.

²³³ BhP XI.14.27-29.

²³⁴ BhP XI.14.31-46.

²³⁵ BhP XI.15.1-32. This section concludes by remarking that these *siddhis* are obstacles that delay the one seeking the ultimate goal of union with the Divine.

While there is no doubt that *bhakti* is paramount in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, it has not been stressed enough that in this text, and throughout the entire medieval period, *bhakti* is often understood to be closely intertwined with, even inseparable from, practices of yoga, *tapas*, renunciation, and tantric visualization.²³⁶ As Book III, Chapter 32 of the *BhP* tells us, the ultimate spiritual goal is possible only for one “whose mind has been composed and rid of all attachments through faith (*śraddhā*), devotion (*bhakti*), daily practice of yoga (*yoga-abhyās*), and renunciation (*virakti*).”²³⁷ From the sixth to the thirteenth century, South Asian religiosity was dominated by tantric ideology and ritual and, in this context, *bhakti* usually appeared as one element, one dimension, among many in the religious life.²³⁸ There are certain medieval compositions—like the Sanskrit *BhP* and the Tamil poetry of the Ālvārs and Nāyanārs—in which *bhakti* undoubtedly takes center stage as a mode of expression (Tamil devotional songs) or as a path of great salvific power (*BhP*), but even in such texts, prior to the sixteenth century, we do not typically—if ever—see the *bhakta* positioned in opposition to the ascetic, *tāntrika*, or

²³⁶ Krishna Sharma makes a related point about the *Bhagavad Gītā*’s understanding of *bhakti* and the *bhakta*, noting that, in the text, “The virtues attributed to the *bhakta* are the same as those attributed to the *yogī*, and the true *yogī* is also called a *bhakta*. Personal excellence, contemplation and detachment are demanded of the true *bhakta*—mere obedience to a personal deity and a simple loving faith in him are obviously not considered sufficient.” Sharma, *Bhakti and the Bhakti Movement*, 115. Along the same lines, Karen Prentiss notes the contemplative nature of the *Gītā*’s *bhakti*, which always includes, and is not opposed to, *jñāna* (higher knowledge). Prentiss, *Embodiment of Bhakti*, 20. To give one more example briefly illustrating my point, Madhvā, a thirteenth century philosopher remembered as one of the great Vaiṣṇava *ācāryas* and a leader in the “*bhakti* movement,” authored a text called the *Tantrasāraṅgraha*. The text is concerned especially with the proper use of various mantras and the correct performance of worship, rituals and sacrifices. In this work, among other topics (including image installation, temple construction, and *homa* performance), Madhvā discusses the contemplation of God in fifty-one places in the body, the specific benefits accrued in using various mantras, the raising of *kuṇḍalinī*, and the mental worship of the Lord at different *cakras* along the *suṣumna nāḍī*. While Madhvā also states the grace of Hari—obtained through devotion, meditation, and scriptural study—is the chief cause of liberation, clearly, a fundamentally tantric paradigm structured the religious thought and practice of even this leading *bhakti* figure in the thirteenth century. H.V. Nagaraja Rao, “Gist of the *Tantrasāraṅgraha*” in *Tantrasāraṅgraha*, ed. A.V. Nagasampige. (Mysore: Oriental Research Institute, 2003): 54-95.

²³⁷ *BhP* III.32.28-30.

²³⁸ Forthcoming work from Hamsa Stainton and Alberta Ferrario examine the important role of *bhakti* in the medieval Śaiva tantric traditions of Kashmir, but also show that *bhakti* to be rather distinct from that of early modern north India.

yoga-practicing *muni*. Rather, prior to the early modern period the term *bhakta* seems to be an entirely non-exclusive identity that simply marks one as having a participatory relationship with God, one in which—especially after the *BhP*—the cultivation and expression of deep emotion were often seen to be central; however, the form of the *bhakta*’s “participation” and the means to his/her emotional experience in no way precluded, and in many instances actually called for, renunciation, asceticism, yoga, or tantric ritual technique.

For our purposes, the point is that when Nābhādās, circa 1600 CE, praises world renouncing, yoga-practicing ascetics like Payahārī, Kīlhadev, and Dvārakādās as exemplary *bhaktas*, this should not be any cause for cognitive dissonance. There was nothing whatsoever unusual about the *bhakti* of these figures. The yogic-ascetic stream of the early Rāmānandī community at Galta serves as a reminder that *bhakti* must be conceived in a way that allows us to imagine a certain breed of detached, yoga-practicing ascetic as just as much a *bhakta* as the poet-saint singing songs to God. Indeed, there is no doubt that in many instances the yoga-practicing ascetic and the passionately singing poet-saint were one and the same person.

For many scholars—for instance, those studying the Christian Desert Fathers or the early Sufis, or even specialists in ancient and medieval traditions of Hindu asceticism and tantra—the point I am making about the close relationship that devotion and devotees have with bodily disciplines of asceticism and yoga, as well as mental practices of contemplation and visualization, will be no surprise at all, and may even seem so obvious and facile as not to merit the attention I have given it. There is no doubt that across cultures, territories, religious traditions, and time periods, these sorts of mental and physical disciplines have often been important ways to express and/or cultivate devotion. Nevertheless, the predominant categories and conceptions, assumptions and preoccupations, of the contemporary study of

Hinduism (generally) and *bhakti* (more specifically) are such that this intervention seems entirely worthwhile in order to remind readers that, for most of Indian history, the realm of *bhakti* was far less circumscribed than it became over the course of the early modern and modern periods, and often involved far more than the love, *līlā*, and emotional devotion in poetry and song with which it then came to be most prominently identified.

If, then, on one hand, the early Rāmānandīs at Galtā remind us that *bhakti* had long been clearly intertwined with asceticism, tantra, and yoga, on the other hand, they also offer valuable insights into how these once rather closely interwoven threads of religious practice began to unravel into increasingly distinct strands of religious identity. Phyllis Granoff discusses a fascinating example of this process when she analyzes the sixteenth century Assamese *bhakti* reformer Śaṅkaradeva's vernacular rendering of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (*BhP*). In his Assamese version of the *BhP*, the *Bhaktiratnakāra*, Śaṅkaradeva alters the text in sometimes telling ways, for instance, in the Ajāmila story. Granoff explains, "In both the Sanskrit *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and Śaṅkaradeva's Assamese version, when Ajāmila is rescued from the clutches of death by Viṣṇu's messengers after he has called out the Divine Name, he repents. He abandons his family and goes to Gaṅgādvāra. There he stays in a temple. But here our texts diverge. The Sanskrit text tells us briefly that he practiced yoga there (6.2.40). He restrained his sense organs and yoked his mind to his soul (6.2.40). He detached his soul from the *guṇas* or the material world through *samādhi* (6.2.41) and united his soul with Brahma, the abode of all auspiciousness and by nature pure experience (6.2.41)."²³⁹ However, in Śaṅkaradeva's *Bhaktiratnakāra*, Ajāmila does none of these yogic practices. In his rendering of the story, "There is no mention of yoga, *samādhi*, yoking the mind to the soul and the soul to

²³⁹ Phyllis Granoff, "The Place of Yoga in Śaṅkaradeva's Vaishnavism," *Journal of Vaishnava Studies* 14.1 (2005): 166.

pure experience ... Śaṅkaradeva's text remains consistently a fulsome homage to the greatness of devotion to God, Kṛṣṇa, and the power of reciting his name remains the sole means to achieve salvation."²⁴⁰ Śaṅkaradeva also vehemently rejected the Śākta tantric practices that were so prevalent in Assam. In his work, we can see the move away from an inclusivist *bhakti* closely intertwined with tantric and yogic practices toward a more circumscribed *bhakti* that marginalized or directly opposed elements of tantra, yoga, and ascetic religiosity.

Śaṅkaradeva's attitude toward tantra and yoga and his articulation of an exclusivist *bhakti* were representative of a larger trend emerging in sixteenth century north India. A number of *bhaktas* in early modern north India—the Rāmānandīs among them—were beginning to cultivate a new *bhakti* identity and imagine a new *bhakti* community positioned against certain core components of tantric, yogic, and ascetic thought and practice. We can see this trend especially in the *rasik bhakta* stream of the early Rāmānandīs represented by Agradās and Nābhādās, but we also see aspects of it in the ascetic-yogic stream of Payahārī and Kīlha, especially when we contrast them with their superficially similar tantric competitors, the Nāth yogīs.

~ Rāmānandī Roots ~

In order to properly understand the Galta Rāmānandīs (and to differentiate them from the Nāth yogīs), we must first get a better sense of their heritage. Ascertaining the historical roots of the Rāmānandīs is no easy task, especially considering that the first real evidence we have of a community tracing itself to the figure of Rāmānand (and including as his disciples famed yet heterodox *bhakti* poet-saints such as Kabīr and Raidās) does not occur until the end

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

of the sixteenth century in Rajasthan. Both Nābhādās, in his *Bhaktamāl* (c. 1600), and Anantadās, in his *Pīpā-parcāī* (1588), connect themselves to Rāmānand through Agradās (i.e., Rāmānand→Anantānand→Krishnadās Payahārī→Agradās). Nābhādās places Rāmānand in Kāśī (Banaras) and links him somewhat ambiguously to the lineage of the great southern Vaiṣṇava ācārya Rāmānuja (11th century) and his Śrī Vaiṣṇava *sampradāy*.²⁴¹ Notably, Anantadās never mentions Rāmānuja or the Śrī *sampradāy*. Nābhā devotes two stanzas to Rāmānuja, one of the few times he gives any one person so much attention. He states that, “No one is equal to Rāmānuja” and praises his Śrī *sampradāy* as “the crown jewel of *sampradāys*” and “the canopy of *bhakti*.”²⁴² Nābhādās certainly had good reasons for linking his burgeoning community to the prestige of Rāmānuja and the Śrī Vaiṣṇavas; Nābhā’s community was liberal in its social views and diverse in its social makeup (including *sūdras*, untouchables, and women) and as Pinch writes, he “afforded this ragtag band of bhaktas and sants a modicum of Vaiṣṇava respectability by endowing them with an unimpeachable sectarian pedigree.”²⁴³ Yet, beyond Nābhā’s assertion there seems to be no evidence of any formal or otherwise meaningful affiliation between the proto-Rāmānandīs and the Śrī Vaiṣṇavas.²⁴⁴ If Rāmānand’s connection

²⁴¹ According to Nābhādās, it was Rāghavānand who brought the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition from the south to the north, settling in Banaras where he initiated Rāmānand (*Bhaktamāl*, stanza 34). Richard Burghart and Peter van der Veer discuss various stories intended to explain how the Rāmānandīs are linked to yet separate from the Śrī Vaiṣṇavas. In these, it is said that (depending on the version) Rāmānand or his guru Rāghavānand either (a) left the Śrī Vaiṣṇava fold when denied commensality after breaking caste rules, or (b) was excommunicated for following tantric practices and doctrines. Burghart, “Founding of the Ramanandi Sect,” 123-124; Peter van der Veer, *Gods on Earth: The Management of Religious Experience and Identity in a North Indian Pilgrimage Centre* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), 87-89.

²⁴² *Chappay* 30:5, 29:6 [Jhā]. Hare, “Garland of Devotees,” 54-55.

²⁴³ Pinch, “History, Devotion,” 380-381.

²⁴⁴ The *Agastya Saṃhitā* demonstrates the institutional presence of Rām devotion in Banaras as early as the twelfth century; however, this text appears to have no relationship with the Śrī *sampradāy*. Hans Bakker suggests that the Śrī Vaiṣṇavas were present in north India—in Ayodhyā—as far back as the sixteenth century and it is possible they could have been in Banaras even earlier and cross-pollinated with groups of ascetic *bhakti* Sants to produce the proto-Rāmānandī community, but this is unsupported by any historical evidence and thus, at this juncture, it

with the Śrī *sampradāy* is doubtful, Richard Burghart has demonstrated that it is even more unlikely that Rāmānand actually founded a monastic order of his own.²⁴⁵ Regardless of these uncertainties, what is clear is that Nābhādās wanted to assert that his community, through Rāmānand, was closely linked with both *saguṇ*-friendly orthodox Vaiṣṇavism (indeed with its most prestigious *ācārya*, Rāmānuja) and with the popular group of predominantly low-caste, *nirguṇ*-focused *bhakti* poet-saints who have come to be known as the “Sants.” Nābhā did not reconcile the seemingly contradictory strains in his assertion, leaving scholars somewhat puzzled over the Rāmānandī community’s origins and early identity.²⁴⁶ Were they an orthodox Vaiṣṇava monastic community seeking to expand their base of support by bringing popular heterodox saints like Kabīr and Raidās into the fold?²⁴⁷ Were they a community of liberal yoga-practicing ascetics and Name-chanting *nirguṇ bhaktas* who sought to acquire more respectable,

seems quite unlikely. Hans Bakker, *Ayodhyā: The history of Ayodhyā from the 7th century BC to the middle of the 18th century, its development into a sacred centre with special reference to the Ayodhyāmāhātmya and to the worship of Rāma according to the Agastyasaṃhitā* (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1986), 139, n. 3.

²⁴⁵ Burghart, “Founding of the Ramanandi Sect.”

²⁴⁶ In regard to the mysterious figure of Rāmānand himself, William Pinch writes that, “As both a Sanskrit-brahman and a Vaishnava-bhakti visionary, Ramanand is believed by many to have occupied an important and neglected space between two competing ‘Hinduisms’: one composed of sophisticated pandits, the other of radical poets. For Indologists reared on the basic structural oppositions of caste hierarchy, the difficult question is, can one life occupy both ends of the spectrum?” He adds that, “it would require little in the way of argumentation to suggest further that Ramanand never even existed but was conjured up by monks at a much later date to satisfy a drive for brahmanical respectability within the order.” William Pinch, *Peasants and Monks in British India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 50.

²⁴⁷ A somewhat contentious issue among scholars has been the question of whether or not Kabīr was actually the disciple of Rāmānand (as claimed by Nābhādās). While Purushottam Agrawal is adamant that the historical evidence indicates a clear “consensus” that this guru-disciple relationship did exist, John S. Hawley points out that nearly all of the evidence for this relationship actually comes from sectarian Rāmānandī sources and the relationship is never mentioned in the poetry attributed to either Kabīr or Rāmānand. This is true, but it is important to note one nonsectarian source, Harirām Vyās (fl. 1535–70), who, in a poem likely predating the Rāmānandī sources, links Rāmānand and Kabīr—referring to Kabīr as the *sevak* (servant) of Rāmānand—thus offering evidence that by about the mid-sixteenth century some *bhaktas* even outside of Rāmānandī circles understood that there was a link (if not a guru-disciple relationship) between the two. Hawley is well aware of the Harirām Vyās verse, but nevertheless expresses great skepticism that Rāmānand was the guru of Kabīr, stating that, “Ramanand solves too many problems on too little evidence,” and suggesting that the link was probably a “pious invention” made to appropriate the substantial following Kabīr had garnered. John S. Hawley, *Three Bhakti Voices: Mirabai, Surdas and Kabir in Their Times and Ours*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 272.

orthodox credentials by linking themselves to the Śrī *sampradāy*? Were they a schism from the Śrī Vaiṣṇavas, a lineage that split off because of their unorthodox views on caste (i.e., their practice of initiating the low-caste)?²⁴⁸ It is difficult to answer these questions with any real certainty, but in looking back to the origins of Rām devotion and the “Sant” tradition we can gain a much better sense of the identity of the proto-Rāmānandīs.

* * *

The two streams of Rāmānandīs that we identified earlier may have common roots in the tradition represented by a text known as the *Agastya Saṃhitā*, a Sanskrit work composed in Banaras, in Vaiṣṇava brahmin circles, in the twelfth century.²⁴⁹ The *Agastya Saṃhitā* (*AgSaṃ*) is novel in making Rāma the exclusive object and aim of worship; he is not just another incarnation of Vishnu, but is equated with supreme reality itself. In the content and emphases of its teachings, the *AgSaṃ* possesses several intriguing links to the sixteenth century proto-Rāmānandī community in Galta. For one, the *AgSaṃ* heavily stresses the recitation of the divine Name, which seems to have been the foundational practice of all the early Galta Rāmānandīs. In addition, the text advocates two paths of worship that mirror the tendencies of the two streams of the early Rāmānandīs. It teaches worship of both the *nirguṇ* Rām and the *saṅguṇ* Rāmcandra, prescribing practices of yoga, meditation, tantric ritual and visualization, and singing the Name. Furthermore, the primary mantra taught in the *AgSaṃ* is the six-syllable *ṣaḍakṣara* mantra (*rāṃ rāmāya namaḥ*), the same mantra used by Rāmānandī ascetics

²⁴⁸ Assuming some actual link between the Rāmānandīs and Śrī Vaiṣṇavas, Burghart states that, “it was more advantageous for the Ramanandis to profit from the established reputation of the Sri sect ... than to abrogate this link and to fend for themselves in the competition with other ascetic sects,” adding that the community’s liberal social attitudes and initiation practices reveal “the broadening of criteria for recruitment into a Vaishnavite sect thereby enabling the sect to compete more effectively for devotees and disciples.” Burghart, “Founding of the Ramanandi Sect,” 133.

²⁴⁹ Bakker, *Ayodhyā*, 70.

today, and one that clearly differentiates them from the Śrī Vaiṣṇavas, who use the *aṣṭākṣara* mantra (*oṃ namo nārāyaṇāya*).²⁵⁰ Interestingly, Nābhādās's *Bhaktamāl* follows the *AgSaṃ* in reconciling Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism by presenting Śiva as part of the lineage of great Rām *bhaktas* initiated through this Rām (*ṣaḍakṣara*) mantra.²⁵¹ In addition to these links, Agradās, in his *Dhyān-mañjarī* (discussed in depth in Chapter Four), describes a meditative vision that adopts the very same detailed description of Rām and Sītā seated on a lotus throne under a tree that the *AgSaṃ* 33.7-15 first articulates in its instructions for the mental worship/visualization of *saguṇ* Rām.²⁵²

According to *Agastya Saṃhitā* 20:29, our primary spiritual goal is to realize the identity of the Self (*ātman*) with Rām and this can be done either by yoga and meditation on the abstract (*nirguṇ*) Rām, by means of worship (to the *saguṇ* Rām), or by both.²⁵³ In the Kali Age, the path of *kīrtana* (devotional singing) and *saguṇ* worship (*ārādhana*) is deemed the easier path. For the *AgSaṃ*, this worship is primarily “a device to convert the supreme abstract principle (which is identical to the *ātman*) into a qualified form, that is, to make god visible in one's own heart and/or in an idol in order to facilitate the identification of the worshipper with him.”²⁵⁴ The *saguṇ* worship of Rām advocated in the text is thoroughly tantric—involving

²⁵⁰ Alternatively, this mantra could be *oṃ nārāyaṇāya namaḥ*. Vaudeville notes that, “the Rāmānujīyas castigate the Rāmānandīs as a ‘non-Vedic’ sect since they use a formula [mantra] which excludes the *praṇava* [OM].” Charlotte Vaudeville, *Kabīr: Volume I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), 114-115. Furthermore, these two communities differ in the basic fact that Rāmānandīs worship Rām and Sītā, while Śrī Vaiṣṇavas tend to worship Vishnu Nārāyaṇ and Lakṣmī.

²⁵¹ Śiva is second (initiated by Brahmā) in the *Agastya Saṃhitā*'s lineage of great Rām *bhaktas*, while in Nābhā's *Bhaktamāl*, he is third after Brahmā and Nārada. Vasudha Paramasivan, “Between Text and Sect: Early Nineteenth Century Shifts in the Theology of Ram” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California-Berkeley, 2010), 43.

²⁵² Paramasivan, “Between Text and Sect,” 104; Bakker, *Ayodhya*, 98-99. This tree-lotus-throne image is not altogether uncommon and could have made its way into the *Dhyān Mañjarī* via other means.

²⁵³ Bakker, *Ayodhya*, 72.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 73.

prāṇāyāma (yogic breathing practices) and the visualization practices of *bhūtaśuddhi* (destruction/purification of the mundane body) and *nyāsa* (divinization of the body)—and does not differ in principle from the Pāñcarātra tradition and its Śaiva and Śākta counterparts.²⁵⁵ We should not find anything unusual in this; to reiterate my earlier point, *bhakti* and tantra were largely integrated throughout the medieval period, with worship and devotion most typically taking place in tantric ritual contexts.

The *AgSaṃ* places special emphasis on the salvific power of the Name of Rām, which is conceived as both the phonic equivalent of the supreme, *nirguṇ* Divine and as “the key or the medium through which the devotee gains access to god in a tangible form.”²⁵⁶ As Hans Bakker explains, in the text, “Singing the praise of Rāma (*kīrtana*), remembrance of him (*smaraṇa*), and listening to the story of his deeds (*śravaṇa*) are all more or less concomitant with the practice of uttering his name.”²⁵⁷ The *AgSaṃ* (25:9-10) states that the Rām mantra can be used even without initiation (*dīkṣā*)²⁵⁸ or tantric divinization of the body (*nyāsa*), proclaiming further that “even sinners who say Rāma, Rāma, Rāma, truly even them he pulls out of the pool of their millions of sins” (3:25).

The *AgSaṃ* even cleverly uses the name of Rām to explain and appropriate the ancient tradition that Śiva grants liberation to those who die in the precincts of Banaras. Chapter Seven of the text explains that many worshippers were coming to Banaras seeking liberation and continuously repeating, “Śiva, Śiva, Śiva.” Hearing them, but unable to help, Śiva

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 77.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 73.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 78.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 78. The *AgSaṃ* also devotes an entire chapter (Chapter 6) to the greatness of *tulasī* leaves, which can be offered in worship to Rām by men and women of all castes without a guru or initiation.

wondered, “How can I grant liberation to these devotees?” He then approached Brahmā, who told him the way, initiating Śiva in the *ṣaḍakṣara* mantra of Rām. Śiva then practiced devotion and *japa* of this mantra until eventually Rām appeared before him. At this point, says the *AgSaṃ*, Rām told Śiva that (a) when anyone worships with this *ṣaḍakṣara* mantra, he (Rām) will make himself present, and (b) if he (Śiva) should whisper the name of Rām into the right ear of anyone who longs for liberation, that person will be released. This account of the *AgSaṃ* comes from Bakker, who remarks, “This was really a dashing feat of the Vārāṇasī Rāmaite *paṇḍits*: to tell their clientele in the hour of death Śiva will come to their rescue by whispering ‘Rāma’ into their right ears.”²⁵⁹

Interestingly, the great sixteenth century *bhakti* saint Tulsīdās precisely mirrors the *AgSaṃ*’s views on Śiva and the holy Name (Rāma). In his *Rāmcaritmānas*, Tulsīdās depicts Śiva as Rām’s most devout *bhakta*²⁶⁰ and states that he continually repeats the *mahāmantra* of the divine Name “Rāma,” compassionately bestowing it upon those dying in Banaras in order to grant them liberation.²⁶¹ Just as much as, and perhaps even more than, the proto-Rāmānandīs, Tulsīdās seems to have followed in the tradition of the *AgSaṃ*, for his conception of Rām as both *nirguṇ* and *saguṇ*, and of the Name as the bridge between these two dimensions,²⁶² also seems to match exactly the *AgSaṃ*’s conception of Rām and the Name. Furthermore, Tulsīdās

²⁵⁹ Hans Bakker, “Rāma Devotion in a Śaiva Holy Place: The Case of Vārāṇasī,” in *Patronage and Popularisation, Pilgrimage and Procession: Channels of Transcultural Translation and Transmission in Early Modern South Asia*, ed. Heidi R.K. Pauwels (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2009), 69-70.

²⁶⁰ The frame of Tulsīdās’s epic is that Śiva is telling Rām’s story to Pārvatī. Tulsī writes this about Śiva as the god recalls the tale of Rām in order to narrate it (1.111.4): “All the deeds of Ram flashed into Shiva mind, his body bristled with love and his eyes filled with tears. The form of Raghunath was reflected in his heart and that embodiment of supreme bliss himself (Shiva) felt great joy.” Paramasivan, “Between Text and Sect,” 43.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 68-69.

²⁶² In *Rāmcaritmānas* 1.21.4, Tulsī writes, “The Name is a witness between the *nirguṇ* (*aguṇa*) and *saguṇ* realms; it is a clever translator through which both [realms] become enlightening.”

is said to have settled in Banaras at a location (now called Tulsī Ghāṭ) adjacent to the temple of Lolārka, a Vaiṣṇava temple that dates back to at least the twelfth century, and was likely the center for the community that composed the *AgSaṃ*.²⁶³ While Tulsīdās was not a member of the proto-Rāmānandī community, he is closely associated with them.²⁶⁴ Nābhādās (a contemporary of Tulsī) praises him as the poet Valmiki himself, taken birth in the Kali Age, and Priyādās's commentary on the *Bhaktamāl* mentions a meeting between the two. Furthermore, Tulsī's *Rāmcaritmānas* and *Hanumān-cālīsā*²⁶⁵ became so central to the religious life of the Rāmānandī *sampradāy* that later sectarian hagiographies (e.g., the *Rasik-prakāś-bhaktamāl* of 1839) invented ways to co-opt him into the community.²⁶⁶

While the proto-Rāmānandī community at Galta did not come into existence until approximately four hundred years after the composition of the *Agastya Saṃhitā*, the text's emphasis on singing and chanting the Name, its worship of *nirguṇ* Rām and *saguṇ* Rāmcandra, its description of yogic practices and visualizations, and its accommodation (within an

²⁶³ Lolārka was one of only two non-Śaiva temples in Banaras in which the royal Gāhaḍvāla family, who were staunch Vaiṣṇavas, are known to have worshipped. Additionally, the *AgSaṃ* identifies Lolārka, on the bank of the Ganges in Banaras, as the place where Brahmā initiated Śiva into the *ṣaḍakṣara* mantra of Rām. Bakker, "Rāma Devotion in a Śaiva Holy Place," 69-71.

²⁶⁴ The brahmin Tulsīdās seems to have had a concern with propriety, orthodoxy, and caste that would have placed him in tension with aspects of the socially liberal early Rāmānandīs and the heterodox views of the Sant poets, like Kabīr, who they claimed as their own. In verse 554 of his *Dohāvalī*, Tulsīdās "condemns the heterodoxy represented by the Sants, specifically mentions the *dohā* (or *sākhī*) as a verse form associated with it," he writes: "By means of *sākhīs*, *śabdīs*, *dohās*, tales and stories, these vile poets expound *bhakti*, while scorning the Vedas and the Purāṇas." Karine Schomer, "The *Dohā* as a Vehicle of Sant Teachings," in *The Sants: Studies in a Devotional Tradition of India*, eds. Karine Schomer and W.H. McLeod (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987), 73-74. Tulsī's perspective also differed from the Rāmānandīs—particularly the *rasik* stream of Agradās—in that he downplayed the *śṛṅgār* sentiment of erotic love and instead emphasized most the worship of Rām as a child, i.e., through the mode of *vātsalya*. Paramasivan, "Between Text and Sect," 45.

²⁶⁵ It is highly unlikely that Tulsīdās actually composed the *Hanumān-cālīsā*, but popular belief universally attributes the text—regularly recited by Rāmānandīs—to him.

²⁶⁶ Paramasivan, "Between Text and Sect," 12. By the early nineteenth century Rāmānandīs claimed Tulsīdās—and thereby the fame of his *Rāmcaritmānas*—as one of their own. A signboard at the Raghunāth Temple in Galta today publicly displays a popular tradition that Tulsī, after seeing the extent of Nābhādās's *bhakti*, came to Galta and resided there for three years.

orthodox framework) of men and women of all castes, including the uninitiated, offer some fascinating parallels with what we know about the practices and attitudes of the community of Krishnadās Payahārī, Kīlhadev, and Agradās. It is uncertain whether these early Rāmānandīs had any direct historical link to the community that composed the *AgSaṃ*, but they certainly seem to have followed that twelfth-century community in spirit and, in several ways, in thought and practice as well.

The *Agastya Saṃhitā* is especially noteworthy as an orthodox Vaiṣṇava scripture that so early and so adamantly advocates the practice of repeating the Name of Rām as a means to salvation. Vaiṣṇava references to the power of the divine Name date back at least to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (c. 9th-10th cent.) where the four syllables of the name Nārāyaṇa are considered to have great salvific potency. However, the practice of chanting the Name—and particularly the name of Rām—is most closely associated with, and was most extensively adopted by, the *nirguṇ* Sant tradition of *bhaktas* like Kabīr, Raidās, Dādū, and Nānak. Bakker’s work is important in demonstrating an early source and an orthodox Vaiṣṇava framework for this tradition’s most cherished practice. He writes that, “The *Rāmarakṣāstotra*, of which the nucleus must be old since it is referred to by the *Agastyasaṃhitā* [12th cent.] declares: ‘The world is protected by the Name of Rāma which is the unique victorious mantra. Accomplishment in all pursuits is easily attainable for him whose voice pronounces (It).’”²⁶⁷

The practice of reciting the name of Rām seems to have risen up alongside the cult of the divine Rāmcandra, which from the twelfth century onward seems to have become an increasingly prominent aspect of Hindu political theology. While Rāmāyaṇa themes are

²⁶⁷ Hans Bakker, “Reflections on the Evolution of Rāma Devotion in the Light of Textual and Archaeological Evidence,” *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Sudasiens* (WZKS) 31 (1987): 23.

prevalent from an early date, Sheldon Pollock has noted that there is no evidence of Rāma as a deity or focal point of religious practice in South Asia until the mid-twelfth century, when we see “a sudden onset of activity of building temples to Rāma, which intensified over the next two hundred years.”²⁶⁸ As Bakker similarly remarks, “we should view the evolution of a Ramaite form of Vishnuism in north India as a new departure occasioned by the specific social and political conditions of the 11th to 13th centuries.”²⁶⁹

More than the emergence of Rām as supreme deity and exemplar of Hindu kingship, here we are interested in the related rise of the so-called “Sant movement” of *nirguṇ bhaktas*. By 1206, not long after the composition of the *AgSaṃ*, nearly all of north India from the Ravi River, on the border of modern-day Pakistan, to Assam had come under the military dominion of Muslim Turks.²⁷⁰ With most of north India under Muslim rule, and with political repression “imped[ing] the construction of new sanctuaries and durable religious artifacts, such as idols,” in this period there seems to have been a shift “from temple worship to non-material modes of devotion as found in the Sant movement and the cult of the Name.”²⁷¹ Indeed, Bakker points out that “the cult of the name as a separate strand in the religion of North India coincided

²⁶⁸ Sheldon Pollock, “Ramayana and Political Imagination in India,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 52.2 (1993): 266. Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya has offered a probing critique of many aspects of the argument in Pollock’s essay. In my view, Chattopadhyaya justifiably criticizes Pollock’s suggestion that Rāma’s story had new appeal because its depiction of the villain Rāvana and his demon cohort resonated with hostile Hindu attitudes toward the Muslim Turks. While the available evidence does not seem to support the view that Hindus widely demonized the Muslim Turks as evil enemies, I think there is nevertheless solid evidence of a clear rise in devotion to Rāma as a deity-king in this period, a rise that was related in some way to the transformed social and political order instituted by the Sultanate. See Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, “Anachronism of Political Imagination,” in *Religious Movements in South Asia 600-1800*, ed. David N. Lorenzen, 209-226 (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004).

²⁶⁹ Bakker, “Reflections on the Evolution of Rāma Devotion,” 21.

²⁷⁰ Pollock, “Ramayana and Political Imagination,” 279.

²⁷¹ Bakker, “Reflections on the Evolution of Rāma Devotion,” 22.

roughly with the period of most stringent repression of temple worship and idolatry.”²⁷² The Sants, then, emerged and flourished in the altered socio-political situation of late-medieval north India, a new environment characterized by the expansive presence of both Muslim politico-military power and Sufi religious activity.

The “Sant movement” is a scholarly designation for a group of like-minded *bhaktas* of fifteenth to seventeenth century north India; however, the “Sants” did not actually make up an organized, coherent community with a clear self-identity. The word *sant* does not mean “saint,” but is from the Sanskrit *sat* (truth, being) and refers to “one who knows the truth” or “one who has experienced ultimate reality.”²⁷³ In general, the Sants are united by their low social class, their heterodox, nonsectarian perspective, their orientation toward a formless, *nirguṇ* (quality-less) Divine, their focus on unmediated inner spirituality, their simple, puritan lifestyle, their vernacular compositions of devotional song and poetry, the importance they gave to *satsaṅg* (the company of the *sants*) and the divine Guru (*satguru*), and, perhaps most of all, their devotion to the Name.²⁷⁴

The Sant tradition is typically considered to be a synthesis of three different movements in late medieval and early modern north India: Sufism, Vaiṣṇava *bhakti*, and the tantric asceticism of the Nāth *yogīs*.²⁷⁵ With the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate at the

²⁷² Bakker, *Ayodhyā*, 123.

²⁷³ Winand M. Callewaert, “Sants,” in *Brill’s Encyclopedia of Hinduism, Volume III*, ed. Knut A. Jacobsen (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 532.

²⁷⁴ Karine Schomer lists the most common topics in the Sant *dohās*: 1) the greatness of the *satguru*; 2) the cherished anguish of separation (*viraha*) from the beloved; 3) the greatness of Sants; 4) the companionship of Sants (*satsaṅg*); 5) the devotee’s need for divine grace; 6) the difficulty of the path and the need for heroic courage; 7) the urgency of seeking salvation in this rare and brief human birth; 8) the power of *māyā* (cosmic illusion); 9) the instability and deceptiveness of the mind; and 10) reassurance that faith in the Lord is rewarded. Schomer, “The *Dohā* as a Vehicle of Sant Teachings,” 76-82.

²⁷⁵ Callewaert, “Sants,” 532.

beginning of the thirteenth century, Sufi orders began to expand, in the process encouraging and promoting beliefs and practices held in common by Hindus and Muslims.²⁷⁶ The Sants were clearly influenced by Sufi ideas, practices, and attitudes. In keeping with the Sufis, they rejected ritualism, idol worship, and caste-distinctions and devoted themselves to a Divine without qualities (*nirguṇ*). The Sants' audience was those most susceptible to conversion to Islam—the lower strata of society—thus the Sants advocated ideas and practices shared by Sufis and Hindus,²⁷⁷ such as worship through communal singing (*samā' /kīrtana*), remembrance and recitation of the Name of God (*dhikr/nāma-japa*) and the concept of divine love (often conceived of in terms of separation).²⁷⁸ In many ways, the Sufi-Sant relationship was not so much one of influence as one of “elective affinity.” As we have seen, a number of these ideas and practices had already been articulated in the orthodox Vaiṣṇavism and Rām devotion of the *Agastya Saṃhitā* and, in the changed social, political and religious environment, they found themselves particularly well suited for emphasis, adoption, and adaptation.

We have already stressed that the practice of the Name was fundamental for the Sants, but it is crucial to note that the Name they invoked was almost exclusively Vaiṣṇava—most often it was Rām, but frequently also Hari, Govind, and Mādhav. While the Sants interacted with and (in certain ways) resembled Sufis, they maintained a loosely Vaiṣṇava identity that kept them distinct from, and in competition with, Sufi Islam. However loose, nonsectarian, and “vulgate” their Vaiṣṇavism was in actuality, a number of the most famous Sants—Kabīr,

²⁷⁶ Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam: India 1200-1800* (Chicago: Chicago Univ Press, 2004), 82.

²⁷⁷ To speak of the Sants in this way is, in fact, rather misleading. Some in the category of “Sant” prided themselves on being neither Hindu nor Muslim (e.g., Kabīr), though others maintained a relatively clear Sufi (e.g., Bābā Farīd) or Hindu identity (e.g., Pīpā).

²⁷⁸ Bakker, *Ayodhyā*, 121.

Raidās, Pīpā, Dhanā, and Sen—are typically remembered as Rāmānandīs; that is, as members of an orthodox Vaiṣṇava *sampradāy*.²⁷⁹ In fact, Nābhādās claimed these figures as disciples of none other than the supposed founder of the community, Rāmānand, who likely was a leading Sant himself.

As Purushottam Agrawal has demonstrated, the image we have from Sanskrit sources of Rāmānand as an orthodox *ācārya* is a recently constructed and spurious one.²⁸⁰ Agrawal argues convincingly that the Rāmānand of Hindi vernacular sources—our earliest sources on Rāmānand—was a historical personage who lived in fifteenth century north India and was a significant figure in the *sant* tradition, as seen in Vaiṣṇava hagiographies and the poetic compositions attributed to him in the *Ādi Granth* and the *Sarvangīs* of Rajjab and Gopāldās.²⁸¹ These poems of the “Hindi Rāmānand” emphasize chanting the name of Rām, renunciation and the illusory nature of worldly pleasures, and turning inward to attain a state of *sahaj* or

²⁷⁹ Nābhādās seems to have conceived all the *bhaktas* he praised in his *Bhaktamāl* to have been Vaiṣṇavas in some sense. In *dohā* 184 [Jhā], he states, “All you Vaiṣṇavas, all you sacred images, great and small, all of your virtues are boundless / Some are mentioned earlier and others later, please do not think it a crime.” *śrī mūrti sab vaiṣṇava laghu dīragh gunani agādh/ āge pīche baran te jinni mānau aparādh//* Thanks goes to Tyler Williams for first drawing my attention to this particular verse.

²⁸⁰ Purushottam Agrawal, “In Search of Ramanand: The Guru of Kabir and Others,” in *From Ancient to Modern: Religion, Power, and Community in India*, eds. I. Banerjee-Dube and S. Dube (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008), 135–170. Agrawal shows rather indisputably that the Sanskrit texts attributed to Rāmānand are actually products of the early twentieth century.

²⁸¹ Historically speaking, Rāmānand remains shrouded in mystery, but there seems little doubt that he did exist. Beyond references to him in sectarian Rāmānandī sources, as just mentioned, poetry attributed to him is found in the anthologies of the Sikhs and the Dādū Panth. Perhaps most interesting of all, he is praised by the nonsectarian *bhakti* poet Harirām Vyās, whose compositions seem to precede all Rāmānandī writings. The research of Heidi Pauwels convincingly demonstrates that Vyās, a Krishna devotee, flourished in Vrindavan between 1535 and 1570. In one of his poems (*pad* 46), Vyās writes, “Truly a holy man (*sādhū*) was Rāmānand, who knew how to love the Lord, having realized that all else is sorrow and duality.” In the next line, he describes Kabīr as Rāmānand’s *sevak* (servant). While a number of scholars have been interested in this poem in so far as it relates to the debate over whether Kabīr was actually the disciple of Rāmānand, perhaps more significant is the simple fact that among the *bhaktas* that Vyās praised—with no sectarian allegiance—was none other than Rāmānand. This powerfully suggests that he was no invented figure but a real historical person who was worthy of note in the north Indian *bhakti* milieu. Pauwels, *In Praise of Holy Men*, 264–268; 105.

sūnya (concepts with clear links to the Nāths), thus offering an ascetic, *nirguṇ* vision that closely parallels that of Kabīr.²⁸²

Both the poetry and disciples attributed to Rāmānand place him, and the Galta community that traced itself back to him, squarely within the tradition of the Sants.²⁸³ Certainly, what we know about Krishnadās Payahārī and his successor, Kīlhadev, indicates that they too followed the Sants in thought, practice, and social/caste attitudes. If, then, we can safely say that the proto-Rāmānandī community had deep roots in the Sant tradition, we must remember that this Sant tradition—in addition to its Sufi and Vaiṣṇava connections—also had links with the Nāth *yogīs*.

In scholarship on *bhakti*, the link between the Nāths and the Sants (sometimes called *nirguṇīs*), most especially Kabīr, has become something of a trope. Pitambar Datt Barthwal, in an essay first published in 1931 and entitled “Hindī kavitā meṃ yog-pravāh” (“The Yoga-stream of Hindi Poetry”), first “drew scholarly attention not only to the general significance of the Nath compositions in the development of Hindi literature, but more importantly to the powerful connection between Nath and the Nirgunis.”²⁸⁴ He elaborated on this argument in his seminal work, *Nirguna School of Hindi Poetry* (1936), declaring that the *nirguṇ bhaktas* “are deeply indebted to the Nath Pantha.”²⁸⁵ Western-language scholarship on the Sants (*nirguṇ*

²⁸² Agrawal, “In Search of Ramanand,” 158-159.

²⁸³ It is worth noting that while Rāmānand and many of his supposed disciples (Kabīr, Raidās, Pīpā, Dhanā, Sen) seem to have been Sants, we know virtually nothing about Anantānand, the disciple of Rāmānand who was Krishnadās Payahārī’s guru, and is thus the critical link between Rāmānand and the proto-Rāmānandī community at Galta. In the course of my research, I am yet to encounter any poetry attributed to Anantānand or any hagiographical references that might give a solid sense of him as a *bhakta*.

²⁸⁴ Purushottam Agrawal, “The Nath in Hindi Literature,” in *Yogi Heroes and Poets: Histories and Legends of the Nāths*, eds. David Lorenzen and Adrian Munoz (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011), 11.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 11-12. We might reasonably be suspicious of Barthwal’s claims for the influence of the Nāths specifically on Hindi literature, considering that (a) the earliest manuscript evidence we have of vernacular (“Hindi”) Nāth

bhaktas) has followed in Barthwal's footsteps. As Karine Schomer explains, "[T]he general scholarly consensus is that the Sants represent a synthesis of Vaishnava *bhakti* and elements from the tradition of the Nath[s]."²⁸⁶ Charlotte Vaudeville similarly states, "The Sant *sadhana* or the Sant ideal of sanctity ... may be viewed as a subtle blending of the two main traditions of Hindu mysticism, apparently antagonistic to each other: Vaishnava *bhakti* and an esoteric Tantric tradition, whose most popular representatives are Gorakhnath and the Nath Yogis."²⁸⁷ Long before these modern scholars, we have evidence that Mughals in the seventeenth century also understood the Sants and the Nāth *yogīs* (and the Sufis) to be closely linked, if nevertheless separate. In a fascinating Mughal miniature painting commissioned around 1650 CE, the Sant *bhaktas* Kabīr, Raidās, Pīpā, and Sen are depicted sitting in a row with—but separate and just across from—Gorakhnāth, the reputed founder of the Nāth *yogī* order, and his guru, Matsyendranāth, at a gathering of Sufis at a major Sufi shrine (see Figure 2).²⁸⁸ Furthermore, the poetry of Kabīr and Raidās makes it clear that, whatever differences these devotee-poets had with the Nāth *yogīs*, they rubbed elbows enough with them to be quite intimate with their yogic practices and ideas.²⁸⁹

yogī writings comes from the seventeenth century and (b) Barthwal's assertions may have been partly motivated by a nationalist agenda that sought to give Hindi literature an ancient (and Hindu religious) pedigree.

²⁸⁶ Karine Schomer, "Introduction: The Sant Tradition in Perspective," in *The Sants: Studies in a Devotional Tradition of India*, eds. Karine Schomer and W.H. McLeod (Berkeley: Berkeley Religious Studies Series and Motilal Banarsidass, 1987), 8.

²⁸⁷ Charlotte Vaudeville, "Sant Mat: Santism as the Universal Path to Sanctity," in *The Sants: Studies in a Devotional Tradition of India*, eds. Karine Schomer and W.H. McLeod (Berkeley: Berkeley Religious Studies Series and Motilal Banarsidass, 1987), 36.

²⁸⁸ Elinor C. Gadon, "Note on the Frontispiece," in *The Sants: Studies in a Devotional Tradition of India*, eds. Karine Schomer and W.H. McLeod (Berkeley: Berkeley Religious Studies Series and Motilal Banarsidass, 1987), 415–422.

²⁸⁹ Schomer writes that, "The principal, and crucial difference between the *dohās* of the Sants and the *śabdīs* of Gorakhnath is the presence of the new emotional element of *bhakti*." Schomer, "The *Dohā* as a Vehicle of Sant Teachings," 71. I will elaborate in some detail on this difference in the pages below.

Figure 2 - Mughal Miniature of Sufi Celebration (with Bhaktas & Yogīs)

Mughal Miniature Painting – commissioned in 1650s (probably by Dara Shikoh)

- Overall Scene: depicts a celebration at the shrine of the Sufi saint Muinuddin Chishti in Ajmer (Rajasthan)
- Top: Sufis standing and observing / Middle: Sufis performing *dhikr*, chanting names of God to accompaniment of music and dance / Bottom: seated at this Sufi performance are a group of *bhakti* saints and Nath *yogīs* (with a clear separation between them)



Left to right: (1) Raidās, (2) Pīpā, (3) Nāmdev, (4) Sena, (5) Kamal (Kabīr's son), (6) an Aughar, (7) Kabīr / / (8) Matsyendranāth, 9) Gorakhnāth, (10) Jadrup, (11) Bābalāl Dās Vairāgī, (12) Unknown

From all this, it becomes clear that the Rāmānandīs, with their Sant roots, had a rather complex relationship with the Nāth yogīs, one in need of further analysis and interpretation. The early Rāmānandī community at Galta brought together aspects of yoga and asceticism—including a number of practices and lifestyle elements which they seem to have shared with the Nāth yogīs—with an emerging *bhakti* perspective that was coming into conflict with elements of the tantric outlook. Determining what these Rāmānandī *bhaktas* had in common with the Nāths and, even more importantly, what distinguished the two, is the task of the next chapter. Before proceeding to that, we conclude this chapter with a brief but crucial look at the monkey-god Hanumān, a metonymic figure who can help us understand the nature of the Galta Rāmānandīs’ religiosity and the way in which they sought to embrace a multiplicity of (sometimes contrasting) religious modalities in a changing socio-political landscape.

~ *The Role of Hanumān* ~

We opened this chapter by taking note of the Bhairava shrine alongside the path leading into Galta, an intriguing presence at a Vaiṣṇava stronghold, and even more so in that this ordinarily fierce, tantric form of Śiva is, at this tiny shrine, worshipped with tulsi leaves as the peaceful, vegetarian devotee-protector of the monkey-god Hanumān. Having examined the Galta Rāmānandīs and their heritage, we can now see why this aniconic stone image is a rather fitting introduction to the Rāmānandī community of Galta, reflecting its *nirguṇ*, ascetic, yogic, and even (to a lesser extent) tantric roots. The “Vaiṣṇavization” of this Bhairava image at Galta speaks to the Rāmānandīs’ bridging of the tantric, ascetic realm of *śakti* and the vulgate Vaiṣṇava devotional realm of *bhakti*, a mediation symbolized especially in the very figure this Bhairava is said to worship and protect: Hanumān.

Hanumān is renowned for being an impeccable exemplar of both *śakti* and *bhakti*. He is the god of *yogīs* and fighting *sādhūs*, a great ascetic with extraordinary powers (*siddhis*), and is often considered the *avatār* (or the son) of Śiva, but he is also—in his relationship to Rām and Sītā—the model *bhakta*, the supreme ideal of dedicated service and selfless devotion. It is no wonder then that the oldest shrines at the Rāmānandī community of Galta—the community that Payahārī founded and where Kīlhadev and Agradās resided—are dedicated to Hanumān.²⁹⁰ It is clear that this community had risen to prominence by the late sixteenth century, for we have record of a grant given to the Galta Rāmānandīs by the Mughal emperor Akbar (r. 1556–1605).²⁹¹ Tradition has it that Kīlhadev built Galta’s first temple, and made it a Hanumān shrine, and it may have partly been Akbar’s patronage that allowed him to finance this project. Installed in this temple, as well as in Galta’s other early Hanumān shrine (known as “Interior Hanumān-jī”), which was also likely built during Kīlha’s tenure as abbot, is the peculiar feature of the the perpetual fire (*akhaṇḍajyotiḥ*), which “is characteristic of both Bhairava and Hanumān worship.”²⁹²

Why would the early Rāmānandī community at Galta have chosen to dedicate the very first temple they constructed to Hanumān? It would seem that Hanumān’s two sides, his ability to bridge the realms of *śakti* and *bhakti*, tantric Śaivism and devotional Vaiṣṇavism, made him the perfect mediating figure for the proto-Rāmānandī community and its diversity

²⁹⁰ Horstmann, “The Rāmānandīs of Galta,” 155–156. Horstmann actually states that “these oldest shrines, either dated or connected with the first two generations of Rāmānandīs in Galta, are dedicated to Śiva and Hanumān,” but in the Galta complex proper, I am not aware of any Śiva temples or shrines. Nearby (~2km) in Jāmṛolī there is a Hanumān temple that has a very old Śiva shrine (its inscription dates to 1212 VS), but it is not in the gorge that is and was the heart of the Galta community.

²⁹¹ Ibid., 156. Specifically, we have a revenue grant dated 1640 that confirms a grant originally issued by Akbar (and thus no later than 1605, his last year as emperor) in which the Galta Rāmānandīs are granted the revenue of 2,592 *bīghās* in Raṇthambhor in the *ṣūba* of Ajmer.

²⁹² Ibid., 155–56.

of practitioners.²⁹³ As Monika Horstmann writes, “His impressive presence in Galta integrates the various religious strands and propensities within the early monastic constituency.”²⁹⁴ If *śakti* and *bhakti* “allude to dual aspects of Hanuman’s personality,” then, as Philip Lutgendorf notes, “Among Ramanandīs, the two aspects seem to have corresponded to the main subdivisions of the order, into *tyāgīs* or wandering ‘renouncers,’ who practiced strenuous yogic disciplines, and Rasiks ‘savorers’ of the sweetness of devotion), who resided in temple-monasteries and practiced visualization based on selected Ramayana episodes.”²⁹⁵ Indeed, while for *tyāgīs* Hanumān is an immortal *yogī*, master of *tapas*, and *avatār* of Śiva, for *rasik*

²⁹³ In light of the fact that Galta’s earliest shrines are dedicated to Hanumān, it is interesting to note that one of the six Hindi poems attributed to Rāmānand is a *pad* praising Hanumān. Scholars have tended to discount this poem because it is *saguṇ* in orientation (all of the other poems attributed to him being decidedly *nirguṇ*) and is found neither in the Sikh *Ādi Granth* nor the Dādūpanthī *Sarvangīs*. While it is entirely possible that this poem is of dubious provenance, this should not be so readily assumed. First, that this poem is not in Sikh or Dādūpanthī collections makes perfect sense, for while the Rāmānandī community included *bhaktas* of both *nirguṇ* and *saguṇ* persuasions, the Sikhs and Dādūpanthīs were rather strictly *nirguṇ* and would not have adopted a poem about Hanumān. More importantly, considering the early Galta community’s apparent preference for Hanumān (as suggested by the two early Hanumān shrines there), it would only make sense if their founder was, like many of them, something of a *nirguṇ*, ascetic Sant as well as a Hanumān devotee. The two were hardly mutually exclusive, as some scholars have mistakenly presumed. Rāmcandra Śukla, among other scholars, used the aforementioned Hanumān poem to imagine the existence of two Rāmānands since, in his eyes, the Vaiṣṇava *bhakta* who authored the Hanumān *pad* could not possibly have composed the other poems rejecting idol worship and celebrating the *nirguṇ* worldview. Here again we have an example of a modern conceptualization of *bhakti*, replete with an overdrawn *nirguṇ/saguṇ* distinction, being projected back onto the past with problematic results. Potentially adding to the evidence that Hanumān played a key role in the early Rāmānandī community, R.S. McGregor notes that vernacular adaptations of the Sanskrit drama, the *Hanumān-nāṭaka*, made in the early seventeenth century, indicate a separate, Hanumān-focused, strand of early Rāmānandī literature. In 1610, Prāṇcand Cauhān composed a Brajbhāṣā version of this retelling of the Rām story emphasizing the deeds of Hanumān and, in 1623, Hṛdayrām (a.k.a. Kavi Rām) wrote another Brajbhāṣā rendering of the tale. McGregor, *Hindi Literature From Its Beginnings to the Nineteenth Century*, 109. Rāmcandra Śukla also discusses both of these figures. Śukla, *Hindī Sāhitya kā Itihās*, 152-154. In addition to Prāṇcand Cauhān and Hṛdayrām’s vernacular devotional works on Hanumān, Śukla mentions a *Hanumaccaritra* composed by Rāymall Pāṇḍe in 1639 CE. Unfortunately, no scholarly work seems to have been done on any of these compositions. It is not clear to me why McGregor cites these authors’ works as “a separate strand of early Rāmānandī literature.” If we could confirm that they were indeed linked to the early Rāmānandī community, then, in conjunction with the early Hanumān temples at Galta, the poem in praise of Hanumān attributed to Rāmānand, and the fact that Priyādās’s *Bhaktirasabodhinī* asserts that Nābhādās is a descendant of Hanumān (*hanumān-vaṃśa*), we would have good reason to believe that Hanumān was of real importance to many early Rāmānandīs, even though he does not figure importantly in Nābhā’s *Bhaktamāl*.

²⁹⁴ Horstmann, “The Rāmānandīs of Galta,” 156.

²⁹⁵ Philip Lutgendorf, *Hanuman’s Tale*, 389.

devotees “Hanumān is understood to be one of the ‘eternal attendants’ (*parikara* or *parṣad*) of the Lord and his Shakti. He appears (depending on the subject into which one is initiated) either as a stalwart guardian of the eastern gate ... or (in his ‘secret’ identity) as Charushila, one of the eight intimate female friends of Sita.”²⁹⁶

Hanumān first comes into his own as an independent god in the tenth to fourteenth centuries (his rise roughly paralleling that of Rām), when free-standing Hanumān images begin to emerge in north and central India; however, “the real iconographic boom” does not begin until “about the fifteenth century.”²⁹⁷ Thus, it was especially beginning in the early modern period that, among both *bhaktas* and *tāntrikas*, Hanumān’s importance began to increase, the surge in his iconographic presence coinciding with the beginning of the north Indian *bhakti* movement. It may be that Hanumān’s rise in popularity occurred at this particular time because, in the context of expanding Vaiṣṇava devotionism, he was able to serve as such an effective mediating figure, appealing to a wide spectrum of types of practitioners and religious approaches. As *bhakti* communities and devotional perspectives spread across north India, for many, especially those with historical links to tantric or ascetic-yogic traditions, Hanumān could act as an ideal focal point, an accessible deity who “combined self-assertive shakti and success with self-sacrificing bhakti and subordination.”²⁹⁸

This certainly seems to have been the case for the early Rāmānandīs of Galtā. Much like Hanumān, the early Rāmānandī community embodied “two contrasting (though not

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 287.

²⁹⁷ Lutgendorf, “My Hanuman is Bigger,” 232-233.

²⁹⁸ Lutgendorf, *Hanuman’s Tale*, 84.

necessarily opposing) religious orientations.”²⁹⁹ The concluding lines of the description of Dvārakādās in Rāghavdās’s *Bhaktamāl* seem to allude to the Rāmānandī reconciling of the tantric-yogic and the devotional, of *śakti* and *bhakti*. In the original Rajasthani, the verse reads—*gur kīlha karaṇ prasād taiṃ, bhakti sakti bhram kauṃ gilyau*—which I translated earlier as: “With the blessing of Guru Kīlha’s compassion, he [Dvārakādās] swallowed (*gilyau*) the confusion (*bhram*) regarding *bhakti* and *śakti*.” How should we interpret this line? Noteworthy is the clear implication that in the religious world of the time there existed some contention regarding the proper relationship between *bhakti* and *śakti*. But *what* exactly was this “confusion”? And *who* was confused? Regardless of the correct interpretation of the verse, it is clear that the Rāmānandī community did seek, like Hanumān (and perhaps through him), to reconcile the two modes of practice I have been discussing.

The figure of Hanumān would have been able to unite the two different streams of Rāmānandī *bhakti* practitioners, absorbing whatever differences they may have had into a common focal point whose symbolic resonances could meet all of their diverse needs at one and the same time. Much like Hanumān himself, these Rāmānandīs maintained an emphasis on yogic calm, ascetic austerity, and tantric power, while also engaging an emotionality, regard for dignity and self-limitation (*maryādā*), and self-effacing, humble devotion that were distinctly *bhakti* qualities separating them from more strictly tantric practitioners of yoga and *tapas* like the Nāths. Whatever similarities these Rāmānandīs may have had with the proto-Nāths, their veneration of Hanumān and their idealization of his deep emotional attachment and humble, self-effacing love and service to Rām and Sītā clearly distinguished them from those tantric yogīs. Indeed, while the Nāth yogīs regularly worship Hanumān today, there does

²⁹⁹ Lutgendorf, “My Hanuman is Bigger,” 240.

not seem to be any historical evidence for the monkey-god's presence in the religious life of the Nāths prior to the eighteenth century.³⁰⁰

Lutgendorf has suggested that Hanumān's dual (*śakti* and *bhakti*) aspects actually constitute "a shorthand for two of the principal currents in Hindu religious history, and their confluence creates a paradoxical yet highly desirable ego-ideal: that of being powerful, autonomous, and self-realized, and yet simultaneously of having an 'open heart' and ready access to deep feeling, especially self-giving love."³⁰¹ In a number of ways, it seems that this ideal was exactly what many of Galta's early Rāmānandīs strived to attain in their religious lives. This being said, in early modern north India, the tides of history were clearly moving in the direction of the *bhakti* side of this dialectic. Thus, even as the Rāmānandīs (in their yogic-ascetic dimension) resembled and were in dialogue with the Nāth *yogīs*, it was their fundamental differences that increasingly were coming to the fore. In the next chapter, we will analyze these key distinctions, thereby gaining insight into the emergence of a new early modern *bhakti* identity whose construction depended in significant part on a caricatured tantric Other, a tantric "magic" to *bhakti*'s "religion," as it were.

* * *

³⁰⁰ Lutgendorf notes that scholars who have ventured to make historical claims about Nāth veneration of Hanumān, such as Peter van der Veer and Charlotte Vaudeville, seem to have based their remarks solely on the early twentieth century ethnographic research of George W. Briggs (1938), who offers no evidence that this practice has any historic pedigree. Lutgendorf, "My Hanuman is Bigger," 227. The modern-day Nāths' worship of Hanumān is likely part of a general Vaiṣṇavization and devotionalization that occurred within various Śaiva and Śākta tantric communities as a result of the success of north India's *bhakti* movement and the pervasive spread of its religious attitudes and modes of expression. The work of Dan and Ann Gold on present-day Nāth communities in Rajasthan offers clear evidence of the extent to which they have adopted the vulgate Vaiṣṇava devotional language of the Saints. Ann Gold notes that today, "The stream of Hindu thought most strongly and consciously associated with Nath teachings in rural Rajasthan is not esoteric yoga but *nirguṇ bhakti* or devotion to a God perceived as 'without qualities'." She states that while "the relation between Nath and Sant traditions is usually seen in terms of Nathism's influence on the iconoclastic teachings of the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Saints," the situation is curiously reversed in the village where she did fieldwork, where the Nāths "seem to have appropriated and become the purveyors of a somewhat altered Sant tradition." Gold, *Carnival of Parting*, 43.

³⁰¹ Lutgendorf, *Hanuman's Tale*, 390.

Reading the past with our modern categories, we have often tended to see *bhakti*, tantra, and yoga as distinct entities, typically conceiving the devotee in stark contrast to the *tāntrika* and the *yogī*. In this chapter we have found that, historically speaking, *bhaktas*' religiosity often had more elements of asceticism, tantra, and yoga than we would ordinarily suppose; however, that is not to say that there were not real differences between these areas, differences that were becoming more and more conspicuous in the socio-religious context of early modern north India. The early Rāmānandīs of Galtā, particularly when compared with the Nāth *yogīs*, illustrate both of these points quite well. Understanding yoga-practicing ascetics like Payahārī and Kīlhadev as Nābhādās did—that is, first and foremost as *bhaktas*—forces us to expand our conception of *bhakti* and the *bhakta*, but at the same time comparing this stream of the proto-Rāmānandīs with the proto-Nāth *yogīs* allows us to see that there were nevertheless important differences between these communities, differences that we might understand as the initial fissures in an increasing divide between the realms of *bhakti* and “Tantra.” It is to these differences that we now turn.

Chapter Three

Nāth Yogīs and Rāmānandī Bhaktas: Distinctions in Yoga, Magic, and Devotion

Early modern north India saw the blossoming forth and spreading of a new and distinctive *bhakti* religiosity that was in tension with key aspects of the tantric tradition. In understanding how the Rāmānandī *bhaktas* differed from the Nāth *yogīs*, we can gain insight into the nature of this tension and conflict. Comparing and contrasting the Nāths and the Rāmānandīs, we will not only come to a better understanding of each group but also shed light on the way in which a new early modern *bhakti* identity was formed, in large part with a caricatured tantric “Other” as its necessary foil. While the perspective of Agradās, Nābhādās and *rasik* devotees like them makes a more obvious contrast with the Nāth *yogīs*, the difference between the more ascetic-yogic Rāmānandīs (like Payahārī and Kīlha) and the proto-Nāths is more subtle and difficult to determine. As Pinuccia Caracchi has claimed, the *tapasvī śākhā*, the ascetic-yogic lineage of Kīlhadev, is “a Rāmānandī branch that was deeply influenced by the doctrine of Gorakhnāth.”³⁰² How, then, did this *tapasvī* lineage of Rāmānandīs differ from the Nāth *yogīs*? As the pages below will show, the answer lies partly in the origins, techniques, and goals of their yogic practice—an investigation into which will lead us to question and refine the category of “the *yogī*” itself—and even more so in a growing distinction in perspective, a fundamental contrast between what we might call “tantric magic” and “*bhakti* religion.”

³⁰² Pinuccia Caracchi, “Rāmānanda and his Hindi Works,” in *Devotional Literature in South Asia, Current Research 1997-2000*, eds. Winand Callewaert and Dieter Taillieu (Delhi: Manohar, 2002), 36. Caracchi’s comment comes in the context of an in-depth study of the Hindi verses attributed to Rāmānand, which she concludes were likely composed by a poet of the Rāmānandī ascetic-yogic stream. In her study, Caracchi discovered that many of the songs attributed to Rāmānand were actually very similar or identical to passages in Nāth and *sant* literary works. For the full results of her research, see P. Caracchi, *Rāmānanda e lo yoga dei sant*, con una traduzione dei canti hindi in collaborazione con Shukdev Singh (Alessandria: Edizioni dell’Orso, 1999).

~ *Who Are the Nāth Yogīs?* ~

We have made frequent reference to the Nāth yogīs in the preceding pages, but they are yet to receive a proper introduction. As mentioned earlier, the Nāth *sampradāy*, as such, did not exist until a late date. The first textual legitimization of the Nāth order, the *Siddhasiddhāntapaddhati*, was not composed until the early eighteenth century and it is in this same century that the word “Nāth” was first used to refer to a distinctive order of yogīs.³⁰³ The various lineages of tantric ascetics that would later come to be known as Nāths were first popularly known simply as “yogīs,” though—to confuse the historical picture—other yoga-practicing ascetics were also sometimes called yogīs as well. These proto-Nāth yogīs first seem to have come to prominence in India’s religious landscape in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, yet they had roots in the older traditions of the *siddhas* and Kaula Śaivas.

The medieval *siddhas* were a diverse group of practitioners who sought—by various tantric, ascetic, and alchemical means—to acquire the powers and accede to the station of various immortal demigods (also known as *Siddhas*) and magicians (*vidyādhara*s) residing in heaven. The tradition of these *siddhas*, famous for their magical powers (*siddhis*) and antinomian behavior, transcended sectarian boundaries and was popular among Hindus, Buddhists, and Jains. Early (13th-15th century) lists of the *siddhas* include Ādinātha (Śiva), Matsyendra, Gorakṣa (Gorakh), and Jālandhara, who each appear in later lists of “the nine Nāths” to which the present-day Nāth order traces its origins.³⁰⁴

Gorakhnāth (Gorakṣa) is considered the historical founder of the Nāth yogīs and is

³⁰³ Mallinson, “Nāth Sampradāya,” 426. It is also only in the (late) eighteenth century that Nāths began their distinctive practice of wearing earrings in the cartilage of their ears (for which they became known as Kānpḥaṭa—‘split-ear’—yogīs). Prior to this, they sometimes wore earrings in their earlobes, but so did yoga-practicing ascetics of many other orders.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 411.

almost always remembered as the disciple of Matsyendranāth (“Lord of the Fishes”); however, these two figures actually lived at least three centuries apart. Matsyendra (Mīna, Macchinda) probably lived in the ninth century, and tradition holds that he was the founder of the Kaula Śaiva tantric movement, which reformed and domesticated the impure and publicly transgressive practices of early tantric cremation ground and *yoginī* cults, shifting emphasis toward a set of erotico-mystical practices which internalized much of the ritual within the subtle body. While Kaula tantric practice accomodates the pursuit of liberation, its primary goal was the acquisition of supernormal powers (*siddhis*)³⁰⁵ through the production of sacramentally transformative ritual substances, namely human (especially female) sexual fluids—in actual or sublimated form—which were understood as manifestations of the power-giving fluid essence of the divine. Gorakhnāth probably lived in the twelfth century and is said to have come out of this Kaula tradition, but to have further reformed it, purging it of sexual practices and establishing a Nāth order of celibate, ascetic *yogīs*.

Our earliest references to Gorakhnāth are found in two different texts from opposite ends of the subcontinent (Karnataka and northern Bengal). Both texts are dated to the early thirteenth century and both “refer to him as a master of yoga, suggesting his reputation was

³⁰⁵ In the pages that follow, I refer to *siddhis* as either “extraordinary powers,” “supernormal powers,” or less often, as “magical powers/abilities.” I deliberately avoid the common translation “supernatural powers” because, historically speaking, in the South Asian context, while these powers were certainly not normal or ordinary (a rare few were thought to possess them), they were assumed to be entirely consistent with the natural world. All human beings were considered naturally capable of attaining them, particularly through medicines, yoga, *tapas*, or mantras. Describing *siddhis* as “magical powers” is a bit more problematic, especially considering the negative connotations of the word which come out of an ancient Western tradition in which certain unauthorized, unapproved practices were often unfairly and misleadingly characterized as “magical” in comparison to “religious” practices that were deemed appropriate and desirable. Nevertheless, I occasionally use the term “magical” to describe *siddhis* in order to distinguish them as powers acquired (often by *tāntrikas* or *yogīs*) primarily through an individual’s own effort (ritual action, mantra *japa*, *tapas*, etc.), in contrast to *miraculous* powers given to (or exercised through) an individual—often a Sufi or *bhakti* saint—from God and God alone. I elaborate on this point in some detail in Chapter Six.

already well established.”³⁰⁶ Running counter to the claims of Nāth tradition and the vast majority of scholarship, which place Gorakhnāth in the north (usually either in Panjab or Bengal) and claim that he was a celibate ascetic, James Mallinson has compiled the available historical evidence to argue compellingly that, in actuality, Gorakh was probably from the Deccan region in the south and was most likely a married householder whose tantric practice involved *kuṇḍalinī yoga* (not *haṭha yoga*) and sexual rites.³⁰⁷ Regardless of who the historical Gorakṣa was or was not, it is clear that already in the thirteenth century he was remembered as a master *yogī* and that at some point later it became important to the identity of the proto-Nāth community to think of him as a celibate ascetic.

The medieval *yogī* communities of the Gangetic plain and northwestern India seem not to have initially linked themselves to Gorakhnāth, but to other *siddhas*, especially Jālandharnāth.³⁰⁸ The social, political, and cultural conditions of thirteenth to fifteenth century north India generated a religious environment of anti-sectarianism in which Sufis, *tāntrikas*, and yoga-practicing ascetics of all stripes came together. Intermingling their soteriological techniques and ascetic lifestyles, they “produced a North Indian ascetic archetype that survives to this day, with the result that members of the main North Indian ascetic orders, including the Nāths, are almost identical in lifestyle and appearance.”³⁰⁹ In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, however, for reasons not yet entirely clear, sectarian

³⁰⁶ Mallinson, “The Original *Gorakṣaśataka*,” 263.

³⁰⁷ Mallinson, “Nāth Sampradāya,” 413, 417.

³⁰⁸ Jālandharnāth—sometimes also known as Hāḍipā, Bālnāth, or Bālgundāī—is a tantric ascetic mentioned in texts dating back to the thirteenth century and is often said to be the disciple of Matsyendranāth and the guru of Kānhapā and Gopīcand. Usually, he is said to have come from Panjab, but to have later travelled to Bengal. Mallinson, “Nāth Sampradāya,” 410, 425.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 425.

identities increasingly began to crystallize, both among ascetic and devotional communities. By the beginning of the sixteenth century, we have the first clear textual evidence (in Sufi *premakhyan* literature) for a community of *yogīs* in north India who adopted Gorakh as their founder and tutelary deity. Sikh scriptures tell us that by the early seventeenth century (perhaps even the late sixteenth century) this community of *yogīs* was organized into twelve *panths* and contrasted with other organized ascetic orders, namely the (Daśanāmī) *saṃnyāsīs*.³¹⁰

* * *

There is much that separated these proto-Nāth *yogīs* and the early yoga-practicing ascetic Rāmānandīs, but let us first briefly highlight their similarities. Put succinctly: (1) both communities tended to conceive of a single, formless Divine without qualities (*nirguṇ*), (2) both held liberal social attitudes, accepting members from every caste (even initiating women and Muslims), and (3) both placed great value on asceticism, renunciation, and inner spirituality; they praised the divine Guru while shunning the world and stressed the need to turn inward to find ultimate Truth.

In addition to these shared perspectives, scholars have tended to assert that yoga-practicing Rāmānandī *bhaktas* such as Payahārī, Kīlhadev, and Dvārakādās also closely resembled the Nāth *yogīs* in their *yogic practice*. Peter van der Veer, in his historical and ethnographic study of the modern-day Rāmānandī *sampradāy*, contrasts their *rasik* devotee branch with that of the *tyāgīs*, the branch of itinerant ascetics, and states that it is the *tyāgīs* who “have remained most faithful to the original identity of the Ramanandi order.”³¹¹

³¹⁰ Ibid., 417. The specific verses come from *Gurū Granth Sāhib* 9.2, 34.2 (Callewaert 1996, pp. 939, 941); and *Vārāṇ Bhāi Gurdās* 8.13, which states: *sannīāsī das nām dhari jogī bārah panth nivāsī*, i.e., “*saṃnyāsīs* are of ten names and *yogīs* are divided into twelve *panths*.” Jodh Singh, *Vārāṇ Bhāi Gurdās*, Volume One (Patiala & New Delhi: Vision & Venture Publishers, 1998), 214.

³¹¹ Van der Veer, *Gods on Earth*, 95.

Following Charlotte Vaudeville, he argues that the early Rāmānandīs were the inheritors of a Śaiva yogic tradition, were “deeply influenced by the Tantric community of the Nath yogis,”³¹² and “could hardly be distinguished from the Nath yogis in appearance and practice.”³¹³

Monika Horstmann echoes this view, claiming that Krishnadās Payahārī “was a yogi whose yogic practice need not be imagined to have been totally different from that of the Nāths.”³¹⁴

What, then, separated these two early modern religious communities? To put it simply, the proto-Rāmānandīs differed from the proto-Nāths in at least two major ways. First, despite scholarly claims to the contrary, these two groups differed importantly in their practice of yoga. Second, the Rāmānandīs’ worldview, their *bhakti* attitude and approach to the Divine, was in marked contrast to the Nāth yogīs’ tantric perspective. In the pages below, we will discuss each of these key differences in depth.

~ *The Nāth as Sādhaka* ~

Recent path-breaking work by James Mallinson suggests that it is time to seriously re-evaluate previous scholarly claims regarding the yogic practice of Rāmānandīs and Nāths and to come to a more sophisticated understanding of, on the one hand, the nature of—and fundamental differences between—these two religious communities, and on the other, the historical roots and development of the yoga tradition itself. Mallinson explains that, as mentioned earlier, the Nāths (i.e., proto-Nāths) of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were not an organized *sampradāy* with any coherent shared identity, but were rather an

³¹² Ibid., 89.

³¹³ Ibid., 95

³¹⁴ Horstmann, “Rāmānandīs of Galta,” 152.

amorphorous group of different regionally-based lineages of itinerant tantric ascetics united only by a certain *siddhi*-oriented perspective and a claimed affiliation with semi-divine, perfected humans, or Siddhas, the likes of Matsyendranāth, Jālandharnāth, and Gorakhnāth (Gorakṣa).³¹⁵ He argues that, unlike the Galta Rāmānandīs, these Nāth “yogīs” in actuality “did not practice much yoga,” but rather focused primarily on the pursuit of *siddhis* (supernormal powers) “through means such as mantra repetition, ritual and alchemy. These Yogīs were yogis as magicians.”³¹⁶

What are we to make of this rather shocking claim that the Nāths “did not practice much yoga”? After all, the Nāths have almost universally been considered the primary exponents and systematizers of *haṭha yoga*, and have long been called—and referred to themselves as—*yogīs* or *jogīs*. While the proto-Nāths did call themselves *yogīs*, we will see that this speaks more to the unstable meaning and constantly changing referents of the term *yogī* than it does to anything else. In other words, that Nāths were known as *yogīs* does not mean that they were avid practitioners of yoga,³¹⁷ at least not the liberation-oriented tradition of *haṭha yoga* that “has been the predominant variety of yoga practice for both renouncers and

³¹⁵ While Gorakhnāth came to be the figure to whom nearly all Nāths claimed allegiance, a number of the earlier proto-Nāths—that is, certain lineages of *yogīs*, particularly in the north and northwest, that would later come to be part of the Nāth order—claimed allegiance to other Siddhas, most especially Jālandharnāth, and only later, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (and not until the nineteenth century for a couple of northwestern lineages) came to hold Gorakhnāth as central. Even today not all Nāths recognize Gorakh’s authority. Mallinson, “Nāth Sampradāya,” 410-411.

³¹⁶ James Mallinson, “The Yogīs’ Latest Trick,” *Tantric Studies* (2012): forthcoming.

³¹⁷ In the interest of the truly paradigm-changing (at least as far as the Nāths are concerned) argument he makes, Mallinson slightly overstates his point when he says that the Nāths “did not practice much yoga.” As we will see, in comparison to Rāmānandīs and Daśanāmis, it is true that they had different “yogic roots” and practiced very little *haṭha yoga*; however, they did practice quite a bit of tantric *laya-yoga* which aimed especially at raising the *kuṇḍalinī* within the subtle body.

householders in India over the last thousand years.”³¹⁸ Mallinson’s research makes it clear that our view of the Nāths has, on a number of fronts, long been shrouded in misconception and confusion. His work serves as an important corrective, convincingly demonstrating that the Rāmānandīs (along with the Daśanāmīs) and their forerunners are actually far more deeply rooted in the tradition of *haṭha yoga* than are the Nāths.

As we have seen, in understanding the early Rāmānandīs as a devotional community, one of the four orthodox Vaiṣṇava sects (*cār sampradāy*), and perceiving them through the lens of our modern category of *bhakti*—one that typically leaves little room for asceticism and yoga in its conception of an emotional practice of devotion and humble service to a personal God—it would be easy to miss out on how incredibly yogic their practice was. Yet, we know that many of the Galtā Rāmānandīs like Payahārī, Kīlha, Dvārakādās, and Puraṇ, were master practitioners of yoga. Their yoga, however, was a liberation-directed (*mumukṣu*) practice that had little to do with the predominantly *siddhi*-oriented (*bubhukṣu*) practice of the proto-Nāths. While the tantric ascetics who would come to be known as the “Nāths” did call themselves (and were called) *yogīs* or *jogīs*,³¹⁹ in some ways, we might better understand them as tantric “wizards” or

³¹⁸ Mallinson, “Yogīs’ Latest Trick,” forthcoming.

³¹⁹ Since the proto-Nāths called themselves *yogīs*, and since others called them *yogīs* as well, I have continued to refer to them as such throughout this work; however, in some ways, it might be more accurate to term them *jogīs*, rather than *yogīs*. In vernacular Indian languages today a distinction is commonly made between the more “magical,” *siddhi*-oriented, tantric ascetic—the “*jogī*”—and the more liberation-oriented, typically non-tantric (and often more “socially-respectable”), practitioner of yoga’s age old practices of mental and bodily discipline—the “*yogī*.” As Mallinson writes, “*Yogī* can still have ‘sinister’ connotations in Hindi, but that role is better played by *jogī*, the latter also carrying with it associations of low social status. Once, in a typical tourist-shopkeeper interaction in Jodhpur, I facetiously responded to the usual questions by saying, in Hindi, that I was a *jogī*. The shopkeeper was most upset. When I tried to explain that I meant that I practised yoga, he told me that I was then a *yogī* and that I must never call myself a *jogī*.” Mallinson, “The Yogīs’ Latest Trick,” forthcoming. Nevertheless, for a number of reasons I have elected not to make this particular terminological distinction (*yogī/jogī*). To term Gorakhnāthīs as “*jogīs*” in contradistinction to “*yogīs*” is problematic because, first, as we have noted, the Nāths and proto-Nāths did refer to themselves (and were referred to by others) as *yogīs*. Secondly, in early modern sources, the distinction between *jogī* and *yogī* was not made, seeing as “*jogī*” was simply the vernacular form of, and meant the same exact thing as, the word “*yogī*.” Thirdly, the vernacular term “*jogī*” today does not *always* have sinister connotations; it is also a caste name which refers to a particular caste of householder (non-celibate,

ascetic “magicians.” In contrast to the perspective of the yoga-practicing Rāmānandī ascetic, the orientation of the Nāth was actually far more in tune with what the tantric tradition had termed a *sādhaka*. In many tantric texts, a clear technical distinction is made between the *yogī*, who has liberation (*mokṣa*) as his aim, and the *sādhaka*, who puts great emphasis on supernormal experiences/enjoyments (*bhoga*) and powers (*siddhis*). While nearly all South Asian religious communities believed that *siddhis* emerge naturally as part of yogic practice, the attitude taken toward these powers varied considerably from tradition to tradition. As Mallinson states, “Within the yoga tradition, from as early as the *Yogasūtra*, *siddhis* are said to be impediments to the ultimate aim of yoga, liberation. Within tantric works, on the other hand, *siddhis* are the main aim of the *sādhaka*.”³²⁰ While the *sādhaka* may also aim for liberation, or the “great *siddhi*” (i.e., realization of Śivahood), he does so only after enjoying worldly and otherworldly powers and pleasures as long as he wishes, the recitation (*japa*) of mantras serving as the primary instrument in his conquest of the *siddhis*.³²¹

As we will see below, the distinction between the *muni* (or *ṛṣi*), on the one side, and the *siddha* (or *yogī*) on the other, might be an even better way to distinguish the yogic practice of the Rāmānandīs and the Nāths. Regardless of the specific terms we use, the important fact is that, when it came to “yoga,” the proto-Nāths were often doing something considerably different and more tantric than the Rāmānandīs, Daśanāmīs and others whose yogic practice

married) Nāths—often bards, musicians, snakecharmers, Bhairava priests, or magicians—who claim Gorakhnāth as their clan deity.

³²⁰ Mallinson, “The Yogīs’ Latest Trick,” forthcoming.

³²¹ Helene Brunner notes that a common “synonym for *sādhaka* is therefore *mantravid* or *mantrin* (the one who knows, i.e. ‘possesses’ a mantra) or else *jāpaka* (he who recites mantras).” Helene Brunner, “The Place of Yoga in the Śaivāgamas,” in *Pandit N.R. Bhatt Felicitation Volume*, ed. P.S. Filliozat et al. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1994), 433; 452, n. 98.

fell far more squarely within the orthodox yoga tradition. In order to explore and expand on this difference, to untangle the threads of the complex relationship between the Nāth and Rāmānandī communities of sixteenth century north India, and to trace their different yogic roots, we must now make a brief detour into the history of yoga.

~ A (Very) Brief Historical Introduction to Yoga ~

The word *yoga* derives from the Sanskrit root *yuj*, meaning “to harness or control,” “to yoke,” or “to unite.” The first systematic account of *yoga* seems to occur in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (ca. 3rd century BCE),³²² where it is linked to the reining in of the senses and the stilling of the mind to reach the highest spiritual state.³²³ Our next major source of information on *yoga* is the *Mahābhārata*. As David White writes, “The five centuries preceding the composition of the BhG [*Bhagavad Gītā*; 0-400 CE] and the YS [*Yoga Sūtras*; 350-450 CE] were witness to a veritable explosion of scriptural references, particularly within the [*Mahābhārata*] itself, to a novel but still inchoate collection of speculations on ‘yoga’ as a path to salvation.”³²⁴ John Brockington, in his study of *yoga* in the *Mahābhārata*, notes that the term refers to “widely diffused spiritual methodologies” which are often closely linked to *tapas* (ascetic practice, or “heat,” that generates powers and boons). He identifies *yoga* practice in the *Mahābhārata* epic as comprising “four main aspects of general preparations through moral conduct; diet, posture,

³²² Patrick Olivelle, *Upaniṣads* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), xxxvii.

³²³ *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 6:10-11.

³²⁴ David Gordon White, *Sinister Yogis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 40.

and surroundings; breath-control; and withdrawal of the senses, concentration, and meditation,” features that clearly anticipate Patañjali’s classical system.³²⁵

Once we arrive at the *Bhagavad Gītā* (0-400 CE), a relatively late section of the *Mahābhārata* text, we find that the term *yoga* has come to possess a complex set of varying meanings. Depending on the context, in the *Gītā*, *yoga* may denote (a) union with the Divine; (b) any path or discipline for attaining that union (e.g., *bhakti-yoga*, *karma-yoga*, *jñāna-yoga*); (c) the state of perfection (sometimes identified with *samādhi*) that is the highest goal of spiritual practice; (d) a divine power of creation, manifestation, multiplicity (e.g., *yoga-māyā*); or, most specifically, (e) a practical discipline of the mind and body aimed at controlling and stilling mental activity to attain a perfected spiritual state or consciousness.³²⁶ It is this last meaning—*yoga* as an assortment of technologies or methods of meditation and mind-body asceticism designed to bring about spiritual experience or realization—that seems to be the most common, consistent, and important in the Hindu traditions. In conceiving of *yoga* in this way—as spiritual disciplines designed to transform consciousness and/or realize the full potential and power(s) inherent in the human mind and body—we see that historically *yoga* has been a diffuse set of different techniques, not confined to any particular sectarian affiliation or social form, that could be appropriated and practiced independently of any ideological allegiances. Therefore, it should be no surprise that both Nāths and Rāmānandīs practiced some form of *yoga*. The question is how their approaches to *yoga*, and their specific yogic practices, were similar and different.

³²⁵ John Brockington, “Epic Yoga,” *Journal of Vaishnava Studies* 14:1 (Fall 2005), 132.

³²⁶ Graham M. Schweig, “Prema Yoga in the Rāsa Lilā: The Vraja Gopikās as the Masters of Yoga,” *Journal of Vaishnava Studies* 14:1 (Fall 2005), 281-82.

In attempting to make sense of the vast yoga tradition, we will identify three major streams of rather distinctive yogic practice. These “streams” are (1) meditational yoga, (2) ascetic (*tapasvī*) yoga, and (3) tantric yoga. This three-fold division of yoga has heuristic value, but it is an artificial one, a drastic oversimplification of a very foggy and complex historical reality. These three streams might be considered genres of yogic practice with particular emphases (in practice and thought) and characteristic methods; however, they were never entirely separate from each other, often intertwining and commingling their respective techniques.

While a diverse array of yoga practices had existed for centuries prior, it was Patañjali’s *Yoga Sūtra* (350–450 CE) that seems to have first codified them into the classical yoga system of eight limbs, i.e., *aṣṭāṅga-yoga*.³²⁷ The eight limbs of Pātañjala yoga are (1) *yama* – ethics/restraint (non-violence, telling the truth, not stealing, celibacy, not being greedy); (2) *niyama* – discipline (cleanliness, serenity, asceticism, study, devotion to the Lord); (3) *āsana* – posture; (4) *prāṇāyāma* – breath control; (5) *pratyahāra* – withdrawal of the senses; (6) *dhāraṇā* – concentration; (7) *dhyāna* – meditation; and (8) *samādhi* – objectless (nondual) meditative absorption.

Patañjali’s classical formulation of *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* would inform all future writings on yoga. As Csaba Kiss has noted, “No yogic text composed after the time when the *Yogasūtra* (YS)

³²⁷ Patañjali’s classical yoga is often incorrectly referred to as *rājā-yoga* (“royal yoga”), but in actuality this commonplace identification dates only from the late nineteenth century. In early texts, when the term *rājā-yoga* is used, it most often refers not to a type of yoga practice, but to the state of mind/being/union that is the goal of yogic practice. As Mallinson states, “The phrase *rājayoga* is not found in any Sanskrit texts other than those of *haṭhayoga*, in which it is usually the goal of practice rather than the method and is equated with *samādhi* (see HP 4.3 and GhS 7.17).” James Mallinson, *The Khēcarīvidyā of Ādinātha: A critical edition and annotated translation of an early text of haṭhayoga* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 190, n. 151.

of Patañjali gained popularity in India could possibly totally avoid its influence.”³²⁸ While Patañjali’s text offered an orthodox, non-sectarian vision of yoga that would be drawn upon by nearly all schools of yoga, it was nevertheless a clear representative of meditational yoga, a stream of yogic tradition whose content and emphases remained distinct in key ways from tantric and ascetic modes of yoga. In the second verse of his text, Patañjali defines yoga as “the cessation of the fluctuations of the mind.” His *Yoga Sutrā* is thus particularly concerned with the development of mental concentration and contemplation to achieve *samādhi* and spends extremely little time discussing any details of bodily posture or breathing practice (key in ascetic yoga) and does not mention visualization practices or subtle body physiology (key in tantric yoga). This meditational stream of yoga, expressed in the *Yoga Sutrā* and also including early Buddhist conceptions of yoga, focused first and foremost on contemplation and the discipline of the mind in order to achieve non-dual consciousness and thus liberation (*mokṣa*).

A stream of yoga not represented in the *Yoga Sūtra*, but constituting a key part of the larger body of ancient yogic knowledge within South Asian culture, was ascetic (or *tapasvī*) yoga. This ancient and nebulous tradition of yoga-practicing ascetics, sages, and renunciators centered on raising the vital breath (*prāṇa*) from the navel or genitals through “energy centers” along the central channel of the subtle body and up to the crown of the head. This genre of yogic practice drew on anatomical conceptions of vital points (*marman*) or supports of the vital breaths (*prāṇāyatana*) that had long been a part of Indian medical literature, such as the *Caraka Saṃhitā* (c. 100 CE), one of the oldest treatises of Ayurveda.³²⁹ If the meditational

³²⁸ Csaba Kiss, *Matsyendranāth’s Compendium: A critical edition and annotated translation of Matsyendrasaṃhitā 1-13 and 55 with analysis* (D.Phil. thesis, Balliol College, Oxford University, 2009), 44.

³²⁹ David G. White, “Yoga in Early Hindu Tantra,” in *Yoga: The Indian Tradition*, edited by Ian Whicher and David Carpenter (London: RoutledgeCurzon Press, 2003), 145-46.

stream of yoga was one centered on the mind, concentration and contemplation, then this set of yogic methods centered on asceticism (*tapas*), the discipline of the body and the manipulation and preservation of key energies within it, especially through breath-control practices (*prāṇāyāma*). While the physical (bodily/mechanical) nature of *tapasvī-yoga* is one of its more distinctive elements, I do not mean to imply that there was no mental or meditational component. Indeed, to raise and manipulate the *prāṇa* required intense mental focus. A fundamental principle undergirding such yogic practice came to be that mind, breath, and life essence (*bindu*) are all closely interrelated, thus the discipline and manipulation of one is closely linked to the control of the others. As we will see, it is in this *tapasvī* stream, which likely was the foundation of the later *haṭha-yoga* tradition, that the Rāmānandī practitioners of yoga find their historical roots.

In the tantric traditions that began to emerge in India in the fifth and sixth century, we see a rather different stream of yoga practice. In contrast to both meditational and ascetic yoga, this tantric yoga was particularly concerned with visualization-based meditations involving the “subtle body” of the human being—conceived as a microcosm of the universe—which it combined with the practice of *mantra-japa* (recitation of mantras). Tantric scriptures (Tantras, Āgamas, Saṃhitās) posited different types of *prāṇa* (vital energy, breath) flowing through a network of channels (*nāḍīs*)—said to be 72,000 in number—in the yogic body and concentrated in different knots (*granthis*) or circles (*cakras*) vertically aligned upon the central channel, or *suṣumna nāḍī*, running up the spine. These *granthis* or *cakras* (sometimes also called *padma* or lotuses) corresponded to primary elements and sounds in the cosmos, were considered the dwelling places (*sthāna*) of particular deities, and often served as points or foundations (*ādhāras*) on which to fix the mind during yogic meditation. Tantric conceptions

of the yogic body and techniques for raising the life-breath (*prāṇa*) or life-essence (*bindu*) up the *suṣumnā* drew and expanded upon already existing ideas about the body from medical traditions and the ancient stream of *tapasvī-yoga*. In turn, these tantric innovations in theorizing the subtle body—including especially Kaula notions of *kuṇḍalinī*³³⁰—were then drawn upon by yoga practitioners of all stripes.

Tantric texts presented a yoga that was clearly distinct from meditational yoga (there is no mention whatsoever of *nāḍīs*, *cakras*, *kuṇḍalinī*, etc. in the *Yoga Sūtras*). Formulations of tantric yoga were usually *ṣaḍaṅga*, or six-limbed. They did not include *yama* and *niyama* and, in most cases, they also removed *āsana* and replaced it with the limb of *tarka*, defined as transcendental logic or perfected reason.³³¹ The fact that tantric traditions commonly marginalized ethical disciplines (*yama*, *niyama*) and physical postures (*āsana*) reflects their primary concern with *mantra-yoga* and *laya-yoga*, or “yoga through dissolution.” Tantric varieties of *laya-yoga* typically involved visualization-based meditations on places and energies in the subtle body, the most well known technique being the raising of *kuṇḍalinī* up the spine. It was only beginning in the thirteenth or fourteenth century that tantric communities began to seriously incorporate physical practices—those we associate especially with *haṭha-yoga*—into their (mantra- and visualization/meditation-focused) yogic repertoire.

³³⁰ Early tantric texts all speak of raising the *prāṇa* and/or *bindu*. Only later, in conjunction with developing theories about the feminine divine energy of *śakti*, did certain tantric traditions conceive *kuṇḍalinī*, the serpent power coiled at the base of the spine, as that which the *yogī* was to raise up his spine. By the fifteenth century, the awakening and raising of *kuṇḍalinī* had become the centerpiece of *haṭha-yoga* practice.

³³¹ Abhinavagupta, the great tantric theologian of tenth century Kashmir, following the *Mālinī-vijayottara-tantra*, exalted *tarka*, or “perfected reasoning,” as the highest limb of yoga, arguing that *yama*, *niyama*, *āsana* and *prāṇāyāma* “serve no useful application” other than assisting in the attainment of *tarka* (*Tantrāloka* 4; 104-109a). Translated in Paul E. Muller-Ortega, “Tarko Yogāṅgam Uttamam”: On Subtle Knowledge and the Refinement of Thought in Abhinavagupta’s Liberative Tantric Method,” in *Theory and Practice of Yoga*, ed. Knut Jacobsen (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 186, 188.

While the goal of meditational yoga was non-dual consciousness (*samādhi*), in tantric yoga the aim was equality or identity with the Divine, the attainment of God's powers and liberated consciousness. If meditational yoga reached its aim most especially through the disciplining, concentrating, and stilling of the mind, then tantric yoga instead sought its goal most characteristically by putting the creative capacity of the mind to work in various visualization-based meditations that typically involved purifying and imaginatively destroying the conventional body (*dehasuddhi*) in order to reconstruct a divine body in its place (*nyāsa*), then using that creative capacity to worship inner deities and manipulate inner energies (which were usually associated with particular mantras). A word often used to describe this distinctive meditation of tantric yoga practice is *bhāvanā*, translated variously as mental construction, creative contemplation, or imaginative meditation. It is also often referred to as *dhāraṇā*, a term used in a slightly different sense than Patañjali uses it in his eight-limbed system, where it refers specifically to a fixation of the mind on a particular object. Here the meaning is similar to that of *bhāvanā* in that, in tantric *dhāraṇā*, one utilizes visualization and the creative, imaginative capacity of the mind to “yoke” oneself to the object of concentration in order to take on certain attributes or powers (*siddhis*) associated with that object (typically a deity). Indeed, while all three of the streams of yoga I have discussed were concerned with the acquisition of *siddhis*, in tantric yoga this was often the main goal. Helene Brunner speculates that, in fact, it was most likely the tantric *sādhaka*, focused on *siddhis*, who first brought yoga (in this context, those techniques of visualization-based meditation on the subtle body sometimes called *laya-yoga*) into the tantric traditions as a tool in his efforts to obtain supernormal powers, integrating it with the foundational practice of *mantra-japa*.³³²

³³² Brunner adds that, “in all likelihood, it is via the *sādhaka*, in whose ritual it could fit perfectly and was soon to

If the sixteenth century Rāmānandī practicing yoga could trace his yogic roots most especially to the *tapasvī* stream, then the proto-Nāth yogī found his in the stream of the tantric *sādhaka* just described.³³³ That being said, as we emphasized at the outset, these streams or genres of yoga were not entirely distinct and often overlapped, intersected, and intertwined with each other. Nevertheless, it is helpful to consider them as three clear tendencies within a field of yoga practice that was generally nonsectarian and in which concepts and techniques could be drawn on and combined in any number of ways. Within this broad field, particularly dynamic was the historical interaction between the ascetic and tantric streams of yoga, an interplay that was extremely influential upon, even constitutive of, the *haṭha-yoga* tradition. It is especially in examining the development of this tradition of *haṭha-yoga* that we will come to understand the differences between the yogic practice of the Rāmānandīs and the Nāths.

~ Munis, Siddhas, and Haṭha-yoga ~

Haṭha-yoga is known as the yoga of force or exertion, the name coming from the root *haṭh-*, which means, “to treat with force or violence.”³³⁴ As Mallinson states, “Most of the

become indispensable, that yoga found its way into the Śaiva religion.” Brunner, “The Place of Yoga in the Śaivāgamas,” 454, 435.

³³³ David White has suggested that the figure of the tantric *sādhaka* may have been the institutionalization and marginalization of earlier noninstitutionalized *yogīs*—who we might imagine as freelance, perhaps low-caste, power-seeking ascetic *yogīs* representing a sort of sub-stream of the *tapasvī-yoga* tradition—who threatened the power of sanctioned tantric orders and lineages. White, *Sinister Yogis*, 196. If this is the case, in certain ways the Nāth *yogīs*’ roots may lie more in this earlier noninstitutionalized stream of power-seeking ascetic *yogīs* or *siddhas*, for the scriptural category of the *sādhaka* implies a level of tantric initiation and demanding ritual activity that likely were not serious concerns for many proto-Nāths.

³³⁴ Jason Birch argues that, in contrast to common assumptions, *haṭha-yoga* did not acquire its name because its practices require strenuous force and exertion. He points out that, in the texts of *haṭha yoga*, the word *haṭha* is never used to refer to violent means or forceful effort. Rather, he asserts, the “force” of *haṭha-yoga* has to do with the fact that its techniques have a forceful *effect*, not that they require a forceful *effort*. Specifically, *haṭha yoga* practices seem to have a forceful effect upon the *bindu*, *prāṇa*, or *kuṇḍalinī* within the subtle body. As Birch puts it, the “force” (*haṭha*) of *haṭha yoga* actually “refers to forcing what normally moves down (i.e., *apāna*, *bindu*) and

varieties of yoga practised around the world today derive from *haṭhayoga*.³³⁵ His research demonstrates that, contrary to the nearly universal opinion of earlier scholarship on yoga, the Nāths were actually not the innovators of *haṭha-yoga*. Its oldest roots do not lie in the tantric tradition, as many have asserted, but rather in the ascetic practices and bodily disciplines of the *tapasvī* stream of yoga discussed above. In fact, the earliest formulations (11th-13th century) of *haṭha-yoga* are found in texts that are neither Śākta nor associated with the Nāth *yogīs*. The distinctive feature of this early *haṭha-yoga* is a set of physical techniques, called *bandhas* or *mudrās*, that are used to raise and preserve the elixir of life, the *bindu* (i.e., semen), forcing it up the central channel and keeping it in the head either through mechanical means or breath control.

Among the texts of early *haṭha-yoga*, of special note is the *Dattātreyayogaśāstra*, which was composed in the thirteenth century and is the first text to teach a systematized form of *haṭha-yoga* and call it by that name. The text teaches ten *mudrās* that would thereafter distinguish *haṭha* from all other forms of yoga.³³⁶ These physical techniques (*mudrās* and *bandhas*) are not taught in opposition to Patañjali's *aṣṭāṅga-yoga*, but as supplements to it.³³⁷ The *haṭha-yoga* of the *Dattātreyayogaśāstra* is a liberation-oriented (*mumukṣu*) practice whose goal is "to stop the lunar *bindu*, or semen, which is equated with *amṛta*, the nectar of

what is usually dormant (*kuṇḍalinī*) to move upwards." Jason Birch, "The Meaning of *haṭha* in Early *Haṭhayoga*," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 131.4 (2011): 531, 537-538.

³³⁵ James Mallinson, "The Original *Gorakṣaśataka*," in *Yoga in Practice*, ed. David G. White (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 257.

³³⁶ These are *mahāmudrā*, *mahābandha*, *khecarīmudrā*, the three *bandhas* (*jālandharabandha*, *uddiyāṇabandha*, and *mūlabandha*), *viparītakarāṇī*, *vajrolī*, *amarolī*, and *sahajolī*. Mallinson, "Haṭha Yoga," 771 (and 778, for brief descriptions of these techniques).

³³⁷ James Mallinson, "Haṭha Yoga," in *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism, Volume III*, ed. Knut A. Jacobsen (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 771.

immortality, from dripping down from its store in the head and being consumed in the solar fire at the base of the central channel.”³³⁸ In other words, the focus of this text and other early formulations of *haṭha-yoga* is *bindu-dhāraṇa*, the preservation of the life-giving essence of *bindu*. In contrast, contemporaneous proto-Nāth works on yoga—which they do not call *haṭha*—emphasize that their goal is the raising of *kuṇḍalinī*.³³⁹ Indeed, the various *yogī* lineages that constituted the amorphous proto-Nāth community had roots in the very Śaiva-Śākta tantric community thought to have originated the concept of *kuṇḍalinī*, the Paścimāmnāya Kaula tradition of the Deccan to which Gorakh and Matsyendra belonged. The practice of raising the *kuṇḍalinī*—the feminine power and divine energy of *śakti* within the body, conceived as a serpent sleeping coiled at the base of the spine—was initially one among many forms of the visualization-based, subtle body focused, practice of *laya yoga*, but this *kuṇḍalinī*-style *laya yoga* quickly rose to a level of preeminence among yogic methods.

Since the practices of early *haṭha-yoga* were nonsectarian and available to all, it was not long before the proto-Nāths and other tantric communities appropriated these physical techniques into the *sādhaka*’s quest for *siddhis*. They combined their own *kuṇḍalinī*-oriented tantric *laya-yoga* with the *bindu-dhāraṇa*-oriented early *haṭha-yoga* of the ascetic (*tapasvī*) tradition. In other words, in addition to (or even in place of) visualizations and mantras, the tantric *yogī* now also began to make use of *mudrās* and *bandhas* to mechanically raise the *kuṇḍalinī* up the spine and, upon reaching the store of *amṛta* in the head, flood the body with that precious nectar. This was a time of experimentation, and the pre-fifteenth century texts reflect a variety of attempts at grafting proto-Nāth tantric yoga (with its *kuṇḍalinī*-raising

³³⁸ James Mallinson, “Śāktism and *Haṭhayoga*,” in *The Śākta Traditions* (Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

³³⁹ *Ibid.*

paradigm) onto ascetic “early *haṭha-yoga*” (with its *bindu*-preserving paradigm), efforts that would eventually result in the “classical *haṭha-yoga*” articulated in Svātāmraṃa’s *Haṭhapradīpikā* (c. 1450).

While the foundation of *haṭha-yoga* lay in the physical yogic practices of ascetics, in this crucial phase of its development, from roughly the thirteenth through fifteenth century, *haṭha-yoga* was linked in important ways to the changing sphere of tantric religiosity, most especially tantric Śaivism.³⁴⁰ In particular, the development of techniques of *haṭha-yoga* often paralleled an interiorization and corporealization of tantric ritual that seems to have been related to the dwindling public and institutional presence of tantric religion in an era of predominantly Muslim rule. For example, in earlier forms of tantric practice, some traditions had called for an external sexual ritual and female consort in order to produce and combine the power-laden human sexual fluids, but now these power-substances (the male *bindu* and female *rajas*) came to be located within the *yogin*’s own body and could be united through his yogic practice.³⁴¹ Furthermore, as mentioned above, while the practices of earlier tantric yoga had been almost exclusively visualization based, now, in texts emerging in the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries, the visualizations and mantras used in the raising of *kuṇḍalinī*

³⁴⁰ The specific nature of the relationship between *haṭha yoga* and tantric Śaivism is often far from clear. Gerald Larson, for instance, writes that “Closely related to [the] new Tantra traditions, at least in their Śaiva and Śākti-Śaiva formulations, is a new kind of Yoga, namely, Haṭha Yoga,”³⁴⁰ but in the very same essay he goes on to say that “Hatha Yoga is clearly distinct from tantric Śaivism and is found in Vaisnava, Śākta, Buddhist, and even Jaina contexts. Likewise Haṭha Yoga is dramatically distinct from Pātañjala Yoga.” Larson, “Differentiating the Concepts of ‘yoga’ and ‘tantra’ in Sanskrit Literary History,” 492, 497. Here *haṭha yoga* is thus described as “closely related to,” but “clearly distinct from” tantric Śaivism. Mallinson similarly states, “Although I distinguish between tantric Śaivism and *haṭhayoga*, and between the texts of both, it should be stressed that there is no clear-cut division between the two;” and speaks of “the futility of trying to differentiate too strictly between tantric and *haṭhayogic* works.” Mallinson, *The Khecarīvidyā of Ādinātha*, 184, n. 116.

³⁴¹ An excellent example of this interiorization/corporealization comes in the *Gorakṣaśataka* (c. 1400 CE), a text claiming to describe Gorakh’s method of yoga, whose last verse (v. 101) states: “We drink the dripping liquid called *bindu*, the drop, not wine; we consume the rejection of the objects of the five senses, not meat; we do not embrace a sweetheart but the *Suṣumnā nāḍī*, her body curved like *kuśa* grass; if we must have intercourse, it takes place in a mind dissolved in the void, not in a vagina.” Mallinson, “The Original *Gorakṣaśataka*,” 272.

were accompanied or replaced by actual physical acts; for example, sitting cross-legged with the heel under the perineum, then raising the body and gently dropping it in order to press the heel against the perineum, forcing the *prāṇa* or *kuṇḍalinī* up the *suṣumnā*.³⁴² In many ways, such *haṭha yoga* techniques seem to have developed as a reaction against the exclusivity and secrecy of the many tantric and other lineages current in the early medieval period. Without patronage these predominantly brahmin-led forms of tantric religion faded, and we see tantric communities seeking to reduce or eliminate complicated initiations, coded mantras, and elaborate visualizations and replace them with physical techniques open to all that could be practiced without intermediaries or ritual paraphernalia.³⁴³

It is worth noting that, historically speaking, the rise of this stripped down, interiorized, and democratized yogic and tantric practice (i.e., *haṭha-yoga*) seems to have been paralleled by the spread of the simple, inward-oriented, socially liberal devotion of *bhakti* figures/communities like the Sants. Indeed, both were spawned by the socio-political conditions of the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries in India: Muslim military-political dominance, the increasing influence of Sufis, and the corresponding decline of institutional tantric Śaivism. As discussed in Chapter One, the rise of Muslim power in north India seems to have wiped out most of the infrastructure and support network of mainstream tantric religiosity. As Lutgendorf explains, “The fact that Muslim elites resisted the assimilation that had brought previous waves of invaders under the umbrella of Brahmanical ideology clearly signaled a crisis of patronage for the custodians of Sanskrit traditions.”³⁴⁴ In this context,

³⁴² Mallinson, *The Khecarīvidyā of Ādinātha*, 26-28.

³⁴³ Mallinson, personal email communication, June 23, 2009.

³⁴⁴ Lutgendorf, “My Hanuman Is Bigger,” 236.

tantric religiosity in north India was forced to transform from more public (temple-based), brahminical, and politically-involved models into other forms, often more interiorized and less institutionalized, like those of the proto-Nāths and other *tāntrikas* who contributed to the development of *haṭha yoga*.

While the earliest formulations of *haṭha-yoga* were grounded in demanding practices of *tapas*, as *haṭha-yoga* techniques were appropriated by *laya-yoga*-practicing *tāntrikas* and householders less inclined to practicing *tapas*, it seems that *haṭha-yoga*'s difficult ascetic dimension came to be downplayed. A perfect illustration of this is the folk etymology first given by the *Yogabīja*, and thereafter often repeated in other texts, in which *haṭha* does not mean “force” at all, but is broken up into *ha*, meaning “sun,” and *ṭha*, meaning “moon.”³⁴⁵ In this popular (re-)definition, *haṭha-yoga* becomes first and foremost the union (*yoga*) of sun and moon, i.e., the union of microcosm and macrocosm, Śakti and Śiva (as menstrual blood and semen), the upper and lower breaths (*prāṇa* and *apāna*), or the *piṅgalā* and *iḍā nāḍīs*.³⁴⁶ The earliest tantric and proto-Nāth texts describing the techniques of *haṭha-yoga* do not use the word *haṭha* and may have deliberately avoided the term because of its links with an ascetic *muni* tradition quite different from their own tantric *siddha* tradition. If this is true, the *Yogabīja*'s (*ha* + *ṭha*) definition may have been critical in allowing tantric communities to openly adopt the term, thereby opening the floodgates for the yogic experimentation and mixing that led to the eventual articulation of “classical *haṭha-yoga*.”³⁴⁷

³⁴⁵ *Yogabīja* 148cd-149ab states, “The sun is known by the syllable *ha* and the moon by the syllable *ṭha*. Owing to the union of the sun and moon, *Haṭhayoga* is named [thus].” The evidence suggests that this definition was not conceived until several centuries after the initial rise of *haṭha-yoga*. Birch, “The Meaning of *haṭha* in Early *Haṭhayoga*,” 533-534.

³⁴⁶ Mallinson, “*Haṭha Yoga*,” 772; Larson, “Introduction to the Philosophy of *Yoga*,” 142.

³⁴⁷ Mallinson, personal email communication, April 26, 2012.

The definitive form of classical *haṭha-yoga* was established by the *Haṭhapradīpikā*, composed in the mid-fifteenth century as, for the most part, a compilation of verses from earlier *haṭha-yoga* texts.³⁴⁸ Svātmārāma, the author of the text, states that his work is intended as a lamp (*pradīpikā*) to clear away “the darkness of many doctrines” that make up early *haṭha-yoga*.³⁴⁹ The *Haṭhapradīpikā* was “the first text that explicitly [set] out to teach Haṭha Yoga above other methods of yoga,” and its synthesis and codification were so successful that “all subsequent Sanskrit Haṭha Yoga anthologies and commentaries refer to it, and most take its definition of the practices of Haṭha Yoga to be authoritative.”³⁵⁰ While the text is a compilation, it is also clearly the work of a tantric *siddha* tradition that traced its lineage through Matsyendra and Gorakhnāth.³⁵¹ Indeed, its stress on *kuṇḍalinī* ensured that awakening and raising this serpent power became the predominant rationale for the practices of *haṭha-yoga*.³⁵² Considering the popularity and authority achieved by the *Haṭhapradīpikā*, and the fact that it calls Matsyendra and Gorakh the first connoisseurs of *haṭha-yoga* (even attributing a number of its verses to Gorakh), it is no wonder that the Nāths have become so closely

³⁴⁸ Mallinson writes that, “we know of no text which predates [the *Haṭhapradīpikā*] and teaches *haṭha* techniques but was not used in its compilation.” Mallinson, “Śaktism and *Haṭhayoga*,” forthcoming.

³⁴⁹ His own research having acted as something of a lamp shedding light on the early history of *haṭha yoga*, Mallinson nevertheless makes this honest remark: “[O]ur view of the practice of *haṭha yoga* in its formative period is little better than that of the proverbial frog’s view of the sky from the bottom of a well. There would have been a vast range of experimentation in the new field of *haṭha yoga* during the first four centuries of its development, involving yogis, both male and female, of all stripes, the majority of whom would not have known Sanskrit. There are no historical reports of the details of the practice of *haṭha yoga* until Islamic interpretations in the fifteenth century and modern-day oral traditions, while they provide some clues, are an unreliable window onto antiquity. All we have to go on is half a dozen short Sanskrit works (and the Marathi *Jñāneśvarī*) written or compiled by scholars who in some cases may not have practised the techniques described therein.” Mallinson, “Original Gorakṣaśataka,” 265.

³⁵⁰ Mallinson, “Haṭha Yoga,” 772.

³⁵¹ Mallinson, “*Siddhi* and *Mahāsiddhi*,” 339.

³⁵² Mallinson, “Haṭha Yoga,” 774.

associated with the tradition of *haṭha-yoga*. Nevertheless, it is quite incorrect to think of the community that produced the *Haṭhapradīpikā* as Nāths, for there was no such organized, self-conscious community until at least the seventeenth century and probably later. Furthermore, even to think of this text as representing a proto-Nāth perspective would be misleading, for at the time of its composition there were an array of “proto-Nāth” *yogī* lineages tracing themselves back to *siddhas* like Gorakh and Matsyendra, and the perspective of the *Haṭhapradīpikā* is, in fact, rather anomalous when considered alongside typical “proto-Nāth” texts.³⁵³ Indeed, the coalescing lineages of *yogīs* that would come to be known as Nāths seem to have gone in a direction entirely different from that of the *Haṭhapradīpikā*, for since the time of that text’s composition (c. 1450) there have been no new texts on *haṭha-yoga* composed by Nāths and not a single one of the many modern schools of yoga comes from a Nāth milieu.³⁵⁴

While it is quite rare to find a Nāth *yogī* today who practices the *mudrās* and *bandhas* of *haṭha-yoga*, “the ascetic traditions among which the first formulations of Haṭha Yoga originated, namely, the forerunners of the Daśanāmī *saṃnyāsīs* and the Rāmānandīs,” adopted the classical *haṭha yoga* of the *Haṭhapradīpikā* and “continue to write about and practice it up to

³⁵³ While most proto-Nāth works are oriented toward the acquisition of *siddhis*, the *Hathapradīpikā* is unconcerned with them and orients itself entirely toward liberation (*mokṣa*). In addition to this, there are other indications that the composer of the *Hathapradīpikā* came from a lineage of *yogīs* who wanted to maintain their *siddha* roots, while simultaneously reforming their tantric practice enough to garner orthodox brahminical respect and cachet. For example, Svātmārāma altogether eliminates mantras from the yogic practice he describes, while he also introduces a set of cleansing techniques that he calls *ṣaṭ karmāṇi* (“six actions”). This is quite curious because (a) the text lists seven, not six, of these techniques and (b) prior to this, the term *ṣaṭ karmāṇi* typically referred to the infamous “six rites of magic,” a set of tantric ritual and mantra practices aimed at achieving six different maleficent aims. Thus, Svātmārāma may have been trying to altogether reinvent and purify certain “ignominious” tantric elements of his tradition. Mallinson, “Haṭha Yoga,” 775. Ultimately, the *Haṭhapradīpikā*’s move toward orthodoxy and brahminical respectability, and away from tantric mantra practice and the acquisition of *siddhis*, is not at all indicative of (and is, in fact, in certain respects contrary to) the direction pursued by the slowly coalescing Nāth *yogī* community.

³⁵⁴ Mallinson, “Nāth Sampradāya,” 423.

the present day.”³⁵⁵ The *Bhaktamāls* of Nābhādās and Rāghavdās indicate that the proto-Rāmānandī ascetics were practicing a liberation-oriented, *tapas*-rooted *haṭha-yoga* in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and in the eighteenth century, among other evidence, we have a Rāmānandī-authored *haṭha-yoga* manual, the Brajbhāṣā *Jogpradīpakā* (1737) by Jayatrāma, who proudly proclaimed himself part of the lineage of Krishnadās Payahārī.³⁵⁶ During these same centuries of the early modern period, the Nāth yogīs were composing no such works and do not seem to have been particularly concerned with *haṭha-yoga* at all.

The *Gorakhbāṇī*, a collection of vernacular (“Hindī”) writings³⁵⁷ attributed to Gorakhnāth whose oldest manuscripts come from the seventeenth century,³⁵⁸ is probably our best resource for understanding the Nāth yogīs in early modern north India and confirms this picture. The first thing to note about the *Gorakhbāṇī* is that it is extraordinarily heterogeneous, with verses sometimes contradicting themselves, a reflection of the fact that the Nāth yogīs

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

³⁵⁶ Mallinson, “Rāmānandī Tyāgīs and *Haṭhayoga*,” *Journal of Vaishnava Studies* 14:1 (Fall 2005): 112.

³⁵⁷ McGregor explains that, “The language of the received texts is very mixed. This may be due to their former wide circulation or to vicissitudes of transmission. Some forms are eastern, others of Rajasthan, while the general character of the language is that of the mixed speech of the Delhi region (Old Khaṛī bolī) with additional admixture of Brajbhāṣā.” R.S. McGregor, *Hindi Literature From Its Beginnings to the Nineteenth Century* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1984), 23. In regard to the language of the text, we should also note that the poems of the *Gorakhbāṇī* frequently include both (a) *sandhyābhāṣā*, or “twilight language,” which hints at esoteric content through language and metaphors of ordinary life, and (b) *ulṭabāmsī*, or “upside-down language,” which uses paradox to mirror (in its form) the process of reversal involved in yogic practice. For an excellent discussion of the difference between these two forms of expression and how each is used in the *Gorakhbāṇī*, see Djurdjevic, *Masters of Magical Powers*, 101-110.

³⁵⁸ The poems of the *Gorakhbāṇī* were collected and edited as such by P. Barthwal. The oldest of the manuscripts he used dates to 1658 CE. While it is possible that some poems of the *Gorakhbāṇī* could date back to as early as the mid-fourteenth century, at this point we have no way to know this, and the situation is complicated by the fact that a number of the *Gorakhbāṇī*’s poems contain references clearly borrowed from the literature of the Saints. McGregor, *Hindi Literature*, 22. As Mariola Offredi notes, “The oldest surviving manuscripts of the works attributed to Gorakh were written in a period when ideals and practice of bhakti had become widespread,” and several of the verses attributed to Gorakh have been found as works attributed to Dādū, Kabīr, and Nānak, while others have taken on the form of popular sayings. Mariola Offredi, “Kabīr and the Nāthpanth,” in *Images of Kabīr*, ed. Monika Horstmann (New Delhi: Manohar, 2002), 136, n. 19.

were not then an entirely coherent community but more of a loose confederation of *yogī* lineages whose practices and perspectives were not always the same. The *Gorakhbānī* emphasizes a number of practices and concerns common to all yogic and ascetic traditions, such as breathing exercises (*prāṇāyāma*), not eating or sleeping too much, restraining the five senses, and maintaining control of the mind. Overall, the verses show a distinct hostility toward women and lust, though in typical fashion for this inconsistent text, the occasional contradictory verse suggests that some Gorakhnāthī *yogīs* were performing sexual rites, likely utilizing the practice of *vajrolī-mudrā* (drawing the semen back into the urethra after ejaculation).³⁵⁹ Despite the heterogeneity of the text, if we look for trends, they are clear. In its 275 *sabḍīs* and 62 *padīs*, the *Gorakhbānī* makes only a couple of references to the *āsanas*, *bandhas*, and *mudrās* of *haṭha-yoga* (those physical practices that distinguish *haṭha* from other forms of yoga),³⁶⁰ whereas again and again, in a large number of poems, we find references to the raising of *kuṇḍalinī*, subtle body physiology (*nāḍīs*, *cakras*, etc.), and/or related interior visualizations of tantric *laya-yoga* aimed at uniting sun (Śakti) and moon (Śiva), preserving the

³⁵⁹ Pad 48 proclaims, “The vagina is a vampire; without teeth, she devoured the whole world. ... [Man] does not understand the nature of sexual lust, so he keeps and nurtures the tigress in his own home.” This perspective is by the most common, but opposing verses do present themselves, such as *sabḍī* 141b, which states, “Those who, in making love, preserve the *bindu*, they are Gorakh’s brothers.”

³⁶⁰ For instance, in one of the few references to these physical practices of *haṭha-yoga*, *sabḍī* 232 states, “Leave the bad woman, give up *bhang* / Perform the bodily *bandhas* day and night / In this way, all success in yoga comes to you / And the guru will establish you in *nirvān samādhi*.” In contrast, *sabḍī* 134 critiques key elements of yogic practice, stating: “O pundit, why do you die struggling for knowledge? / Know the highest place in some other way! You are practicing *āsan* [postures] and *prāṇāyāma* [breathing exercises] / Day and night, you start and finish tired.” *Sabḍī* 133 is particularly interesting as (in contrast to eighteenth century Sanskrit texts by the Nāths that treated Gorakh’s yoga as a continuation and development of classical *aṣṭāṅga-yoga*), it explicitly rejects orthodox Pātañjala yoga, while advocating a yogic practice involving tantric innovations (brought into *haṭha yoga*) such as *khecari-mudrā*, the practice of lengthening the tongue and reaching it to the soft palate to taste the nectar (*amṛta*) of immortality in the skull. This poem states: “Nine *nāḍīs* and seventy-two rooms / All *aṣṭāṅga* [eight-limbed yoga] is a lie / Use the *suṣumnā* as the key and the lock / Reverse the tongue and touch the palate.” Unless otherwise noted, all translations of the *Gorakhbānī* are those of Gordan Djurdjevic and Shukdev Singh, found in the appendix of Djurdjevic’s Ph.D. Thesis. Djurdjevic and Singh, trans., “Appendix: The *sabads* and *padīs* from the Gorakh Bānī,” in “Masters of Magical Powers: The Nāth Siddhas in the Light of Esoteric Notions” (Ph.D. Thesis, University of British Columbia, 2005), 200-326.

bindu, or drinking the nectar (*amṛta*) of immortality. In other words, the clear tendency in the text is toward a simple, ascetic lifestyle and a *kuṇḍalinī*-based tantric *laya-yoga* whose primary goal is a (sublimated, erotic) union of the two divine principles within the human body to attain immortality, transcendence, and sacred power.

* * *

We can now see that the essential contrast between the yogic practice of the Nāths and the Rāmānandīs is the one that separates the tantric heritage of *yogīs* and *siddhas*, on the one hand, from the *tapasvī* heritage of *munis* and *ṛṣis*, on the other. Mallinson points out that this distinction is found in a wide range of texts in which *kuṇḍalinī* and related tantric *laya yoga* practices are associated with *yogīs* and *siddhas* like Gorakṣa and Matsyendra, while the practices of *bindu-dhāraṇa*, *tapas*-based yoga are linked to *munis* and *ṛṣis* like Dattātreya, Mārkaṇḍeya, and Kapila. Importantly, he states that this distinction “manifests among today’s ascetics as a distinction between the Śākta Nāths and the relatively more orthodox Daśanāmīs and Rāmānandīs.”³⁶¹ Mallinson is careful to note that the distinction between *muni/ṛṣi* and *siddha/yogī* is a general principle, not a universal rule, and many anomalies exist (Kapila, for instance, while usually called a *muni*, is referred to as a *siddha* in the *Bhagavad Gītā* and *Dattātreya yogaśāstra*).³⁶² For our purposes, the key point is that the Nāth *yogīs* of the early modern period traced their yogic lineage back to *siddhas* and tended to remain true to those tantric roots—both in their interest in acquiring *siddhis* and in the *kuṇḍalinī*-focused subtle body visualizations that stayed at the heart of their practice—whereas ascetic Rāmānandīs

³⁶¹ Mallinson, “Śāktism and *Haṭhayoga*,” forthcoming.

³⁶² Ibid.

traced their yogic lineage back to *munis*, practicing a *haṭha-yoga* that maintained close ties with those *munis*' ancient physical techniques of *tapas*.

It should not surprise us, then, that Krishnadās Payahārī, founder of the Rāmānandī community at Galtā, is described in Nābhādās's *Bhaktamāl* not as a *siddha* or *yogī*, but as a *muni*. Nābhā describes Payahārī not simply as a *muni*, but as “a great *muni* (*mahāmuni*) whose seed was turned upwards (*ūrdhvaretas*).”³⁶³ This term *ūrdhvaretas* refers to an individual who has managed to raise and preserve his *bindu* (i.e., *retas*, semen), an accomplishment demonstrating real yogic mastery. Mallinson explains that, “The ancient tradition of the *ūrdhvaretās tapasvī* (the ascetic whose seed is [turned] upwards), which is closely associated with the practice of *yoga* in texts such as the *Mahābhārata*, is likely to be the source of early Haṭha Yoga, in which the preservation of *bindu* is paramount. This relatively orthodox tradition has survived in ascetic orders such as the Daśanāmī *saṃnyāsīs* and the Rāmānandīs.”³⁶⁴

When Nābhā describes Payahārī's disciple and successor at Galtā, Kīlhaḍev, he seems to link him to this same yogic tradition, for he explicitly compares Kīlha to Bhīṣma (Gāṅgeya), the great warrior and yoga-practicing ascetic of the *Mahābhārata*, and writes, “Through the power (*bal*) of his practice/deeds (*karnī*), he abandoned his body, and proceeded to the *brahmarandhra*.”³⁶⁵ This verse indicates that through his mastery of yoga Kīlha was able to choose the time of his own passing by leaving (i.e., projecting his soul up the *suṣumṇā nāḍī*) through the *brahmarandhra* opening at the top of his skull.³⁶⁶ Like that of his guru, Dwārkādās's

³⁶³ Chappay 38

³⁶⁴ Mallinson, “Haṭha Yoga,” 779.

³⁶⁵ Chappay 40.

³⁶⁶ As we saw in the last chapter, the reference to *bal* (power) in Kīlha's yogic practice seems to further link Kīlha to Bhīṣma and Bhīṣma's style of yoga. In *Mahābhārata* 12:289.11-56, Bhīṣma expounds on the practice of yoga,

yogic expertise was also deemed noteworthy, for Rāghavdās writes, “[he] mastered *haṭha yoga* and conquered Death.”³⁶⁷

Clearly, Krishnadās Payahārī, Kīlhadev, and Dwārkādās were masters of yoga. The interesting thing is that, despite their yogic expertise, in the *Bhaktamāls* of Nābhādās or Rāghavdās, neither they nor any of the other early Rāmānandī ascetic practitioners of yoga are ever called *yogīs*. We have just seen that these Rāmānandīs typically would have traced their roots back to *munis* and *ṛṣis*, in distinction to *siddhas* and *yogīs*, but even so, a key question remains: What, then, is a *yogī*? If not simply the practitioner of yoga, then who is the *yogī*?

~ Seeking Out the Yogī ~

In the last chapter, a close look at the early Rāmānandīs led us to see that we may need to re-conceptualize our understanding of *bhakti* and the identity of the *bhakta*. From another angle, these same Galta Rāmānandīs show us that our view of yoga and the identity of the *yogī* may need to be thoroughly revised as well. As mentioned earlier, the word *yoga* derives from the root “*yuj*.” The famed Sanskrit grammarian Pāṇini provides two different ‘*yuj*’ verbal roots in his *Dhātupāṭha*: (1) ‘*yuj samādhau*’ (IV.68) and (2) ‘*yujir yoge*’ (VII.7). The second means “yoke” or “join,” while the first means “in the sense of *samādhi*.” Gerald Larson argues that “the term ‘Yoga’ in the tradition of the [*Yoga Sūtras*] and its principal commentaries is seldom used in the sense of ‘yoke’, ‘join’ or ‘union,’ as it is sometimes claimed in popular accounts of Yoga. The term refers, rather, to concentration and is most easily understood in the [*Yoga Sūtras*] and its

placing great emphasis on its *bal* and the *bal* of its practitioners. See James L. Fitzgerald, “A Prescription for Yoga and Power in the Mahābhārata,” in *Yoga in Practice*, ed. David G. White (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 48.

³⁶⁷ Chappay 165.

commentaries simply as ‘disciplined meditation’ in regard to the various states of awareness.”³⁶⁸ David Gordon White has recently argued that overemphasis on philosophical and analytical texts like the *Yoga Sūtras*, *Bhagavad Gītā*, and their commentarial literature has skewed understandings of yoga towards this definition of “disciplined meditation,” which, he claims, is not historically accurate. In his *Sinister Yogis* (2009), White argues that, when we focus our attention on the practitioner of yoga, the *yogī*, then Vedic sources, epic literature, and medieval narrative accounts demonstrate that the “purest,” most original, and most consistent meaning of the term *yoga* centers not on meditation and *samādhi*, but rather on “yoking,” or “occult and extrovert techniques of effecting union by projecting the self outwards in order to overcome death, enter other bodies and perform various kinds of wizardry.”³⁶⁹ The book’s argument is a flawed but important one that deserves attention if we are to properly understand the nature of, and the key distinctions among, *yogas* and *yogīs* in Indian history.

White highlights medieval Indian literature that depicts *yogīs* as sinister, deceitful, freakish, frightening figures who lusted for and wielded great power. From the number and content of these narratives, it is clear that *yogīs* were widely believed to seek and possess dangerous supernormal powers (*siddhis*) that could benefit or harm those with whom they interacted. The stories seem to reflect “a situation in which independent yogis without allegiance to any particular religious or political institution were perceived as threatening to

³⁶⁸ Gerald Larson, “Introduction to the Philosophy of Yoga,” in *Yoga: India’s Philosophy of Meditation. Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies: Volume XII*, ed. G.J. Larson and R.S. Bhattacharya (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2008), 28-29.

³⁶⁹ Mallinson, “The Yogīs’ Latest Trick,” forthcoming; White, *Sinister Yogis*, xii-xiv, 37-42.

those very same institutions.”³⁷⁰ With his argument about the centrality of “yoking” and *siddhis* clearly in mind, White asks, “[W]hy is it that not a single yogi in these narratives is ever seen assuming a yogic posture (*āsana*); controlling his breath, senses, and mind; engaging in meditation (*dhyāna*); or realizing transcendent states of consciousness (*samādhi*)—all of the practices of what has been deemed ‘classical yoga’? If these be yogis, then what is yoga?”³⁷¹ The answer to his first question seems simple enough. These narratives were just that, narratives; they were not how-to manuals on yoga and would obviously seek to highlight the most engaging and entertaining aspects of a *yogī*’s character and practice. As June McDaniel has written:

[O]ne reason ancient Sanskrit texts spoke more about yogis as sorcerers and miracle-workers than as silent priests in meditation is that they made for better stories. Heroes and magicians and wild men captured the attention of listeners better than people sitting quietly in caves, hoping for liberation. Virtually all of these texts were narrated before they were written, and narrative requires drama. It can be difficult to excite an audience with sages chanting stanzas and doing slow breathing exercises. And, of course, the state of ultimate liberation is beyond words.³⁷²

Thus, the fact that popular literature and brahmanical writings would underscore *yogī*’s dangerous side should not surprise us; *yogīs* were widely assumed to gain access to *siddhis* and were free to use them in whatever way they wished. However, there does not seem to be any ground for considering these narrative expressions of both popular and elite fears regarding the potential dangers inherent in yogic powers as the basis for, or even a privileged source for, our understanding of the content of yogic practice or the historical identity of *yogīs*, as White would have us believe.

³⁷⁰ White, *Sinister Yogis*, 21.

³⁷¹ White, *Sinister Yogis*, 37.

³⁷² June McDaniel, “Review of *Sinister Yogis* by David Gordon White,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 79.2 (2011), 540.

The question of extraordinary powers, or *siddhis*, looms large over recent scholarly attempts to make better sense of yoga and *yogīs*. We have seen that a key element in distinguishing the Nāths and the Rāmānandīs is their respective attitudes toward the *siddhis*. In both the *Mahābhārata* and the *Yoga Sūtras* it is quite clear that the acquisition of *siddhis* is an important and natural byproduct of yoga practice, but the attitude toward them is quite ambiguous. In the *Mahābhārata*, warnings of their dangers appear as well as approval of their use for certain purposes.³⁷³ In the *Yoga Sūtra*, descriptions of extraordinary powers and forms of cognition occupy almost the entirety of the third book (*pāda*)—constituting over one fourth of the whole text—yet these *siddhis* are explicitly regarded as hindrances to the larger goal of liberation.³⁷⁴ White rightly notes that historians have largely ignored the *Yoga Sūtra*’s third *pāda*, and generally have neglected the powers and wizardry that are, in fact, a crucial dimension of yoga.³⁷⁵ In bringing attention to the *siddhis* and to unexplored dimensions of “yoking” that constitute critical elements of yoga practice, White provides an important corrective. The problem, as Mallinson has insightfully noted, is that often White seems to confuse the *siddhis* acquired *through* yoga with yoga—i.e., yoga practice—itself. For instance, while entering into (“yoking” oneself to) another body (*parakāyapraveśa*) is often listed as a

³⁷³ Brockington, “Epic Yoga,” 136.

³⁷⁴ Yoga Sūtra III.37 states that the emergence of these *siddhis* is an obstacle to *samādhi* (*te samādhāv upasargā vyutthāne siddhayaḥ*). Gerald Larson (“Introduction to the Philosophy of Yoga,” 124), David Lorenzen (*Kāpālikas and Kālāmukhas*, 93–94), David G. White (“Yoga in Early Hindu Tantra,” 143), and Georg Feuerstein (*The Yoga Sūtra of Patañjali*, 113) have each argued that Yoga Sūtra III.37 refers not to *siddhis* generally speaking but only to the immediately preceding *sūtra* which mentions supernormal capacities of hearing, sight, taste, and smell that arise in externalizing consciousness (i.e., outside of the ecstasy of *samādhi*). Nevertheless, as Larson (130) and Feuerstein (113, 122) point out, *sūtras* III.50–51 seem to make it clear that the *yogin* must have dispassion (*vairāgya*) towards supernormal powers and otherworldly pleasure if he is to achieve the highest state and that he must not be attached or prideful about the higher capacities (powers/knowledges) available to him as that would have undesirable consequences.

³⁷⁵ White, *Sinister Yogis*, 39, 42.

power attained from practicing yoga (i.e., its meditation, concentration, and breath practices), White calls this *siddhi* “the modus operandi” of Indian *yogīs* and “the sine qua non of a yogi’s practice.”³⁷⁶ While it is certainly true that *yogīs* often attain supernormal powers through their practice of yoga, it is critical to remember that, as Mallinson puts it, “The powers are not the practice.”³⁷⁷

White’s main methodological tactic in *Sinister Yogis* is to focus on the *yogī*; that is, to revise the history of yoga by focusing on narrative accounts of *yogīs*. He states, “This book differs from every other history of yoga written to date, because it takes as its starting point the practitioner of yoga, the *yogi*.”³⁷⁸ However, what happens is that in looking for “*yogīs*,” White misses out on a great many “practitioners of yoga.” For, unfortunately, they are not necessarily one and the same. As we have seen, in their respective *Bhaktamāls*, neither Nābhādās nor Rāghavdās even once uses the term *yogī* in describing Krishnadās Payahārī, Kīlhadev, Dwārkādās or the other early Rāmānandī ascetic practitioners of yoga.

At around the same time that Nābhādās composed his *Bhaktamāl*, two Sikh sources—*Guru Granth Sāhib* 9.2, 34.2³⁷⁹ and *Vārāṇ Bhāī Gurdās* 8.13—mention the organization of *yogīs* into twelve *panths* (a feature of the Nāth order today) and the organization of *saṃnyāsīs* into ten divisions (a feature of the Daśanāmī order today). It seems, then, that by the beginning of the seventeenth century the terms *yogī* and *saṃnyāsī* had come to refer to specific communities of ascetics different from the Rāmānandīs; thus, Nābhā was likely quite deliberate in not using

³⁷⁶ White, *Sinister Yogis*, xiii, 37.

³⁷⁷ Mallinson, “The Yogīs’ Latest Trick,” forthcoming.

³⁷⁸ White, *Sinister Yogis*, xii.

³⁷⁹ Winand M. Callewaert, *Śrī Guru Granth Sāhib*. With Complete Index. Part I (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1996), 939, 941.

these words.³⁸⁰ If, by the early sixteenth century the term *yogī* referred most especially to Gorakh-following proto-Nāths, there is ample evidence that the word still sometimes denoted Rāmānandī and Daśanāmī practitioners of yoga.³⁸¹ That a practitioner of yoga would sometimes adopt the label of *yogī* is only understandable; however, “sometimes” is the operative word, for it would seem that the more the term became associated with the proto-Nāths, the more it came to hold sinister, low-caste, and generally undesirable connotations (especially for *bhaktas* or those concerned with orthodoxy and social propriety), leading the Rāmānandīs to distance themselves from the formal label of *yogī*.³⁸² Thus, White, in his focus on “*yogīs*,” and his corresponding intention to link the seekers and wielders of *siddhis* with the practitioners of yoga, almost entirely overlooks the liberation-focused tradition of yoga espoused by Rāmānandīs (and Daśanāmīs) which “has been the predominant variety of yoga practice for both renunciators and householders in India over the last thousand years.”³⁸³

Clearly, there is a great deal of confusion surrounding the term *yogī* itself, which has not had a historically consistent meaning or referent, and has been used rather loosely to refer

³⁸⁰ On this note, it is worth pointing out that, despite the great importance of renunciation to their lifestyle (Nābhā calls Payahārī the “paragon of renunciation”), Nābhādās and Rāghavdās also never refer to any of the Galtā Rāmānandī ascetics as *saṃnyāsīs*. It is possible that by the early seventeenth century, the word *saṃnyāsī* had clear Śaiva connotations that made it an inappropriate label for Rāmānandīs.

³⁸¹ Mallinson writes, “It might be supposed that the forerunners of the Nāths were denoted by the name ‘*yogī*,’ but this term is also ambiguous as it has been used, at least until the modern period, to denote *yoga* practicing ascetics belonging to a wide range of orders, in particular those of the Daśanāmī *saṃnyāsīs* and Rāmānandīs.” Mallinson, “Nath Sampradaya,” 411.

³⁸² Mallinson explains, “While Dasnāmīs and Rāmānandīs will happily refer to themselves in conversations as *yogīs* and the word is used frequently in their liturgies, as a sect name it has long been the preserve of the Gorakhnāthīs. Its ‘sinister’ connotations and its use as a caste name by a variety of low-status groups including snake-charmers and Muslim devotional singers, have led to its being eschewed as a title by even the Nāths themselves, as well as by higher-status *Yogī* castes in Rajasthan who now also call themselves Nāths. These undesirable connotations have long since led the Dasnāmīs and Rāmānandīs, whose members have been in the main drawn from higher-status social groups than those of the Nāth *Yogīs*, to distance themselves formally from the appellation *Yogī*.” Mallinson, “The *Yogīs*’ Latest Trick,” forthcoming.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*

to individuals whose yogic practices and religious outlooks differed considerably.³⁸⁴ While it might seem that a *yogī* is quite simply one who practices yoga, what is considered to constitute “yoga,” and to what degree that “yoga” is central in the religiosity of any given “*yogī*,” varies greatly. Depending on the time period, region, and specific community in which the term is being used, what is meant by the label *yogī* may be something quite different, and scholars writing about yoga and *yogis* must remain cognizant of these differences.

In seeking out the *yogī* in the historical context of our primary concern, early modern north India, one must be aware that many master practitioners of yoga, like the early Rāmānandīs at Galtā, might not necessarily have gone by that name. Furthermore, those who were most often called *yogīs*, the proto-Nāths, mainly practiced a visualization-based tantric *laya-yoga* quite distinct from the *tapas*-oriented physical practices that were the basis of early *haṭha-yoga*. It was these *tapasvī* yogic practices, synthesized with Kaula tantric notions of *kuṇḍalini*’s ascent up the *cakras* of the subtle body but maintaining liberation (not *siddhis*) as their sole goal, that became the classical *haṭha-yoga* adopted and practiced most especially by Rāmānandīs and Daśanāmīs, practitioners of yoga who were sometimes called *yogīs*, but more often went by other terms that would distinguish them from the proto-Nāths. Indeed, for Nābhādās, regardless of their level of yogic mastery, the members of his Rāmānandī

³⁸⁴ A quick review of the confused situation surrounding the term *yogī*: In some tantric texts, the *yogī*, intent upon liberation (*mukti*), is contrasted with the *sādhaka* who seeks enjoyments (*bhukti*) and *siddhis*. In other tantric texts, it is the *yogī* who is considered the seeker of *bhukti*, in contrast to the *jñānī*, who seeks knowledge and liberation. We have also seen that there is also a wide range of texts in which the *yogī* is synonymous with the *siddha*, and their tantric, *kuṇḍalini*-based practice and power-oriented perspective are considered separate from the *tapas*-based practice and *mokṣa*-oriented perspective of *munis* and *ṛṣis*. In early modern texts, the term *yogī* often refers to members of the ascetic lineages that were coalescing into the Nāth order, but even if less frequent, there are still plenty of instances when the term also refers to Rāmānandīs, Daśanāmīs, and/or their forerunners. In modern times, the *yogī* is often considered the respected practitioner of orthodox yoga in contrast to the *jogī*, a term tending to connote a seedy, tantric magician, but also often referring to a specific caste group of snake charmers or bards.

community at Galta were first and foremost *bhaktas*, and even more than in their yogic practice, it was in their devotional perspective that they differed from the Nāths.

~ *The Tantric Magic of the Nāths* ~

We have seen how the proto-Rāmānandī and proto-Nāth communities differed in their yogic practice and roots, yet the most fundamental difference between the two was one of basic religious perspective and attitude, one indicated by their respective attitudes toward the *siddhis*. Namely, the Rāmānandīs’ *bhakti* approach contrasted significantly with the Nāths’ tantric approach to the Divine. As the following pages will show, in many ways, these differences in perspective parallel the distinctions often made between “religion” and “magic.”

There is no doubt that a major theme of scholarly literature on the Nāths is their association with magic. Véronique Bouillier, the world’s foremost ethnographer of the modern-day Nāth community, writes that, “very few [Nāth *yogīs*] practice complex yogic practice (*sādhana*). What ancient narratives and modern stories glorify, more than personal spiritual achievements, are the wondrous deeds, the supernatural powers obtained by heroic *yogīs*.”³⁸⁵ According to S. Dasgupta, “The general religious nature of Nāthism is characterized by a wide-spread belief in occult power attained through the practice of yoga. All the legends are permeated through and through with a spirit of supernaturalism more in the form of the display of magical feats and sorcery by the Siddhas than in the form of occasional interference from the gods and goddesses, or any other supernatural being.”³⁸⁶ Mircea Eliade adds that “[Gorakhnāthis] are chiefly known and respected for their magical prowess: they have a

³⁸⁵ Véronique Bouillier, “Kānpaṭās,” in *Brill’s Encyclopedia of Hinduism, Volume III*, ed. Knut A. Jacobsen (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 347-348.

³⁸⁶ Shashibhusan Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cults*, 2nd Ed. (Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1962), 211.

considerable reputation as healers and magicians, they are supposed to be able to bring rain, they exhibit snakes. The ability to tame wild beasts is also attributed to them; they are said to live in the jungle, surround by tigers, who sometimes serve them as mounts.”³⁸⁷ Furthermore, George W. Briggs regales us with a host of legends about the magical feats of Gorakhnāth, who is said to have turned the water of a well into gold and then crystal, pronounced a spell over a sword enabling it to sever rocks, filled dried up lakes with water, caused dried up gardens to bloom, caused a twelve-year drought in Nepal, taken the form of a fly to avoid guards, changed himself into iron and then into a frog, transformed some of his disciples so that half of their bodies became gold and the other half iron, restored numerous deceased individuals to life, granted children to barren women, turned horse dung into locusts and then into a human body that he infused with life, restored his own hands and feet cut off by his angry stepmother, and carried with him a magic bag from which he drew grains, apples, flowers, and ashes that conferred the gift of sons or transformed themselves into gems, goods, or clothing.³⁸⁸

With descriptions like these so prevalent in scholarly writing on the Nāths, it should not be surprising that Gordan Djurdjevic has recently argued that the Nāth tradition should be conceived in terms of the Western categories of magic and esotericism. His central thesis is that “there is a formal compatibility or ‘family resemblance’ between the principles of (Western) esotericism and the yoga of the Nāth Siddhas,” asserting that Western magic and the tantric yoga of the Nāths are “in accord in their common orientation towards power, use of the praxis of imagination, and the erotic nature of their mode of operation.”³⁸⁹ Djurdjevic expends

³⁸⁷ Mircea Eliade, *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970), 306.

³⁸⁸ George Weston Briggs, *Gorakhnāth and the Kānpaṭa Yogis* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1938 [2007]), 186-91; 199.

³⁸⁹ Gordan Djurdjevic, *Masters of Magical Powers: The Nāth Yogis in the Light of Esoteric Notions* (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag, 2008), 16-18.

a great deal of time explaining his methodology and establishing the parallels between Western esotericism and the tantric practice of the Nāth yogīs, yet he often leaves the reader to wonder about the significance of these parallels and why or how they are worth noting. As we will demonstrate, thinking about the Nāths in terms of magic is not merely theoretically interesting; it helps us to understand the fundamental ways in which tantric yogīs differed from members of *bhakti* communities in early modern north India while it also gives us insight into the formation of early modern *bhakti* identity and the new and magicalized category of “Tantra” constructed as its necessary Other.

In presenting Nāth tantric religiosity as magical, Djurdjevic’s work is most successful in its conceptualization of the relationship between magic and power. As he explains, the tantric practice of the Nāth yogīs “is ultimately not a quest for salvation but for power.”³⁹⁰ Djurdjevic rightly points out that, “power is one of the central features of the magical quest, in India as in the West. It is the search for power that very frequently distinguishes magical activity from the way of life of an ‘ordinary’ believer. While the latter directs his or her devotion to the omnipotent God/dess/es, the former undergoes a whole set of practices in order to obtain power and achieve desired results.”³⁹¹ In a key passage, he writes:

The mutual interrelation between esotericism and power is perhaps most obviously recognized in the nature of the ultimate ideals the Nāths are striving to achieve: divine body (*divya deh*), perfection of body (*kāyā siddhi*), liberation while in life (*jīvanmukti*), obtainment of the elixir of immortality (*amṛt*), becoming a perfect adept (*siddha*), being a wizard (*vidyādhara*). What these ideals and goals signify is explicitly the attainment of infinite occult power in an immortal body. This is the will to power and a dedication to a lifestyle committed to its acquisition. The image of this human ideal with superhuman powers (of immortality, *amṛtatva*, omnipotence, *parāśakti*, and absolute liberty, *svecchācār*) is a Siddha or a Nāth such as Matsyendra or Gorakh – and ultimately

³⁹⁰ Ibid., 26.

³⁹¹ Ibid., 35.

the great god Śiva, a yogi *par excellence* - whose defining characteristic is the ability to do things at will. A Siddha is an immortal, with a diamond body, who can fly through the air and create or destroy according to his own free will. How much of this ideal is manifested in an individual yogi might be irrelevant, but the yogi is feared, admired, or ridiculed on the basis of his or her degree of association with power (*siddhis*), which for them represents the sacred (*vide infra*).³⁹²

The critical point is that the power sought by tantric yogīs is sacred in nature. In the magical perspective of *tāntrikas* like the Nāth yogīs, “the sacred manifests itself as power.”³⁹³ Furthermore, the *tānika* relates to the sacred, to the Divine, by trying to access and appropriate that power for him/herself. In contrast, the *bhakta* tends to approach the sacred as, above all else, the Beloved, relating to the Divine especially through emotional feeling. This is not to say that *bhaktas* did not conceive the sacred as powerful, but rather that, for the *bhakta*, the power of the all-powerful Divine was to be supplicated; it could not be appropriated by one’s own actions.³⁹⁴

Perhaps the most fundamental of the classic Western distinctions between “religion” and “magic” is that magic is manipulative and coercive, involving rituals and techniques that rely on man as the source of power, while religion is supplicative and submissive, relying on God as the sole source of real power. As Richard Kieckhefer has remarked, from this perspective, “the central feature of religion is that it *supplicates* God or the gods, and the main characteristic of magic is that it *coerces* spiritual beings or forces.”³⁹⁵ In this respect, *bhakti*

³⁹² Ibid., 26.

³⁹³ Ibid., 39.

³⁹⁴ Djurdjevic writes—and here we might substitute *bhakta* for his “believer” and *tānika* for his “magician”—that, “A believer may *worship* the divine as a personification and source of power, but, within this context, the divine is essentially viewed as transcendental and requiring supplication. A magician differs from such a believer by insisting, through his or her actions, that there is a link, a correspondence, that establishes the possibility of appropriating this power.” Ibid., 40.

³⁹⁵ Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000 [1989]), 15. Kieckhefer does not find this distinction to be particularly useful.

looks very similar to Western notions of “religion” whereas the practices of the Nāth *yogīs* fit quite nicely into the Western category of “magic.”

In this chapter we have seen how Rāmānandīs and (proto-) Nāths were indeed quite different, as the legendary confrontation of Krishnadās Payahārī and Tārānāth at Galta would have predicted. Up to this point, we have seen this difference from the *bhakti* side; i.e., in the analysis of *bhakti* source materials. Now, let us get a sense of the contrast from the Nāth side of the line; that is, let us have magic talk back to religion.

A number of passages from the *Gorakhbānī* allow us to get a better grasp of how the perspective of the proto-Nāth *yogīs* would have differed from that of *bhaktas* (even yoga-practicing *bhakti* ascetics) in early modern north India. In the following *sabdī* (#200), we see the Nāth *yogīs* poking some fun at the Vaiṣṇavas, claiming that their founder and tutelary deity Gorakhnāth bested Krishna and Rām (as well as Vishnu’s other *avatārs*) by conquering the powerful force of sexual desire that even these great gods could not master.

Viṣṇu descended into the ten *avatārs*,
But they were overcome by lust.
The invincible lust was conquered by the ascetic Gorakh.
He preserved the downward flowing [*bindu*].³⁹⁶

The poem implies that through his yogic mastery, Gorakhnāth attained a station above even the gods. To say the least, this sort of irreverence would not have been popular with Vaiṣṇava *bhaktas*, yet, as we will see, it is quite common in the *Gorakhbānī*.

The first three lines in each of the three *sabdīs* (#17-19) below convey fairly typical yogic and ascetic themes—meditation, controlling the senses, abandoning worldliness and

³⁹⁶ *Sabdī* 200. As noted earlier, all translations of the *Gorakhbānī* are those of Gordan Djurdjevic and Shukdev Singh, found in the appendix of Djurdjevic’s Ph.D. thesis. Djurdjevic and Singh, trans., “Appendix: The sabads and pads from the Gorakh Bānī,” in “Masters of Magical Powers: The Nāth Siddhas in the Light of Esoteric Notions” (Ph.D. thesis, University of British Columbia, 2005), 200-326.

desire—the likes of which ascetic Rāmānandīs would also have supported; however, in the last line of each poem, we see an attitude that could hardly be more opposed to the humble devotional attitude of the *bhaktas*.

The *yogī* who holds above what goes below
Who burns sex, abandons desire,
Who cuts through *māyā* [worldly illusion] –
Even Vishnu washes his feet.

He who does the *ajap-jap*,³⁹⁷ maintains meditation on *śunya* [emptiness],
Who controls the five sense organs
And offers his body as an oblation in the fire of Brahman³⁹⁸ –
Even Shiva (Mahādev) bows to his feet.

He who places no hope in wealth and youth
Having no thoughts about women
In whose body the *nād*³⁹⁹ and *bindu* are burnt
Even Pārvatī serves him.⁴⁰⁰

While the *bhakta*'s religious practice aimed at an intimate knowledge and, even more so, an emotional experience of the Divine, the Nāth *yogī*'s practice aimed at accessing the power within his own body to become divine, and even to excel the gods themselves. According to the text, Pārvatī serves such a *yogī*, Shiva bows to him, and Vishnu washes his feet. These

³⁹⁷ *Ajap-jap* is meditation on the mantra of the (sound of) the in- and out-breaths.

³⁹⁸ The “fire of Brahman,” or *brahmāgni*, is equivalent to the fire of *kuṇḍalinī śakti*, the concentrated divine energy within the human body.

³⁹⁹ The *nād* is the primal “sound,” often referred to in Nāth literature as the “unstruck sound” (*anāhat nād*), and refers, in sonic terms, to the spiritual experience arrived at when, through yogic practice, Śiva and Śakti are united in the uppermost *cakra* (“the circle of the sky”). The *bīj* (seed), equated with Śakti, is a monosyllabic sound or word, and the *bindu*, equated with Śiva, is its nasalization; the *nād* (sound) results from their communion. Commenting on the multiple connotations of the term *bindu*, Djurdjevic writes, “*Bindu* means so many things precisely because these things are in a certain important (esoteric!) manner mutually related and interconnected. Whether starting from the written dot, from the sound, or from the sexual secretion, one eventually arrives at the ultimate ‘transcendental signified’ which is here Śiva (united with Śakti).” Djurdjevic, *Masters of Magical Powers*, 96.

⁴⁰⁰ *Gorakhbānī, sabdī* 17-19.

expressions of the Nāth's tantric perspective could only come off as arrogant, egotistic, and deluded to the humble devotee of God.

In the two *sabdīs* (#147-148) below, the tantric *yogī*'s goal of divinizing himself is made even more explicit. If the *bhakta* strived to worship and to love God, the Nāth *yogī* strived to *become* God.

Breath (*pavan*) is verily yoga, breath is verily pleasure.
Breath verily takes away the thirty-six diseases.
Few know the mystery of the breath.
In so doing, you are the creator, you are God.

Bindu is verily yoga, *bindu* is verily pleasure.
Bindu verily takes away the thirty-six diseases.
Few know the mystery of this *bindu*.
In so doing, you are the creator, you are God.⁴⁰¹

This “you are God” perspective would certainly not have been well-received by either *bhaktas* or Muslims, for whom—no matter how intimate their relationship with the Divine⁴⁰²—there remained a certain distance between man and God, a separation and duality necessary for the devotional relationship to exist at all. More essential than this, however, was that—to reiterate the point—for the *bhaktas* (and Muslims/Sufis), the Divine tended to be of the nature of Love and was distinctly moral and good in character, whereas the Nāth *yogīs* and other *tāntrikas* tended to conceive the Divine as sacred power, an amoral power that could be accessed (through appropriate rituals, mantras, or yogic practices) and used for any purpose, worldly or spiritual, sinister or beneficent. As Djurdjevic notes, to the *bhaktas* “it appears as if

⁴⁰¹ Gorakhbānī, *sabdī* 147-148.

⁴⁰² For *bhaktas*, that “intimacy” with God could come in forms ranging from erotic love for Krishna to the inner presence of a *nirguṇ* Divine within one’s own body.

the yogis are obsessed with the self-empowerment. But for the yogis, to obtain and experience the *siddhis* means to gain access to the sacred as power.”⁴⁰³

If it is not yet clear how objectionable the Nāth *yogī* outlook must have seemed to the humble God-loving *bhakta*, the passage below, summarizing core features of Nāth’s tantric outlook, makes it absolutely lucid. Having analyzed the *bāṇīs* (“sayings”) of Gorakhnāth and the other early Nāth Siddhas (Carpati, Gopicand, Bhartrihari, Dattatreya, etc.), David White identifies the following major themes in the Nāth *yogī* perspective:

First, the *bāṇīs* are *nirguṇ*: there is nearly no mention of any god in them, and when the divine is mentioned, it is without a name, qualities, or attributes. Second, on those rare occasions that the *saguṇ* gods of Hinduism (Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Maheś) are named, they are not at all objects of worship or even respect: what the *bāṇīs* say is that the yogin who succeeds in his practice makes these high gods his slaves! Third, Gorakhnāth and the other authors of the early *bāṇīs* never state that they are themselves incarnations of gods. On the contrary, they emphasize that mere humans like themselves can become unaging and immortal (*ajarāmara*) Siddhas—perfected beings, demigods—through various types of (usually yogic) practice. This is the entire thrust of all of the early Nāth Siddha teachings, both in the vernacular languages and Sanskrit: that humans can, by means of their practice, raise themselves up from their mortal status and become *jivanmukta*, liberated in their human bodies. They were in fact claiming more than this, as the name they chose for their order makes clear: human yogins could, through their practice, lift themselves up to the level of the very same divine Nāths and Siddhas that people were worshiping in the medieval period in western India. They could become “self-made gods.”⁴⁰⁴

As we will see in the next chapter, in the poetry of the *bhakti* saints, from Kabīr to Surdās to Tulsīdās, *yogīs* are regularly mocked and ridiculed for exactly the claims described above. In many instances these saints’ polemic parallels closely the standard Western discourse in which utter dependence on and submissive devotion to an all-powerful personal

⁴⁰³ Djurdjevic, *Masters of Magical Powers*, 41.

⁴⁰⁴ White, “Yogic and Political Power among the Nāth Siddhas of North India,” forthcoming.

God are authorized as “true religion” while unapproved approaches and attitudes, especially those that in any way diminish the omnipotence of God, are marginalized as “magic.” Even more than in *bhakti* poetry, though, it is in the hagiographical literature that we see *bhakti* self-understanding most clearly taking on the tenor of the “religious.” As we will explore in Chapter Six, this happens most especially in “miracle battles” where *bhakti* saints triumph over magical *yogīs* through the gift of miracles from God (or from their devotion to God), powers revealed as much stronger than any derived from individual practices of *tapas* or tantric mantra *japa*.

* * *

In the preceding pages, we have sought to explore how the Nāth *yogīs* of the early modern period were different from the specifically ascetic-yogic stream of Rāmānandīs. In many ways, Galtā Rāmānandīs like Payahārī, Kīlha, and Dvārka shared much with the Nāth *yogīs*, from their liberal social attitudes to their ascetic, renunciatory lifestyle and appearance; however, we have seen that they also differed in important ways. In contrast to a number of scholarly claims, the yogic practice of the Nāths was considerably different from that of the Rāmānandīs, reflecting their tantric Kaula and *siddha* heritage in comparison to a Rāmānandī yoga rooted in the relatively more orthodox traditions of *tapas*-practicing *munis*. More essential than this difference (though reflected in their respective attitudes towards the *siddhis* in yogic practice), was the widening gap between these two communities’ respective devotional and tantric conceptions of and approaches to the Divine. William Pinch puts it well when he states that *bhaktas*’ conflict with *tāntrikas* like the Nāth *yogīs* was “not simply an argument about style. It reflected a profound disagreement about the very nature of God: and

whether men could legitimately aspire to be gods. As such, it reflected a deep disagreement about the meaning of religion.”⁴⁰⁵

While this chapter has discussed the Nāths in relation to the ascetic-yogic stream of the Galtā Rāmānandīs, in fact, nearly everything we know about the early Rāmānandīs comes from the literary efforts of the community’s other more *rasik* and devotional stream, the inaugurator of which seems to have been Payahārī’s disciple Agradās. In the following chapter, we focus our attention on the figure of Agradās, his disciple Nābhādās, and their *rasik* practice and *bhakti* vision. In exploring their devotional vision, we will gain key insights into the way in which emerging *bhakti* communities of early modern north India sought to define themselves and compete for followers and patronage within the new social and political contexts of Mughal India.

⁴⁰⁵ William Pinch, *Warrior Ascetics and Indian Empires* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 195.

Chapter Four

Agradās and the Rām-rasik Tradition: A Case Study in the Formation of *Bhakti* Community

This chapter examines the life and works of Agradās, and the practice and theology of the Rām-rasik tradition he is claimed to have founded. Agradās is an important but virtually unstudied figure whose life and literary output offer valuable insights into the ways in which emerging *bhakti* communities of early modern north India forged their identities and competed for followers and patronage. As we will see, Agra inaugurated a vernacular literary project within his community that sought to praise the deeds of great devotee-saints and spread the saving message of *bhakti* in a fashion that might garner the Rāmānandīs prestige, power, and patronage in the new Mughal-Rajput political and religious environment of the latter sixteenth century. In the service of this project, Agradās composed works that engaged popular literary and theological trends centered on the aesthetic experience of sublime emotion (*rasa*), appropriated tantric ritual technologies for *bhakti* purposes, and articulated Sant values that seem to have been at the earliest core of his community.

In the pages to come, first we address these questions: What is the Rām-rasik tradition that Agradās is said to have founded? What are its central practices and theological tenets? And what are its historical origins and development? This will lead us into an in-depth discussion of Agra himself. Who was Agradās? How is his life remembered in the sources available to us? What did he write and what are the key themes and messages in his compositions? What was his religious outlook and what role did that viewpoint play in the larger “*bhakti* movement” spreading across north India? As we will see, Agradās represented an important perspective within the Rāmānandī community and within the early modern

north Indian *bhakti* movement as a whole, a vision of religiosity that focused on *saguṇ* devotion, was institution-friendly and literature-producing, and borrowed elements of tantric practice while positioning itself in deliberate opposition to key tantric attitudes and perspectives.

~ The Rām-rasik Tradition ~

Many readers will be quite familiar with the adolescent Krishna's erotic sports in Braj with the *gopīs*, and above all, with Rādhā. In the first half of the sixteenth century, the Gauḍiyā Vaiṣṇava Goswamīs of Vrindavan took these legends about the young amorous Krishna and melded them with the Sankrit aesthetic theory of *rasa* to formulate a new kind of devotional practice, inspired by the ecstatic devotion of the great Bengali mystic saint Krishna Caitanya. *Rasa* originally means “taste,” “juice,” or “essence,” an essence typically associated with sweetness or bliss, but in the context of aesthetics, *rasa* is better translated as “aesthetic enjoyment” or “the object of aesthetic relish.” Classical *rasa* theory explains how our transient, individualized emotions (*bhāvas*) can be transformed into purified and universalized aesthetic experiences (*rasas*).⁴⁰⁶ *Bhakti* theologians such as Rūpa Gosvāmī (fl. c. 1500-1550 CE) reformulated these notions to articulate how different varieties of human love could be transformed into an experience of spiritual bliss through the devotional contemplation of the

⁴⁰⁶ Indian tradition glorifies Bhārata and his *Nāṭyaśāstra* as the oldest exponent of and authority on *rasa*. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* is likely a composite work with sections dating back as far as the 2nd century B.C.E., but it did not exist in its current form of thirty-six chapters until sometime between the 4th and 8th centuries C.E. Bhārata's chief goal was to evoke a certain emotional and aesthetic experience in, specifically, the spectators of drama, but his work became the critical starting point for influential theories on the evoking of aesthetic experience in all art forms, especially Sanskrit literature. Probably the most important theories of *rasa* came from two different authors in the eleventh century, Abhinavagupta and Bhoja, who disagreed on a number of points but both conceived the blissful tasting of *rasa* elicited by good art as somehow linked to an experience of the deepest and purest core of our human nature.

deeds of Krishna.⁴⁰⁷ In Rūpa Gosvāmī's *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* (Ocean of Nectar of the Essence of Devotion), the various actors of the Krishna legend are arranged in a hierarchy of relationships through which the devotee may assume the role of servant, friend, elder, or lover in relation to God, savoring the emotions associated with these roles by imaginative participation in the divine "play" or *līlā* of their Lord Krishna. Those initiated into this system of ritual and practice became known as *rasiks*, "those who savor *ras*," and undertook a regimen of daily external rituals of worship and service of the deity as well as internal practices such as visualization, meditation, and role-playing in order to fully participate in the ultimate reality of Krishna's eternal *līlā*.⁴⁰⁸

A substantial amount of academic research has been conducted on this Krishna *rasik* tradition, and its existence is fairly common knowledge to many Hindus. What is far less widely known is that there is a very similar tradition of *rasik* devotion to Rām, based on his intimate life with Sītā.⁴⁰⁹ Krishna is *līlā-puruṣottam*, the exemplar of divine play, and erotic dalliances seem to fit his personality quite well, but Rām is popularly known as *maryādā-*

⁴⁰⁷ It was Rūpa Gosvāmī who systematized emotional *bhakti* religion in terms of aesthetic theory. Rūpa met Caitanya in 1514, settled permanently in Vrindavan in 1516, completed his *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* in 1541, and died around 1557. He saw *bhakti-rasa* as the only true *rasa*, conceiving it not as a temporary aesthetic experience but as the spiritual experience that is the core and culmination of the genuine religious life, one based on devotion. In his *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu*, Rūpa wrote that, "The Rasa associated with the Lord is incomprehensible in every respect for those without devotion; it can be relished only by those devotees who have made the lotus-feet of Kṛṣṇa their all-in-all" (2.5.131). As we will see, the *rasik* practice articulated by Rūpa appropriated much from tantric traditions while simultaneously stressing *bhakti* to the exclusion of all other religious approaches. Rūpa states, "The saints generally believe that knowledge and renunciation cause a hardening of the heart, whereas devotion (*bhakti*) is said to be tender by nature ... [T]hat which is attainable by means of knowledge and renunciation can be attained by devotion alone" (1.2.249-251). David Haberman, *The Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu of Rūpa Gosvāmin* (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 2003), 385, 73.

⁴⁰⁸ Philip Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text: Performing the Rāmcaritmānas of Tulsidas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 311; Philip Lutgendorf, "The Secret Life of Ramchandra of Ayodhya," in *Many Ramayanas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia*, ed., Paula Richman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 219.

⁴⁰⁹ The only full-length study of the Rām-*rasik* tradition is in Hindi, Bhagavati Prasad Singh's *Rām bhakti mem rasik sampradāya* (Balarampur: Avadha Sahitya Mandira, 1957).

puruṣottam, the model of upright behavior and moral restraint, so the existence of a Rām-*rasik* tradition might strike some as strange, if not inappropriate. Nevertheless, as Philip Lutgendorf states, “Ram may be an exemplar of decorum, but he is also a prince and later a king—an enjoyer of the earth's delights. If he is self-controlled and devoted to one wife (*ek patnī vrat*), he is certainly not, in the popular view, celibate; he is, for most of his saga, a happily married householder in that stage of life in which one is supposed to savor the joys of *kāma*—the pleasure principle in classical Indian thought.”⁴¹⁰ Furthermore, the fact is that, historically speaking, from the sixteenth century, the theology and practices of Rām- and Krishna-oriented sects developed along very similar lines and continuously cross-pollinated each other.⁴¹¹ It seems that in this case it was the success of Krishna devotion and the influence of the theology of the Vrindavan Gosvāmīs that led Agradās to rapidly adapt their teachings and found the Rām-*rasik* sect. Indeed, it seems that Agradās and his disciple Nābhādās were very aware of, and significantly influenced by, developments in Vrindavan and that they held the leading figures of Caitanya’s Gauḍiyā Vaiṣṇava community there in high esteem.⁴¹²

⁴¹⁰ Lutgendorf, “The Secret Life of Ramchandra,” 218.

⁴¹¹ Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text*, 310.

⁴¹² Key aspects of Agradās’s religious vision seem to closely resemble that of the Gauḍiyā sect in Vrindavan, particularly in their *śṅgāra*-centered *rasik bhakti* toward Krishna and their heavy emphasis on the divine Name, practices we will see that Agra held very dear. Despite some important differences between them, it is hard not to see that the Gauḍiyā Vaiṣṇava community must have been a major influence on Agradās and his disciple Nābhādās. Nābhā’s *Bhaktamāl* devotes a surprising amount of space to praising Gauḍiyā Vaiṣṇava *bhaktas*, with full entries on Caitanya, Nityānanda, Viṣṇupurī, Raghunātha Gosvāmī, Keśav Bhaṭṭ, Rūpa and Sanātana Gosvāmī, and Jīva Gosvāmī, as well as brief mentions of Gopāl Bhaṭṭ and several other *bhaktas* of the Gauḍiyā tradition in Vrindavan. For a study and translation of these verses in the *Bhaktamāl*, see Philip Lutgendorf, “Kṛṣṇa Caitanya and His Companions as Presented in the *Bhaktamāla* of Nābhā Jī and the *Bhaktirasabodhinī* of Priyā Dāsa,” unpublished MA paper (University of Chicago, 1981). It is difficult to know to what degree Agradās consciously modeled his own project on that of the Vrindavan Gauḍiyās, but if he did largely follow their lead, this may not have been solely out of attraction to their teachings, but also in part as a strategic decision to model the community that, more than any other *bhakti* sect, had earned the special attentions—and financial support—of his own sect’s primary patrons, the Kacchvāhās, and through them the Mughals. As Kumkum Chatterjee has remarked, the Kacchvāhās “supported various religious sects, but had a particularly close relationship with the Gaudiya Vaishnavas with their strong Bengali affiliations,” with Rājā Bhagwān Dās, the father of Rājā Mān Singh,

So how exactly does Rām-rasik devotion work? The description in the pages below offers an ideal portrait of Rām-rasik theology and practices that seem to have first taken hold (in a less developed form) in the sixteenth century. Rām-rasiks focus on a very particular portion of the life of Rām and Sītā – the period of approximately twelve years that they enjoyed together in Ayodhya after getting married but before Rām became heir-apparent and was exiled. In most versions of the *Rāmāyana*, this phase of Rām’s life receives little to no attention; however, Rām-rasiks delight in imagining the details of this idyllic period, a *līlā* in which Rām and Sītā express their ultimate reality through the quality of *mādhurya*, or erotic sweetness. Allan Keislar writes that:

In the context of Vaiṣṇava *rasik* usage, a *rasik* is one who savours *ras* (which may mean juice, relish, taste, essence, sentiment, etc., but in this context refers to a transcendental emotion.) In terms of *mādhurya rasa*, the mood of transcendental conjugality, an orthodox (as opposed to Sahajiyā) *rasik* is one who can appreciate the sweetness of spiritual love without confusing it with corresponding sensations involved in mundane sexuality.⁴¹³

Meditation manuals such as Agradās’s *Dhyān-mañjarī*—to be discussed in depth in the pages below—give detailed descriptions of the beautiful city of Saket (the ancient name of the city of Ayodhya, also meaning “heaven”), the palace and garden at its center where Rām and

perhaps even having accepted initiation into the sect. Perhaps due to the Mughals’ close alliance with the Kacchvāhās, “from the 1560s and extending up to the 1590s, the emperor Akbar and his nobles made generous endowments of rent-free lands to the Govinddeva, Madanmohan and various other Vaishnava temples that were held by members of the Chaitanya *sampradāy*. The close involvement of Rajput nobles such as Bhar Mal, Todar Mal and Ramdas Kachhwaha with the emperor’s endowments is also clear from these *farmans*.” Kumkum Chatterjee, “Cultural Flows and Cosmopolitanism in Mughal India: The Bishnupur Kingdom,” *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 46.2 (2009): 158, 155.

⁴¹³ Alan Keislar, “The Rasik Concept of Transcendental Sexuality,” in *Studies in Early Modern Indo-Aryan Languages, Literature and Culture*, eds. Alan Entwistle et al. (New Delhi: Manohar, 1999), 189, n. 2. Keislar argues for a *rasik* conception of “transcendental sexuality” conceived as an “ideal loving relationship of the eternally blissful individual spirit (*ātmā*), which has a spiritual female form, with the supreme spirit (*paramātmā* or *parabrahman*), whose eternal, original form is masculine” (177). The idea is that qualified persons meditating on the transcendental erotic life of Krishna and Rādhā or Rām and Sītā are immersed in the sweetness of pure love and do not become sexually agitated.

Sītā dwell, and the lotus-shaped throne upon which their eternal union occurs, while offering a head-to-toe verbal portrait of the divine couple themselves. Using such tools, the initiated Rām-*rasik* is able to conduct elaborate visualizations of the intimate life of Rām and Sītā, typically taking on the role of either a female companion (*sakhī*) or maidservant (*mañjarī*) of Sītā or a male companion (*sakhā*) of Rām. These companions were the select few who had access to the inner sanctum of the Kanak Bhavan (House of Gold) in Saket where they served and worshipped Rām and Sītā, witnessing their supreme *līlā*.⁴¹⁴

After completing a period of preliminary training and purification,⁴¹⁵ the *rasik* initiate is given a new body by his guru. This “divine body” is considered to be the *rasik*’s true and ultimate identity, a fact that he should come to realize gradually through intense training and meditation.⁴¹⁶ Through visualization and role-playing the *rasik* is to take on the emotional character of the specific companion of Rām or Sītā that he has been assigned and in order to cultivate the appropriate emotion, he is given specific information about the age, parents, teachers, home, favorite activities, and appearance of that particular *sakhī* or *sakhā*. Having purified himself and mentally assumed the visualized body and its emotional mood, the initiate may begin the most characteristic of *rasik* practices, *aṣṭayām* devotion, that is, service to Rām and Sītā according to the sequence of eight periods of the day, in each of which a

⁴¹⁴ Lutgendorf, “The Secret Life of Ramchandra,” 220-21.

⁴¹⁵ In taking initiation into one of the *rasik* branches of the Rāmānandī *sampradāy*, a Vaiṣṇava first undergoes “the five *saṁskāras* common to Vaiṣṇava sects—the bestowal of a mantra or sacred formula, of the sectarian *tilak* and other bodily marks (*mudrā*), of a rosary (*mālā*), and of a new name, usually ending in the suffix *-saran*—‘one who takes refuge,’ a feature which distinguishes *rasik* devotees from other Rāmānandīs, who generally favor the suffix *-dās*, ‘slave’.” Lutgendorf, “The Secret Life of Ramchandra,” 221-22.

⁴¹⁶ This initiation is called the *sambandh dīkṣā* (“initiation of relationship”) and the new body received is termed the *cit deh* (“body of consciousness”), *sādhana śarīr* (“body of spiritual practice”), or *divya śarīr* (“divine body”) which gives the *rasik* personal access to the supreme *līlā* of Rām and Sītā. See Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text*, 317.

different type of devotional activity is prescribed.⁴¹⁷ Lutgendorf explains the goal of this discipline of daily service, which may occupy one's entire life:

[W]hat begins as an 'imaginative conception' (*bhāvnā*) gradually becomes real. By long practice in visualization, the devotee begins to catch 'glimpses' (*jhalak*) of the actual *līlā*; these gradually intensify and lengthen until the adept acquires the ability to enter the realm of Saket at any moment—a condition regarded by this tradition as “liberation in the body” (*sadeh mukti*).⁴¹⁸

While there are both *sakhī* and *sakhā* branches of the Rām-*rasik* tradition, Sītā typically receives the bulk of attention as a means of access to Rām, and practitioners often inwardly assume the persona of a girlfriend or maidservant of Sītā. An example of such a Rām-*rasik* initiate is Sītārāmśaraṇ Bhagwān Prasād “Rūpkalā,” well-known as the commentator of the most popular edition of Nābhādās's *Bhaktamāl*. Bhagwān Prasād “Rūpkalā” was a servant of the British Empire who worked for 30 years in the Bihar Education Branch of the Bengal Presidency, attracted a sizeable spiritual following in the later years of his life, and in 1893 retired to Ayodhya to devote himself to God, his followers, and to hagiographical exegesis. William Pinch writes this about his *rasik* practice:

⁴¹⁷ Lutgendorf, “The Secret Life of Ramchandra,” 222-23; Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text*, 317.

⁴¹⁸ Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text*, 318. Tony Stewart describes *rasik* practice in slightly different terms, stressing the practitioner's internalization of narratives about the deities. “Meditation extends the appropriation of the text to dramatize it in a four dimensional way, producing a stage, furnishing it, peopling with actors, and then playing out its drama. At the critical moment of total familiarity, where the individual's consciousness is relieved of its burden of impelling the action as it has been heard, the drama is so interiorized that it takes a life of its own. ... The drama is then activated and proceeds without direction.” Tony K. Stewart, “Reading for Krishna's Pleasure: Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava Meditation, Literary Interiority, and the Phenomenology of Repetition,” *Journal of Vaishnava Studies* 14:1 (2005): 271. Some scholars have suggested that the interiorized practice of *rasik bhakti*, with its vivid imaginings and complex visualizations, beginning as it did in sixteenth century north India, was a retreat from—or the establishment of a world of meaning beyond—the Muslim-controlled socio-political sphere. See, for example, David Haberman, *Acting as a Way of Salvation: A Study of Rāgānugā Bhakti Sādhana* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 43-44. Responding to these claims, Lutgendorf perceptively writes, “[I]t is worth reminding ourselves that the practice of visualization and of the fabrication of inner bodies has a very old pedigree in the subcontinent, extending back long before the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate, and also that the ‘other worlds’ of the *rasiks* came to prominence precisely during a period of generally amicable relations between Hindus and Muslims—most notably during the age of Akbar and his immediate successors—when Hindu nobles occupied powerful positions in the imperial administration and large temples were again being constructed in North India under princely patronage.” Lutgendorf, “The Secret Life of Ramchandra,” 229.

[H]is approach to the coupled Sītā-Rām was via the feeling of *shringār-ras* (erotic love). Bhagvān Prasād utilized vigorous role-playing and visualization techniques to recreate the sensory and emotional bliss of the just-married Rām and Sītā. Bhagvān Prasād's particular role was that of a female attendant to the young couple, and he is often pictured as such, attired in a white sari with a generally feminine appearance.⁴¹⁹

Just as it did for Rūpkalā, the *ras* of *śṛṅgār*, or erotic love, has long played a central role in much of *rasik* visualization practice, thus *rasik* texts and gurus have often advocated strict secrecy and warned against revealing their teachings to the uninitiated. *Rasik* literature cautions further that the meditative practices should not be externalized, as this “could easily provoke the scorn of the uninitiated.”⁴²⁰ Indeed, while the tradition has had much historical success and influence, it has also received criticism from British colonialists, nationalist Hindu reformers, and even some segments of the broader public attached to the image of Rām as *maryādā-puruṣottam*. Today in Jaipur, for instance, this local saying can be heard about Galta, where Rām-*rasik bhakti* flourished (and may have originated): “*Galta meṃ galtī bhayī; rām karat hai rās*,” that is, “In Galta, a mistake was made; that Ram does *rās līlās*.”

Rāmānandī tradition holds that *rasik* practice had existed for centuries but was kept secret until Krishnadās Payahārī, himself a *rasik* (again, this according to *rasik* tradition)⁴²¹, gave Agradās the task of popularizing and making more public *rasik* teachings.⁴²² Agradās is thus considered to have formally begun the Rām-*rasik* tradition in Rajasthan in the late sixteenth century; however, it was not until the early eighteenth century that it spread

⁴¹⁹ William Pinch, "Bhakti and the British Empire," *Past & Present* 179 (2003): 186.

⁴²⁰ Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text*, 319; 314.

⁴²¹ As we saw in Chapter Two, Payahārī did present Rājā Pṛthvīrāj with the deity Sītārām-jī, in the form of a *śālagrām* stone, and the deity's name could possibly allude to an amorous unity of Sītā and Rām suggestive of a *rasik* sensibility; however, Nābhā's descriptions of Payahārī indicate far more of an ascetic, yogic, Sant, sensibility than that of a *rasik*.

⁴²² Singh, *Rām bhakti meṃ rasik sampradāya*, 88.

eastward and gained in popularity, taking root most especially in Ayodhya, but also in Citrakut, Janakpur, and Varanasi, among other places. There are several reasons that this expansion began specifically in the early eighteenth century. At that time Rām-rasik practice was flourishing at Galta, in the hills just outside Jaipur, under the Rāmānandī mahant Rāmprapanna (a.k.a. Madhurācārya); however, Sawai Jai Singh II (r. 1700-1743) was intent on making a number of reforms to the religious orders in his domain and, among other demands, was forcing a number of celibate ascetics to marry. Refusing to be married, Rāmprapanna left Galta and went to Citrakut (where Rām, Sītā, and Lakshman are said to have spent part of their period of exile from Ayodhya) and there composed numerous works propagating Rām-rasik bhakti.⁴²³ At the same time, it seems that a number of other Rāmānandī rasik ascetics at Galta also refused to give up their celibacy and left Rajasthan. One of these was Sūr Kiśor, who traveled from Galta to Janakpur (site of Janak's palace where Sītā spent her childhood and was married to Rām), where he is said to have written a text called the *Śrī Mithilā Vilāsa* that praises Sītā as the universal deity—not even mentioning Rām—in the first half of the text, then in the second half describes the actual landmarks of Mithila (many of them previously Śaiva shrines) as sites of the *līlā* of Rām and Sītā.⁴²⁴ Sūr Kiśor is representative of the *rasiks'* Vaiṣṇava bhakti appropriation (and simultaneous subordination) of tantric traditions, for as Burghart describes, one of his acts was to de-center “the previous Maithil centres of Shaivite tantrism by creating a new centre - or more literally a zenith - at Janakpur according to which the Shaivite temples now found themselves on the periphery and integrated into the cult of Sita as the

⁴²³ Monika Horstmann, “The Rāmānandīs of Galta (Jaipur, Rajasthan),” in *Multiple Histories: Culture and Society in the Study of Rajasthan*, eds. Lawrence Babb et al. (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2002), 158.

⁴²⁴ Richard Burghart, “The Discovery of an Object of Meditation: Sūr Kiśor and the Reappearance of Janakpur,” in *Bhakti in Current Research, 1979-1982*, ed. Monika Thiel-Horstmann (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1983), 55-63.

guardian deities of Janakpur.”⁴²⁵ Indeed, just as the physical sites of Krishna’s sports in Braj were “re-discovered” in the sixteenth century and became important pilgrimage locations, in the eighteenth century, the various geographical sites where events in the life of Rām and Sītā occurred (such as Mithila) also began to be “re-discovered” and made into important Rāmaite devotional sites.

Another reason that the early eighteenth century saw the eastern expansion of the Rām-rasik *sampradāy* was the Rāmānandīs’ take-over of Ayodhya from the Śaivas. Probably in response to increasing threats and competition from the Śaiva Daśnāmīs, in the early 1700s the Rāmānandīs had organized themselves into *akhārās* of *nāgās*, warrior ascetics who were able to take control of Ayodhya.⁴²⁶ Furthermore, the gradual breakdown of the Mughal Empire had greatly altered the political landscape of north India by the second half of the eighteenth century, allowing for “the rise of various regional kingdoms, thus opening up new avenues of patronage across the Gangetic plain.”⁴²⁷ It was the generous patronage of newly enfranchised rulers in the eastern Ganges Valley (Banaras, Rewa, Tikamgarh, and Dumrao), most especially that of the Nawabs, Shi’ite Muslim nobles who were the successors to Mughal power in Avadh, that made possible the expansion of the Rāmānandīs and other Hindu groups in Ayodhyā.⁴²⁸

⁴²⁵ Ibid., 61.

⁴²⁶ William Pinch, *Peasants and Monks in British India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 27-28.

⁴²⁷ Vasudha Paramasivan, “Yah Ayodhyā Vah Ayodhyā: Earthly and Cosmic Journeys in the *Ānand-Laharī*,” in *Patronage and Popularisation, Pilgrimage and Procession: Channels of Transcultural Translation and Transmission in Early Modern South Asia*, ed. Heidi Pauwels (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2009), 104.

⁴²⁸ Lutgendorf, “The Secret Life of Ramchandra,” 229. Peter van der Veer explains that “The reason for this sudden strong Muslim patronage of Hindu institutions can be found in the process in which Awadh under its nawabs passed from the status of a Mughal province to that of an autonomous regional state, during which it doubled its original size, attained great economic and political power, and began to develop its own cultural and historical identity (Barnett, 1980: 2). The central cultural and political feature in the success of the nawabs’ state seems to have been its very liberal attitude towards Hindu participation in military and political arenas. Under the first four nawabs there was hereditary control of the *dīwāni* (chief ministership) by a family of Panjabi Khatris

Indeed, it was one of the Nawabs who granted Rāmānandī *nāgās* the land and financial support necessary to build the Hanumāngarhi temple,⁴²⁹ one of the earliest Rāmānandī sites established and one that today—along with Kanak Bhavan (a representation of Rām and Sītā’s “House of Gold”)—dominates religious life in Ayodhya.⁴³⁰ In taking control of Ayodhya from the Śaiva Daśnāmīs⁴³¹ and securing the patronage of the Nawabs, Rāmānandī warrior ascetics paved the way for the settlement of their Rāmānandī brethren, the *rasiks*.⁴³² Vasudha Paramasivan explains that while the *rasiks* began “to establish their presence in Ayodhyā in the eighteenth century, it was not until the nineteenth century that the Sampradāya was able to secure its position firmly enough to emerge as a dominant force in the religious life of the city.”⁴³³

(Hindus).” Peter Van der Veer, *Gods on Earth: The Management of Religious Experience and Identity in a North Indian Pilgrimage Centre* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), 144. On the question of why (and in what context) the nawab Shuja-ud-Daula patronized both Rāmānandīs and (their apparent competitors) the Daśnāmī *nāgās*, see Van der Veer, *Gods on Earth*, 150-151.

⁴²⁹ Local tradition tells how Rāmānandīs liberated the site of Hanumāngarhi from Śaiva control and then built the temple. Apparently, a Rāmānandī by the name of Abhayrāmdās came with his Nirvani *akhārā* “to Hanuman’s hill where an image of Hanuman was worshipped under a tree by Shivaites and Muslims. They were not allowed to worship the image and were forced to retire to their camp near the river Sarayu. In the night Abhayramdas dreamt that Hanuman came to him and told him to chase away the Muslims and Shivaites who were defiling his place of worship and to build a temple in his (Hanuman’s) honour, because this was the place where he had stayed in the time of Ram. The next day Abhayramdas, given magical power by Hanuman, was able to drive out the Shivaites.” Van der Veer, *Gods on Earth*, 150.

⁴³⁰ While Kanak Bhavan was built in the eighteenth century, it remained a small temple until the nineteenth century when it received the patronage of the Mahārājā of Orrcha. Vasudha Paramasivan, “Between Text and Sect: Early Nineteenth Century Shifts in the Theology of Ram” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California-Berkeley, 2010), 91.

⁴³¹ Apparently, even the Śaiva Daśnāmīs in Ayodhya today admit that the Rāmānandī *akhārās* pushed them out of Ayodhya in the early eighteenth century, as van der Veer learned from a conversation with the abbot of the Juna *akhārā* of Daśnāmī *nāgās* at Ayodhya’s Siddhigiri *math*. Van der Veer, *Gods on Earth*, 146.

⁴³² Interestingly, records suggest that Piṇḍorī Dhām in the Panjab, the Rāmānandī community begun by Agradās’s disciple Bhagwān-jī and discussed in Chapter Two, was especially important in a concerted Rāmānandī effort to expand into Ayodhya, establishing five centers (*gaddis*) there. Surajit Sinha and Baidyanath Saraswati, *Ascetics of Kashi: An Anthropological Exploration* (Varanasi: N.K. Bose Memorial Foundation, 1978), 120.

⁴³³ Paramasivan, “Yah Ayodhyā Vah Ayodhyā,” 105.

The popularity and influence of the Rām-*rasik* tradition thus appears to have peaked in the second half of the eighteenth and in the nineteenth century. The rise of Rām-*rasik bhakti* at this time may have been related to a corresponding decline in warrior asceticism among the Rāmānandīs due to the increasingly powerful presence of the British. As William Pinch has suggested, “In retrospect, it can be argued that with the gradual removal of armed monks from territories controlled by the Company in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, north Indian monasticism turned inward, away from worldly martial pursuits and toward more aesthetic, devotional, and literary accomplishments.”⁴³⁴ Another factor behind the increasing prominence of Rām-*rasik bhakti* at this time was the publication of the *Ānand Lahirī*, an influential commentary on Tulsīdās’s *Rāmcaritmānas* authored by *mahant* Rāmcarandās (1760-1831).⁴³⁵ Rāmcarandās is recognized as perhaps “the key figure in the consolidation of the *rasik sampradāy*’s authority in Ayodhya.”⁴³⁶ His commentary claimed to openly reveal the secrets of *śṛṅgārī bhakti* (erotic devotion) and the *rasik* orientation that Tulsīdās had intentionally concealed in his text.⁴³⁷ Recently, Paramasivan has argued that Rāmānandī *rasiks* such as Rāmcarandās and his disciples critically reshaped Rām *bhakti* in the nineteenth century by linking Tulsīdās and his immensely popular vernacular devotional text, the *Rāmcaritmānas*, to the theology and practice of their own sect, thereby uniting the two principal (but until

⁴³⁴ Pinch, *Peasants and Monks*, 31.

⁴³⁵ The *Ānand lahirī* was funded largely by the patronage of Rājā Vishwanāth Singh of Rewa, himself an initiated *rasik* practitioner and the writer of many *rasik* works. Paramasivan notes that this work by Rāmcarandās was indebted especially to three earlier works, the *Agastyasaṃhitā*, discussed in detail in Chapter Two, the *Sadāśīvasaṃhitā*, a no longer extant text that seems to have been modeled on the *Agastyasaṃhitā*, and the *Dhyānmañjarī* of Agradās. Paramasivan, “Between Text and Sect,” 65, 103-104.

⁴³⁶ Paramasivan, “Between Text and Sect,” 93.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*, 93, 97.

then rather separate) facets of Rām devotion in north India.⁴³⁸ If Rāmcaraṇḍās was crucial in connecting the *Rāmcaraṇḍās* to *rasik* theology, then his disciple, Jīvarām Yugalpriya, was key in bringing Tulsīdās himself within the Rām-*rasik* community. Yugalpriya authored the important Rāmānandī *rasik* hagiographical work, the *Rasik-prakāś-bhaktamāl* (1839), which claimed Tulsīdās as a member of the *sampradāy*, while describing (and seemingly reinventing) major figures of the Rāmānandī past (such as Payahārī, Kīlhadev, etc.) as great *rasiks*. The Rām-*rasik* tradition peaked in the nineteenth century, but it is nevertheless still very significant today, especially in Ayodhya, where *rasik* sects continue to control the majority of important temples and pilgrimage sites.⁴³⁹

Having gained a sense of the theology, practice, and history of the Rām-*rasik* tradition, we now turn to an investigation of the life, literature, and importance of its founder, Agradās.

~ The Life of Agradās ~

Agradās was a disciple of Kṛṣṇadās Payahārī at Galta, the reputed founder of the Rām-*rasik* tradition, and the guru of Nābhādās, the famous author of the *Bhaktamāl*. Of the fifty-two Vaiṣṇava *dvārās* (“gateways” to the Lord; i.e., recognized initiatory centers/lineages), thirty-six of which are Rāmānandī, he is said to have established at least eleven,⁴⁴⁰ more than any other individual. Despite Agradās’s clear importance, a full study of his life and works has not yet been conducted in any language. While a complete, proper study of Agradās is beyond the

⁴³⁸ Vasudha Paramasivan, “Between Text and Sect: Early Nineteenth Century Shifts in the Theology of Ram” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California-Berkeley, 2010).

⁴³⁹ Lutgendorf, “The Secret Life of Ramchandra,” 2

⁴⁴⁰ Several Hindi scholars say fourteen, Ghurye says twelve, and Lutgendorf says eleven. I have been unable to ascertain which of these is correct, but regardless, within the north Indian rubric of the four Vaiṣṇava *sampradāys*, Agradās clearly established more initiatory lineages than any other figure.

scope of this chapter, I will here demonstrate his critical importance in north Indian *bhakti* history, discussing aspects of his hagiography and writings that have never before received scholarly attention.

Agradās's exact dates are difficult to ascertain with any confidence; however, it is clear that he flourished during the second half of the sixteenth century, which would have made him a contemporary of Tulsīdās and the later Vrindavan Gosvāmīs.⁴⁴¹ Tradition maintains that he was born as a brahmin at Pīkasī village in Rajasthan and in his late teenage years traveled to Galta where he took initiation from Krishnadās Payahārī into the Rāmānandī *samprāday*. At the death of his guru Payahārī, Agradās's guru-brother Kīlhadev took over the Galta *gaddī* and Agradās is said to have traveled approximately 100 km north/northwest to Raivāsā (Rewāsā), situated at the base of the Arāvalī mountains, near modern-day Sīkar, where he began the Rām-*rasik* tradition.⁴⁴² In Agradās's *rasik* practice, he is said to have taken on the persona of

⁴⁴¹ Rām-*rasik* tradition holds that Agradās was born in 1496 CE in Pīkasī village and traveled to Galta and became a disciple of Krishnadās Payahārī in 1513 or 1514 CE; however, in my estimation, these dates seem a bit too early. Ratanlāl Mishra states that the Kacchvāhā king Āskaraṇ, who ruled but a single year, 1548 CE, wrote *pads* while in power in which he identified himself as a devotee of Kīlha, and that by virtue of this fact Krishnadās Payahārī must have died by this time and Kīlha taken over as *mahant* of the Galta community, which means that Agradās would have gone to Raivāsā by this time as well (if he went there at all). I have not been able to view these *pads* myself, but have met with Mr. Mishra who claims to have seen them with his own eyes. If we are to believe Priyādās's story about a meeting between Kacchvāhā Mahārājā Mān Singh (r. 1590-1614 CE) and Agradās then he must have lived until at least 1590 CE. According to the *Mīśrabandhu Vinod*, one of Agradās's works can be dated to 1603 CE (1660 VS), suggesting that he must have lived at least that long. *Mīśrabandhu Vinod*. Khaṇḍ: 1-2. (Lakhnau: Gaṅgā Pustak Mālā, 1980), 1631 (#242).

⁴⁴² Regarding Agradās's departure from Galta, according to one popular (and rather odd) Rām-*rasik* story, Kīlha and Agra were bathing together there and Agra accidentally put on Kīlha's *laṅgoṭī* (loincloth). Kīlha became extremely angry about this, to the point that Agra left Galta, unable to understand why he would get so angry about such a trivial thing. Agra's name means "first" and, in informal conversations with Rāmānandī *rasiks* and Indian scholars, I have heard several people speculate that he—not Kīlha—was actually the first (senior) disciple of Krishnadās Payahārī and the rightful successor to the seat at Galta. Some with this view maintain that Agra was so *virakt* (passionless) that he had no interest in the prestige, leadership, or administration of this position and declined it in order to focus on his practice and writing. Others have suggested that Kīlha was elevated to the seat of Galta because of his social status (his father was the governor of Gujarat), while Agra was not seen as the appropriate choice for the seat because he was of low-caste. (In this context, it is interesting to note that Nābhādās explicitly notes the caste status of both Payahārī and Kīlha, but never mentions the social status of his

one of Sītā's closest female companions, Candrakalā, and many hold that he was actually an incarnation of this *sakhī*. Indeed, some of his poetry is signed “Agra-ali,” the “-ali” being a colloquial term for a woman's intimate female friend.⁴⁴³ Rāghavdās's *Bhaktamāl* of 1660 CE lists the following thirteen disciples of Agradās: Nābhā, Jangī, Prāg (Prayāg), Vinodī, Pūraṇ, Banvārī, Bhagwān, Divākar, Narsiṃh, Khem, Kisor (Kīśor), Jaganāth, and Laghu Udhyau.⁴⁴⁴ While it is Nābhādās who usually receives all the fanfare and whose fame is highlighted at Raivāsā today, it was in fact Agra's disciple Vinodī who is said to have taken over the *gaddī* at Raivāsā *dhām*.

As we saw in Chapter Two, our earliest description of Agradās comes from his disciple Nābhādās's *Bhaktamāl*. Nābhā writes:

Agradās never spent a moment when he was not [absorbed] in doing devotion to Hari. He acted in accordance with the good conduct of the saints. In service, meditation, and remembrance (*sumiran*), he kept his heart on the feet of Rāghav [Rām]. He loved his famous garden and worked on it endlessly with his own hands. The pure name of God fell from his tongue like rain from a cloud. Blessing him, Kṛṣṇadās [Payahārī] gave [Agra] the gift of *bhakti* and made him firm in heart, speech, and action. Agradās never spent a moment when he was not [absorbed] in devotion to Hari.⁴⁴⁵

Love, devotion, and service are the focal points of Agra's description and he is also linked to the word *sumiran*, the remembrance of God. Anantadās, the grand-disciple of Agra, in his *Pīpā-parcāī*, written in the late sixteenth century, confirms the lineage given by Nābhā and similarly

own guru, Agra. Tradition maintains he was a Brahmin.) These are fascinating claims but I have found no evidence to either validate or invalidate them.

⁴⁴³ The fact that this signature (*chāp*), “Agra-ali,” does not occur in any of the seventeenth century manuscripts of his work and tends to occur only in sectarian Rām-*rasik* collections makes me skeptical that Agra ever identified himself in this way. It seems more likely that the presence of this *chāp* is linked to hagiographical accretions and new works attributed to Agradās that occurred in conjunction with the rise of the Ram-*rasik bhakti* in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

⁴⁴⁴ *Chand* 159.

⁴⁴⁵ *Chappay* 40. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations in this chapter are my own. See Chapter Two for original text.

notes that Agra “excelled in love (*prem*) and strictly observed the rules of remembrance (*sumiran*).”⁴⁴⁶ Nābhādās and Anantadās’s use of the word *sumiran*⁴⁴⁷ was deliberate and, as we will see, particularly apt in that this term’s two main connotations—the practice of chanting the divine Name and the practice of visualization meditations of the Lord (his pastimes, service to him, etc.)—seem to have been the two primary components of Agra’s devotional life and religious practice.⁴⁴⁸

In describing his guru, Nābhādās makes a point of mentioning Agradās’s “famous garden” and presenting him as a devoted gardener. The garden is a crucial feature of Agra’s hagiography from the very beginning and acts as a metaphor for the loving attention, constant care, and dedicated service he gave to God. Nābhā’s verse suggests that the pure devotion of Agradās’s *bhajans* and his repetition of the name of Rām were the water that nourished and sustained his garden. Rāghavdās echoed these sentiments in his 1660 CE *Bhaktamāl*, writing: “Understanding his garden to be Hari’s, [Agra] loved it very much. Weeding, digging and watering [the garden] himself, whatever fruits and flowers grew, he offered them all to

⁴⁴⁶ The four verses in which Anantadās lists his lineage, *Pīpā-parcāī* 35:25-28, constitute important early evidence about the Rāmānandīs and the notion of the four *sampradāys*. He writes: “If a person stays in one of the four *sampradāyas*, he will be loved by Hari. He will be called pure, and if he does not find liberation, he will at least not be unfortunate. / If Hari maintains the respect for your appearance, even death cannot touch you. Anantānand, the disciple of Rāmānanda, was pure, appearing like the full moon. His disciple was Krishnadās Adhikārī, known to all as *dūdhādhārī* or ‘having only milk as food’. His disciple was Agra who excelled in love [*prem*] and strictly observed the rules of meditation [*sumiran*]. / Vinod received the teachings of Agra, and I Ananta came as his disciple. By his grace I completed this *parcāī*, listen, saints, to my true testimony (*sākhī*).” Winand Callewaert, *The Hagiographies of Anantadās: The Bhakti Poets of North India* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000), 225.

⁴⁴⁷ *Sumiran* is also commonly seen as *simraṇ*, *sumaraṇ*, *sumiraṇ*, and *smaraṇ*. The very first word of Agra’s *Dhyān Mañjarī* is the imperative form of this verb: *sumirau śrī raghuvīr* - “Remember (meditate on) Rām!”

⁴⁴⁸ Among *rasik bhaktas*, it seems that remembrance (*sumiran*, *smaran*) of the Name came to be thought of as purifying and preparing the *rasik* practitioner for the more difficult remembrance (*sumiran*, *smaran*) of meditation on (visualization of) the *līlās* of God. Tony Stewart describes the term in a Krishnaite context: “*Smaraṇa* is the act of recalling these stories—it literally means ‘recollecting’—but perhaps more precisely in the *vaidhī* context it is better understood as the act of appropriating them, for *smaraṇa*, which begins by recalling the name of Krishna, signals the process by which the stories of Krishna are iterated and reiterated until they become wholly possessed of the devotee.” Stewart, “Reading for Krishna’s Pleasure,” 263.

Prabhu.”⁴⁴⁹ As Philip Lutgendorf notes, “Portraits of Agradas often show him in a garden: he is said to have chosen this setting for his visualizations of Ram and Sita's intimate pastimes, and the custom of planting formal gardens adjacent to Ram temples may have originated with him.”⁴⁵⁰ Indeed, Jhā writes that Ram-rasik *bhaktas* continue to follow the example of Agradās by keeping small gardens in their temples and by combining their names with *bāg*, *kuñj*, *nikuñj*, *bāṭikā*, *van*, and other similar horticultural words.⁴⁵¹

Agra's garden plays a key role in a popular story, first found in Priyādās's *Bhaktamāl* commentary of 1712 CE, in which Mahārājā Mān Singh comes to visit and pay homage to Agradās. As Priyādās narrates it, Mān Singh arrived with a great entourage while Agra was working in his garden. The king entered the garden but was asked to wait by two guards seated at the entrance. Agra, meanwhile, was sweeping some leaves out of the garden when he saw the large crowd assembled outside. Not wanting his devotional routine to Rām and Sītā to be disturbed by them, he sat down and became absorbed in a state of *ras*-filled meditation. At this point, Nābhādās came to speak with his guru. Having approached and prostrated himself before Agradās, Nābhā stood up and became so moved by the sight of his beloved guru engrossed in meditation that his eyes filled with tears. By this time, Mān Singh had grown tired of waiting and had come looking for Agradās. Arriving at the scene and witnessing with his own eyes the two *sants*' extraordinary and tender display of love and devotion, Mān Singh

⁴⁴⁹ Chappay 157:1-3. *bahut bāg sūṃ prīti rīti hari kī jin jāñīm/ nīndai gaundai āp āp parvāhai pāñī/ jo upajai phal phūl soī prabhujī kaum arapai/*

⁴⁵⁰ Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text*, 315.

⁴⁵¹ Jhā, “Pratham Khaṇḍ (Vivecan),” in *Bhaktamāl: Pāṭhānuśīlan evam Vivecan*, ed. Narendra Jhā (Patna: Anupam Prakāśan, 1978), 34.

realized that Rām had indeed fully bestowed his mercy and kindness on these servants of his.⁴⁵²

In this story, Priyadās praises the single-minded dedication and deep emotion inherent in the devotion practiced by Agra and his disciple Nābhādās, while simultaneously showing these saints' interaction with and impact upon perhaps *the* leading Hindu-Rajput political figure in the Mughal Empire.⁴⁵³ Indeed, oral tradition at Raivāsā remembers this as the event responsible for firmly planting the seed of *bhakti* in Rājā Mān Singh's mind and making him thereafter a great patron of the Vaiṣṇavas.⁴⁵⁴ In his *Rāmrāsikāvalī* (1864), the *rasik* devotee and writer Raghurājsiṃh of Rewa went so far as to say that Mān Singh became the disciple of Agradās.⁴⁵⁵

One legend in particular is often told about Agradās's arrival in Raivāsā. Having left Galta, Agradās was traveling with a group of *sants*. They were on the road in an uninhabited area when evening came upon them. Looking out into the distance they could not see a single

⁴⁵² Kavitt 123. Nābhājī, *Śrī Bhaktamāl, with the Bhaktirasabodhinī commentary of Priyā Dās*, 314. Also see William Pinch, "History, Devotion and the Search for Nabhadās of Galta," in *Invoking the Past: The Uses of History in South Asia*, ed. Daud Ali (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 393.

⁴⁵³ Priyādās (in kavitt 121) also makes a point of showing that Kīlha had personal interaction with Rājā Mān Singh. He tells the story of how Kīlha was in Mathura with Mān Singh when he had a vision of his father, Sumerdev, the governor (*subadār*) of Gujrat, ascending in the sky upon his death. Mānsingh doubted him, but when the death was confirmed, he returned to Kīlhdev, penitent, and abased himself before the great sage. A signboard in the Raghunāth Temple in Galta today goes further, stating the Kīlha received a visit from Akbar himself, who wanted to take the saint's blessing.

⁴⁵⁴ The tradition at Raivāsā adds further details to Priyādās's account. When Agradās emerged from meditation, Mān Singh gave him *pranām* and, accepting his respectful greeting, Agradās ordered Nābhā to distribute ten bananas apiece as *prasād* to all of Mān Singh's assembled men. According to this oral tradition, Mān Singh was on his way to war and had with him an army of ten thousand men. When Agra ordered Nābhā to distribute 10 bananas to each soldier, Mān Singh noticed that Nābhā held a single bunch of ten bananas in his hands. Nevertheless, Nābhā went around and gave ten bananas each to everyone present, arriving back before Agra and Mān Singh holding the same ten bananas he had begun with. Amazed by this miracle in which God had seemingly provided an inexhaustible abundance of bananas to his devoted servants, it is said that the seed of Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* was then firmly planted in Mān Singh's mind and thereafter he became a great patron of the Vaiṣṇavas. See Manohar Siṃh Rāthaur, *Revāsā kī Madhuropāsānā* (Revāsā, Sīkar: Śrī Jānakīnāth Baḍā Mandir, 2003), 22-23.

⁴⁵⁵ R.S. McGregor, "The Dhyān-Mañjarī of Agradās," in *Bhakti in Current Research, 1979-1982*, ed. Monika Thiel-Horstmann (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1983), 237-238.

dwelling. That day also happened to be the Ekādaśī fast and, sitting in the wilderness, they became very thirsty and hungry. Agradās was extremely concerned about the suffering of the *sants* with him. He wondered how God could watch the distress of his true devotees. At that exact moment, far away they saw a flickering light in a hut. Seeing this light in the midst of the desolation and darkness, their hearts rose. Agradās led the men towards the hut and upon arriving they saw that a radiant elderly woman was seated there beside a charming lake and garden. The old woman gave them cold water and insisted on giving them a meal of fruit. The *sants* accepted and when the meal was ready, they offered *prasād* to God and invited Agradās to come and take fruit. Wanting to give to the old lady first, Agra requested that she come; however, when the *sants* went to get her they saw that the old lady was no longer there and that the beautiful lake and garden had vanished as well. Understanding what had happened, Agradās then realized that this woman who had come to their aid, offering light in the darkness, was none other than the divine mother Sītā (Jānakī). He was filled with great sorrow that Mā Jānakī had suffered so much difficulty for him and that he was not able to properly take her *darśan*. All night tears flowed from his eyes in separation from his Jānakī. He began to wonder how long Jānakī, who bestows happiness on the world, could endure her devotee's intolerable grief. At that very place, smiling, Sītā then presented herself. She gave her devotee assurance that she would always be ensconced in Raivāsā and that he should start a community there. It was based on that divine encounter that Agradās arrived in Raivāsā village at the feet of the Arāvalī hills. There at the base of the mountains, under a *pīpal* (fig) tree—that still stands today, right next to his still burning *dhūnī*—Agra sat down and began meditating. In those days, there was a serious drought; there was no water whatsoever in Raivāsā. Hearing that a famous saint had arrived in their village, some residents came out to

Agradās and told him about the great suffering they were experiencing due to the lack of water. Moved by their stories, Agradās thrust his *cimṭā* (fire tongs) into the ground. At that moment, at that precise spot, an underground spring of fresh water burst through the earth. Later a well was built there that, according to tradition, is the very well that stands still today in the garden behind Raivāsā monastery.⁴⁵⁶

While tradition—as well as all scholarship—maintains that Agradās founded a Rām-*rasik* community at Raivāsā after leaving Galta in the mid-sixteenth century, there may be good reason to believe that Raivāsā did not exist until the early eighteenth century and that Agradās never actually went there and, perhaps, never left Galta. It is noteworthy that Raivāsā is mentioned neither in Nābhā's *Bhaktamāl*, Rāghavdās's *Bhaktamāl* of 1660 CE, nor Priyādās's *Bhaktamāl* commentary of 1712 CE. In my research thus far, I have not found Raivāsā mentioned by name or associated with Agradās in any sectarian document until Jīvārām Yugalpriyā's *Rasik-Prakāś-Bhaktamāl* of 1839 CE. This may raise suspicion; however, no other place name or information is given in any other pre-nineteenth century text to determine where Agradās was residing, so there may be no compelling reason to deny the claims of tradition, especially since there are a host of legends surrounding his arrival in Raivāsā and specific locations there that are linked to these legends and that are still today carefully maintained.⁴⁵⁷ On the other hand, there is evidence strongly suggesting that no formal

⁴⁵⁶ Rathaur, *Revāsā kī Madhuropāsānā*, 21.

⁴⁵⁷ One example of such a tradition is the garden (claimed to be Agradās's) at Raivāsā today, the beauty of which I can attest to after a visit to Raivāsā where I witnessed a Rāmānandī *sādhu* devotedly attending to a clean and thriving garden of lush green plants. While on the topic of present-day Raivāsā, I should note that visitors to Raivāsā today will likely be puzzled by the prominent place given a figure named Śrī Raṇchorḍās who was never a Raivāsā *mahant* but whose *murti* stands right next to those of key figures like Agradās and Nābhādās. It seems that during the tenure of Raivāsā *mahant* Jānakī-vallabha (claimed as Raivāsā's fifteenth *mahant*) in the twentieth century, there was a financial crisis at the monastery that took all of his attention and because of which he did not take on any disciples and did not have a successor. Eventually (supposedly with the help of a Balrāmdās from

Rāmānandī institution existed at Raivāsā until the early eighteenth century. The first mention of Raivāsā that I have found in connection with any Rāmānandī is a document from the Kapad Dvārā collection in the Jaipur City Palace that shows an agreement between Savāī Jai Singh II and Rāmsevak, who has been given the *jāgīr* of Raivāsā.⁴⁵⁸ In her research at the Rajasthan State Archives in Bikaner, Monika Horstmann has discovered two additional documents that seem to confirm that a Rāmānandī community at Raivāsā did not exist—at least not in any formal, institutional sense—until the early eighteenth century.⁴⁵⁹ The first document, dated 1796 VS (c. 1739 CE), states that custody of the deity Jānakīvallabha (at Raivāsā) be transferred from Svāmī Sukhrām, who had died, to Svāmī Rāmsevak, and adds that Sukhrām had originally received it in 1767 VS (c. 1710 CE) by order of Vijaysingh (Savāī Jai Singh’s rival brother who held power in Jaipur for a very brief period).⁴⁶⁰ In addition, a genealogical table of the *mahants* of Raivāsā, dated 1947 and claiming to have been put together on the basis of old records, lists

Gujarat), a figure by the name of Shālgrāmācārya was found in Citrakut and deemed worthy to take over leadership at Raivāsā. Shālgrāmācārya’s guru was Śrī Raṇchordās. Clearly, Raṇchordās came from an altogether different guru lineage, one that the current *mahant*, Dr. Svāmī Rāgavācharya Vedanti—a figure by all appearances more interested in Hindutva politics than in the religious heritage of his sect—and all post-Shālgrāmācārya *mahants* are a part of, but in order to link him to the Rāmānandī lineage of Agradās, some inventive (and chronologically mind-blowing) storytelling has occurred that posits Raṇchordās as having come from Maharashtra to Galta in the sixteenth century where he met Krishnadās Payahārī and then went to Raivāsā where he spent time with Agradās. It was his divine body (incarnation?) that somehow, centuries later, initiated Shālgrāmācārya in Citrakut.

⁴⁵⁸ Kapad Dvārā #1284. Gopal Narayan Bahura and Chandramani Singh, *Catalogue of Historical Documents in Kapad Dwara, Jaipur* (Amber-Jaipur: Jaigarh Public Charitable Trust, 1988), 163-164. Bahura and Singh’s description of this document (which, like all of the Kapad Dvārā collection, is presently not accessible to scholars) speaks to Savāī Jai Singh’s efforts to control religion in his domain and bring it in line with brahminical orthodoxy: “As the Maharaja had granted Ramsewak the *jagir* of Rewasa, he would stick to the rules laid down by the shastras; and would abstain from branding on the body; in case of defiance he could be removed from the place.”

⁴⁵⁹ The following information from the Rajasthan State Archives comes solely thanks to the hard work and perspicacity of Monika Horstmann, who has generously allowed me to share her unpublished findings.

⁴⁶⁰ Yāddāst, Kārttika b. 7, VS 1796, Rajasthan State Archives, Bikaner.

a line of *mahants* that begins with Sukhrām, mentioning no Raivāsā *mahant* before him.⁴⁶¹

While it is certainly possible that Agradās went to Raivāsā in the mid-sixteenth century and started an informal community there that only later became more formally institutionalized (in 1710 CE, under Sukhrām), until further evidence of this surfaces (beyond the claims of oral tradition), it would seem there is good cause for skepticism.

As mentioned above, the earliest text explicitly linking Agradās to Raivāsā is Jivārām Yugalpriyā's *Rasik-Prakāś-Bhaktamāl* (1839 CE). This sectarian hagiographical text devotes two stanzas to Agradās:

ras-bodh vipul ānandaghan agra svāmi bānī biśad /
akṣar pad anuprās madhurtā bālmik sam //
āśay gūṛh upāy prāpti rasikan kī saṅgam /
raivāse jānakī vallabhī rahasi upāsī //
lalit rasāśray raṅg mahāl kal kuñj khabāsī /
ācāraj ras rās-path rasik barj rasikan sukhad //
ras bodh vipul ānandaghan agra svāmi bānī biśad // 14

A knower of *rasa*, an abundant cloud of bliss whose words were beautiful, this was Agra Svāmī.

His use of letters, verses, and alliteration and his *mādhurya* (erotic love/sweetness) were like that of Vālmīki.

He obtained the hidden meaning and secret method of the meeting of the *rasiks*. Living in Raivāsā, he enjoyed the worship of Jānakī (Sītā) and her Lord.

The servant⁴⁶² Agra's garden was a beautiful shelter of *rasa* like Sītā and Rām's private royal chamber.

Founder (leader) of the sect which delights in *rasa*, he is the greatest *rasik*, and gave happiness to all the *rasiks*.

A knower of *rasa*, an abundant cloud of bliss, whose words were beautiful, this was Agra Svāmī.

⁴⁶¹ Saravarak Files, Daftar Waqaya, Raj Sawai Jaipur, File 807, Rajasthan State Archives, Bikaner. The line of *mahants* listed in this document's genealogical table is as follows: Mahant Sukhrām-jī, Mahant Rāmsevak-jī, Mahant Keshodās-jī, Mahant Jānakīdās-jī, Mahant Sahajrām-jī, Mahant Baghirathdās-jī, Mahant Rāmānujdās-jī, Mahant Chaturbhuj-jī.

⁴⁶² It is important to note that the word for servant here is the feminine *sevikā*, indicating that in his *rasik* visualization practice, Agra served the divine couple in the role of a female *mañjarī*, or handmaiden, of Sītā, a fact made even clearer in Yugalpriyā's next stanza.

only a single one comes from before 1800 CE.⁴⁶⁴ The nineteenth century was the heyday of Rām-rasik *bhakti*, thus it makes good sense that it was then that the *Dhyān Mañjarī* found its greatest popularity. Yet, as we will see below, Agradās seems to have been just as much a Sant as a *rasik*, and he composed a number of works and poetic verses that do not have explicitly *rasik* themes, but instead emphasize renunciation, the power of reciting the Name, and the importance of *bhakti* in a more general sense. It is actually these (non-rasik) compositions that we find in all the earliest manuscripts of works attributed to Agra, including two seventeenth century manuscripts of his *Kuṇḍaliyā* and at least six seventeenth century manuscripts of collected poetry that include his *pads*. While we cannot be certain, all of this suggests that it was possibly not until the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century, when Rām-rasik *bhakti* was rising to prominence and felt the need to look back and establish a clear lineage with a distinguished past, that Agradās was marked as the founder of the Rām-rasik tradition and thereafter increasingly came to be remembered almost exclusively as a *rasik* (his hagiography perhaps even acquiring new elements), while the rest of his work and historical identity were marginalized.⁴⁶⁵ Let us turn now to the compositions of Agradās to get a sense of both the *rasik*

⁴⁶⁴ Of the 24 *Dhyān-mañjarī* manuscripts I have found, 14 come from the nineteenth century, 9 are undated, and a single one comes from the eighteenth century (1761 CE). See Appendix A.

⁴⁶⁵ We should also note the role that Agradās has played in modern-day debates within the Rāmānandī community. In the early twentieth century, a major split occurred within the Rāmānandī fold. Since the early eighteenth century (when they succumbed to the pressures for brahminical orthodoxy applied by Jai Singh II), the Rāmānandīs had maintained an explicit and relatively close relationship with the Śrī Vaiṣṇava *sampradāy* and its famous southern *ācārya*, Rāmānuja. However, in the years 1918-1921, many Rāmānandīs, resentful of elitist attitudes and caste/commensal practices that they associated with Rāmānuja and his followers, completely renounced their ties with the Śrī Vaiṣṇava *sampradāy*. These Rāmānandīs, whose views eventually came to dominate the community, argued that Rāmānand is an *avatār* of Rām who singlehandedly founded the Rāmānandī order and who has no links whatsoever with Rāmānuja. For our purpose, the interesting fact is that it was none other than Agradās whose authority was invoked—it was a *guru-parampara* supposedly composed by him that was “discovered”—to prove that Rāmānand had no connection whatsoever with Rāmānuja. The leading figures behind this movement were Rām-rasiks based in Ayodhya who traced their spiritual descent back to Agradās through Bhagwān-jī at Piṇḍorī Dhām. Purushottam Agrawal discusses the lineage document, supposedly authored by Agradās, which served as the key evidence justifying this new Rāmānandī identity. “The parampara was composed by Agradās in the form of a dialogue. In it, Agradās’s guru Krishandas requests his guru Anantanand—

and Sant dimensions of his religiosity and the way in which his literary output (and that of his disciples) embraced the ethos of *nirguṇ* ascetics and Sants while also engaging with the burgeoning *śṅgār* (erotic love) devotional themes and Brajbhāṣā aesthetic refinements that could garner his community patronage and prestige within the developing Mughal-Rajput literary and court culture.

~ The Compositions of Agradās ~

Scholars writing in Hindi have been rather inconsistent in the texts they attribute to Agradās, though two works, the *Dhyān-mañjarī* and the *Kuṇḍaliyā*, are always mentioned. In my own manuscript searches in the archives of Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh (namely, in Jaipur, Jodhpur, Udaipur, Vrindavan, and Varanasi), I have found thirteen different compositions attributed to Agradās (including one in Sanskrit), in addition to many scattered verses in anthologies of *bhakti* poetry.⁴⁶⁶ Unlike any other Rāmānandī before him, it is clear that Agra

one of the twelve immediate disciples of Ramanand—to identify the lineage through which the initiatory Rama mantra had passed. The parampara consists of twenty-two slokas and contradicts all traditional paramparas on the question of Ramanand's belonging to the spiritual lineage of Ramanuja. Bhagwaddas wrote an introduction to this parampara and dismissed all the other paramparas with an argument that had no academic merit but was appealing to his target audience of Ramanandis: 'None of the current Paramparas is composed by any of our own Acharyas. We are duty bound to honour a Parampara composed by someone of our own fold. Our committee has found a Parampara that is absolutely different from all others. It is worthy of our special attention and respect as it is composed by Agradasji, who was third in the lineage from Ramanandji himself. We, the Ramanandis, must ponder it. After all, who amongst us dare say that Agradasji was writing any falsehood.... This Parampara clearly tells us that Ramanandji did not belong to lineage of Ramanujaji'" (163). For full details on this historical episode, see Purushottam Agrawal, "In Search of Ramanand: The Guru of Kabir and Others," in *From Ancient to Modern: Religion, Power, and Community in India*, eds., I. Banerjee-Dube and S. Dube, 135-70 (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008). See also Pinch, *Peasants and Monks*, 61-70.

⁴⁶⁶ See Appendix A for a list of all the manuscripts of works attributed to Agradās that I found during my research. In addition to the thirteen titles I have found (all of which are in addition to the many scattered *pads* of his found in manuscripts of *bhakti* poetry anthologies), if we include the names of texts that the *Mishrabandhu Vinod* and various Hindi scholars attribute to Agradās, we can add at least four (and perhaps more) to that list. Of the thirteen compositions I have seen, I found at least five different manuscripts of the following: the *Dhyān-mañjarī* (24), the *Kuṇḍaliyā*, also called the *Hitopadeśa-bāvanī* (10), the *Prahlād-caritra* (6), and the *Nāmpratāp* (5). A number of Hindi scholars mention a collection of Agra's verses called the *Agrasāgar* that they regret is no longer extant. In the Jaipur City Palace I found a manuscript, dated 1685 CE and given the title "*Bhāgavat pad prasaṅg*" that, though

was quite prolific. Based on the number of manuscripts I have found for each of his compositions, it seems that his most popular works are, in order of significance, these four: the *Dhyān-mañjarī*, the *Kuṇḍaliyā*, the *Prahlād-caritra*, and the *Nām-pratāp*. Of these key works, in the pages below I have chosen to focus especially on the *Dhyān Mañjarī* and the *Nām-Pratāp*, for they represent what seem to have been the two most important aspects of Agra's spiritual life: *rasik* meditation practice (on Rām-Sītā) and the remembrance of the divine Name.

The earliest known compositions of Agradās are the poems attributed to him in anthologies. The earliest verses I have located come from a manuscript dated v.s. 1670 (1613 CE), which would be remarkably close to the saint's lifetime.⁴⁶⁷ In *bhakti* anthologies that include his compositions, it is safe to say that Agradās is most commonly found with Tulsīdās and/or Sūrdās. His poetry is also quite often grouped together with that of Nandadās and Krishnadās (of the Vallabha *sampradāy*), and not uncommonly with that of Paramānand, Mīrā, and Kabīr. We should be careful not to read too much into this, but one might speculate that he was most often grouped with Tulsī and Sūr because, like him, these poets wrote in a more polished, literary fashion and with a typically *saguṇ* Vaiṣṇava orientation.

Nevertheless, in addition to his more *rasik* (*saguṇ*, *śṛṅgār*, refined aesthetic) sensibilities, Agradās had a clear Sant dimension as well (i.e., a more ascetic, *nirguṇ* outlook we might associate with the likes of Kabīr and Raidās). Sometimes his verses are even included with those of the famous Rajasthani *nirguṇ bhakta* Dādū, whom—as we will see—he seems to have explicitly criticized. Regardless of Agra and the Rāmānandīs' feelings toward them, members

incomplete and partially damaged, contains well over 300 poems of Agra and could be this seemingly lost *Agrasāgar*.

⁴⁶⁷ *Pad Sangrah*, v.s. 1670, Jodhpur RORI #13498 (2). This collection includes ten continuous manuscript pages of poetry with the *chāp* (signature) of Agradās. The scribe's handwriting is not always entirely legible thus I am still analyzing and attempting to transcribe and translate these verses.

of the Dādū *panth* seem to have had no problem including Agradās's verses in their collections of *bhakti* poetry. Indeed, Rajjab's *Sarvāṅgī* (c. 1600) includes ten of Agradās's poems.⁴⁶⁸ Below I have translated five of these poems that speak to some representative themes in Agra's oeuvre.⁴⁶⁹

We begin with a poem about a practice that was undoubtedly at the very heart of Agradās's spiritual life: the remembrance (reciting, singing) of the divine Name.

*rām nām sidhānt siromani /
des kāl kul nem nahīm tahm bidhi niṣedh dāre dūnyūṃ cuni // tek//
ved purāṇ sumaratī sāstra hūṃ ihai ank rakhyau sabhīm gani /
mārg rāj duhūṃ kar sonauṃ nirabhai calai nisīdin bani ṭhani//
siv virañci sanakādi seṣ such nārad sārād sākhi sant muni /
viduṣaṇi sār udhāri liyau mathi agra nirantari ātam pati bhani // 20.9⁴⁷⁰*

The Name of Rām is the crown jewel of all accomplishments.
Where there is no country, time, family, or daily rites, there I have abandoned both the
proscriptions and restrictions [of orthodox religion].
The Vedas, Purāṇas, *smṛti* and *śāstras*, having considered them all, I have embraced this
[Rām-Nām].
On a highway with gold in both my hands, I walk fearlessly day and night, well-adorned
[with the Name].
Having mulled over [all knowledge], scholars have revealed this essence, thus Agra
endlessly speaks of (recites the Name of) his own Lord (husband).

In this *pad*, Agradās shows his learning in the orthodox Sanskrit traditions (saying that he has considered the Vedas, Purāṇas, *smṛti* and *śāstras*), yet at the very same time he expresses a strong Sant sentiment that orthodoxy's requirements and prohibitions are meaningless

⁴⁶⁸ These ten poems attributed to Agradās were found in the 1707 CE manuscript used by Brajendra Kumar Siṃhal in his published edition of Rajjab's anthology. For more information on the *Sarvāṅgī* literature of the Dādūpanth, see Dalpat Rajpurohit, "Thematic Groupings of Bhakti Poetry: The Dādūpanth and *Sarvāṅgī* Literature," in *Bhakti in Current Research 2003-9: Early Modern Religious Literatures in North India*, ed. Imre Bangha, 43-64 (New Delhi: Manohar, 2012). In this piece, Rajpurohit convincingly establishes the circa 1600 CE date of composition of Rajjab's *Sarvāṅgī* (49-55).

⁴⁶⁹ These translations are my own, though I am grateful for Dalpat Rajpurohit's expert assistance in editing and polishing them. All translations are based on the Devānāgarī text found in: *Rajjab kī Sarbāṅgī*, ed. Brajendrakumār Siṃhal (Rāygarh [Chattisgarh]: Brajmohan Sāṃvadiyā, 2010).

⁴⁷⁰ Ang 20 ("nām mahīmā kau ang"), *Pad* 9.

beside—or perhaps better put, they can be transcended in—the practice of remembering the Name of God. In the last line of the poem, Agra states that he recites the Name without end as his “very own husband,” a phrase that could indicate his *rasik* sensibilities and preference for approaching the divine in a feminine role (i.e., one of the servant-companions of Sītā).

The next *pad* further emphasizes the power of the divine Name and its recitation, one of the most consistent and emphatic themes in all of Agradās’s work.

*jo nar rām nām anusarāi /
bidhi niṣedh bādhā nahim tākauṁ tīn karam tan taim jhari paraī // ṭek//
loh aginat pākhān nāv pari jo baisai so pār utarāi /
koṭi baras kau timar sadan meṁ dīpak udai tihī chin harāi //
cit kī vṛtti avidyā ṭākau kañcan kalaṅk again jaisaiṁ jarāi //
agradās sansau nahim yāmeṁ anīyās bhav dūtar tarāi // 22.14⁴⁷¹*

The one who follows the Name of Rām,
For him, proscriptions and restrictions are not obstacles; the three *karmas* fall away
from his body.
One who sits on a stone boat loaded with countless pieces of iron, [with the Rām-Nām]
even he crosses [the ocean of existence].
For even in a house that has been in darkness for one hundred million years, when a
lamp is lit the darkness is banished in the blink of an eye.
As a fire burns away gold’s impurities, so [the Name of Rām purifies] the workings of
the mind bound to ignorance.
Agradās says, there is no doubt in this, [with the Rām-Nām] one effortlessly crosses the
insurmountable [ocean of] existence.

This poem extols the purifying, salvific potency of the Name of Rām, which can carry even the most sinful beings across “the ocean of existence.” As we will see, Agra devotes an entire ninety-eight-verse independent work, his *Nām-Pratāp*, to this theme; it was clearly of fundamental importance in his belief and practice.

The following poem is striking in its expression of intense humility and servitude. In this, it is representative of an increasingly prominent devotional perspective that was in sharp

⁴⁷¹ Ang 22 (“*bhajan pratāp kau ang*”), Pad 14.

contradistinction to tantric religious approaches and attitudes.

*yahu mohi dījai rājā rām /
dāsanidās dās kau anucar śravan kathā mukh nām // ṭek//
mokhi ādi de-cāri padārth mere nāhin kām /
caran ren sādhan kī sir pari kṛpā karau such dhām //
santani kau anurāg nirantari ihi bidhi bitaḥuṃ jāṃ //
agradās jācat hari carcā sudhā sindhu biśrām //41.6⁴⁷²*

Oh King Rām, give me just this,
I am the follower of the servant of the servant’s servant, put your story in my ear and
your Name in my mouth.
Liberation and the things of this world, I have no use for them.
[I place] the sand from the feet of the saints upon my head; have mercy on me, abode of
happiness.
[Engaged in the] endless love of the saints, in this way let me spend every period of the
day.
Agradās begs to hear about Hari,⁴⁷³ that resting place, the ocean of nectar.

These verses overflow with a loving devotion that revels in humble service, adoration, and
praise. Agra, the “follower of the servant of the servant’s servant,” wants only one thing, to
have his ears filled with accounts of the Lord’s deeds and good qualities, and his mouth filled
with the Lord’s sacred Name. He would give up worldly pleasures and even spiritual liberation
in order to continue to immerse himself in devotion to Rām. It is hard to imagine a
perspective more contrary to that of the power-seeking approach of the Nāth yogīs (e.g., as
seen in the *Gorakh-baṇī*) than this.

The composition below comes from a section of poems in the *Sarvāṅgī* dedicated to the
theme of warnings (*citāvanī*). This particular *pad* is in tune with common Sant attitudes about
the body and the fragility and preciousness of human life.

⁴⁷² Ang 41, (“*bhaki pasāv kau ang*”), Pad 6. Another of Agradās’s poems in Rajjab’s *Sarvāṅgī*—Ang 39, Pad 10—similarly emphasizes his lowness and powerlessness and begs for the mercy and compassion of the Lord (Mādhav), “the crest-jewel of benevolence.”

⁴⁷³ Alternatively, this final verse could be rendered, “Agradās begs Hari to hear the stories [of the saints], those who rest in the ocean of nectar.”

*nānau nikhar sakhar saudā milai tau kāhe na lehu maṁdamati āgar /
 kari hari bhajan pratī na tan kī jyūṁ jal bharyau karautī kāgar //
 deh kheh chin bhaṅgar kram biṭ nāhin chānī bāt ujāgar /
 agra syām kau nām amolak rasnā sumari rām sukh āgar // 73.36⁴⁷⁴*

If, in a trade, you get a pile of good things for just a penny, why not take this treasure, you fool?

Sing your devotion to Hari! Don't trust the body, it's like a paper cup filled with water. Oh ignorant one, you haven't learned the obvious: this body—breakable in a moment—will next be dust.

Agra says, the Name of God (Syām) is priceless; let your tongue remember (recite) Rām, the treasure-house of contentment.

In this poem, Agradās warns his listeners not to become attached to the body, which is unreliable and impermanent. Again, Agra expresses a point of view very much at odds with that of the Nāth *yogīs*, whose tantric practice used the body as its foundation in a quest for physical immortality. From Agra's devotional perspective, one must not rely on the body but should instead focus solely on devotional songs and actions to God. Agra praises the Name once again in this *pad*, using a business/trade metaphor to stress its great value, attained with such ease. As he reiterates in other of his poems in the *Sarvāṅgī*, with one's lifespan so uncertain, and human birth so rare, why not take the name of God and do *bhakti* right away!

The next poem is quite striking, especially if one thinks of Agradās in the way he has almost universally been remembered by scholars and devotees alike, that is, as the great *rasik* devotee of the *saguṇ* Rām. First, the *pad* stresses the importance of the *nirguṇ* dimension of the divine, then, when Agra shifts the poem's orientation by pointing out the identity of *saguṇ* and *nirguṇ*, he does so with a reference not to Rām, but to Krishna and the ladies of Braj.

*sukah paihau nirguṇ ke jānaim /
 ahūṁ mamat guṇ doṣ bisarihau byāpak brahm pichānaim //
 jyūṁ til tel dār meṁ hutabhūk aise sab meṁ dekhau /
 kistūrī ke mṛg kī nāī anant kahūṁ jinni pekhau //*

⁴⁷⁴ Ang 73, (“*upadeś citāvaṇī kau ang*”), Pad 36.

*yahū upades syāmsundar kau braj banitā ur dhārau /
agra syām pūraṇ paramānand bichūran bharam nivārau // 43.14*⁴⁷⁵

Contentment is obtained by knowing the *nirguṇ*.

By recognizing the pervasive *brahman*, one forgets worldly attachment, good qualities and faults.

As the oil within a sesame seed or fire within wood, see [the *brahman*] within all.

Look for it just as the musk deer looked about endlessly [for that sweetest of scents].⁴⁷⁶

This is the instruction of Krishna (*śyāmsundar*); the ladies of Braj hold it in their hearts.

Agra says that Shyām is complete and supreme bliss; abandon the illusion (confusion) of separation [between *nirguṇ* and *saguṇ*].

It is tempting to say that Agradās could not possibly have composed this verse. While that is certainly a possibility, it seems more reasonable and productive to accept the poem and correspondingly expand our view of Agradās in the realization that, in a community like that of the early Rāmānandīs, the perspective of this poem is not only completely plausible but actually quite representative.

The poem above from the *Sarvāṅgī* is certainly not the only time that Agradās composed devotional verses with Krishna in mind. To give one other example, in a *pad* from a 1685 CE manuscript entitled the *Bhāgavat Pad Prasaṅg*, containing over three hundred of his poems, Agradās describes the lush, enchanted environment of Braj in the rainy season and praises the “gentle, heart-stealing” smile of Krishna, concluding that “his face is a treasure-house of bliss like the moon of Vrindavan.”⁴⁷⁷ In early modern north India’s world of *bhakti*, it

⁴⁷⁵ *Ang 43, Pad 14.*

⁴⁷⁶ Legend has it that the *kasturi mṛg* (musk deer) was roaming around in the forests when it suddenly became aware of a beautiful scent that stirred it so profoundly it resolved to find its source. Day and night, it desperately searched all over for the source of the sweet scent, eventually falling off a cliff to its death. As it lay there taking its last breaths, the deer realized that the scent that had inspired all its searching actually came from its very own navel and thus it found inexpressible peace and happiness in its last moment. Presumably, the pervasiveness of the invisible, intangible scent and its ultimate location within the deer itself symbolize, respectively, the *brahman* and *ātman*. Agradās follows tradition in likening the determined searching of the musk deer to the noble pursuits and efforts of the genuine spiritual seeker.

⁴⁷⁷ *agra svāmi ānan ānand nidhi vṛndāban ke cand kau//14d.* Agradās, *Bhāgavat Pad Prasaṅg*, Ms 1616 (3), Jaipur City Palace, v.s. 1742 (1685 CE).

should come as no surprise that a devotee-poet with a special preference for the worship of Rām would nonetheless have also composed devotional verses focused on Krishna. When it came to Rām and Krishna, those two brightest stars of the contemporary Hindu devotional scene, there was certainly no imperative to choose one to the exclusion of the other.

Devotional preferences existed, but they were typically nonexclusive in nature. The great Krishna poet Sūrdās wrote poems about Rām (as well as Sītā and Hanumān) while Tulsīdās, the great Rām *bhakta*, dedicated a full work of poems to Krishna, his *Krishna-Gītāvalī*. Even Sant poets like Kabīr and Raidās, whose perspective was predominantly *nirguṇ* in orientation, drew on the imagery and narrative traditions of both Rām and Krishna.

This inclusive Vaiṣṇava approach also seems to have characterized the early Rāmānandī community to which Agradās belonged.⁴⁷⁸ Krishnadās Payahārī, the founder of the community at Galta (and Agra’s guru), seems to have been a devotee of Krishna—as his name clearly indicates—and to have turned his disciple King Pṛthvirāj to Krishna devotion as well,⁴⁷⁹ yet he is also remembered for bringing aniconic (*śālagrām*) images of both Sītā-Rām and Nṛsiṃha (Vishnu in his half-man/half-lion *avatār*) with him to Galta (which were then installed at the court of the Kacchvāhās at Amer);⁴⁸⁰ thus he seems to have been a devotee of Vishnu in

⁴⁷⁸ A devotion to Krishna, as well as Rām, characterized the Galta community of Rāmānandīs even into the mid-eighteenth century, as indicated by a Sanskrit text entitled the *Gālavgītā*. This text was written in the mid-1700s by a figure named Dwārkānāth who was the son of Jaisingh II’s court poet, Śrī Krishna Bhaṭṭ. The *Gālavgītā* praises the natural beauty and sacredness of Galta while singing the praises of a Krishnaized Rām (who wears yellow, has a peacock feather crown, and plays the flute) and a Ramaized Krishna (carrying a bow and arrow), referring to them both as being eternal residents of Galta. The last line of the poem stresses that there are only two vessels for crossing the ocean of existence and achieving contentment, Rām and Krishna. The Sanskrit text (consisting of 15 three-line stanzas), with a Hindi commentary, can be found in: Bhatt Śrī Mathurānāth Śāstrī, *Jaipurvaibhavam* (Jaipur: Rāṣṭrīy Sanskr̥t Sāhitya Kendra, 2007), 246-253.

⁴⁷⁹ In the *Bhaktamāl*, Nābhādās’s verses on the Kacchvāhā king Prithvirāj (*chappay* 116) make it clear that, through his guru Krishnadas Payahārī, he became acquainted with the Truth and had a vision, not of Rām, but of Krishna, in his form as Lord of Dvārka (Dwārkanāth).

⁴⁸⁰ Horstmann, “The Rāmānandīs of Galta,” 148.

all forms. If this was the devotional perspective of Agradās's guru, that of his disciple Nābhādās was quite similar. In the opening passage of his *Bhaktamāl*, Nābhā implies that he venerates all twenty-four *avatāras* of Vishnu that proceed from the four *vyūhas* (though he states that he especially reveres Rām and Sītā).⁴⁸¹ That Agradās would praise Krishna in some of his poems is, then, clearly not so odd at all. What begs for a bit of further explanation, however, is Agradās's extolling of the *nirguṇ* (quality-less) Divine in the poem above.

The distinction between *nirguṇ* and *saguṇ* conceptions of the divine goes back to at least the late sixteenth century. That this was a topic of debate—a matter on which all did not see eye to eye—is suggested by a number of *bhakti* sources including the *Rāmcaritmānas*, in which Tulsidās “goes out his way to assert the essential compatibility of both conceptions of Ram.”⁴⁸² In a key scene, Pārvatī tells Shiva that she is unable to reconcile the transcendental majesty of the *nirguṇ* Rām with the worldly deeds and qualities of the *saguṇ* Rām. Shiva explains (1.121.3-4) the essential correspondance of these *nirguṇ* and *saguṇ* dimensions, asserting that it would be deluded not to see the two as ultimately one and the same. Tulsī (via Shiva) states:

Wise men, sages, the Vedas and Puranas declare that there is no difference between the *saguṇ* and *nirguṇ* forms of Brahman.
That which is without attributes, without form, imperceptible, and without birth is compelled to take on the qualities of the iconic under the influence of the devotees' love.
How can that Absolute without attributes become qualified? In the same way that water and hailstones are not different from each other.
He whose very name is like the sun to the darkness of ignorance, tell me how can he be subject to ignorant delusion?⁴⁸³

⁴⁸¹ Chappays 5, 6, and 28. See Horstmann, “The Rāmānandīs of Galta,” 152.

⁴⁸² Paramasivan, “Between Text and Sect,” 37.

⁴⁸³ Translated in Paramasivan, “Between Text and Sect,” 38.

We will return to this important subject later, but for now it is enough to note that Agradās seems to have shared Tulsī's views on the relationship and essential compatability of the *nirguṇ* and *saguṇ* Divine. In the final line of his poem above, Agra urges his listeners to abandon the illusion that there is any separation between the *nirguṇ brahman* and the *saguṇ* Krishna. As we will see, many others on the religious scene of the day—Sufis, Sikhs, and Nāths, to name a few—shared different and more strictly *nirguṇ* theological views, and this may have been a source of real conflict.⁴⁸⁴

* * *

In the poems attributed to him in Rajjab's *Sarvāṅgī*, we have seen Agradās express the themes of total humility, servitude, the fragility of the body, the preciousness of human life, and, above all else, the power of the Name. Tulsīdās, in the *Rāmcaritmānas*, had asserted that the name of Rām was the vital bridge between the *saguṇ* and *nirguṇ* dimensions of the Divine. He wrote, "The Name is a witness between the *nirguṇ* (*aguṇa*) and *saguṇ* realms; it is a clever translator through which both [realms] become illuminating."⁴⁸⁵ Once again, Agradās seems to have felt just the same way. As a *bhakta* who sought to bridge not just the *nirguṇ* and the *saguṇ*, but to embrace his community's Sant values while simultaneously asserting for them a more patronage-friendly orthodox identity, the Name was of the utmost importance to Agra, for its practice and theology were something agreed on and respected by nearly all. We can gain some valuable insights on Agra's perspective on the divine Name, as well as his overall literary project, in his *Nām-Pratāp*.

⁴⁸⁴ In other words, while it was not unusual for *bhakti* poets with a *saguṇ* preference to praise the *nirguṇ* dimension of the Divine, as Agra does, acknowledging it as the ground or essence of the *saguṇ*, it seems far more rare to find poets with a *nirguṇ* preference praising the *saguṇ*. The problem, as it were, existed far more on the side of the *nirguṇīs*.

⁴⁸⁵ *Rāmcaritmānas* 1.21.4b. My translation. *aguṇa saguṇa bica nāma susākhī / ubhaya prabodhaka catura dubhāṣī //*

~ *The Nām-Pratāp* ~

The *Nām Pratāp* is essentially Agradās's vernacular rendering and interpretation of the story of Ajāmil as told in *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (*BhP*) VI.1-3. The discussion and translations below are based on the ninety-eight Brajbhāṣā verses of this text found in a manuscript dated 1701 CE (1758 v.s.).⁴⁸⁶ Agradās opens his work with these words of invocation:

śrīguru caran kamal ur dhāraṃ / kachuk nām pratāp ucāraṃ //1

hridai prakās bimal karau banī / nām kīrtī jyaṃ jai bakhānī //2

I place the lotus feet of the Guru upon my heart. I recite some small part of the glory of the Name (*nām pratāp*).

May the light of my heart make these words pure, so that the glory of the Name be described.

As in *BhP* VI.1-3, the verses of Agra's *Nām-Pratāp* occur within this narrative frame: Śukdev (son of Vyāsa, the sage author of the *Mahābhārata*) is telling the story of Ajāmil to King Parīkṣit, the first king of the Kali Yuga, who is deeply troubled at the corruption and evil of the age and fearful of the horrible sufferings of hell. Ajāmil was a corrupt, sinful brahmin who, after wasting away years in immoral behavior, found himself lying on his deathbed. As the story goes, when the messengers of Death (Yama) approached to take him away, Ajāmil cried out for his son, who happened to be named Nārayaṇ. When Vishnu (Nārayaṇ) heard his Name called out, he immediately sent his own messengers to confront those of Death and protect Ajāmil from them. After some debate, Death's messengers returned defeated and empty-handed to the realm of Yama, who then had to explain to them why they could not take away this man whose sins seemed to so greatly outnumber his merits. The reason, of course, was the saving

⁴⁸⁶ *Nām-pratāp*, v.s. 1758, Jaipur City Palace, Ms 1541(2).

power of the divine Name, which protected Ajāmil and ignited a transformation within him that would eventually lead him to become a model of piety.

With Śukdev as his mouthpiece, Agradās explains this purifying, salvific force of God's Name, writing (v. 43), "If the Name comes to your tongue / The tyranny of death can never grasp you."⁴⁸⁷ Even after hearing the tale of Ajāmil, however, King Parikṣit remains doubtful about the power of the divine Name. The text states (v. 50), "In response, the king asked a question / How can just reciting the Name bring you salvation?"⁴⁸⁸ Śukdev replies to the king's question in a series of verses that articulate the core message of Agradās's work.

*nām sakal sādhanī kau rājā / jog jagya tap sarai na kājā //*69

The Name is the king of all spiritual practice.

[Without it] yoga, sacrifice, and asceticism achieve nothing.

*sādhana sabai nām bal sāñce / nām binā sādhan sab kāce //*70

The power of the Name is the essence (truth) behind all spiritual practice.

Without the Name all spiritual practices are worthless.

*aur juganī bahu bidhī byāuhārā / kali keval hari nām adhārā //*71

In other ages, there were many systems and paths,

but in this Kali Yuga, the Name of Hari is our only shelter.

*sakrit nām jo badan ucārai / āpun tirai aur kauṃ tārā //*72

He who pronounces this word, this perfect Name,

he saves himself and saves others as well.

*bhav samudra nām naukā daṛhī / aganit patit pār bhaye tihi caṛhī //*73

The Name is a steady boat [to carry one across] the ocean of existence.

Having climbed into it, countless fallen souls have crossed.

⁴⁸⁷ *rasnā nām kyaum haum jau āvai / jam jātnā kabhū nahi pāvai //*43

⁴⁸⁸ *ulṭī bhūp tahā prasan ju kīnī / nām mātra kaisai gati dīnī //*50

nām ābhās nirnnai ko karaī / syau birañci śravanani ur dharaī //74

Who can describe the splendor of the Name?
Even Shiva and Brahma listen to it and hold it in their heart.

In verse after verse, Agradās continues to praise the incomparable glory and efficacy of the Name. He writes (vv. 86-88):

dhani janam soī baḍbhāgī / rām nām sauṃ rasnā pāgī //86

He who is so very fortunate as to have this blessed [human] birth / Let his tongue be immersed in the name of Rām.

des kāl pūjā mantra hīnā / sab nirbighan nām kai līnā //87

Without country or time, without worship or mantras / One engrossed in the Name [can achieve] all things without obstacle.

rām set bin sāgar vārā / nām liyai nar hai bhav pārā //88

Without the bridge of Rām, [one cannot cross] this endless ocean, [but] taking the Name, a man crosses this [ocean of] existence.

Having extolled the Name in virtually every conceivable way, Agradās concludes his composition with these two verses:

nām pratāp jo sunai sunāvai / jīvan mukat param pad pāvai //97

ān upāi nahī kī koī āsā / agardās śrī hari nām bisvāsā //98

Whoever listens to and recites the glory of the Name (*Nām Pratāp*),
Their soul is liberated and attains the highest place.

There is no hope in other ways.
Agradās places his faith in the Name of Hari.

The *Nām-Pratāp* clearly demonstrates the incredible importance that the Name held in the theology and practice of Agradās and his Rāmānandī community. Agra's verses in this text reiterate the message of many of his poems in the *Sarvāṅgī*. The absolute power of the Name

was a message proclaimed by *bhaktas* far and wide in early modern north India: Tulsīdās, the Sikhs, the Gauḍiyā Vaiṣṇava followers of Caitanya, and Sants like Kabīr and Raidās, among others, were united in this core belief/practice. Indeed, Agra’s words in verse 71, “*kali keval hari nām adhāra*” (“In this Kali Age, the Name of Hari is our only shelter/foundation”), are nearly identical to those in verses composed by both Raidās⁴⁸⁹ and Tulsīdās.⁴⁹⁰ For Agradās, the devotional practice of remembering the Name (whether in song, recitation, or meditation) was a truly necessary form of devotion without which all other spiritual practices became useless. He highlights the ultimate superfluity (if not worthlessness) of yoga, asceticism, sacrifice, worship rituals (*pūjā*), and the use of mantras (verses 69 and 87); one need only have faith in the Name.

* * *

The significance of Agra’s *Nām-Pratāp* is not simply its emphatic advocacy of the Rām-Nām. As a rendition of a popular devotional tale from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, this work may also suggest Agradās’s involvement in the project of making Sanskrit religious and literary texts available (in written form) to a broader audience in the emerging cosmopolitan vernacular of Brajbhāṣā. The Rāmānandīs had deep roots in the tradition of the Sants and we have already noted the spirit of asceticism, renunciation, and yoga among the early community at Galta. Agradās sought to maintain the Rāmānandīs’ Sant values while taking the community in a new direction that could garner them prestige, power, and patronage in a changing socio-political

⁴⁸⁹ In *Raidās Vānī* 32.1 (AG), Raidās states: *kali keval nām adhār*. Winand Callewaert and Peter Friedlander, *The Life and Works of Raidās* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1992).

⁴⁹⁰ In *Rāmcaritmānas*, Uttarkāṇḍ (VII) 102:2b-4a, Tulsīdās says this (in addition to the meaning of this passage, which parallels Agra’s verses closely, note also that Tulsī here makes use of the phrase that would become the title of Agra’s work): *kalijug keval hari gun gāhā / gāvat nar pāvahi bhav thāhā // kalijug jog na jai na jñānā / ek adhār rām gun gānā // sab bharos taji jo bhaj rāmhi / prem samet gāv gun grāmhi // soi bhav tar kachu sansay nāhīm nām pratāp pragat kali māhīm //*

environment. While the Sants by and large rejected Sanskrit and brahmanical traditions, in certain contexts, Agradās—as we will see especially in his *Dhyān Mañjarī*—embraced Sanskrit literary authority and joined a growing movement of poets who were cultivating in Brajbhāṣā “a new and self-consciously classicizing idiom of Hindi.”⁴⁹¹ Agra seems to have authored at least one work in Sanskrit⁴⁹² and was probably quite learned in Sanskrit traditions, but his mission was to spread the messages and stories of *bhakti* in Brajbhāṣā, a language of great promise in that it was not only accessible to everyday devotees, but was also developing a new register perfectly suited for sophisticated literary expression in the courts of Rajput kings, and perhaps even Mughal emperors.

In the second half of the sixteenth century, while poets such as Nandadās in Braj were rendering Sanskrit texts into artfully constructed Brajbhāṣā verses, giving special attention to the legends of Krishna in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (*BhP*), Agradās chose to write interpretive vernacular tellings of stories (all found in the *BhP*, but also almost certainly in vernacular oral circulation) about the power of *bhakti* and the deeds of exemplary *bhaktas*, a concern and a project he would pass on to his disciple Nābhādās. In this effort, Agradās authored not only the *Nām-pratāp*, on the tale of Ajāmil (*BhP* VI:1-3), but also the *Prahlād-caritra*, about the story of the great devotee Prahlād (*BhP* VII:1-10), and the *Dhruv-carit*, which retells the narrative of the inspiring and praiseworthy *bhakta*, Dhruv (*BhP* IV: 8-12).⁴⁹³

⁴⁹¹ Allison Busch, *Poetry of Kings: The Classical Hindi Literature of Mughal India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 26.

⁴⁹² *Caturviṣāti-avatāranāmāni*, Jaipur City Palace, Ms 3090 (2), undated.

⁴⁹³ In my research, I have found five manuscripts of Agradās’s *Prahlād-caritra* and two manuscripts of his *Dhruv-carit* (see Appendix A). Very briefly, the stories of Prahlād and Dhruv are as follows. The story of Prahlād occurs in *BhP* VII: 1-10. The great devotee Prahlād was the son of the evil demon king Hiraṇyakaśipu. Despite fierce warnings and multiple murder attempts from his father, he continued to devoutly worship Vishnu, meditating on him and chanting his Name. In an especially famous episode, Prahlād’s devotion to Vishnu protects him from a pyre burning on the lap of Hiraṇyakaśipu’s sister Holika where his father has ordered him to sit. Eventually,

We now turn our attention to Agradās's most famous work, the *Dhyān Mañjarī*, in order to gain more insight into his *rasik* side, a dimension that manifested itself in terms of both his devotional practice and his literary style and output.

~ *Agradās the Rasik* ~

The *Dhyān Mañjarī*, or “Handmaiden of Meditation,” is Agradās's most well known and most important work. Composed sometime in the last quarter of the sixteenth century, it is the earliest known distinctly Rām-*rasik* work and became a foundational text of the Rām-*rasik* community. Like nearly all of Agra's compositions, it is written in Brajbhāṣā⁴⁹⁴ and consists of seventy-nine rhyming couplets in the *rolā* metre.⁴⁹⁵ The only English-language scholarship on the *Dhyān Mañjarī*, which also constitutes the only English-language discussion of any of the works of Agradās, is that of R. Stuart McGregor. In a short essay, McGregor gives a brief, but useful description of the contents of the text, but does not translate any of the verses.⁴⁹⁶ In the

Vishnu saves Prahlād from his father's treachery by killing him in the form of Narasiṃha, the half-man/half-lion *avatār*. The story of Dhruv occurs in *BhP* IV: 8-12. Dhruv was the son of King Uttānapāda and at the age of five was told that he did not deserve the throne of his father and must devote himself to the feet of Vishnu with austere penances if he was to have any hope of ascending to a royal station. Against the advice of the sage Nārada, the child Dhruv journeyed into the forest where he undertook a determined and ascetic devotion, offering himself completely to the Lord with such an intensity that Vishnu appeared before him, promising him that because of his pure-hearted devotion he would attain a position higher than any ever reached before. Thus, after ruling as king on earth for thousands of years, he was transported to the exalted seat of the pole star (*dhruv*) in the highest heavens of Vishnu.

⁴⁹⁴ Some of the verses in Agradās's compositions contain “Rajasthani” language mixed with Braj. As Allison Busch has noted, “some texts from the region are hard to pigeonhole on linguistic grounds, freely combining Braj and Rajasthani language, meters, and styles within the same work.” Busch emphasizes that “Rajasthani” is a problematic label, but that it refers to language/texts “strongly marked by western Indian linguistic forms, such as Marwari (often called Dingal), or genres that tend to be more localized.” Busch, *Poetry of Kings*, 168.

⁴⁹⁵ The *rolā* metre consists of 11 + 13 *mātrās* per line. A *mātrā* is a metrical instance; short vowels are of one *mātrā* and long vowels are of two *mātrās*.

⁴⁹⁶ McGregor, “The Dhyān-Mañjarī of Agradās.” McGregor also briefly discusses Agradās and this text in his “The Progress of Hindi, Part 1: The Development of a Transregional Idiom,” in *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, ed. Sheldon Pollock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 936-937.

pages below, I offer translations of some of this foundational work's most essential verses.⁴⁹⁷

Before delving into the text, we should note the significance of the title Agra gave to his composition, the *Dhyān Mañjarī*. First and foremost, it is a work meant to assist in meditation, or *dhyān*. As we will see, the vision of meditation articulated in the text has close parallels with traditional tantric practices of inner worship and yogic visualization, showing that just as much as *bhakti* communities were distancing themselves from many aspects of the tantric tradition, at the same time they were also appropriating certain tantric ritual practices, remaking them in a new devotional context. Agradās intended his work to be a helper and intimate companion, or *mañjarī*, for *rasik* practitioners, a “handmaiden” working in service of their meditation on the divine play of Rām and Sītā. Yet Agra’s use of the word *mañjarī* in the title is suggestive of more than this. In the developing Krishna *bhakti* of Braj, the girlfriends of Rādhā, her closest companions and servants, came to be known as *mañjarīs*. A form of spiritual practice developed in which the *rasik* took on the role and identity of one of these *mañjarīs* in order to best witness and relish the profound love of Rādhā for Krishna.⁴⁹⁸ As Tony Stewart explains, the role of the *mañjarī* had “an advantage enjoyed by no other figure in the *līlās* of

⁴⁹⁷ The Brajbhāṣā text of the following translations of the *Dhyān Mañjarī* is based on my transcription of the earliest manuscript of the *Dhyān Mañjarī* I have found, which comes from the Nāgarī Pracāriṇī Sabhā (#772) in Banaras and is dated v.s. 1818 (1761 CE). I compared this manuscript against the second oldest *Dhyān Mañjarī* manuscript I have found, Ms 25307 from the Jodhpur RORI, dated v.s. 1872 (1815 CE), and found for the most part only minor differences in spelling (e.g., “*dhare*” versus “*dharaiṃ*”). I also checked these manuscripts against the two printed versions of the text I have been able to attain. To my knowledge there are only two published sources available of works attributed to Agradās (beyond those verses found in published versions of Rajjab’s *Sarvaṅgī*). The first is the *Agradās Granthāvalī* (which includes the *Kuṇḍaliyām*, *Dhyān Mañjarī*, and *Sādhana Gītāvalī*), edited by Balbhadrā Tivārī (Ilāhābād: Saryendra Prakāśan, 1985). Tivārī’s edition of the *Dhyān Mañjarī* relies solely on a manuscript from the Pune Vidyāpīṭh dated v.s. 1911 (1854 CE). His edition is littered with misprints and errors in transcription from the manuscript. The second available published source is the *Agra-Granthāvalī* printed (in 1994) and distributed by Raivāsā Dhām itself, which consists of two parts (each a small pamphlet without proper binding). The text of this edition of the *Dhyān Mañjarī* has far fewer errors and misprints and matches up more closely with the manuscripts of the *Dhyān Mañjarī* that I have in my possession; however, the manuscript source(s) for the text is not identified. The verse numbers in this printed version are one removed (one additional) with respect to the manuscript from which I translate.

⁴⁹⁸ For more on this subject, see especially Haberman, *Acting as a Way of Salvation*, 108-114.

Krishna: immediate and continuous access to Rādhā’s and Krishna’s play.”⁴⁹⁹ As we have seen, Agradās is remembered to have taken on the role of Sītā’s closest female companion in his *rasik* devotion. There is no doubt he was a trailblazer in taking contemporary developments in Krishna *bhakti* in Braj—particularly the *rasa*-centered theology and *mañjarī sādhana* formulated among the Vrindavan-based Gauḍiyā Vaiṣṇava followers of Caitanya—and adapting/applying them within a Rāmaite devotional context. Agradās likely advocated that Rām-*rasik* devotees take on the role of *mañjarī*, which would allow them to become “the supreme participant-observer” of the *līlās* of Rām and Sītā, “present and contributing, but not the direct object of [their] attentions,” and thus perfectly situated to observe and become a vessel of their sublime emotions.⁵⁰⁰

The *Dhyān Mañjarī* opens with the following line, a directive to meditate on Rām and the power inherent in this practice:

sumirau śrīraghuvīr dhīr raghuvams vibhūṣaṇ /
saraṇ gahe sukhrāsī harat aghsāgar dukhaṇ //1

Engross yourself in the remembrance of Śrī Raghuvīr (Rām), ornament of the Raghu family.

He who takes the refuge of this source of joy removes oceans of sin and suffering.

Following this invocation, Agradās begins describing the city of Ayodhya, or Avadh-puri (vv. 3-8) and the righteousness, devotion, and good fortune of its residents (vv. 9-11). He says (v. 12), “This very Ayodhya is the Ayodhya described in *śruti* and *smṛti*. When you meditate [on this Ayodhya], it gives contentment; pronouncing its name destroys all sins.”⁵⁰¹ The text (vv. 14-27) then proceeds to describe the pleasure groves of Ayodhya, the divine splendor of its birds,

⁴⁹⁹ Stewart, “Reading for Krishna’s Pleasure,” 266.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁰¹ *avadh-pūrin ko avadhi yahi śruti smṛti varanī / dhyān dhare such karani nam ucarat agh haranī //12*

trees, fruits, and flowers, and the sin-cleansing and heaven (Vaikuṇṭha)-granting power of the Sarju River flowing nearby. In a number of ways, Agra's description of Rām's Ayodhya seems to be modeled on Krishna's Vrindavan. Indeed, these verses reflect "the quest for a mythical space that would be the site of the *madhurya lila* of Ram and Sita," a site that, as Paramasivan puts it, "would parallel, if not rival, the spaces of Vrindavan and Golok that had so captured the imagination of much of North India through the Krishna devotional traditions."⁵⁰²

The detailed images in Agra's descriptions are often astonishing. In a particularly evocative verse about the trees of Ayodhya, he writes, "The branches, heavy with the weight of fruits and flowers, are leaning to the surface of the earth, as if extending their arms to offer fruit to those passing by."⁵⁰³ The detailed imagery in such verses is a reminder that the disciplined meditation the text is meant to assist depends on the ability of the *rasik* practitioner to reproduce first a spatial environment, the geography of Ayodhya, as the prelude to emotional involvement with Rām and Sītā.⁵⁰⁴

After describing the pleasure groves of Avadh puri, Agra depicts the gold-inlaid, jewel-studded lotus throne upon which Rām sits (vv. 28-30), then delves into an elaborate *śikh-nakh* (head-to-toe) description of the beautiful and awe-inspiring features of Rām (vv. 31-47), whose form "ten million suns feel ashamed upon seeing."⁵⁰⁵ Verses 48 to 65 offer an equally detailed vision of Sītā, and of the divine pair seated together. Before moving on to describe their attendants—Shatrughna, Lakṣman, Bharat, Hanumān, Nārada *muni* (vv. 66-70)—Agradās

⁵⁰² Paramasivan, "Between Text and Sect," 104-105.

⁵⁰³ *bhumi rahe lagi bhār ḍār phal phūlan bhārī / pāthik janan phal den man hu yeh bhujā pasārī //17*

⁵⁰⁴ For a similar analysis of Krishna *rasik* practice, see Stewart, "Reading for Krishna's Pleasure," 267.

⁵⁰⁵ *rām rūp ko nirakhi vibhākar koṭik lāje //47b*

concludes his verses on Rām and Sītā with these words: “How can one describe the incomparable appearance of the divine couple? / Whatever poetic language one uses, it finds meaning and expression only through their (Rām and Sītā’s) divine power.”⁵⁰⁶

Before proceeding to a translation and analysis of the final ten verses of Agra’s text, let us pause to make a few key observations. As we have seen, over half of the verses in the *Dhyān Mañjarī* are devoted to intricate *śikh-nakh* verbal portraits, a descriptive genre commonly seen in Indian poetry, but one that, Lutgendorf reminds us, we must not dismiss “as a mere convention” because “in serving to create (in Kenneth Bryant’s memorable phrase) a ‘verbal icon’ of the most literal sort, it represents, in fact, a recipe for visualization.”⁵⁰⁷ The *Dhyān Mañjarī* offers a “recipe” for a meditative vision of the divine couple (*yugal svarūp*) seated upon a lotus on a throne under a wishing-tree, one based on an image—a meditation (*dhyān*)—of the pair first described in the *Agastya Saṃhitā* (where the practitioner is to visualize Rām and Sītā within his own heart), but which Agradās places in the pleasure groves of Avadh puri. As B.P. Singh has demonstrated, Agra’s description of this vision (particularly the tree-throne-lotus theme) closely parallels a passage from a no longer extant tantric text called the *Sadāśiva Saṃhitā*;⁵⁰⁸ however, McGregor points out that this theme was well known and thus it is likely that Agra’s source was simply analogous to this text.⁵⁰⁹ More than the *Sadāśiva Saṃhitā*, it

⁵⁰⁶ *atulit jugal svarūp kavan as upamā jinkī / jetik upamā dīpti sakti kari bhāsit tinhkī //65*

⁵⁰⁷ Lutgendorf, “The Secret Life of Ramchandra,” 222. To flip the coin back over, if Agradās’s detailed descriptions of Rām-Sītā were recipes for visualization, it is crucial to note that he composed them according to accepted literary codes and sophisticated aesthetic protocols in order to evoke a deep and purified emotional experience. In Sanskrit literary theory, portraying the beauty of a main character in terms of these accepted codes was thought to deepen the experience of *rasa*. Here, the emotional experience being evoked and heightened through literary method is a devotional one, thus the aesthetic and the religious truly blur into one another.

⁵⁰⁸ Singh, *Rambhakti meṃ rasik sampradāy*, 94. The *Sadāśiva Saṃhitā* seems to have been a canonical text for *rasiks* and parts of it survive as quotations in *rasik* literature, especially in the work of Rāmcaraṇdās (1760-1831).

seems that Agradās drew heavily on the work of the Braj poet, scholar, and Krishna devotee, Nandadās.

In the *Dhyān Mañjarī*, Agradās not only adopts the meter of Nandadās’s *Rāspañcādhyāyī* (Quintet on Krishna’s Dance), but also makes “a series of striking verbal and conceptual borrowings” from Nandadās’s work in his descriptions of the beauty of Rām and Avadhपुरi’s pleasure groves. As McGregor points out, “The way Agradās makes these borrowings, from different parts of the source poem and evidently with close knowledge of its text, illustrates his intention and ability to make the fullest use of this contemporary, vernacular Kṛṣṇa source. The variations of topic and interpretation between the two poems, and the different order of treatment of some shared topics, means that considerable literary skill was required.”⁵¹⁰ The fact that Agradās borrowed from the work of Nandadās is interesting for a couple of reasons. First, it further indicates his interaction with the burgeoning Krishna devotional communities of Braj and, second, it speaks to his adoption of a refined literary sensibility, demonstrating a concern and intent to display poetic artfulness and cosmopolitan sophistication in accord with the conventions of an emerging Brajbhāṣā public sphere.⁵¹¹

⁵⁰⁹ McGregor, “The Dhyān-Mañjarī of Agradās,” 240-241. While a number of scholars, including McGregor, have considered the *Bhuṣuṇḍī Rāmāyaṇa*—a Rāmaite adaption of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* published in three volumes by Bhagavati Prasad Singh—a likely source for Agradās’s *Dhyān Mañjarī* (and Tulsīdās’s *Rāmcaritmānas*), Alan M. Keislar has argued that the version of the *Bhuṣuṇḍī Rāmāyaṇa* used by Singh was actually composed in the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century and thus could not have been a source text used by Agra (or Tulsī). Alan Mott Keislar, “Searching for the Bhuṣuṇḍī Rāmāyaṇa: One Text or Many? The *Ādi rāmāyaṇa*, the *Bhuṣuṇḍī-rāmāyaṇa*, and the *Rāmāyaṇa-mahā-mālā*,” Ph.D thesis (University of California, Berkeley, 1998).

⁵¹⁰ Stuart McGregor, “The Progress of Hindi, Part 1: The Development of a Transregional Idiom,” in *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, ed. Sheldon Pollock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 936-937.

⁵¹¹ McGregor notes that the rapid dissemination, study, and sharing of Nandadās’s work across sectarian boundaries illustrate “how far and how readily doctrinal differences could be bridged in the late sixteenth century at the levels of vernacular literature and popular devotion.” McGregor, “The Progress of Hindi,” 937.

Nandadās's influence on Agradās seems to have been strictly literary, for their religious views differed substantially; so much so that Agra's disciple Nābhādās does not mention Nandadās at all in the earliest manuscripts of his *Bhaktamāl*, which, as we have seen, envisioned an extraordinarily expansive community of devotee-saints.⁵¹² This is not necessarily surprising as, in many ways, Nandadās was far more influential as a scholar-poet than he was as a *bhakta* of Krishna. Nandadās flourished in Braj in the second half of the sixteenth century and while he is claimed as a member of the Puṣṭi Mārg sect of Vallabha, his literary influence extended far beyond that of any single religious community, for he was a critical early figure in familiarizing vernacular poets and their audiences with the theory, conventions, and vocabulary of Sanskrit poetics.⁵¹³ Indeed, Allison Busch identifies Nandadās's *Rasmañjarī* as a forerunner of the *rīti-granth* genre⁵¹⁴ and says that he "paved some of the way toward the classicization and elaboration of Hindi literary culture."⁵¹⁵

Agradās was probably a junior contemporary of Nandadās, with most if not all of his works preceding those of the great *rīti* poet Keshavdās (who burst onto the scene in 1591 CE with his *Rasikpriyā*). Thus, Agradās wrote at a time when Brajbhāṣā was already well established in *bhakti* religious circles and was on the rise as a sophisticated literary idiom,

⁵¹² Jhā, "Pratham Khaṇḍ (Vivecan)," 243.

⁵¹³ McGregor, "The Progress of Hindi," 923, 925. Nandadās (fl. 1570) sought to make Sanskrit texts and aesthetic conventions available to a growing Braj Bhāṣā reading community and composed vernacular versions of several important Sanskrit texts, often significantly altering from the originals to fit his own purposes. His works included Brajbhāṣā renderings of Bhanudatta's *Rasamañjarī*, the *Rāsapañcādhyāyī* (Five Chapters on the Round Dance, from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*), and Krishna Mishra's *Prabodhacandrodaya*, as well as two oft-referenced Braj dictionaries—the *Mānamañjarī* (a thesaurus) and *Anekārthamañjarī* (a versified vocabulary of difficult Sanskrit words)—based on the *Amarakośa*. Allison Busch, *Poetry of Kings*, 116.

⁵¹⁴ "Rīti poetry" generally refers to a refined genre of Brajbhāṣā poetry and literature produced, usually in/for royal courts, according to a distinct method or way (*rīti*) based on time-honored Sanskrit literary-aesthetic codes and concepts regarding *rasa*, *nāyikābheda* (catalogues of female characters), *alaṅkāra* (figures of speech), etc.

⁵¹⁵ Busch, *Poetry of Kings*, 62.

rapidly gaining importance in courtly contexts. Agra wrote in Rajasthan, within the orbit of the Kacchvāhā rulers of Amer who were taking the lead role in establishing “a transregional Rajput courtly culture that was evolving in dialogue with the Mughal imperial system”⁵¹⁶ and was significantly informed by the values, images, and narratives of Vaiṣṇava *bhakti*. This developing cosmopolitan court culture engendered a new interest among Rajput rulers in literacy and books, which manifested in the second half of the sixteenth century in an explosion of written texts (that increasingly supplemented oral practices) and the first development of libraries.⁵¹⁷

Agradās found himself in the midst of all these trends and the new patronage conditions to which they gave rise.⁵¹⁸ He wrote at a time when Brajbhāṣā literary production and the Vaiṣṇava devotion with which it was so often associated were increasingly becoming part of Rajput kingly self-presentation, a self-fashioning designed to display the Rajput rulers’ worthiness, prestige, sophistication, and power to: (a) the Mughals, who, crucially, could participate firsthand in the “cultural repertory” of Brajbhāṣā (unlike with the far more inaccessible realm of Sanskrit),⁵¹⁹ (b) rival Rajput houses, and (c) their own local subjects. By following the lead of Brajbhāṣā literary figures like Nandadās and composing polished vernacular works on Vaiṣṇava themes according to time-honored Sanskrit aesthetic

⁵¹⁶ Ibid., 46.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid., 173.

⁵¹⁸ By producing written texts, especially ones that interfaced with the increasingly popular Krishnaite-influenced *śṛṅgāra* literary culture, it was possible for *bhakti* poets to plug into the petty noble circuit and perhaps make even bigger court connections that would bring the benefits of both prestige and patronage to themselves and their communities. Tyler Williams, personal email communication, November 24, 2011. Williams’ ongoing research on the Nirañjanī *sampradāy* suggests that they, like the Rāmānandīs, had a rather “hard core” ascetic, yogic first generation but that in the second and third generations they started producing *rasik* and *rasik*-like texts.

⁵¹⁹ Busch, *Poetry of Kings*, 163.

conventions, Agradās made the Rāmānandī *sampradāy* into an active participant in an emerging cosmopolitan Mughal-Rajput literary culture. In this historical context, to compose works like the *Dhyān Mañjarī* and *Nām-Pratāp* was truly a display of virtue and power. In his literary project, Agradās thus provided the Rāmānandīs a level of dignity, distinction, and deportment that was vital in their competition with other religious communities for the support and patronage of those with wealth, sophistication, and political power.⁵²⁰

* * *

Let us return now to the text of the *Dhyān Mañjarī* and see how Agradās concluded his most famous work. If the first sixty-nine verses of the work were primarily a display of artful poetic description, in the last ten verses (vv. 70-79), Agradās shows a bit more of himself as he elaborates on the significance of the *rasik* meditation he has so carefully laid out. He writes:

*ye hī dhyān ur dhare svayaṃ tatu suphal karevā /
bhav caturānan ādi caran bande sab devā //70*

Keep only this *dhyān*⁵²¹ in your heart and it will bring forth good fruits in the body.
The feet of Rām are worshipped by Śiva, Brahmā, and all the gods.

*yah daṃpati var dhyān rasik jan niti prati dhyāve /
rasik binā yeh dhyān aur sapne nahi pāve //71*

Rasik practitioners meditate daily (always) on the *dhyān* of this magnificent couple
(Rām & Sītā).

⁵²⁰ It is worth noting that even as popular as Krishna *bhakti* and Krishnaite *śṛṅgāra* literature were becoming, Agradās still had a great deal going in his favor in writing about Rām. The most powerful Rajputs of his day, the Kacchvāhās, were his neighbors and they traced their own lineage back to none other than Rāmcandra. There is no doubt that the Mughal leaders also held a deep respect for Rām as a long-standing Indian symbol of supreme kingly virtue and power, as seen in Akbar's commissioning of an illustrated Persian manuscript of the *Ramāyaṇ* and his order for coins bearing the image of Rām and Sītā to be minted in his realm. See Siṃh, *Rāmbhakti meṃ rasik sampradāy*, 110-111.

⁵²¹ I have elected to keep *dhyān* untranslated in these verses in order that a greater depth and breadth of meaning might speak forth, but if this rich term must be translated, perhaps the best sense of the word here is "meditative vision."

Those who are not *rasiks* cannot obtain this *dhyān* even in dreams.

*amal amṛt ras dhār rasik jan yehī ras pāge /
tāku nīras gyān jog tap choī lāge //72*

Rasiks immerse themselves in the pure nectar of the flow of this *rasa*.
To them, *jñāna* (knowledge), *yoga*, and *tapas* (asceticism) are as *rasa*-less (dull, useless) as
a dried up stem of sugar cane.

*param sār yeh carit sunat śravanani aghahārī /
dhyān param kalyān sant jan ānand kārī //73*

Hearing the supreme essence of this *Dhyān Mañjarī* destroys all sins.
The greatest prosperity comes from this *dhyān*, which gives bliss to the saints.

*tinhi bhūli jani kahu kuṭilatā pañk malin man /
yah ujjal mani māl paherehi param rasik jan //74*

Even by mistake do not tell this to minds soiled by the mud of wickedness.
This shining jeweled garland can only be worn by great *rasiks*.

*jagat īs ko rūp varani kahe kavani adhik mati /
kahā alp khadyot bhānu ke nikaṭ kare duti //75*

Tell me what great wise person can describe Rām, Lord of the World?
What light can a firefly shine when it is next to the sun?

*kahā cātak kī sakti akhil jal cañcu samāve /
kachuk būṇḍ mukh pare tāhe le ānand pāve //76*

Does a *cātak* bird⁵²² have the power to put all water (every single drop of rain) in its
beak?
Just a few drops fall in its mouth and it obtains bliss from these.

*sunī āgam vidh arth kachuk jo manhī suhāyo /
yah maṅgal kar dhyān jathā mati varani sunāyo //77*

Having heard the *Āgamas*, some of its teachings pleased my mind;
According to these, I have proclaimed and described this auspicious *dhyān* in keeping
with my own understanding.

śrī guru santani anugrah te as gopur vāsī /

⁵²² The *cātak* (*cāṭṛk*), or pied cuckoo (*papīhā*), is a bird believed to survive only on falling rain drops it catches with its beak.

rasik janan hit karan rahasi yah tāhi prakāśī //78

By the grace of the guru and the saints, this Gopur-dwelling man
Has shed light on this secret for the benefit of *rasiks*.

dhyān mañjarī nām sunat man mod baḍhāve /
śrī raghuvar ko dās mudit man agra sugāve //79

Hearing just the name of the *Dhyān Mañjarī*, the heart's joy increases.
Agra, the servant of Raghuvar (Rām), sings this [*Dhyān Mañjarī*] with a happy heart.

What can we learn from these concluding lines? Let us begin by taking note of Agradās's use, in verse 77, of a seemingly innocuous, but actually quite revealing phrase: *jathā mati*, or “according to my own understanding.” As Allison Busch has pointed out, this little phrase was “the refrain of *rīti* poet-intellectuals,” invoked by a number of early modern north India's most refined poets.⁵²³ Indeed, Keshavdās said in his *Rasikpriyā* (5.41), “I have composed this passage according to my own understanding” (*kahe apanī mati anusāra*), while Nandadās used the similar phrases “according to my own judicious understanding” (*sumati anusāra*) and “in keeping with my understanding” (*yathā mati*).⁵²⁴ Busch argues that we should take seriously these authors' claims that they were expressing their own opinion, as such assertions were frequent and central to their identities and projects. These statements demonstrate that the poets intended to create new knowledge, to make their own interpretations and poetic flourishes, offering their own visions while working within classical genres and protocols.⁵²⁵ Strictly speaking, Agradās was perhaps not a *rīti* poet, yet it seems clear that he must be included among those vernacular poets of early modern north India who “sought to reshape

⁵²³ Busch, *Poetry of Kings*, 110.

⁵²⁴ Busch, *Poetry of Kings*, 110; 271, fn. 36.

⁵²⁵ *Ibid.*, 128.

the classical tradition ‘according to their own understanding’.”⁵²⁶ If composing interpretive vernacular renditions of three different stories from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (his *Nām-Pratāp*, *Prahlād-caritra*, and *Dhruv-carit*) is not evidence enough, his intention to reshape earlier Sanskrit religious tradition is expressed clearly in the *Dhyān Mañjarī* when he states that he has examined the Āgamas and “described and proclaimed [this *dhyān* of Sītā-Rām] in keeping with [his] own understanding” (v. 77).

It is noteworthy that Agradās refers specifically to the corpus of the Āgamas as the classical tradition that he has become familiar with and sought to reshape in his *Dhyān Mañjarī*. The term “Āgama” typically refers to one of the Śaivāgamas, the Sanskrit scriptures of the orthodox tantric Śaiva-siddhānta tradition, but it seems likely that Agradās meant this as a more general reference to Sanskrit ritual texts of the orthodox tantric traditions (including works such as the *Agastya Saṃhitā*). Indeed, it seems that in this text Agradās sought to draw on and utilize tantric ritual practices and understandings, but to place them within a distinctly *bhakti* framework that was largely critical of the tantric approach to the Divine.

In verse 71, we see that there is a certain exclusivity to the devotional practice that Agradās has described; it is only for *rasiks* to cultivate and experience this meditative vision. He uses the word *rasik* a number of times in these concluding verses, but what exactly does Agra mean by this term? In the world of Sanskrit poets, a *rasik* was a connoisseur, a trained interpreter, an emotionally attuned reader, and this sense definitely remains present in the way Agradās uses the term, though here, in the context of Rām *bhakti*, the *rasik* is an

⁵²⁶ Ibid., 116. Agradās was probably not a *rīti* poet if we mean by “*rīti* poet,” one who designed his poetry for more courtly, literary, and (dare I say) “secular” (i.e., not purely “religious”) contexts and/or whose attentions were first and foremost on producing works in tune with refined Sanskrit literary codes. Of course, the line between *bhakti* poetry and *rīti* poetry is regularly so blurry as to be meaningless.

emotionally attuned devotee, a connoisseur trained specifically to understand and imagine the stories of Rām and Sītā and to perform himself into the role of their intimate companion-servant, and thereby to taste the sweet, juicy essence (*rasa*) of divine love. Agradās's text was meant not only to appeal to already existing *rasiks* like this, but also to create a new community of such *rasiks* and to demarcate that community from others. As Agradās stresses again in verse 74, the teachings of the *Dhyān Mañjarī* are meant only for *rasiks* and should not be shared with the ignorant. In verse 78, he reminds his listeners that this is a “secret” (*rahasi*) revealed “for the benefit of *rasiks*.” In advocating such secrecy and restraint in the propagation of these teachings, Agra's text here takes on an aspect of esoteric tantric traditions. Indeed, as Lutgendorf has remarked, “Like tantric treatises, *rasik* texts often contain warnings against revealing their teachings to the uninitiated or people who have not yet attained mastery over their senses.”⁵²⁷

Secrecy and initiation are hardly the only parallels between tantric and *rasik* devotional practices. Certainly the element of *rasik bhakti* most clearly indebted to the tantric tradition is its detailed visualization meditations. The meditative process of visualizing an object (usually a deity) and trying to identify oneself with that object, often termed *bhāvanā*, *dhyāna*, or *smaraṇa* in tantric literature, is “an indispensable part of tantric ritual and yoga in general.”⁵²⁸ The visualization meditation of tantric ritual and yoga described in texts like the *Āgamas* involves an imaginative creation, a detailed mental construction of the deity being

⁵²⁷ Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text*, 314. At the same time that the *Dhyān Mañjarī* stresses secrecy, as a work that put into writing a type of meditation practice that ordinarily had only been directly transmitted between master and disciple, this text's very composition could be considered a sign of changing times, evidence for a new valuing of textual knowledge.

⁵²⁸ Csaba Kiss, *Matsyendranāth's Compendium: A critical edition and annotated translation of Matsyendrasaṃhitā 1-13 and 55 with analysis* (D.Phil. Thesis, Balliol College, Oxford University, 2009), 57.

worshipped. As Csaba Kiss states, this tantric meditation “is not merely a 'mechanical' mental reproduction of a visual image, but an intense, emotional and empathic 'living out' of a dream-like goal by completely losing one's self in the image.”⁵²⁹ Kiss describes the practice of tantric *dhyāna* as having the following three key elements: “[1] the mental creation by effort of something which is not normally present in the mind; [2] the vivid visualization of a predefined object; and [3] an empathic, emotional attitude towards the created mental object or a total self-identification with it.”⁵³⁰ Clearly, this description of meditation in tantric yoga could just as easily refer to the meditative practice of *rasik bhakti*. As we have seen, Agradās links his *Dhyān Mañjarī* to the tradition of the Āgamas and uses the same terms—*dhyāna* and *smaraṇa*—as these tantric texts to describe *rasik* meditation. The detailed visualization of Ayodhya, Rām, and Sītā that his work was designed to assist seems to be none other than a tantric meditation.

If the ritual process, the creative mental work being done, was essentially identical in the meditations of tantric yoga and *rasik* devotion, the two were nevertheless very different in terms of the worldview, sensibility, and goals that framed their practice and made it meaningful. Put most simply, tantric visualization typically aimed at identification with the deity, i.e., the divinization of the self, whereas the visualization of *rasik dhyān* sought to cultivate a purified emotional experience of divine love, one that required a separation from—and a rich emotional relationship with—the deity. While the *rasik* practice that Agradās’s text was meant to assist involved elements of secrecy and meditative visualization that had their roots in tantric tradition, the point of this *rasik* meditation was to lose oneself in devotion to

⁵²⁹ Ibid., 58.

⁵³⁰ Ibid., 59.

Rām and Sītā, to imagine oneself into a position in which one could heighten one’s experience of love by relishing their every feature and witnessing their every move. To take on their divine identity and acquire their power(s), as one might in tantric traditions, would have been the furthest thing from the *rasik bhakta*’s mind. Agradās’s text was designed to repurpose tantric method, to appropriate a powerful technique of disciplined imagination that had been refined in tantric contexts and completely reframe it as a meditation performed with a type of devotional mindset utterly incompatible with the usual goals and perspectives of tantric tradition.

* * *

According to Philip Lutgendorf, “the whole *rasik* orientation in Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* ... seems to have represented the culmination of a long historical process of the ‘tantricization’ of Vaiṣṇavism.”⁵³¹ In my opinion, the notion of a “tantricization” of *bhakti* is inaccurate and a poor frame for understanding *rasik* Vaiṣṇavism. As we have seen, forms of *bhakti* and tantric religiosity had long been intermixed in India, with devotion usually taking place within a tantric paradigm during the medieval period. In the early modern period in north India, however, a new *bhakti* identity began to emerge among many *bhakti* poets and communities who criticized and sought to separate themselves from tantric understandings of and approaches to the Divine. At the same time that they articulated a new and more exclusive notion of *bhakti*, some of them also, especially in *rasik* contexts, continued to utilize and repackage certain distinctly tantric ritual methods and practices.⁵³² Agradās’s *Dhyān Mañjarī*

⁵³¹ Lutgendorf, “The Secret Life of Ramchandra,” 230.

⁵³² Not just tantric method, but also tantric theology was sometimes appropriated by early modern *bhaktas*. Rachel McDermott points out that the six Gosvāmīs of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava community in Braj “were influenced by Tantric and Āgamic works, in some of which the language of *kuṇḍalinī* yoga is imported to illuminate the spiritual meaning of Rādhā’s union with Kṛṣṇa.” McDermott, *Mother of My Heart, Daughter of My Dreams*, 342, n. 120.

offers an important illustration of how north India's "*bhakti* movement—particularly in its *rasik* forms—drew on and was continuous with dimensions of tantric practice even as it reacted against and marginalized other key aspects of tantric tradition.

~ *The Bhakti Community Envisioned by Agradās & Nābhādās* ~

As we have seen, Agradās is the first Rāmānandī for whom we have any significant body of written literature. It is clear from the corpus of his own work, as well as the literature produced by his disciple lineage—most especially his immediate disciple Nābhādās and his grand-disciple Anantadās—that Agra began a literary project that aimed to extol exemplary Vaiṣṇava *bhaktas* and spread the saving message of *bhakti* in a fashion that would give his own community a place of prominence in the new social, political, and cultural atmosphere of Mughal India. While all indications are that Kīlhadev, Krishnadās Payahārī, and probably even Rāmānand himself positioned themselves primarily within an ascetic, yogic, and Sant devotional culture and were not much concerned with either brahmanical propriety or the composition of literature, Agradās seems to have spearheaded an effort to secure respectability and legitimacy for the Rāmānandīs among other sectarian “Hindu” communities by producing vernacular devotional literature that engaged Sanskritic/brahmanical traditions and interfaced with the developing Mughal-Rajput court culture. With the Rajputs’ rise to political power within the system of Mughal rule developed under Akbar, paralleled by the intertwined ascent of *rasik* aesthetics and Vaiṣṇava *bhakti*, religious communities found

An interesting instance of devotion embracing and incorporating tantric theology (within a *bhakti* paradigm) comes in Rūp Gosvāmī’s *Ujjvalanīlamanī* (Rādhāprakaraṇa, v. 6), which boldly states that the *śakti* of the tantric tradition is, in fact, Rādhā herself (*hlādinī yā mahāśakti-varīyāsī/ tatsāra-bhāvarūpayamiti tantrē pratiṣṭhitā*). Shrivatsa Goswami, “Govinda Darśana: Lotus in Stone,” in *Govindadeva: A Dialogue in Stone*, ed. Margaret H. Case (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 1996), 275.

themselves in a new patronage milieu and Agradās took the lead in adapting and representing his own community in light of these developments, all the while promoting the power of *bhakti* and praising the great *bhaktas*.

Agradās's disciple Nābhādās, in accord with Agra's directives, continued this project. In fact, while Agra may have inaugurated a multipurpose Rāmānandī *bhakti* literary endeavor, there is no doubt that history remembers Nābhā's contribution to have exceeded that of his guru. According to Priyādās's *Bhaktirasabodhinī* (1712), one day Agradās and Kīlhadev came across a blind infant who had been abandoned in the forest; this child was none other than Nābhādās. Agra and Kīlha restored his sight and brought him back to Galta, where Agradās initiated him into the Rāmānandī order.⁵³³ At the beginning of his *Bhaktamāl*, Nābhā explains that it was Agra who ordered him to compose his famous work in praise of the devotees of God. In the fourth *dohā*, he states, "Guru Agradev gave the order: 'Sing the glory of the *bhaktas*. There is no other way to cross the ocean of existence.'"⁵³⁴ Towards the end of the *Bhaktamāl*, Nābhā reiterates the key role of his guru in the composition of the text, stating, "Agra says, he who narrates the virtues of the followers [of God] gains the power of Sītā's Lord (Rām)."⁵³⁵ We have already seen that Agra composed several Brajbhāṣā works creatively retelling stories (all found in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*) about exemplary *bhaktas*—namely, his *Nām-Pratāp*, *Prahlād-caritra*, and *Dhruv-carit*—in order to praise the power of Vaiṣṇava devotion (and the Name).

⁵³³ The caste of Nābhādās (who was also called Nārāyandās) is not entirely certain, but all the available evidence suggests that he was of low status, probably of the Ḍom caste of untouchable bards. His initiation into the order would thus have been emblematic of the early Rāmānandīs' liberal social views and heterodox caste practices. On the question of Nābhā's caste, see Pinch, "History, Devotion and the Search for Nabhadās of Galta," 384-388; and James P. Hare, "Garland of Devotees: Nābhādās' *Bhaktamāl* and Modern Hinduism," Ph.D. thesis (Columbia University, 2011), 32-33.

⁵³⁴ *Dohā* 4. *śrī guru agradev ājñā daī bhaktan kau jasu gāy/ bhavsāgar ke taran kau nāhin ān upāy//4*

⁵³⁵ *Chappay* 180:5. *agar anug gun baranate sītāpati tihi hoī bas/*

Nābhā's verses about his guru give further evidence of Agradās's *bhakti* philosophy, suggesting that the *Bhaktamāl* was a work, in many respects, directly inspired by and dedicated to Agra's conviction that divine favor, even liberation, can be attained by singing the praises of the great *bhaktas*, cherishing their memory, and following their model.

We will discuss Nābhādās's key contribution in more depth below, but let us first note that, in addition to Nābhā, Agradās's grand-disciple Anantadās (a disciple of Agra's disciple Vinod) also continued his literary project of praising the great *bhaktas* and popularizing the power of their devotion through works of Brajbhāṣā literature. While technically he was Agradās's "grand-disciple," Anantadās was a contemporary of Nābhā and thus was likely not any more distant from Agra than was Nābhā. Anantadās composed a number of *parcāīs*—separate hagiographical works in praise of individual *bhaktas*, namely Nāmdev, Pīpā, Kabīr, Raidās, Trilochan, Sen, Dhanā and Aṅgad—that constitute, along with the Nābhā's *Bhaktamāl*, some of our earliest and most significant sources for understanding *bhakti* in early modern north India. Nābhādās is explicit that Agradās's guidance and *bhakti* outlook fundamentally informed his *Bhaktamāl*, and Agra's leadership and vision, in some measure, were likely also behind the *bhakti* hagiographical works of Anantadās.⁵³⁶

* * *

Hagiographical texts serve as valuable tools for the historian seeking insights into how

⁵³⁶ What has always fascinated and perplexed me is the fact that Anantadās, despite the importance of his *parcāīs* in *bhakti* scholarship, does not seem to be remembered by the Rāmānandī tradition in any way today. Nābhā's *samādhi* is at Galta and, even more than there, he is a focal point of worship and remembrance at Raivāsā, but in neither place is there any living memory of Anantadās. Anantadās definitely saw himself as a Rāmānandī, a member of one the prestigious *catur-sampradāy*. In *Pīpā-parcāī* 35:25-28, he approvingly references the four-*sampradāy* formulation (seen in Nābhā's *Bhaktamāl*) and traces his genealogy from Rāmānand to Anantānand to Krishnadās Payahārī to Agradās to his guru Vinod. Nevertheless, his *parcāīs* seem to have been influential and remembered only among the *nirguṇ*-oriented Rajasthani communities of the Nirañjanīs and Dādū Panth, in whose manuscript collections his *parcāīs* are most often found (perhaps because they focus on *nirguṇ*-oriented devotee-saints).

communities of the past imagined themselves and defined their identity in relation to others.

In this regard, Nābhādās's *Bhaktamāl* has received special attention from scholars for the catholic Vaiṣṇava devotional community it imagined into being in early modern north India.⁵³⁷

A closer examination of this important text can teach us much about Agradās and Nābhādās's influential *bhakti* vision.

There are several south Indian hagiographical collections that might be considered precedents to Nābhādās's *Bhaktamāl*, but there seems to be no north Indian precedent for such a work.⁵³⁸ Nābhā would almost certainly not have consulted any of the southern hagiographies (which were in Tamil, Telegu, or Sanskrit); the *bhakti* community he envisioned was a distinctly north Indian one.⁵³⁹ If the *Bhaktamāl*'s vision of *bhakti* community had any immediate model, it would seem to be in the work of Harirām Vyās, who flourished in Vrindavan, circa

⁵³⁷ In a classic essay, Richard Burghart suggested that the *Bhaktamāl*'s liberal inclusion of servant castes, untouchables and women (more than 75% of the population of the Ganges basin) "reveals the broadening of criteria for recruitment into a Vaishnavite sect thereby enabling the sect to compete more effectively for devotees and disciples." Richard Burghart, "The Founding of the Ramanandi Sect," *Ethnohistory* 25/2 (1978): 133, 126. Expanding on Burghart's work, William Pinch has argued that the *Bhaktamāl* reimagined the core institution of orthodox sectarian Vaiṣṇavism, the *sampradāy*, in order to make room for the popular, heterodox group of Sants thriving outside the order; it reconstituted the notion of *sampradāy* "so that it could accommodate not simply sādhus but all followers as believers and members of the religious community." Agradās's disciple thus "crafted a language of and conceptual frame for supra-sectarian religious organization that could accommodate both monastic and lay populations." William Pinch, "History, Devotion and the Search for Nabhadās of Galta," 379, 399, 369.

⁵³⁸ One south Indian precedent to Nābhādās's hagiography is the mid-twelfth century *Periya Purāṇam* (or *Tiruttonṭar Purāṇam*), Cēkkiḷār's accounts of the sixty-three canonical *nāyanmārs*, poet-saints of the Tamil Śaiva tradition. Another is the *Basava Purāṇa*, Somanātha Pāṅkuriki's account of the life of Basava and (approximately one hundred) other key members of the Vīraśaiva tradition in Karnataka. Others include the twelfth-century Sanskrit *Divyasūricaritam*, about the twelve Tamil Vaiṣṇava Ālvārs, and the fourteenth-century Tamil *Guruparamparāprabhāvam*. As James Hare points out, Nābhā's *Bhaktamāl* "is not the first Hindu text to celebrate the lives of devotees in order to assemble a canonical community. It differs from its earlier, southern predecessors, though, in that its community is far more expansive in its boundaries than the community imagined by these earlier collective hagiographers." Hare, "Garland of Devotees," 6.

⁵³⁹ Nābhādās (much like Harirām Vyās) either did not know or was quite unconcerned with the *bhaktas* of south India, who get little to no mention in his text. The *bhakti* community imagined in the *Bhaktamāl* is generally restricted to north India, including devotee-saints ranging from Gujarat in the west, to Bengal in the east, to Maharashtra in the south, but focused most on those of Rajasthan and the Gangetic plain.

1535-1570 CE.⁵⁴⁰ Vyās did not write a hagiographical collection, but he produced a number of non-sectarian hagiographical poems praising an array of north Indian devotees whom he clearly imagined to be members of a common *bhakti* community. Interestingly, Vyās repeatedly lists together and praises as a group six early Sants—Nāmdev, Kabīr, Raidās, Sen, Dhanā, and Pīpā—five of whom Nābhādās and Anantadās boldly claimed as disciples of Rāmānand and thus members of their own *sampradāy*.⁵⁴¹ These Sants were from different regions and different castes—though most of them were from very low (poor, disadvantaged) social locations—but they were united in their exemplary devotion to God and, according to Nābhā and Ananta, in their discipleship to Rāmānand (all except Nāmdev, that is).⁵⁴² Whether or not this assertion was justified, in publicly laying claim to these highly popular Sants, the Rāmānandīs were raising themselves up as the preeminent representative of a *bhakti* that transcended the boundaries of geography and social/caste location. At the same time that Nābhā claimed these heterodox, low-caste *bhaktas*, he also explicitly linked his community to one of the loftiest symbols of Vaiṣṇava orthodoxy, the south Indian brahmin *ācārya* Rāmānuja and his Śrī *sampradāy*.⁵⁴³ Faced with the challenge of appealing to both low-caste rural

⁵⁴⁰ Heidi Pauwels convincingly establishes these dates in her excellent book on Harirām Vyās and early modern north Indian *bhakti*. Heidi Pauwels, *In Praise of Holy Men: Hagiographic Poems by and about Harirām Vyās* (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 2002), 264-268.

⁵⁴¹ As Pauwels notes, this was not an arbitrary grouping, these poets saw themselves as linked, a fact seen in early poems attributed to them. In a poem in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, Dhanā mentions Nāmdev, Kabīr, Raidās, and Sen, while an early poem by Pīpā mentions Nāmdev, Kabīr, and Raidās. Pauwels, *In Praise of Holy Men*, 162.

⁵⁴² Vyās often grouped them together based on their low caste, writing in one poem: “A barber (Sen), a farmer (Dhanā), a leather worker (Raidās), a weaver (Kabīr), a cotton carder (Nāmdev) ... That’s whom God cherished.” Pauwels, *In Praise of Holy Men*, 101 (*pad* 41b). Nāmdev simply lived too much earlier than the other devotees to have possibly been considered a disciple of Rāmānand.

⁵⁴³ The way in which claimed links to south Indian Vaiṣṇavism could provide burgeoning north Indian *bhakti* communities with prestige and authority when, in substance, north Indian *bhakti* seems to have had very little to do with the south, is a topic worthy of further exploration. For some excellent insights on this subject, see Chapter Three, “The Four Sampradāys and the Commonwealth of Love,” in John S. Hawley’s forthcoming book, *India’s Real Religion: The Idea of the Bhakti Movement* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, [2013]).

communities and the political and intellectual elite, in this Nābhā once again followed his guru Agradās's lead, for as we have seen, Agra sought to maintain and assert his community's Sant values while also providing the Rāmānandīs with orthodox brahminical respectability and marketing them for patronage in the new Mughal-Rajput cultural and political sphere.

While the *Bhaktamāl* in part aims to articulate the Rāmānandīs' position as first among equals in the early modern *bhakti* universe, only a handful of the approximately eight hundred *bhaktas* it praises are marked as part of the Rāmānandī *sampradāy*; the text's vision of *bhakti* community is quite broad and thoroughly non-sectarian. Indeed, James Hare writes that the *Bhaktamāl* is "radically inclusive" in its selection of exemplary devotees, praising women, servant castes, "untouchables," and *bhaktas* of nearly every sectarian orientation in addition to brahmins, kings, and "Rāmānandīs."⁵⁴⁴ Hare emphasizes that the text envisions a community that is "striking" in "its breath and inclusiveness" and is not restricted by sectarian boundaries; "rather, it is defined by *bhakti*."⁵⁴⁵ A page later, he reiterates that "Nābhādās imagines *bhakti* as a wildly inclusive community."⁵⁴⁶ In the midst of all this wild, radical inclusion, it is that much more "striking," and that much more meaningful, that certain popular religious figures (and thus their communities) are entirely left out of Agra and Nābhā's vision of *bhakti* community. This was a broad, catholic Vaiṣṇava community they imagined, but it did *not* include everyone; it did not even include all of north India's major *bhaktas*. Crucially, Nānak, Dādū Dayāl, and Gorakhnāth are nowhere to be found in the *Bhaktamāl*, nor are any of the members of their respective communities. What do we make of this? Hare is

⁵⁴⁴ James Hare, "Contested Communities and the Re-Imagination of Nābhādās' *Bhaktamāl*," in *Time, History and the Religious Imagination in South Asia*, ed. Anne Murphy (New York: Routledge, 2011), 153.

⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁵⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 155.

correct that the community envisioned by Agra and Nābhā was defined by *bhakti*, but exactly what kind of *bhakti* are we talking about? In taking a closer look at the *Bhaktamāl*'s key *exclusions* we will gain a much better understanding of the *bhakti* identity Agradās and Nābhādās sought to cultivate.

A key factor behind the *Bhaktamāl*'s exclusion of the Nāths, Sikhs, and Dādū Panth must have had to do with competition, self-definition, and social status. In many respects—in their devotion to the *nirguṇ* Rām (even if they encouraged devotion to *saguṇ* forms of Vishnu as well), the importance they attributed to chanting the Name, and their liberal social values and open acceptance of low castes—the Rāmānandīs had more in common with the Nāths, Sikhs, and Dādūpanthīs than they did with the three communities of Caitanya, Vallabha, and Nimbārka. These three *sampradāys* were rather distinct from the Rāmānandīs, yet quite similar to each other, in that they each focused rather exclusively on worship of Krishna, had clear brahmanical roots, and generally held a greater concern with caste practices and orthodox social/religious propriety. In claiming themselves as one (arguably the most prestigious one) of the *cār sampradāy*, Agradās and Nābhādās must have sought to give their socially inclusive community, which consisted of many members from the poorest echelons of Indian society, an enhanced social status that would allow them to compete more effectively for both patronage and followers. If this was the case, it would only make sense that they would also have wished as much as possible to (a) distinguish themselves from their closest competitors in recruiting followers from the lower rungs of society, and (b) distance themselves from any association with those communities whose orthodox “Hindu” credentials and/or brahmanical deportment were in question. In both cases, the Rāmānandīs probably would have wanted to separate themselves most from Nāth *yogīs* and the followers of Nānak and Dādū, and excluding them

from the *Bhaktamāl* was likely an effort in that direction. Through Nābhādās, the Rāmānandīs thus made a number of brilliant strategic moves as they laid claim to the most popular heterodox (*nirguṇ*) Sants (as disciples of Rāmānand), simultaneously associated themselves with the burgeoning orthodox (*saguṇ*) Krishnaite communities of Braj, who seemed increasingly to be the favorite beneficiaries of Mughal and Rajput patronage, and at the same time distanced themselves from key competitors of questionable social status by excluding them from their vision of *bhakti* community.

Even with these issues of competition and social status in mind, the exclusion of Gorakhnāth, Nānak, and Dādū still begs for further explanation. It was not all a matter of strategy, but also something more substantive that kept these figures out of the *bhakti* community imagined forth by Agradās and Nābhādās. Let us take a brief look at these three exclusions one by one.

Perhaps the least surprising of the figures excluded from the *Bhaktamāl*'s imagined devotional community is Gorakhnāth. We have already discussed, and will further explore in the coming chapters, how the Nāth *yogīs*' tantric conceptions of and approaches to the Divine were in sharp conflict with the perspectives of most early modern *bhaktas*. With the significant exception of the Dādūpanthī *Sarvāṅgīs* (of Rajjab and Gopāldās) and the Dādūpanthī *Bhaktamāl* of Rāghavdās, none of the early *bhakti* collections include either poetry or hagiographical descriptions of Gorakhnāth or any other Nāth *yogīs*. Even though Gorakhnāth was a *major* figure on the religious scene of the day and despite the fact that the early Rāmānandī community had a distinctly yogic-ascetic spirit, Gorakhnāth's tantric persona (among other traits) placed him and his followers well outside the *bhakti* community that Agra and Nābhā envisioned.

The exclusion of Nānak, the founder of the Sikh community in the Panjab, seems far more striking, for there is no doubt that Nānak was a *bhakta*. At present, it is not entirely certain whether the renown of Nānak's teachings or knowledge of the political and anthologizing activities of his Sikh community in Panjab would have reached Rajasthan (Galta) by the start of the seventeenth century. Nevertheless, considering the distance between them (less than four hundred miles), general patterns of circulation in north India (the very same ones that had brought knowledge and compositions of Rāmānand, Kabīr, Raidās, and other *bhaktas* to the burgeoning Sikh community by then), the likelihood that a Rāmānandī community—Piṇḍorī Dhām—had been established in the Panjab by end of the sixteenth century, and the fact that Nānak had passed away roughly half a century before the composition of the *Bhaktamāl*, it seems extremely unlikely that Agradās and Nābhādās would not have known about him and his teachings. Like the Rāmānandīs, Nānak and the Sikhs propagated a *bhakti* message in distinct opposition to the attitudes and practices of the Nāth *yogīs*. In the last three decades of the sixteenth century, Sikhs developed some of the first anthologies of *bhakti* poetry and amid the devotional songs of their own gurus, they included compositions by Kabīr, Dhanā, Trilochan, Raidās, and Sen, whom the Rāmānandīs had claimed as their own. Considering all of this, it is puzzling that Nānak would have been left out of the *Bhaktamāl*'s broad collection of exemplary devotees.

Probably the most interesting of all the *Bhaktamāl*'s exclusions is that of Dādū. Nābhādās certainly knew about Dādū, for he was a contemporary of Agradās and a fellow Rajasthani who achieved considerable renown during his life and resided in Amer, near the court of the Kacchvāhās, from roughly 1579 to 1593 CE. Dādū wrote *nirguṇ* devotional songs and preached about the power of *bhakti*; it seems that in many ways his message and lifestyle

were inspired by Kabīr.⁵⁴⁷ As we have seen, a member of Dādū's community—Rajjab, in his *Sarvāṅgī* (c. 1600)—included Agradās's compositions in an anthology of *bhakti* poems composed at about the same time as the *Bhaktamāl*, while later Dādūpanthīs praised Payahārī, Kīlhadev, Agradās, and Nābhādās in their hagiographical collections. All this would seem to indicate that Dādū and his immediate followers were a part of the same general *bhakti* community as the Rāmānandīs; however, Agra and Nābhā did not seem to think so, as Dādū is nowhere to be found in the verses of the *Bhaktamāl*. As we will see, it is clear that the teachings and lifestyle of Dādū were not in tune with the *bhakti* vision of Agradās and Nābhādās on a couple of significant fronts. This may partly have to do with the fact that Dādū was quite friendly with the Nāth *yogīs* and seems to have closely resembled them in aspects of his yogic practice and asceticism. Indeed, there is a “profuse occurrence of Nāth-Yogic symbols”⁵⁴⁸ in Dādū's *sākhīs*, and his community clearly maintained the link he had established with the Nāths, for the Dādūpanthī Rāghavdās's *Bhaktamāl* includes passages praising a line of Śaiva *yogīs* and Nāth *siddhas* going all the way back to Matsyendranāth.⁵⁴⁹

While Dādū's relationship with the Nāth *yogīs* must have been a source of discomfort for the Rāmānandīs, it does not explain the absence of Nānak and the Sikhs in the *Bhaktamāl*. It

⁵⁴⁷ Dādū frequently references Nāmdev and Kabīr by name in his poetry. Jan Gopāl, in his biography of Dādū, the *Janmā Līlā* (c. 1620), states, “He continually sang Kabīr's poems and verses and became his equal in word and deed” (2:4a). Winand M. Callewaert, *The Hindī Biography of Dādū Dayāl* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988), 37.

⁵⁴⁸ Monika Thiel-Horstmann, *Crossing the Ocean of Existence: Braj Bhāṣā Religious Poetry from Rajasthan* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1983), 3.

⁵⁴⁹ If any vision of *bhakti* community deserves to be called “radically” and “wildly” inclusive, it is not that of Nābhādās, but that of Rāghavdās whose anthology of *bhaktas*, composed in 1660 CE, includes virtually everyone in Nābhā's work while also devoting hagiographical passages to Nāths, Śaiva *saṃnyāsīs*, Nirañjanīs, Nānak and his successors, and, of course, Dādū and his followers. Rāghavdās relied heavily on Nābhādās's text and worked with its rubric of the “four *saṃpradāys*,” but he also formulated a new, parallel quartet, the “four *panths*” of Nānak, Dādū, Kabīr, and Haridās (Nirañjanī), which he explicitly identified, and contrasted with the four *saṃpradāys*, as a foursome united by *nirguṇ bhakti*.

would be more convincing if we could find a common denominator between Gorakhnāth, Nānak, and Dādū, something all shared that would have made their religiosity unpalatable to the likes of Agradās and Nābhādās. Two related facts come to mind. First, the Nāths, Sikhs, and Dādū Panth are all known to have had regular, friendly relations with Sufis and/or deliberately blurred the lines between Islam and “Hinduism” in their practices and philosophies. Bolstering the significance of this point is the fact that Nābhādās’s *Bhaktamāl* does not include any Sufis, whereas Sikh and Dādūpanthī anthologies included the poems of Sufi devotees. If Muslims were beyond the pale of the *bhakti* community that Agra and Nābhā envisioned, this was likely because they shared a fundamental outlook with Nānak and Dādū: a fiercely and strictly *nirguṇ* sensibility and approach to the Divine.⁵⁵⁰

That an exclusively *nirguṇ* perspective would have been problematic for the Rāmānandīs is suggested in a revealing verse from the *Bhaktamāl* about the Kacchvāhā king Pṛthvīrāj (who had become the disciple of Krishnadās Payahārī after Payahārī defeated the Nāth yogī Tārānāth). Nābhādās wrote that, “Thanks to the teaching of Śrī Krishnadās [Payahārī], he [Pṛthvīrāj] became acquainted with the Supreme Truth. By the description of it as *nirguṇ* and *saguṇ* [Payahārī] destroyed the darkness of unknowing.”⁵⁵¹ The fact that Nābhā praises Payahārī for destroying ignorance by means of describing the ultimate Truth as both *nirguṇ* (without qualities) and *saguṇ* (with qualities) is significant. Indeed, if Pṛthvīrāj’s guru prior to Payahārī was the Nāth yogī Tārānāth, Nābhā seems to have implied that a purely *nirguṇ*

⁵⁵⁰ One of Islam’s most foundational and passionately held principles is that God is One, absolutely indivisible without form or qualities, thus it seems reasonable to assume that (whether via their family backgrounds or interactions with Sufis) the influence of Islam had a significant role to play in the strict *nirguṇ* perspectives of Dādū and Nānak. We should also note here that Dādū’s followers (Rajjab, Rāghav, etc.) did not necessarily share all of his theological views and were not all as exclusively *nirguṇ* as was he.

⁵⁵¹ Chappay 116. Translated in Horstmann, “The Rāmānandīs of Galtā,” 153-154.

conception of the Supreme—that generally espoused by the Nāths, as well as Nānak and Dādū—was the “darkness of unknowing” which Payahārī’s teaching destroyed.⁵⁵²

Like Payahārī, Agradās and Nābhādās fully accepted and respected the *nirguṇ* Divine, but they also reveled in the sweet essence (*rasa*) of a love experienced in and through praising, reading, hearing, and imagining the deeds and qualities of a *saguṇ* God. Earlier we saw that in one of his poems, Agradās stresses that there is ultimately no difference, no separation, between the *nirguṇ brahman* and the *saguṇ* forms of Vishnu; however, it seems that he could not abide a religious outlook that would not allow for the incomparable taste of the Divine in form.⁵⁵³ In fact, a fascinating poem by Agradās explicitly critiques Dādū for precisely this reason.⁵⁵⁴ The following translation is based on the text found in the oldest manuscript of Agradās’s *Kuṇḍaliyā* that I have been able to locate, dated 1635 CE.⁵⁵⁵

apnī mā ḍāyan kahai aisau kaun kapūt /
aisau kaun kapūt kahai ḍāin mahatārī /
daḍū pakarī ṭek bheṣ bin deh bigārī /
kathanī kathanī atibhalī man diyau na cālan /
ek laun ke svād bin bigare sab sālan /

⁵⁵² G.N. Bahura’s translation of four *pad*s attributed to Prṥhvīrāj during “the time of his adherence to the Nātha-pantha” supports this view, as they articulate a thoroughly *nirguṇ* devotional vision with allusions to Nāth *kuṇḍalinī* yoga. See Gopal Narayan Bahura, *Literary Heritage of the Rulers of Amber and Jaipur* (Jaipur: Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum, 1976), 25-27.

⁵⁵³ We might say that, as long as it made room for *saguṇ* conceptions as well, the *nirguṇ* understanding of the Divine was not an obstacle in theory or practice for devotees of Rām and Krishna, while, to the contrary, for many Sufis, Sikhs, Dādūpanthīs, and Nāths who worshipped God as absolutely unqualified, *saguṇ* conceptions of the Divine constituted an error, if not an affront.

⁵⁵⁴ It is important to keep in mind that the early Dādūpanthī community may not have been particularly organizationally unified or held an entirely consistent theological position, and that Agradās was critiquing and satirizing Dādū, not his followers. Indeed, some of his early followers, as their works would suggest, were considerably more open to *saguṇ* devotional options than Dādū was, even if they did maintain a primarily *nirguṇ* orientation. As Monika Horstmann has explained, it was not Dādū, but his first generation disciples who incorporated their community into the system of *sagūn* Vaiṣṇavism. Thiel-Horstmann, *Crossing the Ocean of Existence*, 3.

⁵⁵⁵ *Kuṇḍaliyā*, Jaipur City Palace, Ms 1489 (15), v.s. 1692 (1635 CE). The translated poem is #65 in a manuscript of the *Kuṇḍaliyā* consisting of 66 poems. Later manuscripts include as many as 76 poems. I am very grateful for the expert insights of Tyler Williams and Dalpat Rajpurohit in making sense of this challenging poem.

*agar svām ke svāṅg bin dekhat hī ke bhūt /
apnī mā dāyan kahai aisā kaun kapūt//65*

What kind of a bad son would call his own mother a witch?⁵⁵⁶
Dādū held firm in his intentions, but without proper dress, he ruined his body.⁵⁵⁷
For all his great sayings, he would not let his heart be moved.⁵⁵⁸
Without the taste of a bit of salt, all the vegetables are spoiled.⁵⁵⁹
Agradās says, without (not seeing) the garb (svāṅg) of the Lord (svāmī), he (one) sees
only an evil spirit.⁵⁶⁰
What kind of a bad son would call his own mother a witch?

⁵⁵⁶ I have not translated the second line of the poem, which is an exact repetition of the first line. Ordinarily, a *kuṇḍaliyā* stanza consists of a *dohā* couplet (13+11 *mātrās*) followed by a *rolā* (11+13 *mātrās*) quatrain, with the first *pāda* of the *rolā* repeating the last *pāda* of the *dohā* (and the last line of the poem returning to the phrase with which it started). It appears that Agradās has altered that standard metric structure here, imitating the *kuṇḍaliyā*'s repetitive aspects, but seemingly in a poem consisting of seven lines (not six), with the second and third lines in *rolā* and all others in the meter of a *dohā*.

⁵⁵⁷ *Tek* could also be translated as either “shelter” or “stubbornness,” substantially altering this line’s meaning. Other possible renderings are “Dādū held to his stubborn ways and without proper dress he corrupted his body,” or “Dādū took the shelter [of Rām], but without proper dress he ruined his body.”

⁵⁵⁸ I have chosen to translate this line in a manner that makes its meaning in tune with an alternate version of the line given in two other manuscript sources: *kahanī karanī ek ras man hiyau na cālan* - “In his words and deeds, not a single *rasa* moved in his heart and mind.” The line in the manuscript I have relied upon could also be translated as “All of his words were excellent and he would not let his mind be distracted (moved),” i.e., he was a master at both meditation and composing poetry. In any case, the overall meaning is not much changed, for the next line clearly implies that whatever his virtues, Dādū’s practice was missing something essential; it lacked the all important taste or *rasa* of the Divine. The other two versions of this poem I consulted come from the *Agradās Granthāvalī* edited by Balbhadrā Tivārī (Ilāhābād: Saryendra Prakāśan, 1985) which relies on a manuscript from the Pune Vidyāpīṭh dated v.s. 1911 (1854 CE) and the *Agra-Granthāvalī* printed in 1994 as a small pamphlet and distributed by Raivāsā Dhām itself (the manuscript source(s) for this text is not identified).

⁵⁵⁹ This line might also be translated: “Without any flavor (taste)—not even a bit of salt—all of the sauce is ruined (wasted).” In either case, here Agradās is clearly advocating an aesthetically based experience of the Divine. It was not uncommon for poets to talk about the sweet essence (*rasa*) of God in terms of flavors, food, and eating. As Tyler Williams has suggested to me, this line may be “a reference to the ontology prevalent at that time: God is the salt in the sauce, or the water – he permeates it, and gives it its flavor (i.e., joy), although you can not see Him or separate Him from this sauce (the phenomenal world). The one who recognizes God/salt in the sauce has bliss; the one who perceives no salt misses out on God and the joy of existence.” Tyler Williams, personal email communication, July 6, 2012.

⁵⁶⁰ This is perhaps the most difficult and, also, most crucial line of the poem. It is not clear whom *svām* (*svāmī*) refers to in the verse. Agradās sometimes used “Agra Svāmī” as his *chāp* though the word here seems more likely to refer to God, or to mean “religious leader.” The word *svāṅg* in this line is equally troublesome and can be variously translated as “garb,” “disguise/guise,” “pretence,” “sham/farce,” “a show/drama,” “a role in a play,” or “pretender.” Here it is probably meant to refer back in some way to the word *bheṣ* (“dress”) in the third line, thus I have rendered it as “garb.” Alternate translations might be: “Agra says, without the garb of a *svāmī* (religious leader), he (Dādū) just looks like a ghoul.” It seems most likely that the use of *bhūt* is meant to parallel the use of *dāyan*; i.e., that Dādū sees the “garb” of Rām as an evil spirit and thus he calls his own mother (the feminine, immanent dimension of the Divine) a witch.

This is a difficult poem that resists easy interpretation and could be translated in a multitude of ways. Nevertheless, Agradās's core intent is clear. In these verses, he cleverly critiques Dādū on two different levels at once. On the one hand, Agra criticizes Dādū's inappropriate dress. From what we can tell, Dādū's appearance was neither clearly Hindu nor clearly Muslim; he may even have resembled the ascetic Nāth *yogīs*, who typically roamed about with only a few ragged garments on their bodies. Supporting this view is Jan Gopāl's account of the life of Dādū, the *Janma Līlā* (c. 1620), which tells of an incident when "the question of dress arose and Svāmījī was not pleased," [and said] "How can I please the Muslims and what should I wear for the Hindus?" (3:23).⁵⁶¹ In another verse, Jan Gopāl states that Dādū "radiated the contemplative mind of Sukhdev and had the ascetic appearance of Gorakhnāth" (7:2a).⁵⁶² Agradās and his disciple Nābhādās envisioned an expansive Vaiṣṇava community, but their generous understanding of what it meant to be "Vaiṣṇava" did not extend far enough to include a figure whose appearance and lifestyle blurred the boundaries between ascetic tantric *yogī*, Hindu, and Muslim. As the poem suggests, for Agradās, Dādū's inappropriate dress/appearance was not only problematic (and harmful to the body) in itself, but was also indicative of far larger misunderstandings.

The second level of critique in Agra's poem is the more fundamental one: Dādū does not understand or appreciate the feminine, immanent dimension of the Divine (*māyā*, *śakti*) and sees in the manifest world only evil and illusion, thus calling his own mother a witch. Just as he does not wear appropriate dress (*bheṣ*), Dādū also does not understand the importance of

⁵⁶¹ Callewaert, *The Hindī Biography of Dādū Dayāl*, 41. *Janma Līlā* 2:5a states that Dādū "ignored all Muslim customs and abandoned Hindu practices." *turkī rāh ṣodī sab gaḍī arū hīnduni kī karnī chāḍī/*

⁵⁶² Callewaert, *The Hindī Biography of Dādū Dayāl*, 52. *dhyān manaū sukhdev sarīra jog jugati gorakh thai nīrā/*

the garb (*svāṅg*) of the Lord (*svāmī*).⁵⁶³ Agradās's use of the word *svāṅg* is significant, for in addition to referring to dress or garb, it also refers to a drama (play) or dramatic role, as in the drama or *līlā* of the Lord and the dramatic role, or garb, that God takes on when he descends in form into the world. It is this immanent, feminine, *saguṇ* aspect of the Divine that Dādū misperceives. It may be a show, a guise, in some respects (as the other meanings of *svāṅg* and *māyā* would suggest) but it is a garb essential to divine "self-expression" and to the textured experience of human beings' relationship with God. However excellent Dādū's words, however firm and unwavering his *tapas* and meditation, in not seeing this vital dimension of the Divine, Dādū's heart is unmoved, and he lives a dull and wasted life without the sweet taste of God.

Agra's portrayal of Dādū is once again confirmed by Jan Gopāl, who states in the *Janma Līlā* that Dādū "rejected *svāṅg*, *bheṣ*, partiality, and sectarianism, knowing only the (*nirguṇ*) *brahman* as the complete truth. He did not perform ritual worship to any god or goddess, nor did he honor pilgrimage sites, fasts, or caste."⁵⁶⁴ According to Jan Gopāl, Dādū even once stated, "If you stay firm in the *nirguṇ* devotion, the Unknown will help you, and there will be no room for the corruption of a personal deity. Reflect and ponder on this" (15:18.13).⁵⁶⁵ For Agradās and Nābhādās, none of this would have been acceptable. To follow a path of strict, exclusive *nirguṇ* devotion or yogic-ascetic practices aimed at making the mind immovable—as did Dādū, Nānak, and Gorakhnāth—was, from Agra and Nābhā's perspective, to make oneself

⁵⁶³ Said differently, Dādū's inappropriate attention to dress mirrors his inappropriate understanding and perception of the "dress/garb" of the Divine, the feminine *māyā/śakti* that is his very own mother, but that he calls a witch. While Dādū clearly did worship the *nirguṇ* Rām, he did not acknowledge either the *saguṇ* Rām or, crucially, Rām's wife—in the *rasik* sense, his *śakti*—Sītā.

⁵⁶⁴ My translation. *Janma Līlā* 2.6: *svāṅg bheṣ paṣ panth na mānai pūranbrahm sati kari jānai / devī dev na pūjā pātī tirath brat na sevā jāti* // I have deliberately left *svāṅg* and *bheṣ* untranslated in order to highlight this verse's resonance with the specific words and criticisms in Agradās's poem.

⁵⁶⁵ Callewaert, *The Hindī Biography of Dādū Dayāl*, 82. *jo nirguṇ mat maiṃ rahasī bhāī tākī abagati karai sahāī/ iṣṭ bhiṣṭ kauṃ ṭhāhar nāhīṃ samajhi dekhau apaṇaiṃ man māhīṃ*//15:18.13

impervious to the sweetest, most delicious, *rasa*-filled aspects of God's grace and presence.

We can now understand why the *bhakti* community imagined by the *Bhaktamāl* did not include religious figures as important as Dādū, Nānak, and Gorakhnāth. Agradās and Nābhādās envisioned an expansive community defined by *bhakti*, but their understanding of *bhakti*, as catholic as it was, did have its limits. They celebrated the identity of the *bhakta* and imagined an expansive community based on a Vaiṣṇava (in the broadest sense) devotional understanding of, and attitude or approach to, the Divine. Their vision fully embraced the *nirguṇ*, but found its greatest joy in the aesthetic experience of sublime emotion—love—for God in form and with qualities.

As discussed in Chapter Two, throughout the medieval period *bhakti* generally was not an exclusive practice, but an element or aspect of a larger religious life, a devotion performed in combination with asceticism, yoga, and tantric ritual worship. Agradās and Nābhādās were key proponents of a new understanding of *bhakti*. Theirs was a vision of *bhakti* as the primary identity marker of a vast group of religious people; it was a vision of *bhakti* that gave no significant place to yoga, *jñāna* (knowledge), *tapas* (asceticism), and tantric religiosity. As Agradās said, in comparison to *rasik* devotion, “*jñāna*, *yoga*, and *tapas* are as dull and useless as a dried up stem of sugar cane” and, in comparison to singing the Name of God, “*yoga*, sacrifice, and *tapas* achieve nothing.”⁵⁶⁶

* * *

In her *Bhakti and the Bhakti Movement*, Krishna Sharma states that, prior to the influence of Orientalist scholarship, “Hindus had never taken a restricted view of *bhakti* as a definite religious cult involving a uniform set of ideas or beliefs,” adding that, “The Hindus never used

⁵⁶⁶ *Dhyān Mañjarī*, v. 72; *Nām Pratāp*, v. 69.

the term *bhakti* to denote any *mata* (school of thought), *siddhānta* (doctrine), or *sampradāya* (sect).⁵⁶⁷ While it is true that Hindus did not conceive *bhakti* as a restricted category of religiosity or a uniform set of ideas in the way that Western scholars later would, nevertheless, Hindus in early modern north India did come to understand *bhakti* as the basis of a particular community identity, as the common praiseworthy foundation linking together a great diversity of religious practitioners and distinguishing them from others. Agradās and his disciple Nābhādās were key players in this historical development, reinventing the *bhakta* as a distinct category of religious person/identity. While their views were not the final word, Agra and Nābhā represented and contributed to an expansive new vision of *bhakti* community, a catholic Vaiṣṇavism infused with both Sant and *rasik* values that would, in many respects, become the foundation of mainstream Hinduism in modern India.

In the next two chapters, we depart from our focus on the Rāmānandī devotional community in order to identify and explore some crucial larger trends in the religious landscape of early modern north Indian. If *bhakti* had long been closely intertwined with asceticism, tantra, and yoga, then in early modern north India these once tightly interwoven threads of religious practice began to unravel into increasingly distinct strands of religious identity. As we will see in a wide-ranging survey of *bhakti* poetry and hagiography, a number of *bhaktas* in early modern north India—the Rāmānandīs among them—were cultivating a new and Sufi-inflected⁵⁶⁸ *bhakti* identity defined in fundamental contradistinction to certain core components of tantric, yogic, and ascetic thought and practice.

⁵⁶⁷ Krishna Sharma, *Bhakti and the Bhakti Movement: A New Perspective: A Study in the History of Ideas* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1987), x; 6, n. 1.

⁵⁶⁸ While Nābhā's *Bhaktamāl* excludes Sufis and while the Rāmānandīs disagreed with the strict, exclusively *nirguṇ* viewpoint of Islam, nevertheless, we will see in the following two chapters that Sufi religious attitudes and

Chapter Five

Yogīs, Tantra, and Mantra in the Poetry of the *Bhakti* Saints

Gorakh awakened yoga and drove bhakti away from the people.
~Tulsīdās

Against the snake of passion, no mantra or magic avails.
~Raidās

A significant gap exists in the historiography of the north Indian “*bhakti* movement.” As we have discussed, scholarship to date has generally failed to consider the important place of tantra and yoga, broadly construed, in the rise of devotional religion in early modern north India. How did north Indian *bhakti* poets, hagiographers, and communities understand tantric religion and what role did their depictions of tantra and yoga have in the growth of *bhakti* from the sixteenth century onward? This chapter continues our exploration of the development of *bhakti* identity and community in early modern north India as a process that took place in clear interaction with—and often opposition to—the tantric-yogic asceticism and “magic” of groups such as the Nāth yogīs. If identity is typically formed in opposition to an “other,” there were multiple “others” against whom *bhaktas* defined themselves, yet arguably the most important foil for *bhakti* identity was one that has not received much scholarly attention: the two-fold tantric “Other” of the yogī and Śākta. Heidi Pauwels has already begun this project in an article entitled “Who Are the Enemies of the *Bhaktas*?”⁵⁶⁹ in which she examines derogatory references to Śāktas in the poetry of Kabīr, Tulsīdās, and Harirām Vyās. Pauwels demonstrates

perspectives fundamentally (if subtly) informed the *bhakti* vision and identity of not just the Rāmānandīs, but nearly all of the devotional communities of early modern north India.

⁵⁶⁹ Heidi Pauwels, “Who Are the Enemies of the *bhaktas*? Testimony about ‘śāktas’ and ‘Others’ from Kabīr, the Rāmānandīs, Tulsīdās, and Harirām Vyās,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 130.4 (2010): 509-39.

how the identity of *bhaktas* across the spectrum—whether devotees of Rām, Krishna, or the *nirguṇ* Divine—was formed in part by a consistent mocking and critique of the “other” of the Śākta, a category whose meaning was inconsistent but closely associated with blood-sacrifice, sexual ritual, goddess-worship, and/or immoral, unorthodox, and low-caste practices.

Holding certain links to the Śāktas, but quite a separate figure, the tantric *yogī*—whether in the guise of sorcerer-magician, ascetic, or healer—was perhaps an even more important “other” in the construction of *bhakti* identity. In order to demonstrate this important point, we will conduct an examination and analysis of references to *yogīs*, *yoga*, *tantra*, *mantra*, and Śāktas scattered throughout the poetry of north Indian *bhakti* saints and the literature of *bhakti* communities. Looking at both commonalities and differences in attitude toward yoga and tantra-mantra among the various streams of north India’s “*bhakti* movement,” we will discuss poet-saints who cover the spectrum in terms of sectarian affiliation, devotional orientation (*nirguṇ/saguṇ*), theological outlook, caste background, and geographical location. While our discussion will range from hagiographers like Anantadās and Krishnadās Kavirāj to poets like Nānak and Harirām Vyās, I focus especially on the *bhakti* poetry of Kabīr, Raidās, Sūrdās, Mīrābāī, and Tulsīdās. In addition, I examine the role of *yogīs* and *tantra-mantra* in Sufi *premākhyān* literature, thus beginning an investigation—continued in the next chapter—of Sufi precedents and parallels to *bhakti* attitudes and literary strategies.

As we have seen in the preceding chapters, it is in sources of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that we first observe the formation of a distinct *bhakti* identity opposed to certain yogic and tantric perspectives. Prior to this time, while tensions between different religious attitudes and approaches certainly existed, there does not seem to have been any fundamental dividing lines between the realms of *bhakti* and tantra, or *bhakti* and yoga. The

poetry we will examine below helps to demonstrate that, in north India, those lines began to be drawn especially in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, and that this trend continued into and even intensified in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

By looking at how *bhaktas* contrasted themselves with the two-fold tantric Other of the *yogī* and Śākta, we will get a better idea of exactly what *bhakti* meant in early modern north India and how it was perceived as different from other modes of religiosity. While *yogīs* and Śāktas are hardly one and the same,⁵⁷⁰ in this period, *bhakti* poets and communities who differed from each other in many ways came together in positioning themselves against both of these groups. In exploring the reasons for this phenomenon, I seek to improve our understanding of the development of *bhakti* identity during the early modern period and to articulate more precisely the dynamics involved in a broad change in the Hindu religious world that manifested itself especially during the Mughal period: the rise of Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* at both the elite and popular levels, a development that was often to the detriment of tantric Śaiva-Śākta religious forms.

~ *Kabīr and the Nāth Yogīs* ~

In our investigation of the place of *yogīs* and tantra in the *bhakti* poetry of early modern north India, who better to start with than Kabīr? Kabīr has often been associated with the Nāth *yogīs*, who, according to a number of scholars, appear to be the primary source of the

⁵⁷⁰ Put briefly and all too simplistically, critiques of *yogīs* tended to center on the pretensions of their ascetic lifestyle, the pointlessness of their physical practices, and the ignorance and delusion at the core of their quest for power(s) and immortality, while critiques of *śāktas* tended to focus more on the moral deprivation, sensual indulgence, and spiritual bankruptcy of their (supposed) blood sacrifice to the Goddess, meat-eating and related impurities, and tantric sexual rituals. Nāth *yogīs* have roots in the Kaula tradition of tantric Śāktism (and thus would seem to be a bridge between *yogīs* and Śāktas), but with the passage of time the followers of Gorakhnāth (with exceptions) seem to have taken on a more celibate and misogynistic stance that made previously external tantric rites (involving sex or sexual fluids) into internal practices and processes of the subtle yogic body.

heterodox attitude, paradoxical style, yogic imagery, and mystical language that we see in the poetry attributed to Kabīr. Writing in Hindi, P.D. Barthwal, in the 1930s, and Hazariprasad Dvivedi, in the 1940s, first noted how Kabīr's verses are filled with terminology and imagery borrowed from the Nāth *yogīs*. Dvivedi, in his most famous work, *Kabīr* (1942), described Kabīr's metaphysics as a direct outgrowth of Nāth philosophy, going so far as to argue that "Kabir was brought up in a community of weavers which was Nath-Panthi by tradition and had only recently converted to Islam"—an argument that has been thoroughly critiqued in subsequent scholarship—and adding that, "You just cannot understand the sayings of Kabir, if you do not possess knowledge of the Nath Panthi doctrines."⁵⁷¹ The Nāths' influence on Kabīr has been something of a trope in English-language scholarship as well. Following Dvivedi, Charlotte Vaudeville writes, Kabīr "appears so heavily indebted to the Nāth-panthī form of Yoga that [his] sayings can hardly be understood without reference to it."⁵⁷² She suggests further that Kabīr's great popularity derived in part from the prestige and power of the Nāth symbols and language that he used; that is, his verses resonated so much because "the mass of his listeners" had already "drunk deep" of the tantric yogic tradition "through the preaching of the ubiquitous Nāth-panthī Yogīs."⁵⁷³ Similarly, John S. Hawley speaks of "the fundamental debt Kabir owed to a community of yogis called Nāths, whose teaching crystallized an

⁵⁷¹ Hazariprasad Dvivedi, *Kabīr* (Delhi: Rajakamal Prakasan, 2000 [1942]), 22-24. Quoted and translated in: Purushottam Agrawal, "The Nath in Hindi Literature," in *Yogi Heroes and Poets: Histories and Legends of the Nāths*, eds. David Lorenzen and Adrian Munoz (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011), 15.

⁵⁷² Charlotte Vaudeville, *Kabīr* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), 120.

⁵⁷³ *Ibid.*, 121.

approach to the technology of bodily transformation that appears in his poetry time and time again.”⁵⁷⁴

If scholars have made clear the Nāth “presence” and influence in Kabīr’s poetic corpus, most have also rightly emphasized that Kabīr differed from, and criticized, the Nāth yogīs in important ways. Mariola Offredi argues that Kabīr responded to the perspective of Gorakhnāth and emulated the paradoxical style of poems attributed to him, but rejected the value that Gorakh and the Nāths gave to yogic practice.⁵⁷⁵ Similarly, Hawley writes, “Kabir seems to know the whole Nāth Yogī routine, the husbanding of *kuṇḍalinī* energies, and to be comfortable with it—at least verbally,” yet the haṭha yogic “form of discipline, at least as an end in itself, is not for him.”⁵⁷⁶ In Kabīr’s opinion, “Anything that depends on a technology of the senses ultimately doesn’t work. ... Real naturalness, real selfness (*sahaja subai*) eludes the disciplines of yoga. In the end, Kabir seems to battle the upside-down hydraulics of *kuṇḍalinī* yoga, however much he also loves to do this verbal plumbing. His point of orientation may often be this rarefied physiology, but ... [often] it yields to the language of Krishna and Rām.”⁵⁷⁷ For Gorakh and the Nāths, the body is a source of mortality and decay that must be mastered and purified, made immortal through yogic practices such as raising the *kuṇḍalinī*, breath control, retention of semen, consumption of herbs and alchemical potions, and various physical austerities and deprivations. As Lorenzen writes, “Kabir, as might be expected, has little use for any of this. For him, the central truth is that Ram dwells within the body. He is

⁵⁷⁴ John S. Hawley, *Three Bhakti Voices: Mirabai, Surdas, and Kabir in Their Time and Ours* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 273.

⁵⁷⁵ Mariola Offredi, “Kabīr and the Nāthpanth,” in *Images of Kabir*, ed. Monika Horstmann (New Delhi: Manohar, 2002), 133.

⁵⁷⁶ Hawley, *Three Bhakti Voices*, 274.

⁵⁷⁷ Hawley, *Three Bhakti Voices*, 304.

always with us. A person need only look within his body to find him. The body is not something to be controlled and transformed. The body, as it is, is the key to salvation” because “[it] is Ram’s vessel.”⁵⁷⁸

Vaudeville states that whatever influence the Nāths had on Kabīr, he “emphatically rejected their practices and mocked their vain pretension to have conquered death and to have obtained bodily immortality.”⁵⁷⁹ Indeed, poems attributed to Kabīr are especially critical of the Nāths’ claims to achieve immortality and liberation through tantric yoga. The following verses critiquing Gorakhnāth come from three different *sākhīs* attributed to Kabīr:

Flickering, struggling, swaying—no one is left out. Gorakh got stuck in Death City. So who's a yogi?⁵⁸⁰

Gorakh was yoga's connoisseur. They didn't cremate his body. Still his meat rotted and mixed with dust. For nothing he polished his body.⁵⁸¹

Gorakh couldn't keep his breath though he knew some yogic tricks. Power, profit, control—yes, but he couldn't go beyond.”⁵⁸²

In these compositions, the poet stresses the inevitability of death for all, the senselessness of *haṭha-yoga*’s bodily practices, and the inability of Nāth tantric methods to achieve anything other than worldly goals. In fact, we find these sorts of critiques of the Nāth *yogīs* in all three of the major manuscript traditions of poetry attributed to Kabīr—the corpus of the Dādūpanth, compiled in Rajasthan, that found in the Sikh *Ādi Granth*, compiled in Panjab, and that

⁵⁷⁸ David N. Lorenzen, “Religious Identity in Gorakhnath and Kabir,” in *Yogi Heroes and Poets: Histories and Legends of the Nāths*, eds. David Lorenzen and Adrian Munoz (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011), 43.

⁵⁷⁹ Vaudeville, *Kabīr*, 120.

⁵⁸⁰ Bījak, *sākhī* 42. Linda Hess and Shukdev Singh, trans., *The Bījak of Kabīr* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1983), 94.

⁵⁸¹ Bījak, *sākhī* 43. Ibid.

⁵⁸² Bījak, *śabda* 90. Ibid., 71–72.

represented by the Bījak, compiled in eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar—as well as in the Fatehpur Manuscript (1582 CE), a source (separate from these three manuscript traditions) that includes our oldest extant Kabīr poetry.

While the verses above critique specifically Gorakh, and thus the Nāths (i.e., proto-Nāths), more commonly the compositions of Kabīr and the other *bhakti* poets refer simply to *yogīs* or *jogīs*. The question thus arises: Are Nāths and *yogīs* one and the same? Before going any further, we must briefly revisit a perplexing question: In the *bhakti* poetry we will be dealing with, *who* is the *yogī*? As we have just seen, Gorakh is occasionally referenced (and criticized) in the *bhakti* poetry of early modern north India; however, one is hard-pressed to find any mention of a “Nāth” in this same *bhakti* literature.⁵⁸³ As we have learned, this is because it was not until approximately the eighteenth century that the use of the word “Nāth” came to refer to a particular assortment of ascetic lineages that, before that time, were most often known simply as *yogīs*. The confusion comes in the fact that while the forerunners of the Nāths were typically denoted by the name “*yogī*,” that term was also used to refer to a wide-range of other yoga-practicing ascetics (who had no links with Gorakh or the *siddhas*), including Daśanāmi *saṃnyāsīs* and sometimes even Rāmānandīs.⁵⁸⁴ In the *bhakti* poetry of our period, the identity of the *yogī*, then, is not always clear.

⁵⁸³ The word *nāth* simply means “Lord.” It was most commonly used as a suffix (*-nātha*) and is found on the end of the names of a wide variety of religious figures (both human and divine). Prior to the eighteenth century, when the word is found alone (including its mentions in the *Gorakhbāṇī*) it tends to designate God (“the Lord”) or is a term of respect (sometimes referring to a famous group of *siddhas* called “Nāths”), but never refers to either a community-identity or a specific type of *yogī* or ascetic (as it later came to do).

⁵⁸⁴ James Mallinson, “Nāth Sampradāya,” *Brill Encyclopedia of Hinduism, Volume III* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 3.

Nāths, who exemplified a number of traits that *bhaktas* were increasingly finding problematic, but were by no means the only ones exhibiting those traits. While not all *yogīs* and ascetics shared the Nāths' tantric roots and traditional interests in magic and worldly power, characteristics that most *bhaktas* found particularly unsavory, *yogīs* and ascetics of all stripes pursued a lifestyle and bodily regime that often came under fire from devotees as misguided and fruitless.⁵⁸⁹

~ *Fake Yogīs, Senseless Yoga* ~

Many of Kabīr's critiques of *yogīs* center on the uselessness and vanity of their physical practices, attire, and external markings. In fact, the "true *yogī*," Kabir says in one poem, is the one who has abandoned yoga's external trappings, powers and practices in favor of simple devotion to God. He is, Kabīr writes, that "rascally kind of *yogī*" with "no deeds, no creeds, no yogic powers, not even a horn or gourd, so how can he go begging? ... That *yogī* built a house brimful of Rām. He has no healing herbs; his root-of-life is Rām."⁵⁹⁰ In another poem, Kabīr says:

Go naked if you want, put on animal skins. What does it matter till you see the
inward Rām?
If the union yogis seek came from roaming around in the buff, every deer in the
forest would be saved.
If shaving your head spelled spiritual success, heaven would be filled with
sheep.

⁵⁸⁹ As much as possible, in this chapter I try to distinguish the tantric *yogī* from the (non-tantric) *yogī*. My point here is that, despite their significant differences (in goals, worldview, and the specifics of their practice), these two also had much in common (in terms of ascetic lifestyle and general mode of body-focused practice) thus *bhakti* poets—though most fundamentally opposed to the *tāntrikas*—often critiqued both (without clearly distinguishing one from the other).

⁵⁹⁰ Bījak śabda 74. Hess and Singh, *The Bījak of Kabīr*, 66. In the last line of this quotation, Kabīr contrasts the "true *yogī*" with the herb-carrying tantric healer. As we will discuss in depth in an upcoming section of this chapter, a number of *bhakti* poems invoke the figure of the tantric healer and snakebite curer in order to convey their messages about the power of *bhakti* and the inefficacy of yogic and tantric means.

And brother, if holding back your seed earned you a place in paradise, eunuchs
would be the first to arrive.
Kabir says: Listen brother, without the name of Rām, who has ever won the
spirit's prize?⁵⁹¹

Again and again, Kabīr drives home the point that *yogīs*' practices get them absolutely
nowhere, for without devotion to God one remains spiritually empty-handed. He says,
“Without Hari he's befuddled, without a guru he's a mess. Everywhere he goes he loses himself
in nets within nets. The yogi says, ‘Yoga's the top, don't talk of seconds.’ Tuft of hair, shaven
head, matted locks, vow of silence—who's gotten anywhere?”⁵⁹² In another poem, this one
from the *Ādi Granth*, Kabīr states, “Brother, even dressed up with your staff, earrings,
patchwork cloak, and arm rest, you have gone astray. Madman, give up yogic posture (*āsanu*)
and breath-[control] (*pavanu*). Madman, give up trickery and always worship Hari.”⁵⁹³ The
Kabīr Granthāvalī version of the same song reads: “You stay fixed on yogic postures and
breath-[control]. But, madman, it is mental impurity you should renounce. What's the use of
going about with horns and earrings? What's the use of smearing all your body with ashes?”⁵⁹⁴

Anyone familiar with the poetry of Kabīr knows that he mocks and disparages not only
yogīs, but just about everyone on the religious scene of his day. Hindus, Muslims, brahmins,
mullahs, pandits, sheiks, Śāktas, and *pīrs* all come in for criticism. Why should we give special
attention to the figure of the *yogī*? With this question in mind, it is well worth noting that in
Kabīr's poetic corpus, *yogīs* (or *jogīs*) “are mentioned by name more often than any other

⁵⁹¹ Granthāvalī pad 174. Hawley, *Three Bhakti Voices*, 275.

⁵⁹² Bījak śabda 38. Hess and Singh, *The Bījak of Kabīr*, 53-54.

⁵⁹³ *Millenium Kabīr Vāñī* 420. Lorenzen, “Religious Identity,” 33-34.

⁵⁹⁴ *Millenium Kabīr Vāñī* 420. Ibid., 34-35.

group.”⁵⁹⁵ Clearly, *yogīs* were an especially central “other” against which the *bhakti* perspective defined itself. And Kabīr was hardly the only *bhakti* poet to heap criticism upon the religiosity of *yogīs*, thereby bringing the *bhakti* perspective into relief. Harirām Vyās, a devotee of Krishna residing in sixteenth century Vrindavan, writes, “[What good are] yogis, *yatīs*, ascetics (*tapīs*) and *sannyāsīs*? There is no end to their pain.”⁵⁹⁶ The devotional poet Trilochan, a lesser-known saint remembered by tradition as a thirteenth century contemporary of Nāmdev, has this poem critiquing ascetics and *tāntrikas* attributed to him in the *Ādi Granth*:

Without cleansing your soul from filth, you donned the garb of an Udāsī,
 But within the lotus of your heart, you’ve not recognized Brahmin: how then
 have you become a Sannyāsī?
 O Jay Chand, you are wandering in error: Never did you find your Paramānand!
 Eating in each and every house, you’ve fattened your body, wearing a patched
 garment and an ascetic ear-ring for gain!
 In vain you rub on yourself ashes of the cremation-ground: without the Guru,
 you never found the Essence.
 What’s the use of your litanies and penance (*jap tap*)? Why do you keep
 churning water?
 O you Seeker of Nirvana! Invoke that One who created the eighty-four lakhs of
 beings!
 O you, Kāpālīka! What’s the use of carrying that gourd-pot, of wandering to the
 sixty-eight holy spots?
 Says Trilochan: ‘O living beings, listen: without the corn, there is no redeeming
 the pledge!’⁵⁹⁷

⁵⁹⁵ Lorenzen, “Religious Identity,” 29. Lorenzen uses the word-index of Callewaert and Op de Beeck’s *Kabīr-bījāk* and that of P.N. Tiwari’s edition of the *Kabīr-granthāvalī* to analyze the frequency of these key terms in Kabīr’s poetry. Here are some of the results: *yogī/yogī* – 52x, *Gorakh* – 15x, *śākta* – 17x, *brahmin* – 37x, *pīr* – 23x, *shaykh* – 7x, *mullah* – 7x.

⁵⁹⁶ *Yatī* (or *jatī*) is another word for an ascetic. This verse actually comes from a poem praising the ‘true devotion’ of Kabīr. Translated in Heidi Pauwels, *In Praise of Holy Men: Hagiographic Poems by and about Harirām Vyās* (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 2002), 95.

⁵⁹⁷ Winand M. Callewaert, *Hagiographies of Anantadās: The Bhakti Poets of North India* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000), 138-139.

As Winand Callewaert explains, “This *pad* is a condemnation of all kinds of wandering ‘holy men’ and ascetics, whatever their garb and denominations ... According to Trilochan, all their pretensions are vain, since they never got the ‘corn’, i.e. the experience of God within their soul, necessary to ‘redeem the pledge’ and obtain final release from the bonds of mundane Existence.”⁵⁹⁸ This same perspective regarding the senselessness of the yogic-ascetic regime comes across in Anantadās’s *parcaī* of Trilochan, in which Anantadās writes: “Reciting mantras, performing asceticism and sense-control, [one] emaciates the body in vain.”⁵⁹⁹

Guru Nānak similarly questions and critiques the external pretensions of the *yogī* in his *Siddh Goṣṭ* (*Siddha Goṣṭi*).⁶⁰⁰ This composition makes up part of the *Ādi Granth* and is a philosophical discourse presented as a dialogue between Guru Nānak and the Nāth *yogīs*.⁶⁰¹ In the text, the Nāths proclaim to Nānak that the way of yoga is renunciation and asceticism, admonishing him to take up their garb, earrings (*mudrā*), small cloth pouch (*jholī*), patched cloak (*khinhā*), and philosophical perspective (*darśan*) so that he will become a “master *yogī*” (*yogendra*) and suffer no more.⁶⁰² Nānak responds that only one whose mind is attuned to the Guru (*gurumukhi*) can attain the way of true yoga. Highlighting the fact that true spirituality rests on inner qualities, not external trappings, he says:

⁵⁹⁸ Callewaert, *Hagiographies of Anantadās*, 139, n. 99.

⁵⁹⁹ *Trilochan parcaī* 16-17. My translation from original text in Callewaert, *Hagiographies of Anantadās*, 128-129. Callewaert translates *japtap saṁjam sādhi kain bādi karai tan šīn* as “Through asceticism, sense-control and discipline, opponents of *bhakti* emaciate their bodies in vain” (126).

⁶⁰⁰ The text is attributed to Guru Nānak and tradition holds it was composed in the latter years of his life, c. 1524-39 CE. Kamala Nayar and Jaswinder Singh Sandhu, *The Socially Involved Renunciate: Guru Nānak’s Discourse to the Nāth Yogis* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 59-61.

⁶⁰¹ Piar Singh argues that the *Siddh Goṣṭ* represents the end product of a number of actual discussions between Nānak and the Nāth *yogīs* that occurred at different places and times. Piar Singh, *Guru Nanak’s Siddha Goshti* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1996), 20.

⁶⁰² *Siddh Goṣṭ* 7 & 9.

Let the eternal Word (*sabad*) within you be your earrings (*mudrā*) and forsake
 selfish attachment.
 Rid yourself of desire, anger, and egoism and adopt wisdom through the Guru's
 Word.
 Let this be your patched cloak (*khinthā*) and ascetic's pouch (*jholī*), Nānak says,
 for only the One, Hari, brings salvation.⁶⁰³

He goes on to state:

Let detachment from the worldly be your begging bowl (*khapar*) and let the
 qualities of the five elements be your cap (*topī*).
 Let the body be your meditation mat and let the mind be your loincloth (*jāgotī*).
 Let truth, contentment, and self-discipline be your companions.
 Nānak says, the one whose mind is attuned to the Guru (*gurumukh*) is immersed
 in the Name.⁶⁰⁴

This stanza underlines the futility of the *yogī*'s outward symbols (begging bowl, earrings, patched cloak, etc.) and, as Piar Singh notes, “in their place it advocates the cultivation of virtues of truth, continence, self-restraint, etc.,” asserting that spiritual realization is “obtained through the Yoga of Nam-Simran [remembrance/recitation of the Name] alone and not through intricate Haṭha-yogic practices.”⁶⁰⁵ Later in the text, Nānak states, “The twelve sects of *yogīs* and the ten sects of *saṃnyāsīs* wander (over many rebirths) in confusion,” for one finds the door of liberation only through the Word of the Guru.⁶⁰⁶

Lying behind the verses above from Kabīr, Trilochan, and Nānak seems to be an overarching perception that most *yogīs* were not at all what they claimed to be. While many may have taken on the garb of the *yogī*, they simply did not possess the spiritual qualities these external accoutrements were meant to signify—detachment, wisdom, inner purity, etc. They

⁶⁰³ *Siddh Goṣṭ* 10:1-3. All translations from the *Siddh Goṣṭ* are mine, but come from the Devanagari transliteration of the original Panjabi text provided in Piar Singh's *Guru Nanak's Siddh Goshti* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1996) and draw on Singh's own useful but inadequate English translation.

⁶⁰⁴ *Siddh Goṣṭ* 11.

⁶⁰⁵ Singh, *Guru Nanak's Siddh Goshti*, 87.

⁶⁰⁶ *Siddh Goṣṭ* 34.3-4.

were false *yogīs*. In his *Dohāvalī*, Tulsīdās suggests that such figures were prevalent in his day: “Those who wear inauspicious and inappropriate clothes, external markings, and ornaments, who eat everything whether clean or unclean – in the Kali Yuga these sorts of *yogīs* and *siddhas* are revered by people.”⁶⁰⁷ William Pinch has noted that, “A central concern for Tulsidas was the evil of unbridled asceticism fueled by unconstrained *tapas* (or heat/power generating austerities),” so much so that he added an episode to the first book (*Bālakāṇḍ*) of the *Rāmcaritmānas* (one not in the Valmiki *Rāmāyana*) whose main purpose was “to show how Pratapabhanu, a good and just king, was ruined by a vengeful, deceitful forest-dwelling ascetic – a false ascetic.”⁶⁰⁸ Reiterating Tulsī’s sentiments about these fakes, Kabīr says, “In body, they are all ‘*yogīs*’, but *yogīs* of the mind are few.”⁶⁰⁹ In another verse, he writes, “Donning an ascetic’s garb, he becomes a Lord, he eats and drinks his fill! But the narrow path which the saint has taken is ever closed to him.”⁶¹⁰ A frequently cited poem attributed to Kabīr, but likely of late-sixteenth century provenance, criticizes warrior ascetics who dress as *yogīs* and falsely claim detachment and wisdom:

Never have I seen such *yogīs*, brother.⁶¹¹
 They wander mindless and negligent, proclaiming the way of *Mahadeva* [Śiva]. For this
 they are called great *mahants*.
 To markets and bazaars they peddle their meditation – false *siddhas*, lovers of *maya*.

⁶⁰⁷ *Dohāvalī* 550. All translations of the *Dohāvalī* are my own from original text in *Goswami Tulsidas’ Dohawali*, ed. Ajai Kumar Chhawchharia (Delhi: Abhishek Prakashan, 2006).

⁶⁰⁸ William Pinch, *Warrior Ascetics and Indian Empires* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 212. David White discusses this same episode, noting that, “While it is the case that Tulsīdās never calls the villain of this piece a *yogi*, but rather a false hermit, one can readily recognize him as a *yogi* through his *modus operandi*,” i.e. *yogic* powers, spells, and wizardry. David Gordon White, *Sinister Yogis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 25-26.

⁶⁰⁹ *Granthāvalī sākhī* 25.5. Translated in Vaudeville, *Kabīr*, 281.

⁶¹⁰ *Granthāvalī sākhī* 25.12. *Ibid.*, 282.

⁶¹¹ This poem offers an instance of a reference to *yogīs* that does not refer to the Nāths. It seems to refer to militarized Śaiva Daśanāmī *saṃnyāsīs* for there is no evidence that the Nāth *yogīs* ever militarized.

When did Dattatreya attack a fort? When did Sukadeva join with gunners? When did
 Narada fire a musket? When did Vyasadeva sound a battle cry?
 These numbskulls make war. Are they ascetics or archers? They profess detachment,
 but greed is their mind's resolve.
 They shame their profession by wearing gold. They collect stallions and mares, acquire
 villages, and go about as millionaires.⁶¹²

Pinch explains that this poem reflects “a wide religious condemnation of false religion, and false yogis in particular, that was gaining momentum in northern India, especially after 1500.”⁶¹³ This is certainly true; as we have just seen, fake yogīs were major targets of criticism from *bhakti* poets. Nevertheless, *bhakti* critiques extended well beyond false yogīs. Even “real” yogīs—those whose practice might be perceived as authentic and sincere—were often deemed to be followers of a path that simply did not work, or one whose spiritual efficacy was far inferior to that of *bhakti*. As we will see below, Tulsidās is particularly vehement in making this point.

~ *Powerful Bhakti, Powerless Yoga* ~

Throughout his poetic corpus, Tulsidās repeatedly emphasizes how mantras, yoga, and practices of renunciation and asceticism are completely unnecessary; all one needs is loving devotion to God. He writes: “Without detachment (*vairāg*), mantric recitation (*jap*), sacrifices, yoga, and fasts, without asceticism (*tap*), without sacrificing the body – Tulsi says, all contentment is quickly and easily obtained if you simply love the Prayag-like feet of Prabhu.”⁶¹⁴ Not only are these other (non-*bhakti*) modes of religiosity needless; they are also

⁶¹² Bījak *ramainī* 69. Translated in Pinch, *Warrior Ascetics*, 194.

⁶¹³ Pinch, *Warrior Ascetics*, 195.

⁶¹⁴ *Gītāvalī*, Uttarakāṇḍ 15.4. All translations of the *Gītāvalī* are my own from original text in Goswami Tulsidas’ *Geetawali and Barvai Ramayan with Ram Raksha Stotra*, ed. Ajai Kumar Chhawchharia (Delhi: Abhishek Prakashan, 2006).

ineffective. In the *Vinay Patrikā*, Tulsī states, “People follow the prescriptions of the Āgamas, reciting mantras and doing sacrifices, but they do not obtain their goal. Even in dreams, contentment does not come from the practice of yoga and *siddhis*; only sickness and sorrow remain.”⁶¹⁵ He goes on to conclude the stanza with this verse: “Tulsī says, without trust and love [in God] one wanders aimlessly, is defeated, and dies. The Name of Rām is the only vessel to carry one across the ocean of existence.”⁶¹⁶ Here Tulsī stresses that those who follow the path of yoga, tantra, and asceticism do not achieve their spiritual aims, for contentment and liberation can come only through faith and love in Rām and the power of the Name.

While he is known as the quintessential poet and devotee of Rāmcandra, Tulsīdās also composed works praising Krishna. In his *Krishna-Gītāvalī* (*pad* 16), he describes the birth of Krishna through Yashoda’s fasting and prayer; however, in doing so, in R.S. McGregor’s words, he “asserts that Śiva’s favour is won by *bhakti*, and is hardly accessible by austerities or by *yoga*. ... These practices are, Tulsīdās implies, of far inferior worth to the devotion which Yaśodā now can, and must, feel for Kṛṣṇā.”⁶¹⁷

For Tulsīdās, *bhakti*’s great power, and the inefficacy and inferiority of yogic and tantric religious modes, has much to do with the historical context of the Kali Yuga. In days past, he seems to say, yoga, renunciation, and sacrifice may have worked, but in these dark times such methods no longer have any efficacy. In the *Rāmcaritmānas*, he writes, “In this difficult age there is a great wealth of sins, there is no dharma, no wisdom, no *joga*, no *jap*. Abandoning faith

⁶¹⁵ *Vinay Patrikā* 173.3. All translations of the *Vinay Patrikā* are my own from original text in Goswami Tulsidas’ *Vinai-Patrika*, ed. Ajai Kumar Chhawchharia (Delhi: Abhishek Prakashan, 2006).

⁶¹⁶ *Vinay Patrikā* 173.6.

⁶¹⁷ R.S. McGregor, “Tulsīdās’ Śrīkṛṣṇagītāvalī,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 96.4 (1976): 524.

in all these, the one who does *bhakti* to Ram alone is wise.”⁶¹⁸ He reiterates this point in his *Kavitāvalī*, stating: “This Kali Age has engulfed all *dharma*; mantric recitation, yoga and renunciation have all fled for their lives. Who grieving after them will die? Tulsī says, I have sold myself into the hands of the Lord of Jānakī [i.e., Rām].”⁶¹⁹

In highlighting the needlessness of asceticism, mantras, and yoga, Tulsīdās also stressed the great power inherent in singing and hearing stories of the Divine. In the *Rāmcaritmānas*, he writes, “Even without renunciation, mantric recitation, or yoga, those who sing or hear the praises of Ravana’s foe [Rām] shall be rewarded with steadfast devotion.”⁶²⁰ Anantadās, in his *Pīpā parcaī*, similarly states, “Yoga, sacrifices, repetition of mantras, asceticism, and fasts (*joga jigi jap tap vrat*) – all that cannot equal the recitation of the stories of Hari.”⁶²¹ Here we see that in contrast to the esoteric tantra-mantra and bodily austerities constituting yogic religiosity, a major component of *bhakti*’s religion of the heart is simply to absorb oneself in telling and listening to tales about God.

Raidās also makes it crystal clear that *bhakti* is not about asceticism or the practice of yoga, but about losing oneself in the love of God. He sings:

Bhakti is not like this, my brother. Whatever is done without the name of Rām,
is all called delusion.

Bhakti is not suppression of the senses, not speaking of wisdom, not digging a
cave in the forest. Not some joke, not the snares of desire. This is not
bhakti.

Bhakti is not binding the senses, not practicing yoga, not eating less—all these
practices are called *karma*.

⁶¹⁸ *Rāmcaritmānas*, Aranyakāṇḍ 6 (so.). Unless otherwise noted, all translations of the *Rāmcaritmānas* are my own from original text in *Tulasidasa’s Shriramacharitamānasa*, ed. & trans. R.C. Prasad (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988).

⁶¹⁹ *Kavitāvalī*, Uttarakāṇḍa 7.105. All translations of the *Kavitāvalī* are my own from original text in *Goswami Tulsidas’ Kavitawali*, ed. Ajai Kumar Chhawchharia (Delhi: Abhishek Prakashan, 2006), 120.

⁶²⁰ *Rāmcaritmānas*, Aranyakāṇḍ 46.

⁶²¹ *Pīpā parcaī* 35.31. My translation from original text in Callewaert, *Hagiographies of Anantadās*, 276.

Bhakti is not reducing the sleep, not practicing renunciation. These practices are not *bhakti*; they are the pride of the Vedas.⁶²²

Later in the poem Raidās states that *bhakti* happens when one loses the ‘self’ in Rām; all else is merely senseless pride and delusion.

Pride, egotism, and desire emerge persistently in *bhakti* poetry as spiritual obstacles that the yogic and ascetic paths simply cannot overcome. Raidās lists *yogīs* and ascetics among those who are enslaved and ruined by these worldly temptations of *māyā*. He says, “Viṭṭhal, stop, stop your *Māyā* devouring the world. She has such great power, she enslaves all, she leads gods, men and sages astray. Child, old woman, very beautiful maiden – she assumes diverse guises. *Yogīs*, renunciates, ascetics, *sanyāsīs*, wise men – none of them survives.”⁶²³ In another poem, Raidās lumps *yogīs* in with several other arrogant figures who are lost and confused without Rām. He writes, “[They think to themselves] ‘We are great poets, high-born pandits, *yogīs*, *sanyāsīs*, wise, virtuous men, warriors, benefactors’ – such states of mind are never destroyed. Ravidās says, none of them understands, they have fallen into error like madmen.”⁶²⁴

Despite their difficult practices, *yogīs* and ascetics are not able to abolish their selfish greed, pride, and confusion and are haunted by these things through the night. The *bhaktas*, on the other hand, sleep like babies, for they have given themselves in devotion to Rām. In Tulsīdās’s words: “Itinerant *yogīs* and bands of ascetics stay awake, practicing meditation, for in their hearts lies a heavy fear of greed, delusion, anger, and desire. ... But Tulsī sleeps

⁶²² Raidās Vānī 17. Callewaert and Friedlander, *The Life and Works of Raidās* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1992), 114.

⁶²³ Raidās Vānī 38.1. Ibid., 127.

⁶²⁴ Raidās Vānī 13.2-3. Ibid., 112.

soundly—his one faith is in Rām.”⁶²⁵ From the *bhakta*’s perspective, in many ways the *yogī* and his practices represented the epitome of delusion, egotism, and foolishness. Sūrdās suggests exactly this when he writes, “Fool, dispense with pride and pretension and before you roast in the flames, say the name of Rām. ... Unless you reflect on Hari, the Lord of Sūr, you’ll be like those *yogīs*—like monkeys they are—you’ll wriggle on a leash, and dance.”⁶²⁶ Here Sūr openly mocks the *yogī* by comparing him to a monkey performing tricks on a leash, a puppet to *māyā* and its worldly illusions and desires. Hawley notes that this “estimation of yogis as practicing a senseless regimen, one that purports to lead to liberation but is in fact an instrument of imprisonment, is made at several points in the *Sūrsāgar*.”⁶²⁷ On that note, let us now move to a more in-depth consideration of the theme of *yogīs* in the poetry attributed to Sūrdās, in conjunction with that attributed to Mīrābāī.

~ *Yogic Imagery in the Poetry of Sūrdās and Mīrābāī* ~

Both Sūrdās and Mīrābāī make frequent use of yogic imagery in their compositions and do so most commonly in depictions of the quintessential *bhakti* emotion of *viraha*, love in separation.⁶²⁸ In his essay, “Mirabai as Wife and Yogi,” Hawley isolates a number of poems attributed to Mīrā in which she refers to Krishna as a *yogī* or describes herself as a *yoginī*.

⁶²⁵ *Kavitāvalī*, Uttarkāṇḍa 7.109.

⁶²⁶ KB 387, NPS 59. Translated in Hawley, *Sūr’s Ocean* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, forthcoming), 696. KB = Kenneth Bryant’s edition of the *Sūrsāgar*, published in Hawley and Bryant, *Sūr’s Ocean*, Vol. 2 (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming). NPS = Nāgarīpracārīṇī Sabhā edition of *Sūrsāgar*.

⁶²⁷ Hawley, *Sūr’s Ocean*, 696–697.

⁶²⁸ A quick note about dating: Unlike the poetry of Sūrdās, a great deal of which we can confidently place in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, fewer than twenty-five of the poems attributed to Mīrābāī can be dated to the seventeenth century. While a great many Mīrā poems, largely from the nineteenth century, thus cannot be used to support the chronological dimensions of my argument, (a) the poems of many other *bhakti* poets serve that purpose more than adequately, and (b) her poems nevertheless express key features of *bhakti* rhetoric and identity (in relation to tantra and yoga) that I want to highlight here.

“Don’t go, *yogī*, don’t go, I fall, a slave, at your feet,”⁶²⁹ she writes in one poem. Why would Mīrā depict her beloved Krishna as a *yogī*? Krishna is called a *yogeśvara*, or master of yoga, in the climax of the *Bhagavad Gītā* “when he reveals his body to be coextensive with the entire universe and all its creatures,” and in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* he is again referred to as a master of yoga, this time “in over twenty contexts, ranging from his role as creator of the universe to his theft of the *gopīs*’ clothes and his wrestling match with Cāṇūra.”⁶³⁰ Yet this is *not* the subject of these Mīrā poems; rather, when these verses imagine Krishna as *yogī*, they do so in order to express Mīrā’s sense of abandonment and to describe a Beloved who seems to have no concern for His devotee. As she laments in another poem, “To love a *yogī* is a source of pain. When you are with him he speaks sweet words, but then he leaves and forgets you.”⁶³¹

These poems must be seen in the context of a rural tradition of mobility and seasonal migration bound up with the annual agricultural cycle and military labor market of medieval and early modern north India. Indeed, one of the most widespread themes of medieval Indian folklore and literature is that of separation, especially of lover and beloved. Men in agricultural families often went away for long periods of military service or commercial enterprises and the *virahiṇī*, the woman separated from her husband, thus became one of north India’s most common literary heroines. The *yogī*-themed poetry attributed to Mīrā comes especially out of a tradition of folk songs expressing the *virahiṇī*’s feelings of

⁶²⁹ PC 46. PC = Paraśurām Caturvedī, *Mīrābāī kī Padāvalī* (Allahabad: Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, 1973 [1932]). *Yogī mat jā mat jā mat jā, pāv parū main terī cerī hau*. Hawley, *Three Bhakti Voices*, 120.

⁶³⁰ White, *Sinister Yogis*, 182, 186.

⁶³¹ PC 54. Translation adapted from Maya Burger, “Mīrā’s Yoga,” in *The Banyan Tree: Essays on Early Literature in New Indo-Aryan Languages*, Vol. II, ed. Mariola Offredi (New Delhi: Manohar, 2000), 434.

abandonment and desire.⁶³² These poems often represented the absent beloved as one who performed his far-away trade or warfare in the garb of a *yogī*, or ascetic.⁶³³ As Dirk Kolff states, “Whatever the motive,” that is, whether as a merchant or a soldier, “to leave one's home and kin alone for any extended period of time, will always require an ascetic's effort and in itself almost turns a man into a *yogī*.”⁶³⁴ In a particularly evocative poem, *Mīrā* sings:

Yogī, day and night I watch the road, that difficult path where feet refuse to go—
so blocked, so steep, so overgrown.
A *yogī* came to town. He roamed around but didn't find the love in my mind,
and I was a girl of such simple ways that I had no way to make him stay.
Now it's been many days that I've watched for that *yogī*, and still he hasn't come:
The flame of loneliness is kindled inside me—inside my body, fire (*tapan*).
Either that *yogī* is no longer in this world or else he's gone and forgotten me, so
what am I to do, my friend? Where am I to go? I've lost my eyes to tears.
Yogī, the pain of you has burrowed inside me: see that I am yours and come ---To
Mīrā, a desperate, lonely woman. The life in me, without you, writhes.⁶³⁵

While Krishna here is depicted as a *yogī*, and the poet is no doubt a passionate devotee of Krishna, this certainly does not equate to a positive evaluation of *yogīs* and the yogic life. On the contrary, Krishna is described as a *yogī* here, and in other poems like this, in order to express his abandonment and apparent lack of concern for his devotee as well as to express the nature of the love that she feels for Him -- an anguished love given to a Beloved whose whereabouts are unknown and who does not come when he is called or appear when he is

⁶³² Related to this tradition is the genre of the *bārahmāsā*, or “twelve-month” songs, which express the woman's longing for her partner against the backdrop of the seasonal changes and ritual events that occurred with the passing of the months. As Francesca Orsini notes, “Today, *bārahmāsās* are perceived only as a kind of folk song, but a significant literary tradition attests to the attractiveness of this template for poets in all the literary languages of north India for centuries.” Orsini, “Barahmasas in Hindi and Urdu,” in *Before the Divide: Hindi and Urdu Literary Culture*, ed. Francesca Orsini (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2010), 143.

⁶³³ Dirk Kolff, *Naukar, Rajpat and Sepoy: The ethnohistory of the military labour market in Hindustan, 1450-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 74-75.

⁶³⁴ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁶³⁵ PC 44. Hawley, *Three Bhakti Voices*, 119-20.

desired. The aforementioned poem describes the pain of loneliness and separation as a fire, using the word *tapan*. The choice of words here is significant, for *tapan*, from the Sanskrit root *tap-*, refers not just to the heat of fire, but to a specifically ascetic heat. It is the term used by renunciators and *yogīs* for the inner heat and power produced in ascetic practices that conserve, refine, and concentrate bodily energy that would otherwise be expended in desire.⁶³⁶ The poem thus suggests that the intensity and single-mindedness of Mīrā's devotion is essentially yogic and ascetic in nature.

This connection between the devotee and the *yogī*-ascetic is made even clearer in a number of poems attributed to Mīrā in which she explicitly takes on the identity of a *yogī*.⁶³⁷ In one, the poet says: “For you, I’ll make myself a *yoginī*, wandering town to town looking for you, looking in every grove. Ash on my limbs and an antelope skin pulled up to my neck, my friend: that’s how I’ll burn my body to ash for him.”⁶³⁸ If the Beloved seems to have gone away, wandering as a *yogī*, then His devotee will also take on the garb of a *yogī* and wander in search of Him. Just as He has left everything, so too will she abandon all in a single-minded search for Him. She sings:

⁶³⁶ Sūrdās, whose poetry we will come to shortly, also makes use of this specific term (*tāp*, *tapas*) to describe the pain felt by the *gopīs* in separation from Krishna, alluding to the yogic character of their devotion even as he contrasts that devotion with, and shows its superiority to, the traditional path(s) of yoga. See KB 248, NPS 4107 (vv. 2-3).

⁶³⁷ One precedent for this sort of yogic metaphor comes in Baṛu Caṇḍīdāsa's *Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtana* (c. 1350-1600?), “the only surviving pre-Caitanya Vaishnava text in the Bengali language” (11), which makes use of yogic imagery at multiple points as it tells the story of Rādhā and Krishna. In one poem, Rādhā exclaims, “Like an ascetic intent upon yoga, I am aware of no other than Krishna” (272, Song 10). In another, she tells Krishna, “If, forsaking everything, you turn into a yogi, I’ll become a yogi too, attending on you, Krishna!” (286, Song 32) and later she cries, “What is my life? What are my home and possessions? As an ascetic, I’ll roam every land if I’m deprived of my Krishna!” (296, Song 47). Page references in this note come from Baṛu Caṇḍīdāsa, *Singing the Glory of Lord Krishna: The Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtana*. M.H. Klaiman, trans. (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984).

⁶³⁸ PC 94. Hawley, *Three Bhakti Voices*, 123.

I'm not staying here, not staying where the land's grown strange without you,
 my dear,
 But coming home, coming to where your place is; take me, guard me with your
 guardian mercy, please.
 I'll take up your yogic garb—your prayer beads, earrings, begging-bowl skull,
 tattered yogic cloth—
 I'll take them all and search through the world as a *yogī* does, with you—*yogī* and
 yoginī, side by side.⁶³⁹

Here is a model of devotion in which the devotee is willing to abandon family, home, modesty—everything *except* her Beloved. She will happily wander the earth with only the meager possessions of a *yogī* if it means finding and being with Him. Based partly on poems such as this, Maya Burger has gone so far as to say that, “Mīrā was a *yoginī* before she was made into a *bhakti* model,” stating further that “Her yoga cannot be simply classified as belonging to either the classical line of yoga or to the more popular Nātha tradition, but shows a very personal character.”⁶⁴⁰ I would beg to differ. The reason that Mīrā’s yoga cannot be classified as belonging to either the classical or Nāth yoga traditions is that it is no yoga at all. Mīrā is a *bhakta* through and through. Poems such as these generally do not describe the practice of yoga; they reference the external trappings of the *yogī*, but in contrast to certain poems of Kabīr, for instance, they give no indication of the details of the physical disciplines, inner physiology (*kuṇḍalinī*, etc.), supernormal powers, or experiential realities of yogic praxis.

⁶³⁹ PC 117. Hawley, *Three Bhakti Voices* 124.

⁶⁴⁰ Burger, “Mīrā’s Yoga” 429. It is worth noting here that in the popular Rajasthani folk song tradition known as the *Mīrā Janma Patrī*, Mīrā actually becomes the disciple of a Nāth *yogī*. In this episode, Mīrā’s guru is none other than Raidās, who is depicted not only as a *camār* (untouchable leatherworker), but also a Nāth *yogī*. This is an oral tradition and cannot be accurately dated, but, like most of the poems attributed to Mīrā, probably comes from the nineteenth century, a time when the Nāth tradition had been thoroughly “devotionalized” and taken on many aspects of *nirguṇ bhakti* traditions (in fact, neither Raidās nor Mīrā does or says anything particularly yogic or tantric in this tale). Moreover, it comes out of a very particular Rajasthani folk context in which Mīrā “does not belong to any particular sectarian lineage,” but “fits easily into the religious world of low-caste groups in Rajasthan whose devotion often takes an inclusive and noninstitutional form, blending devotion to Rāmdev with Vaiṣṇava and Nāth influences.” Nancy Martin, “Mīrā Janma Patrī: A Tale of Resistance and Appropriation,” in *Religion, Ritual and Royalty*, edited by N.K. Singhi and R. Joshi (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 1999), 237.

Nor do these poems endorse yoga in any way; rather, yogic imagery and the figure of the *yogī* are used as metaphors to highlight the desperate passion, restless intensity, and single-minded focus of the devotee's love for God. Here we see the appropriation of the *yogī* and all he stands for in the interests of asserting a different religious mode—*bhakti*—as being above and beyond that of yoga.⁶⁴¹

Many of the poems of *Sūrdās* also take on the voice of a *virahinī* separated from her beloved Krishna and make use of yogic imagery in much the same way as do *Mīrā*'s poems. As Hawley explains, "It is relatively commonplace in the *Sūrsāgar* for a comparison to be made between the rigors endured by a woman separated from Krishna and those that yogis (or *yoginīs*, their female counterparts) undertake in the cause of spiritual discipline."⁶⁴² In fact, in her devotion to Krishna the *virahinī* naturally attains, and even goes beyond, the levels of ascetic discipline and mental concentration to which *yogīs* aspire. In Hawley's words:

[T]he *gopīs*, separated from Krishna, endure mortifications by virtue of the sundering of their love that are deeper by far than any austerities yoga can concoct. They manifest all the marks of yogic discipline naturally. A yogi must learn through years of practice the art of keeping awake for long periods of time; for the women of Braj separated from Krishna, sleep is out of the question. The one-pointed concentration for which yogis strive is also all too easily theirs: they can think of nothing but their lost love. They go about their daily tasks with the indifference that yogis so carefully cultivate; their egos are mere husks. ... As for the internal heat (*tapas*) that yogis learn to fan and channel so as to make all this possible, it is theirs without even asking. Love is an unquenchable forest fire, as they often say: robbed of its object it scorches everything in sight.⁶⁴³

⁶⁴¹ Tyler Williams has suggested to me that these sorts of *Mīrā* poems seem to use a "yogic idiom in the service of a distinctly domestic sensibility." After all, the *virahinī* is no wandering *yogī*, but is actually stuck at home pining for her lover, and only uses the *yogī* symbolically to express her emotional state. Personal email communication, May 7, 2012.

⁶⁴² Hawley, *Sur's Ocean* 289.

⁶⁴³ John S. Hawley, *At Play with Krishna: Pilgrimage Dramas From Brindavan* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1992 [1981]), 234-235.

The *virahinī*, in many respects, might thus be considered the supreme *yogī*; however, the unquenchable love she holds for the Divine clearly distinguishes her spirituality. If *bhakti* poets like Sūr and Mīrā highlighted certain parallels between the *bhakta* and the *yogī* in order to measure the profundity of the devotional path, they also made it clear that yogic asceticism was utterly unnecessary and, if not grounded in and powered by love for God, fundamentally misguided.

The following Sūr poem, with its references to the horn (*sīṅgī*) and to Gorakhnāth, depicts the devotee specifically as a Nāth *yogī*.

If I knew where to find Gopāl, I'd go—
Go with horn (*sīṅgī*), earring (*mudrā*), begging bowl in hand
And wearing the clothes that yogi women do;
I'd don a patchwork cloak, slather ashes on my skin,
And bind my hair in an unkempt mound.
If I thought I could meet Hari, I'd rouse old Gorakh
By carrying on like Shiva, that great god.
I'd burn my mind and body and cover myself with dust—
The sort of thing gurus tell lonely women to do—
For without Sūr's Dark One, all Braj is empty (*sūnau*)
Like a cobra that's lost the jewel in its crown.⁶⁴⁴

As in the Mīrā poems, here the *virahinī* takes on the role of the *yogī*, saying that she would gladly give up her current life and wander about as an ascetic if it would mean finding her beloved Krishna. The implication throughout the poem, however, is that doing this—living as a *yogī*—would in fact *not* help the devotee reach her goal of (re)union with Krishna. Hawley's insightful analysis of the last line of the poem makes this point clear. Sūr says that without Krishna, all Braj is empty, or *sūnau*. This is the term Nāths often use to designate ultimate reality, the state of “emptiness” sought in their practices of tantric asceticism. Yet, as Hawley

⁶⁴⁴ KB 201, NPS 3844. Translated in John S. Hawley, *The Memory of Love: Sūrdās Sings to Krishna* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 115.

points out, Sūrdās uses the term here to subtly critique the value of the Nāth's yogic path, highlighting the fact that "The emptiness that yogis strive so hard to achieve is precisely the state that Krishna's *virahiṇī*s would love to escape."⁶⁴⁵

In similar fashion, the following Mīrā poem uses yogic paraphernalia and practice as its fundamental metaphors, but ultimately undercuts both the goals and methods of yogic asceticism.

Your secret (*maram*), yogi, I have not found.
I've sat in a cave, taken a yogic pose (*āsaṇ*), and meditated (*dhyān*) on Hari
With beads around my neck, a bag of beads in my hand, limbs smeared with
ashes.
Mīrā's Lord is Hari, the indestructible. My Fate has been written and that's what
I've found.⁶⁴⁶

Here, even after retreating to a cave and trying out the practice of yoga, the *virahiṇī* cannot determine the yogī's secret, she cannot make sense of his ways. The specific word used here for "secret" is *maram* (*marm*), meaning core, heart, or essential truth. In the yogī's *āsanas* (postures) and *dhyāna* (meditations), Mīrā finds no essential truth; instead, she finds only her Fate, an anguished love in perpetual separation from her beloved Krishna.

Echoing these sentiments, in the excerpts from the following Sūrdās poems, the *gopīs* of Braj can find absolutely no value in yoga. These poems come from a genre called *bhramargīt*, or "songs to the bee." The setting is this: Krishna has left Braj for Mathura and the messenger Ūddhav (or Ūddho) is sent to console the distraught cowherdesses (*gopīs*) of Braj who pine desperately for their Beloved. As Ūddhav speaks, trying to convince the *gopīs* that they ought to take up the path of yoga, a bee flies by and, in their distress, the *gopīs* address their

⁶⁴⁵ Hawley, *Memory of Love* 229-30, n. 201.6.

⁶⁴⁶ PC 188. My translation; adapted from Hawley, *Three Bhakti Voices*, 121.

reproaches and pleas of longing to this bee.⁶⁴⁷ “Why should we take up the discipline of yoga, so unknowable, untellable, unmeasurable?”⁶⁴⁸ they cry out. In another poem, the *gopīs* make it clear that, for them, yoga foolishly and cruelly misses the entire point: the joy of an intimate personal relationship with God. They sing:

It’s a dirty trick, this yoga, and it won’t sell in Braj.
 ... Who will give up grapes to feed on fruit from the bitter *nīm* tree?
 How could we leave the taste of Sūr’s Dark Lork, and live on that insipid stuff of
 yours?⁶⁴⁹

Here yoga is characterized as bitter and insipid in contrast to the sweetness of devotion to Krishna. This perspective is reiterated in the following excerpts, which describe the ascetic *yogī*’s path as tasteless, a source of suffering, and a worthless concoction that does absolutely nothing to help with the *gopīs*’ fundamental dilemma: separation (*viraha*) from their Beloved.

[Īddho] says to leave behind our clothes and jewels, also our love for family and home,
 Let our hair grow wild, put ash on our skin, and study his tasteless no-trait path.
 To my way of thinking, he’s only speaking grief—love’s pain—in the hearts of
 poor young maidens.⁶⁵⁰

Īddho, they say, has arrived in our midst to peddle his yoga to poor young maidens.
 His postures, dispassion, his eyes turned within—friend, how can they cancel our distance from Śyām?
 ... What kind of doctor, says Sūr, can this be who hands out prescriptions when he doesn’t know the disease?⁶⁵¹

⁶⁴⁷ Flying from flower to flower, gathering sweet nectar, the bee personifies the seemingly fickle Krishna. At the same time, Īddho, because he is dark like Krishna and serves as his messenger, is also the bee. The *bhramargīt* poems—most famously composed by Sūrdās, but also by other poets such as Nanddās—have their origin as elaborations on a minor vignette in Bhāgavata Purāṇa X.47 in which the *gopīs* see a passing bee and address it as Īddho, reproaching the bee for Krishna’s faithless and hard-hearted ways.

⁶⁴⁸ KB 248, NPS 4107. Hawley, *Memory of Love*, 129.

⁶⁴⁹ KB 278, NPS 4282. Ibid., 134.

⁶⁵⁰ KB 253, NPS 4132. Ibid., 130.

⁶⁵¹ KB 266, NPS 4208. Ibid., 132.

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In the preceding pages, we have seen that yoga and *yogīs* feature quite prominently in the poems of Sūrdās and Mīrābāī. The fact that yogic imagery is so marked in many of their *viraha-bhakti* compositions speaks to an environment in which *yogīs* were visible figures inspiring (among some) a certain measure of awe or respect, yet when one analyzes the poems themselves, there is no real pro-yogic content. Neither *yogīs* nor the yogic life is idealized or endorsed; rather, *bhakti* is. In fact, what we see in these poems is a crafty move in which the poets subtly appropriate the yogic ideal even as they supersede it with the ideal of *bhakti*. If *yogīs*—in their attire, lifestyle, and practices—were supreme exemplars of an intense mental focus, selfless abandon, and ascetic discipline in search of spiritual goals, we have seen these poems attributed to Sūrdās and Mīrābāī use them as metaphors to ascribe those very qualities to the devotional life. To put the point another way, the *bhakti* of the *virahinī* is celebrated for possessing all the admirable spiritual traits associated with yogic practice, yet at the same time the yogic ideal is undercut, for these poems—some more explicitly than others—mark the *yogī*'s lifestyle as being somehow insufficient and confused. Indeed, these poems make it clear that neither tantric asceticism nor yogic intellectualism can meet the needs of the *bhakta*; they are inferior to the devotional path and fundamentally miss the point—the joyful essence—of the true religious life, an intimate personal relationship with the Divine.

~ *Sufi Parallels and Precedents* ~

The use of yogic imagery in devotional literature was hardly the exclusive preserve of the Hindu *bhakti* tradition. In fact, it was paralleled and, in most cases, preceded in the *premākhyān* (“romance”) literature of Indian Sufis. As Heidi Pauwels notes, “It is a striking

feature of all Sufi Romances that they use the imagery of the esoteric yoga of the Nāthas.”⁶⁵²

Composed in Hindavī (Avadhi), Indian Sufi romances drew on the conventions of the Persian *masnavī* (a verse romance written in rhyming couplets) while incorporating the Indian aesthetic theory of *rasa* and regional literary traditions like the *bārahmāsā*. This uniquely Indian genre consists most notably of Maulānā Dā’ūd’s *Cāndāyan* (1379), Qutban’s *Mirigāvatī* (1503), Jāyasī’s *Padmāvat* (1540), and Manjhan’s *Madhumālatī* (1545). A basic plot line of these works is that the protagonist sees his beloved, an idealized heroine representing Truth/Beauty, experiences intense suffering in separation from her, and is impelled to take on the garb of the *yogī*, seemingly renouncing all to set out in search of the Beloved. In the *Padmāvat*, King Ratansen falls in love with the princess Padmāvatī and, tortured by *viraha*, embarks upon an ascetic quest for his beloved. In certain Sūrdās and Mīrābāī poems, we have seen how the *virahinī*, driven by passionate longing for Krishna, considers and sometimes adopts the way of the *yogī* in order to seek him out. In similar fashion, Jāyasī describes how love’s suffering leads King Ratansen to take on the guise of a *yogī* to find his beloved Padmāvatī:

The king left his kingdom and became a Yogi. Lover-like he took his viol in his hand. His body was uncared for, his mind was distraught and drooping; love was fixed [in his mind] and a tangled knot of hair was on his head. He whose face was bright as the moon and whose body was fragrant as sandal wood, reduced his person to a clod of earth, smearing it with ashes. [He was provided with] string girdle, horn whistle, ring and gorakhdhandha, with Jogbāt, rudraksha necklace and crutch. Clothed in patch-work he gripped his staff in his hand, with a view to becoming a siddha, as Gorakh prescribed. In his ears were ear-rings, round his neck a rosary, in his hand his drinking bowl, on his shoulder a tiger’s skin, on his feet were wooden clogs, and he had an umbrella over his head. He carried a begging bowl and had put on ochre attire. He set

⁶⁵² Heidi Pauwels, “Whose Satire? Gorakhnāth Confronts Krishna in *Kanhāvat*,” *Indian Satire in the Period of First Modernity*, eds. Monika Horstmann and H. Pauwels (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, forthcoming, 2012).

out to beg for happiness, having made outward show of penance and Yoga in his body. “May I win Padmavati [he said] whose love is implanted in my heart.”⁶⁵³

Here Jayasī makes specific reference to Gorakh and the paraphernalia of the Nāth yogīs. We will reserve a full discussion of the relationship between Sufis and Nāth yogīs for the next chapter, but we can already say that the prevalence of Nāth figures, imagery, and ideas in Sufi romances and hagiographies makes it clear that they were important players interacting and competing with Sufis on the religious scene of fourteenth to sixteenth century north India.

In the *Madhumālatī*, the hero, Manohar, falls deeply in love with the beautiful Madhumālatī and, overwhelmed by the pain of separation from her, he resolves to set out to find her, first taking on the guise of—once again—a Gorakhnāthī yogī. Manjhan writes:

Whoever loses his senses on the path of love can comprehend nothing in the two worlds. So acute was the pain of separation he [Manohar] could not control himself. He asked for a begging bowl and a yogi’s staff and crutch. He marked his forehead with a circle, smeared his body with ashes, and hung shining earrings in both his ears. He took his drinking cup firmly in hand, and tightened the strings of his ascetic’s viol. Letting down his matted locks, he donned the patched cloak and the girdle of rope. With loincloth tied around his waist, the Prince took the guise of a Gorakh yogi.

The yogi forged within his trident suffering, indifference, and renunciation. His rosary was a basil-bead necklace. Around his neck hung the horn whistle. On his shoulder was the crutch for meditation. With his staff and the thread of Gorakh, he controlled his mind and his breath. He put on his feet the sandals of love, and arranged on himself the deerskin of renunciation. He assumed this guise for a vision of Madhumālatī. For her sake he assayed wretchedness. He sat in meditation, thinking, reflecting, and his eyes and ears were steeped in love. He took on this guise for a vision of his beloved, but it seemed as if Gorakh had awakened.⁶⁵⁴

In the passages above from the *Padmāvat* and *Madhumālatī*, while Ratansen and Manohar each take on the appearance of a Nāth yogī, there is something amiss; this is no

⁶⁵³ *Padmāvat* 12.1. A.G. Shirreff, trans., *Padmavati of Malik Muahammad Jaisi* (Calcutta: Bibliotheca Indica, 1944), 87–89.

⁶⁵⁴ *Madhumālatī* 172–173. Manjhan, *Madhumālatī: An Indian Sufi Romance*, trans. Aditya Behl and Simon Weightman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 72–73.

endorsement of the Nāth ascetic's path of non-attachment, for it is clearly passionate love that is driving all their actions. Indeed, Ramya Sreenivasan notes a sharp distinction between the Sufi and Nāth perspectives. In the Nāth *yogīs*' own legends, when "protagonists like Gopichand and Bhartrhari renounce their kingdoms and become ascetics in pursuit of a spiritual goal, their renunciation is a step toward overcoming attachments and conquering passion; love for the queens is here an impediment to spiritual self-realization."⁶⁵⁵ In the Sufi romances, however, the hero's actions are fueled by love and the final goal is the consummation of that love (i.e., union with the Beloved). Aditya Behl, in discussing the Prince's "yogic transformation" in Qutban's *Mirigāvatī* (1503), further highlights the key difference in the spiritual goals of the Sufis and the Nāths. He explains how the Prince "puts on a yogi's guise, with all the accoutrements of the Gorakhnath *panth*: the matted locks, the basil-bead rosary, the stick, the begging-bowl, and the deerskin on which to meditate," but then he says, importantly, "The prince-turned-yogi is ... lost in love. The object of his meditation is not yogic immortality, but the beautiful Mirigavati."⁶⁵⁶

The Sufi romances not only feature *yogīs* as central characters, but key elements of their plot design also symbolically mirror the inner path and progression of tantric yoga practice. Simon Weightman describes how Manjhan "included a complete model of the Tantra yogic psycho-spiritual process" within the plot structure and symbolism of the *Madhumālatī*.⁶⁵⁷

⁶⁵⁵ Ramya Sreenivasan, *The Many Lives of a Rajput Queen: Heroic Past in India, c. 1500-1900* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007), 42.

⁶⁵⁶ Aditya Behl, "The Magic Doe: Desire and Narrative in a Hindavi Sufi Romance, circa 1503," in *India's Islamic Traditions, 711-1750*, ed. Richard Eaton (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 194.

⁶⁵⁷ Simon Weightman, "Appendix: The Symmetry of *Madhumālatī*," in Manjhan, *Madhumālatī: An Indian Sufi Romance*, trans. Behl and Weightman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 233-234. Weightman notes that the hero (Manohar) and heroine (*Madhumālatī*) are described as the sun and the moon, which in *kundalinī* yoga represent masculine and feminine essences/energies with the body that are to be united through yogic practice.

“But,” he says, “the yogic symbolism is a disguise, ... It is as if he was indicating that in his eyes the whole yogic process is valuable only in so far as it sets [the character] free to awaken the heart to Love, which is the real means of mankind’s salvation.”⁶⁵⁸ Here is one instance where the *bhakti* and Sufi perspectives merge: they both mark love for the Divine as the one true path, a religiosity far above and beyond the methods and goals of tantra and yoga.

What do we make of the fact that the *yogī* figures so centrally in the plots of these Sufi *premākhyāns*? As we have seen, this is neither an instance of some peaceful, feel-good “syncretism” nor an endorsement of tantric-yogic practices. So *what* is it, then? Pauwels remarks, “While the yogi symbolizes the seeker for the divine, isn’t there also a certain amount of irony involved in casting the love-lorn prince precisely as an ascetic, someone who is supposed to have risen above worldly ties? Does this discredit the ascetic garb as a guise rather than a sign of rejection of worldly joys?”⁶⁵⁹ While the meaning and function of the *yogī* in Sufi romances extends well beyond this suggestion, it definitely seems to be one piece of what is happening. In the *Padmāvat*, when Ratansen storms the fort at Singhal to be with Padmāvatī, he is captured in his yogic garb and the text states: “The people said ‘This is not a Yogi: it is some wandering love-lorn prince. For someone’s sake he has become an ascetic’.”⁶⁶⁰ Later, a bard says about Ratansen, “This is a prince, he is not a Yogi: he has become a pilgrim of love, on hearing of Padmavati.”⁶⁶¹ In these Sufi literary depictions of *yogīs*—as well as in

He provides a fascinating diagram in which verses from the text of the *Madhumālatī* are correlated with different *cakras* (energy centers along the spine) and *nāḍīs* (energy channels) of the yogic subtle body.

⁶⁵⁸ Ibid., 234.

⁶⁵⁹ Pauwels, “Whose Satire?”, 3.

⁶⁶⁰ *Padmāvat* 25.1. Sherriff, trans., 158.

⁶⁶¹ *Padmāvat* 25.13. Ibid., 163.

certain of the *bhakti* poems in which Krishna or the *virahinī* takes on the garb of the *yogī*—there seems to be an element of parody and satire. While it is not always the case, in a number of instances in *bhakti* and Sufi literature, the incorporation of yogic figures and imagery is done in order to mock *yogīs* and/or mark their religious path as insufficient. There is no doubt that *yogīs* constituted a rival group for both Sufis and *bhaktas*, whose literary appropriation of yogic elements, sometimes done in humorous fashion, demonstrates an implicit critique of and challenge to the *yogī*'s authority.

This element of satire is perhaps nowhere clearer than in a scene in the *Padmāvat* in which, Ratansen, having attained Padmāvatī's hand in marriage after a challenging ascetic quest, at long last goes to meet her. When he arrives at Padmāvatī's bedroom, he sees her and instantly, "the yoga which he had accomplished became useless." At this moment Padmāvatī's attendants hide her away and begin to taunt Ratansen. Jāyasī describes the scene with a careful and deliberate choice of words, writing that, after the maidens took Padmāvatī away, it was as if Ratansen had lost an "invaluable mantra" or "a precious herb," as if he had eaten a drugged sweet that had caused him "to lose all knowledge of *tantra-mantra*."⁶⁶² He could not laugh or cry he was so overcome by her being taken away. Here, the mere sight of the beloved brings about the loss of all the *yogī*'s most cherished tools: his charms, healing herbs, and *tantra-mantra*. Once again we see how paltry these things are beside the power of love and longing in separation (*viraha*). The maidens proceed to mock the supposed *yogī*, saying, "How is the sun all alone without his moon? You have learnt, O Yogi, to practice alchemy: how have

⁶⁶² *Padmāvat* 27.2. My translation from original text in this Devanagari edition: Malik Muhammad Jāyasī, *Padmāvat*, ed. Śrī Vāsudevaśaraṇ Agrawāl (Ciraḡāw: Sāhitya-sadan, 2018 v.s. [1961]).

you now become unmettled and separated?”⁶⁶³ Ratansen tells the maidens, “If after I have obtained the beloved she is separated from me, this sets my body on fire. Either by obtaining her will the burning of my body be extinguished, or it will be extinguished by my death.”⁶⁶⁴ At this, the maidens only laugh, remarking “That moon is now hidden in the sky: How will you obtain her, O Yogi, by coveting her?” The satire is heavy here, and the large gap separating the *yogī*’s path of detachment and the burning passion of Ratansen’s love could not be clearer. The maidens continue their mocking: “You are a *yogī* and should roam about performing asceticism (*tapas*) and yoga. How can a *yogī* know the story of a king?”⁶⁶⁵ At last, the maidens bring Padmāvatī before Ratansen, whispering in his ear with jest, “Gorakh has come and is standing by you: rise, O disciple.”⁶⁶⁶ Yet the fun is not over, for now Padmāvatī tells him, “Be gone ... The very sight of the ashes [with which you are smeared] is a defilement to me: the moon trembles and flees from the sun. O Yogi, your ascetic’s body will throw a shadow upon my limbs. ... No Yogi or beggar can effect an entrance to this house.”⁶⁶⁷ At this point Ratansen comes clean, revealing the not-so-yogic motives behind his yogic guise and ascetic quest: “It was for your sake, my dearest love, that I left my kingdom and became a beggar. It was when your love filled my heart that I left Chitaur and changed my condition. ... I became a beggar, lady, for your sake: I became a moth for the lamp and endured the flame. ... When I heard of your fame in the world, I undertook Yoga and buried my body. When as an ascetic I took the

⁶⁶³ *Padmāvat* 27.3. Sherriff, trans., 180. The Nāths were closely associated with the practice of alchemy. See David Gordon White’s *The Alchemical Body* (1996).

⁶⁶⁴ *Padmāvat* 27.5. Sherriff, trans., 181.

⁶⁶⁵ *Padmāvat* 27.6. My translation.

⁶⁶⁶ *Padmāvat* 27.14. Sherriff, trans., 186.

⁶⁶⁷ *Padmāvat* 27.15. Ibid.

viol in my hand, the fire of love was renewed.”⁶⁶⁸ Still Padmāvatī remains unconvinced, remarking, “I am a princess and you are a beggarly Yogi: what acquaintance can there be between a votary of yoga and a votary of pleasure? All Yogis play frauds like this: you, the beggar-man, are preeminent in it. ... Yogīs are full of tricks: they do not refrain from them.”⁶⁶⁹ Eventually, Ratansen convinces Padmāvatī of the truth of his words and the two consummate their love, but not before his yogic identity has been thoroughly mocked and satirized.⁶⁷⁰

While the Sufi romances do poke fun at the *yogī* at times, it is clear that in them the *yogī* also plays a respected role and is a figure symbolizing the purification, the difficult emptying of ego and abandoning of worldly concern, that is necessary for the Sufi to experience divine love. Even then, however, for the heroes of *premakhyaṇ* literature, the identity of the *yogī* is a temporary and ultimately false one entirely inappropriate and insufficient to the deepest goals and meanings of the devotional life.

* * *

The religious environment in north India’s Delhi Sultanate and early Mughal periods was one in which *yogīs*, Sufis, and *bhaktas* did not usually represent sealed communities; on the contrary, interaction, competition, and mutual exchange of ideas and practices between them was the order of the day. If one imagines that many Sufis and *bhaktas* regularly rubbed elbows with *yogīs*, respecting and even borrowing aspects of their thought and practice, then head-on

⁶⁶⁸ *Padmāvat* 27.16, 27.20. *Ibid.*, 186, 188.

⁶⁶⁹ *Padmāvat* 27.17, 27.21. *Ibid.*, 187-188.

⁶⁷⁰ We should note that while there is a clear critique of Ratansen’s yogic identity, there is also a gentle mocking of Ratansen himself, who represents love’s fool (as well as love’s hero), one willing to do anything to attain Padmāvatī. She is “love-as-test” and Ratansen’s yogic-ascetic quest is the purifying ordeal he must undergo to pass the test of love and to unite with Padmāvatī, who represents none other than the Divine. Special thanks go to Jack Hawley for lending his insights on this particular point.

hostility and vitriolic attack would hardly seem an appropriate means for articulating difference and asserting superiority. At one end of the spectrum of devotional critiques of yoga and tantra, genuine dislike and strongly-worded disapproval certainly do emerge, yet in the dialogical cultural atmosphere of much of early modern north India,⁶⁷¹ humor, playful satire, and clever appropriation were literary and performative tools often better suited to the task of subtly critiquing those religious “rivals” who may have less often been one’s enemies than one’s fellow participants in debate, collaboration, and competition.

Returning to our discussion of the Sufi romances, we can now say this: It is not that the Sufi heroes of the *premākhyān* genre become Nāth yogīs; rather, Nāth imagery is used—with a mix of seriousness and satire—to represent an Indianized Sufi spiritual vision in which a desire for the beloved is ascetically transformed and purified into divine love. Though this religious vision differed in certain respects from that seen in Hindu *bhakti* literature, the Sufi romances—much like the *Mīrābāī* and *Sūrdās* poems we have discussed—appropriated (and thus in some sense affirmed) yogic imagery, symbols, and values, while simultaneously undercutting (sometimes satirizing) and transcending them with a different perspective, a religiosity centered on love. Again, this is not to say that the Sufi devotional message was identical to that of *bhakti*—it was not; however, as we will see in the next chapter, the religious attitudes of Sufis and *bhaktas* did have significant overlap, areas of commonality that come to the fore when we see the similarities in both their critiques of yogīs and the literary-poetic strategies they utilized in making those critiques.

⁶⁷¹ It is important to note that not all of the early modern north Indian social world was so “dialogical,” and this pluralistic atmosphere of shared symbols and idioms is one we find much more in vernacular texts. In the texts of religious elites and conservatives of this period, whether brahmins writing in Sanskrit or Muslim clerics writing in Persian (or even Arabic), there is sometimes a clear lack of dialogue, whether expressed in blissful ignorance or pointed critique of the other.

* * *

Before moving on, we should take a moment to discuss a particularly interesting case of the sort of satire described above. This is the *Kanhāvat*, an Islamicate text recently analyzed with great insight by Heidi Pauwels.⁶⁷² While this work is attributed to Jāyasī and claims the same date as his *Padmāvat* (1540 CE), Pauwels shows that it is unlikely that Jāyasī authored the text and that it was likely composed after the *Padmāvat*, though definitely prior to the mid-seventeenth century. She argues convincingly that the *Kanhāvat*'s narrative, a rather folksy, *masnavī* retelling of the story of Krishna, was intended as a work of comedy and satire, meant to entertain even as it discredited the religious paths of both *yogīs* and *bhaktas*. The end of the text features a fascinating scene in which Krishna and Gorakhnāth encounter each other in Mathura. Francesca Orsini, who has also examined the work, explains that the illustrious founder of the Nāth tradition, Gorakhnāth, accompanied by a host of *yogīs*, comes to Mathura “because the fame of [Krishna’s] *bhakti* has spread through the whole world.” Gorakh is “disappointed to see [Krishna] enveloped in *bhoga* [enjoyment]: he should take advantage of the time he has left to become a *yogī*, so as to acquire an immortal body and the powers that come with it.”⁶⁷³ He tells Krishna to give up the life of the householder and become a *yogī*, saying: “If one does yoga properly in this world, you will live for many years. You will become bodily immortal, and you will live for age after age. And if you wish, then you can travel by flying, you can in a moment reach what you glance at. Whatever you look at, there (and then)

⁶⁷² Heidi Pauwels, “Whose Satire? Gorakhnāth Confronts Krishna in *Kanhāvat*,” *Indian Satire in the Period of First Modernity*, eds. Monika Horstmann and H. Pauwels (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, forthcoming 2012).

⁶⁷³ Orsini, “For a Comparative Literary History: Malik Muhammad Jayasi's *Kanhavat* (947H/1540)” (Unpublished paper), 17.

that [you obtain], if you master asceticism and yoga.”⁶⁷⁴ Krishna responds, “What would I do with your yoga? ... your teaching has no use for me.”⁶⁷⁵ He rejects Gorakh’s advice on a variety of grounds, defends the value of *bhakti*-based *bhoga* in a world manifested for the sake of God’s *līlā* (play), and exhorts Gorakh and his party to convert to *bhakti*. Both sides of the debate seem to be caricatured, for—in words that likely no *bhakti* poet or hagiographer would agree with—Krishna consistently emphasizes the *bhoga* dimension of *bhakti*, going so far as to say, “Why not just enjoy yourself and fulfill craving? A long life [spent] in yoga is stale; I’d rather live a short life [spent] in enjoyment.”⁶⁷⁶ After this debate, Krishna and Gorakh decide to fight each other, but it is a brief and comical battle with no injuries and no clear winner. The scene ends with the line: “For the *yogī*, yoga is good; for the *bhogī*, *bhoga* is fine.”⁶⁷⁷

There is more to the story, but for our purposes what is of special interest here is, firstly, the clear use of satire to poke fun at and undermine the religiosity of both Krishna devotees and Nāth *yogīs*. Secondly, and perhaps even more noteworthy, is the very existence of the confrontation between Gorakh and Krishna in this work. It is unclear who the author of the text was; he seems to have been sympathetic to neither *bhaktas* nor *yogīs*, yet—despite following certain Islamicate literary conventions—his writing also does not evince any elements of Sufi spirituality.⁶⁷⁸ The fact that such a figure would compose a narrative in the sixteenth or early seventeenth century in which the most revered figures of *sagun bhakti* and

⁶⁷⁴ *Kanhāvat* 349. All translations from this text come from Pauwels, “Whose Satire?”. She relies on two editions of the text: Parmeśvarī Lāl Gupta, ed., *Malik Muhammad Jāyasī kṛt Kanhāvat* (Banaras: Annapūrṇā Prakāśan, 1981) and Śiv Sahāy Pāṭhak, ed., *Kanhāvat (malik Muhammad Jāyasī kṛt)* (Allahabad: Sāhitya Bhavan, 1981).

⁶⁷⁵ *Kanhāvat* 350.

⁶⁷⁶ *Kanhāvat* 352.

⁶⁷⁷ *Kanhāvat* 354.9.

⁶⁷⁸ Pauwels, “Whose Satire?”.

tantric yoga openly challenge each other illustrates just how clear the confrontation between *bhakti* and tantra had become to everyone in the north Indian religious landscape of the time.

~ *Locating the Bhakti Critique: Factors of Caste and Geography* ~

It is interesting to note that when it comes to the specific content of *bhakti* poetry referencing Nāth *yogīs*, there is a marked tendency for poetry attributed to lower caste, *nirguṇ* Sants like Kabīr, Raidās, and Nānak to show a familiarity with the technical terms of Nāth tantric yoga practice and philosophy, whereas poetry attributed to higher caste-oriented, *saguṇ* saints like Tulsīdās and Sūrdās shows a clear awareness of the details of the Nāth *yogī*'s garb, accoutrements, and lifestyle but rarely if ever shows the same intimate knowledge of *kuṇḍalinī* yogic praxis or Nāth philosophical terminology.⁶⁷⁹ Much of Sufi literature shows the same heightened awareness of Nāth *yogīs* that we find in the lower-caste *nirguṇ bhakti* poetry, suggesting a common social location shared by some Sufis, *yogīs*, and *nirguṇ bhakti* Sants that may have allowed for more frequent and more intimate exchanges among them. As James Mallinson has pointed out to me, this distinction is born out in Mughal miniature paintings, which depict extremely few Dasnāmīs and higher-caste, *saguṇ bhaktas*, but show many *yogīs* and a number of lower-caste *nirguṇ sants*.⁶⁸⁰ Many Sufis and *nirguṇ bhaktas* like Kabīr and Raidās seem to have been alike in being rather unconcerned with matters of caste purity and this likely allowed them to mix more freely with each other, and with *yogīs*, a fact reflected in

⁶⁷⁹ Mīrābāī, a markedly *saguṇ* poet-saint, is an interesting case in this regard. Contributors to the Mīrābāī poetic corpus seem to have come from both higher-caste and lower-caste backgrounds, but while lower-caste communities have gone so far as to make her the disciple of an untouchable Nāth *yogī* guru, nevertheless, poems attributed to her tend to show no evidence of the intimate details of (or terminology associated with) tantric yoga or Nāth meditative experience. Furthermore, while figures like Kabīr, Raidās, Pīpā, and Sena occasionally appear with *yogīs* and Sufis in Mughal miniature paintings, this is not the case with Mīrā, nor with Sūr or Tulsī.

⁶⁸⁰ Personal email communication, January 10, 2012.

the content of literature they both wrote that utilized Nāth *yogī* imagery, symbols, and terms even as it critiqued and marginalized key aspects of Nāth *yogī* religiosity.

The social location of devotees certainly affected the specific content of their critiques of tantric-yogic religion, but—as Tulsīdās and Kabīr make clear—*bhaktas* across the social spectrum were truly on the same page in their negative attitudes toward tantric *yogīs* and Śāktas. Earlier we discussed some verses from Kabīr that explicitly directed themselves at Gorakh and the Nāths, critiquing their yogic practices and attitudes. It is Tulsīdās, however, who penned perhaps the most striking of the *bhakti* verses that speak to the conflict between *bhaktas* and Nāth *yogīs*. In his *Kavitāvalī*, he famously wrote: “Gorakh awakened yoga and drove *bhakti* away from the people (*Gorakh jagāyo jog, bhakti bhagāyo log*). He played with the directives of the scriptures—what a fraud!”⁶⁸¹ Here Tulsī boldly proclaims not only that the tantric-yogic teachings of the Nāths are opposed to those of *bhakti*, but also that they have actually caused *bhakti* to weaken among the people.

It is important to point out that while Tulsī and Kabīr differed in many important respects, they were in clear agreement in their negative opinion of tantric *yogīs* and ascetics. Tulsī was a Brahman, a devotee especially of the Divine in form and with qualities (*saguṇ*),⁶⁸² and he has often been remembered as a socially conservative poet who sought to maintain the caste and purity restrictions of traditional Hindu *varṇāśramadharma*. Kabīr, on the other hand, was a low-caste weaver with Muslim and perhaps even Nāth background, a devotee of a formless God without qualities (*nirguṇ*), and he is remembered for his vehement attacks on

⁶⁸¹ *Kavitāvalī*, Uttarakāṇḍa 7.84.

⁶⁸² While Tulsī is most often thought of as poet with a *saguṇ* perspective, and while most of his work focuses on God in form (especially as Rāmcandra, but also Krishna and Śiva), we have seen that he also acknowledged the *nirguṇ* (quality-less) perspective, seeing the *saguṇ* and *nirguṇ* aspects of the Divine as inextricably linked and viewing their distinction as a rather artificial one that should be transcended.

conservative brahminical social views and institutions. If these characteristics would place Tulsī and Kabīr at opposite ends of the spectrum of *bhakti* poets, the two are nevertheless united in their rejection of tantric and yogic religious approaches. For both, utter devotion to Rām—whether conceived as the formless Ultimate or as Rāmcandra, *avatār* of Viṣṇu—is the only valid and authentic spiritual path; all else is worthless egotism, pretension, and foolishness.

Kabīr and Tulsī were linked in at least one other way. They both resided in the sacred city of Banaras along the Ganges River. The question that arises from this simple fact is one about location. We have just noted the impact of social location on *bhakti* polemics, but what about geographic location? To what degree did the anti-yoga, anti-tantra rhetoric of *bhakti* reformers in early modern north India emerge out of specific local contexts? There is no doubt that an aspect of the differences in the content of poetry attributed to the various north Indian *bhakti* saints (and also the differences among manuscript recensions of individual poets like Kabīr) has to do with the specific contexts of religious competition in the particular geographic regions in which the poetry was produced. The precise nature of “the other” necessarily depended on exactly who one was competing against for followers and patronage at a particular place and time. For instance, in the medieval and early modern period in north India, Nāth *yogīs* seem to have had a major presence in Rajasthan, Panjab, and around Banaras, thus we see them referenced, critiqued and marginalized especially by poets from these regions. On the other hand, *bhaktas* writing out of Braj (like those in the nascent Gauḍiya, Vallabhan, Rādhāvallabhan, and Haridāsī communities) far less frequently refer to *yogīs*/*yogīs*. As a rather new and developing pilgrimage center for Krishna devotees, it makes sense that Braj would not have been a regular stopping point on the circuits of itinerant tantric *yogīs*;

they simply were not major competitors in the religious marketplace of the area. As we will see in more depth in the pages below, Braj-dwelling *bhaktas* like Harirām Vyās did, however, compose polemics about Śāktas, who seem to have maintained a significant presence in Braj even after the sixteenth century Krishna revival there. As Charlotte Vaudeville writes, “In spite of Vaiṣṇava abhorrence of the bloody rites associated with Devī-worship, the pastoral castes, especially the Jāṭs and Gujārs who form the bulk of the autochthonous population of Braj-bhūmi, did remain attached to the cult of their local goddesses.”⁶⁸³

While there were nuances in poetic content and emphasis that correlated (in part) with differences in *bhaktas*’ geographic locations, the fact is that already we have seen critiques of yoga and tantra coming from devotional poets in a wide variety of places including Banaras, Avadh, Braj, Rajasthan, and Panjab. Clearly, the *bhakti* identity that was forming against the foil of the two-fold tantric Other in the early modern period was one that stretched across a broad swath of north India, one extending even into Bengal and Assam.

Up to this point, the sources we have examined and discussed have primarily come from Rajasthan, Panjab, and the Gangetic plain (e.g., Braj, Avadh, Banaras), but *bhakti* critiques of tantric-yogic religion also came from further east, addressing audiences in Bengal and Assam. A number of early modern authors writing in Bengali and Assamese included yoga in lists of religious approaches they said were worthless in comparison to, or ought to be abandoned in favor of, *bhakti*. Krishnadās Kavirāj, in his *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* (1537 CE) states, “*Karma*, *yoga*, and *jñāna*—these look toward the face of *bhakti*. But all these *sādhana*s yield most

⁶⁸³ Vaudeville adds, “The fact that a good number of popular Devī shrines remain to this day integrated with the *Braj parikramā* testifies to the failure of the reformers significantly to alter the religious pattern of the Devī-worshipping pastoral castes.” Charlotte Vaudeville, “Braj, Lost and Found,” *Indo-Iranian Journal* 18 (1976), 208.

worthless fruit, for without *bhakti* they have not the power to give.”⁶⁸⁴ In Locana Dāsa’s Bengali hagiography of Caitanya, the *Caitanya Maṅgala* (c. 1560-1580 CE), there is a scene in which the young Caitanya challenges a man, saying “Wagging your hands and head [in pride], you have abandoned *bhakti* and seek *yoga*. Instead of *jñāna* and *karma*, give your heart over to the worship of Kṛṣṇa and become a *rasika* immersed in blissful consciousness. Gaining mastery over the elements of the material world is not the practice of proper worship.”⁶⁸⁵ Another example comes from Kavikarṇapūra’s allegorical drama, the *Caitanyacandrodaya* (c. 1575 CE), in which Caitanya, on his pilgrimage south, encounters the great devotee Rāmānanda Rāya, who explains to him the essential truths of *bhakti*. The text (v. 7.13) states, “Rāmānanda observed that one who yokes himself to Kṛṣṇa through love (*prema*) is better than one follows the path of *yoga*; that only the one who relies on the spiritual body of Bhagvān, the heart thrilling form, and not on the physical form of this worldly body, is truly liberated from the world of creation.”⁶⁸⁶

Śaṅkaradeva, a Krishna devotee writing in Assam in the sixteenth century, also saw absolutely no value in the practice of *yoga*. As Phyllis Granoff explains, “Śaṅkaradeva’s rejection of the practice of *yoga* comprises a central episode in his biography that was composed in Assamese by his disciple Daityāri sometime in the early 17th century.”⁶⁸⁷ While Śaṅkaradeva seems initially to have been a practitioner of *aṣṭāṅga* and *haṭha yoga* and to have

⁶⁸⁴ *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* 2:22.14-15. *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* 2:21.100 also states, “*Karma, japa, yoga, jñāna, vidhi-bhakti, tapas, and dhyāna*—from these [God’s] sweetness is hard to obtain.” *Caitanya-caritāmṛta of Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja*, trans. Edward C. Dimock, Jr., ed. Tony K. Stewart (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

⁶⁸⁵ Tony Stewart, *The Final Word: The Caitanya Caritāmṛta and the Grammar of Religious Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 74. LCM 2:1 [10]381-403.

⁶⁸⁶ Stewart, *The Final Word*, 174-75.

⁶⁸⁷ Phyllis Granoff, “The Place of *Yoga* in Śaṅkaradeva’s Vaishnavism,” *Journal of Vaishnava Studies* 14.1 (2005): 156.

seen them as the means to salvation, Daityāri's hagiography explicitly and emphatically states that when he discovered the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, he gave up all practice of yoga and came to believe fervently in the necessity for the exclusive practice of devotion.⁶⁸⁸ Granoff demonstrates how Śaṅkaradeva, in his *Bhaktiratnakāra*, very selectively made use of verses in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* to present it as unambiguously expressing the message that only devotion to God brings liberation and that yoga, mantras, austerities, etc., cannot. Śaṅkaradeva carefully chose verses that elevated devotion and the recitation of the Name, while also selecting verses that explicitly rejected or marginalized yoga practices, despite the fact that, as we saw in Chapter Two, those same practices are clearly praised in other verses in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.⁶⁸⁹

Śaṅkaradeva was opposed not only to yoga, but (as we will see below) also and especially to Śākta and other tantric practices, arguing in his *Kīrttana-ghoṣa* that devotional remembrance of the name of Hari utterly surpasses all other rites and practices, including “*tantra mantra ... yajña*,” and so forth.⁶⁹⁰ Tantra-mantra often gets highlighted as an inferior or ineffective religious practice in a particular genre of *bhakti* poetry that we consider below.

~ Bitten by the Snake: Bhakti and Tantric Healing ~

We now shift our focus to the figure of the tantric *yogī* as healer, as represented in *bhakti* poetry, and the utter powerlessness of the tantric *yogī*'s tantra-mantra against either the

⁶⁸⁸ Ibid., 158.

⁶⁸⁹ As Granoff states, “While there is no question that one viewpoint in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is certainly the one that Śaṅkaradeva (and Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja) espoused, and which denies the validity of any practice other than devotion, there are also a number of passages in the *Bhāgavata* that recommend and describe in detail yogic practices.” Ibid., 161.

⁶⁹⁰ Hugh Urban, *The Power of Tantra: Religion, Sexuality, and the Politics of South Asian Studies* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 151. Urban cites Śaṅkaradeva, *Kīrttana-ghoṣa* 3.52.

snake of *viraha* (love in separation from the Divine) or the snake of *māyā* (that worldly delusion and desire that bind us in suffering and prevent liberation). There is a long tradition of *tāntrikas* and *yogīs* acting and earning renown as healers. As David White has noted, in the pragmatic religious world of the rural lower-castes, “possession, exorcism, divination, and healing have historically been the most pervasive forms of Tantric practice, and it has been in their roles as ritual healers ... and ground-level problem solvers that popular tantric specialists first established and have continued to maintain their closest ties with every level of South Asian society.”⁶⁹¹ The work of Kenneth Zysk brings out the historical origins of this link between healing and ascetic *yogīs*. As he explains, healers were often marginalized because of their “polluting” bodily contact with all castes and classes, but they found acceptance “among the communities of heterodox renunciants and mendicants.” They “wandered the countryside performing cures and acquiring new medicines, treatments, and medical information,” and eventually they became “indistinguishable from the ascetics with whom they were in close contact.”⁶⁹² Always at the core of these itinerant *yogīs*’ healing practices was (and still is) the recitation of mantras and the use of plants and herbs as amulets consecrated and made potent through mantric recitation.⁶⁹³

Travelers to India from Marco Polo (13th century) to Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (14th century) to the late-seventeenth century Englishman John Marshall have noted the expertise attributed to

⁶⁹¹ David Gordon White, *Kiss of the Yoginī: “Tantric Sex” in its South Asian Contexts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 260.

⁶⁹² Kenneth G. Zysk, *Asceticism and Healing in Ancient India: Medicine in the Buddhist Monastery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 5. Zysk argues that Indian medical knowledge was developed and transmitted primarily by heterodox ascetics (esp. monastic Buddhists), who were crucial in the transition from the healing exemplified in the *Atharva Veda* to the methods and medicines of *āyurveda*. Only later did orthodox brahmans assimilate this knowledge, appropriating and re-articulating it in texts like the *Caraka Saṃhitā*, *Suśruta Saṃhitā* and *Bhela Saṃhitā*.

⁶⁹³ Zysk, *Asceticism and Healing in Ancient India*, 16.

yogīs in curing diseases, enhancing health, and lengthening life with mantras and herbal and alchemical potions and pills.⁶⁹⁴ In his classic work, George Briggs notes that the Nāth *yogīs* are known for their attempts to cure disease by “muttering texts over the sick” and states that they have “a considerable reputation in the practice of medicine” with a method that is “in part that of exorcism and in part the use of magic, of charms, and of drugs.”⁶⁹⁵ Indeed, a trope in Indian literature and folktales is the tantric *yogī* specially summoned in to cure the sickness that no one else can cure. White tells a story offering an instance of this popular trope. One day a “*mahārāja* fell deathly ill, and no one in the country was able to heal him. At death’s door, the *mahārāja* had [a] *tāntrika* brought to him and he ... using mantras he had perfected through years of cremation-ground vigils—exorcised the demons that were the cause of the great man’s illness.”⁶⁹⁶

Here we are particularly concerned with the tantric healing of snakebites, which—we will see—were not only a real health hazard in many parts of India, but also a common poetic metaphor. Classical Sanskrit āyurvedic texts such as the *Caraka Saṃhitā* and *Suśruta Saṃhitā*, as well as Buddhist monastic medical treatises, devote entire chapters to identifying, classifying, and treating venomous snakebites.⁶⁹⁷ Central in all of their remedies is the recitation of mantras. Frederick Smith discusses a Buddhist manuscript dating back to the late-fourth or early-fifth century that contains sections on incantations used to combat snakebite. In one portion, the text advocates the recitation of a long mantra called the *mahāmāyūrī*, or “great

⁶⁹⁴ White, *Sinister Yogis*, 217-220.

⁶⁹⁵ George W. Briggs, *Gorakhnāth and the Kānpṛaṭa Yogis* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2007 [1938]), 23, 127.

⁶⁹⁶ White, *Kiss of the Yoginī*, 265.

⁶⁹⁷ Zysk, *Asceticism and Healing in Ancient India*, 102.

peacock”⁶⁹⁸ to cure a patient bitten by a large black snake.⁶⁹⁹ The most fundamental and influential sources on the topic of treating snakebites are the Gāruḍa Tantras, which have close links with a variety of Śākta traditions to snakebite goddesses. According to Michael Slouber, who has worked on these scriptures in some depth, the tantric repertoire of the *gāruḍika*, or snakebite healer, typically consisted of herbal medicines, mantras to the bird-king Garuḍa, protective diagrams (*yantra*), and spells (*vidyā*) understood to be sonic embodiments (i.e., mantras) of particular goddesses.⁷⁰⁰

In the first Indian Sufi *masnavī*, the *Cāndāyan* (1379), the main character Cāndā is bitten by a snake and dies on two separate occasions. In both instances, it is only through the mantras of a *gāruḍī* (or *gāruḍika*),⁷⁰¹ a tantric healer and snake charmer, that Cāndā is revived.⁷⁰²

⁶⁹⁸ The peacock is known to have a taste for poisonous snakes and to dine on them with no ill effects. Indeed, the peacock has a legendary ability to consume poison and be unaffected by it, even to turn the poison into a nutrient. In one common version of the famous myth of the gods and demons’ churning the elixir of immortality—along with the primordial poison—out of the ocean, Śiva takes the form of a peacock in order to consume the poison in his throat, absorbing its negative effects to save the world. See Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty, *Śiva: The Erotic Ascetic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981 [1973]), 279. The tenth-century Buddhist Dharmakṣita entitled one of his meditation texts *The Poison-Destroying Peacock*, likening the enlightened bodhisattva who remains in the world able to consume and productively transform the poison of selfish desire, to a peacock roaming freely in forests of poisonous plants and snakes.

⁶⁹⁹ Frederick Smith, *The Self Possessed: Deity and Spirit Possession in South Asian Literature and Civilization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 509.

⁷⁰⁰ Michael Slouber, “Snakebite Goddesses in the Śākta Traditions: Roots and Incorporations of Tvaritā, Kurukullā, and Bheruṇḍā,” in *The Śākta Traditions*, eds. Gavin Flood and Bjarne Wernicke Oleson (Oxford University Press, forthcoming). Slouber notes one scriptural instance of *gāruḍī* practice in which “the Gāruḍika mantra practitioner would install the syllables on his body and be able to carry out various magical acts just like Garuḍa, incant a string with the *vidyā* and ritually place it on a patron to ward off snakes, and incant gravel to be thrown in a house to drive out Nāgas.”

⁷⁰¹ The *gāruḍī*, a snake-charmer and tantric healer, derives his title from Garuḍ, the legendary eagle and “king of the birds,” who is the enemy and devourer of snakes. It is worth noting that Garuḍ is often depicted as the vehicle of Vishnu, and that our other devourer of snakes, the peacock, has very close associations with Vishnu’s avatar Krishna. Krishna wears a peacock feather in his hair and is known for defeating the poisonous snake-demon Kāliyā (who was residing in the Yamuna River and terrorizing Braj) by dancing upon his head.

⁷⁰² Naseem Hines, “The Snake-bite Episodes in *Cāndāyan*: A Journey within a Journey,” in *Studies in Early Modern Indo-Aryan Languages, Literature and Culture*, eds. Alan Entwistle and Carol Salomon (New Delhi: Manohar, 1999), 167-168.

What I am interested in exploring, however, is a genre of devotional poetry and story, first emerging in the sixteenth century, in which the tantric healer and his mantras are *not* so successful and are, in fact, entirely ineffective.

In another of the Sufi romances, the *Madhumālatī* (1545), the story's hero, Prince Manohar, falls terribly ill, and when none of the physicians, exorcists, or sages can help him, a tantric healer is summoned. This learned *tāntrika* boasts of his "skills and magic," saying he can raise the dead with his incantations and invoke the gods through his magic;⁷⁰³ however, in the end he is forced to admit that the illness is beyond his powers: "He tried everything—words, medicines, all his skills as a healer—but all proved useless."⁷⁰⁴ The text states emphatically: "The Prince's ailment was incurable. No herb, no mantra in this world could heal him."⁷⁰⁵ Similarly, in Jāyasī's *Padmāvat* (1540), the protagonist King Ratansen falls into a condition "more grievous than death," repeatedly losing consciousness in his intense pain. "All his family and dependents, his princes and lords, all came speedily. And all the magicians and the curers of snakebite (*gāruḍī*) and the sorcerers and the physicians and the wise men were summoned."⁷⁰⁶ But they could not heal his sickness. What was this incurable illness of Ratansen and Manohar, seemingly unparalleled in the agony and madness it brought on? The answer, of course, is *viraha*—the passionate, anguished love that occurs in separation from one's beloved.

There is a long tradition in Indian literature of depicting *viraha* as an intense burning

⁷⁰³ *Madhumālatī* 158-159. Behl and Weightman, trans., 67.

⁷⁰⁴ *Madhumālatī* 167. Ibid., 70.

⁷⁰⁵ *Madhumālatī* 166. Ibid.

⁷⁰⁶ *Padmavati* 11.1-2. Sherriff, trans., 83-84.

pain, an insufferable madness, a disease that no doctor can cure, for only the beloved can heal the afflicted. In the Sufi *premākhyāns*, as in *bhakti* literature, that longed-for beloved is ultimately none other than the Divine. We find this plea in the *Gīta Govinda* (12th century): “Divine physician of her heart, the love-sick girl can only be healed with elixir from your body. Free Rādhā from her torment, Krishna—Or you are crueler than Indra’s dread thunderbolt.”⁷⁰⁷ Three centuries later, Kabīr voices a similar cry: “O Physician! Go home! There is nothing you can do: He who caused that painful disease, He alone can cure it!”⁷⁰⁸

In the *bhakti* poetry highlighted below, *viraha* is often depicted specifically as a snake or snakebite. “The snake of *viraha* has entered the body,” says Kabīr, “it has bitten the inmost heart—Yet the saint does not turn a limb: ‘Let it bite as it pleases!’ he says.”⁷⁰⁹ In another *sākhī*, he declares, “I found a raft formed by a snake in the Ocean of Existence: If I let go, I shall drown, if I hang on, it will bite my arm.”⁷¹⁰ In both of these Kabīr poems, the snake is *viraha*, and though it causes suffering, that pain is welcomed as a necessary element in the path of *bhakti*, which alone brings liberation from the suffering of worldly existence. Krishnadās Kavirāj, in the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, identifies the snake not with *viraha*, but with God (Krishna) whose serpent-bite of love causes that *viraha*; “Long and powerful bars are the two arms of Kṛṣṇa; they are not arms, but long black-snake bodies. Coiling through the cleft of the twin mountains they bite the hearts of women; in that poison’s burning women die.”⁷¹¹ Similarly,

⁷⁰⁷ *Gītagovinda* 9.20. Barbara Stoler Miller, trans. *Love Song of the Dark Lord: Jayadeva’s Gītagovinda* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 89.

⁷⁰⁸ KG 2.14. Translated in Charlotte Vaudeville, *Kabīr: Volume I* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 163.

⁷⁰⁹ KG. 2.2. Translation adapted from Vaudeville, *Kabīr*, 160.

⁷¹⁰ KG 2.11. Vaudeville, *Kabīr*, 163.

⁷¹¹ *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Antya Līlā 15.66. In this same work, Kṛṣṇadās Kavirāj tells how Caitanya’s wife, Lakṣmī, died in separation from him due to the poison of the “snake of *viraha*.” In Ādi Līlā 16.18-19, he writes, “In this way

Sūrdās, in one of his poems, describes Krishna as a snake that has bitten Rādhā then abandoned her to suffer intense pain in separation from her Beloved. After listing multiple failed efforts to cure Rādhā's faint, feverish condition, Sūr states: “[N]othing availed against the cruel bite of that serpent, the God of Love.”⁷¹²

While some of these poems depict the Divine as the snake or snakebite of *viraha*, other *bhakti* poetry and literature equate the Divine with the snakebite curer. The *Camatkāra-Candrikā*, a Sanskrit text attributed to the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava ācārya Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura (c. 1650-1750 CE), narrates a fascinating tale in which Krishna disguises himself as a tantric snakebite healer in order to be with Rādhā.⁷¹³ Rādhā's in-laws have confined her to their home, preventing her from going out to meet Krishna. She is bitten by a black snake, but adamantly refuses that any male be allowed to touch or chant healing mantras upon her body, so her in-laws seek out a female *gāruḍī* who “is well-versed in the tantric and *āgama* scriptures and knows excellent snake-*mantras*.”⁷¹⁴ As it turns out, the female tantric healer they bring home is none other than Krishna in disguise. Dressed as a woman and going by the name Vidyāvali, Krishna, in a hilarious scene, tells Rādhā's in-laws that her clothes must be removed so that he (i.e., “she”) can move his (i.e., “her”) hands along Rādhā's body to detect the location

Prabhu did many *līlās* in Vaṅga; and meanwhile in Navadvīpa, Lakṣmī was greatly sad, in *viraha*. The serpent of *viraha* bit Lakṣmī, and due to the poison of the serpent of *viraha*, she went to the other world.” Dimock, trans., *Caityanya-caritāmṛta of Kṛṣṇadās Kavirāja*, 944; 305-6.

⁷¹² KB 315 (NPS 1367). Excerpt translated in John S. Hawley, *The Memory of Love: Sūrdās Sings to Krishna*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 142.

⁷¹³ I am grateful to Michael Slouber for bringing this text to my attention. He notes that the authorship of the *Camatkāra-candrikā* is in question as there is another edition (Kawthekar 2004) that ascribes the text to a Kavikarṇapūra Goswāmin and knows no competing authorship issue. Personal email communication, December 16, 2011.

⁷¹⁴ *Camatkāra-candrikā* 3.35. Translations of this text come from the edition found in *A Moonbeam of Complete Astonishment: Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura's Camatkāra-Candrikā* (Gaudiya Vedanta Publications, 2006).

of the poison. Under this pretense, he caresses her body from the feet up, stopping to grope her breasts at length while chanting mantras. Just as we have seen the *yogī* mocked and ridiculed in devotional sources, here it seems that the figure of the tantric healer is being satirized.⁷¹⁵

In the next scene, the comedy continues as the healer Vidyāvali (i.e., Krishna) tells Rādhā's in-laws:

She is still yellow with the poison. I shall have to change the treatment. All of you please leave the room. I will lock the door and recite a snake *mantra* to summon the snake that bit your daughter-in-law. The snake will arrive within a moment and I will talk with him. Do not worry in the slightest; I will very soon revive your daughter-in-law. After I have been reciting this *mantra* with focused mind for three hours I will show all of you the result.⁷¹⁶

Behind closed doors, Krishna, now feigning the voice of the snake, says that Rādhā can be cured, but “[F]rom this day forth, if you ever prevent Her from going here and there, I will be so enraged I will immediately bite your son and daughter-in-law, and they will both die.”⁷¹⁷

Rādhā's in-laws are allowed to enter the room and she reports to them that she is no longer in pain. The story concludes with another humorous bit. Having been told that the fever from Rādhā's snakebite may rise again and therefore the snake charmer should remain near the patient, Rādhā's in-laws state, “So be it. Let Vidyāvali, who is learned in *mantras*, rest happily together with Śrī Rādhā on the flower-bed in the room on the roof.”⁷¹⁸ In this tale, the bite of the snake serves rather obviously as a symbol of Rādhā's *viraha*, her torment in forced

⁷¹⁵ It is worth noting that many, if not most, snake-charmers today are Nāth *yogīs*. A caste of householder “*yogīs*” who do not practice yoga, these snake handlers (snakebite healers/musicians) trace their roots to Gorakhnāth and worship him. See Briggs, *Gorakhnāth and the Kānpaṭa Yogīs*, 59-60.

⁷¹⁶ *Camatkāra-candrikā* 3.66-68.

⁷¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.84-85.

⁷¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.99.

separation from Krishna, and she is thus healed not by any actual *gāruḍī* medicines or tantra-mantra, but by the presence of her beloved Krishna. The story’s chief intention is to entertain, to show Krishna’s cleverness, and to convey a message about the power of Krishna and Rādhā’s love, but in the process the story repeatedly seems to poke fun at the figure of the *gāruḍī* and subtly undermines or marginalizes tantric healing methods.

In an altogether different tone, Sūrdās, taking on the voice of the *gopīs* of Braj, sings of Krishna as the lone healer capable of curing the snakebite of *viraha*:

We’ve been bitten, my friend, by a dark, black snake
And no one—no one but the Lord of the Yadus—
can take the poison away.
Ūdho, it’s a good thing you’ve come
to bind us with a tourniquet before you leave,
But when will you send us Sūrdās’s Lord
to pour his mantras on our heads?⁷¹⁹

A slightly later (1640 CE) version of this poem adds these lines: “None of the tantras and mantras work—the experts have given up and gone. Call the doctor of snakebites (*gāruḍī*), call Gopāl: [only] he can make these waves of fainting go away.”⁷²⁰

⁷¹⁹ KB 314 (NPS 1365). Translated in John S. Hawley, *Sūr’s Ocean* (forthcoming), 545. Hawley notes that the snake in this poem is described as dark or *syām*, one of the more common titles of Krishna, making it clear that Krishna is both cause and cure of the pain of *viraha*. He writes, “This measure of identity between the infection and the cure corresponds well to the method of the *gāruḍī*, who, after saying the various Garuḍ mantras intended to summon snakes, throws either cowries or black lentils in the direction where they are imagined to be, hitting the cobras’ hoods and bidding them come and remove the poison by whatever method they used to inject it in the first place.”

⁷²⁰ Hawley, *Sūr’s Ocean*, 546. Other *bhakti* literature indicates that the Divine (and devotion to the Divine) has power over not only the metaphorical snakebites of *viraha* and *māyā/saṃsāra*, but also over actual snakebites. In the *Bhāvprakāś* of Dinkaradās and Mukunddās in the *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* (*Tīn Janma kī Līlā Bhāvnā Vālī*), Dinkaradās is bitten by a snake and when none of the usual folk remedies work to heal him, responding to the cries of “the tender-hearted devotee,” Kṛṣṇadās Meghan gives him *caranāmṛt* (water that had bathed the feet) of his guru, the great *bhakti* saint Vallabha (believed by some of his followers to be an incarnation of Krishna), which causes the poison to leave Dinkaradās’s body instantly. This episode is translated and discussed in: Christine H. Marrewa Karwoski, “Powers Politics, and Proselytization: The Roles of Kṛṣṇadās Meghan in the *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* and Harirāy’s Commentary” (MA Thesis, University of Washington, 2010), 61–62, 75–78.

Snakebites, and tantric healing practices for dealing with them, seem to have been relatively widespread among the audiences to whom many *bhakti* poets and storytellers performed. The story and poems we have seen above utilize the burning pain, fever, and fainting caused by a snakebite as metaphors for the intense anguish and longing experienced by the devotee in separation from God. Together these *bhakti* sources speak to the paradox that the beloved Divine is simultaneously both the snake that has caused the tormented love of *viraha* and the snakebite curer (*gāruḍī*) uniquely capable of healing the devotee's love-sickness. This much is quite clear. The point I want to emphasize, however, is that these verses consist of more than just metaphors and clever literary devices for describing the nature of *viraha*; in them we can also see expressions of a broad *bhakti* critique of tantric attitudes and practices. In other words, that “none of the tantras and mantras work” is a detail very much worth noting, for it suggests that for the religious needs and desires of these *bhaktas*, tantric methods simply had no worth or power. This sentiment, which we have already seen in the devotional perspective of the *Padmāvat* and *Madhumālātī*, is one that pops up repeatedly in the poetry and hagiography of the north Indian *bhakti* saints.

Mīrābāī, in her earliest dated poem (in 1604 CE Kartārpur manuscript), describes the anguished love she feels for the Divine and explicitly critiques the worth of tantras and mantras. She sings:

He's bound my heart with the powers he owns, Mother—he with the lotus eyes.
 Arrows like spears: this body is pierced, and Mother, he's gone far away.
 When did it happen, Mother? I don't know but now it's too much to bear.
 Tantras, mantras, medicines—I've tried, but the pain won't go.
 Is there someone who can bring relief? Mother, the hurt is cruel.
 Here I am, near, and you're not far: Hurry to me, to meet.
 Mira's Mountain-Lifter Lord, have mercy, cool this body's fire!
 O Mother, my heart is bound in the bonds of the Lotus-Eyed One.⁷²¹

⁷²¹ Translation slightly adapted from Hawley, *Three Bhakti Voices*, 105.

Mantras are the bread and butter of tantric practice. Indeed, Tantra is commonly known simply as *mantraśāstra*, or “the science of mantras.” Yet again and again in their compositions, our poet-saints note how these vital tools of the tantric trade have no value and no power in the realm of *bhakti*. As one of Kabīr’s poems declares, “Once the snake of *viraha* is in the body, no mantra can control it. To live in separation from Rām is to live in madness.”⁷²² An early (1657 CE) poem attributed to Mīrābāī shows a similar attitude towards mantras, stating: “Mantras cannot bind a heart that Krishna the Mountain-Lifter’s limbs have set free.”⁷²³ The message in these verses is clear: Love—love for the Divine—is far stronger, far more potent, than any power a tantric mantra might harness.

The ineffectiveness of tantras, mantras, and magical healers is a theme not only in *bhakti* poetry, but also *bhakti* hagiography. The Rāmānandī Anantadās, writing in Rajasthan in the late sixteenth century, narrates this story about Pīpā, the great king and *bhakti* saint. Pīpā was a worshipper of the Goddess; “for him there was no other deity ... he was focused only on the goddess, ignorant of the true path to liberation.”⁷²⁴ Having served her well, one day Pīpā asks the Goddess to grant him liberation. Anantadās’s use of parody and satire comes through clearly in the Goddess’s response to Pīpā’s request. She says, “When did you ever see anyone find liberation through me? Yet, even understanding saints do not know that. I can give you every other joy; if that satisfies you, then serve me. But if you hope to find liberation, then worship only Hari without hesitation.”⁷²⁵ When the Goddess leaves, Pīpā becomes incredibly

⁷²² KG 2.1. My translation; adapted from Vaudeville, *Kabīr*, 160.

⁷²³ My translation. Original text in Hawley, *Three Bhakti Voices*, 111.

⁷²⁴ Pīpā *parcaī* 1.5. Callewaert, *Hagiographies of Anantadās*, 142.

⁷²⁵ Pīpā *parcaī* 2.4-5. Ibid., 145.

distraught, crying, sighing, and refusing to speak. Foreshadowing that these were signs of the anguish of *viraha*, a sudden and intense longing for Hari ignited in Pīpā by the Goddess's revelatory words, Anantadās says that Pīpā was “like a beautiful woman without her husband.”⁷²⁶ He writes,

Some thought he was under the spell of witchcraft (*mūṇṭhi*), and they called wise tantric healers (*gāruḍī*). Others thought a demon had possessed him, or that he had been cheated by a crook. Some thought he had been struck by a sudden sickness which caused immense pain. They called for a doctor (*vaid*) to give medicines and a sorcerer (*bhopā*) to exorcise him. Magical practices (*tāman*) were tried and occult mantras (*ṭaunān*, spells/charms) were chanted. The Devī was touched when offerings were made. Brahmins were asked to consult his horoscope and alms were given according to the planets. But they did not know the secret of Hari, as if they had taken cannabis or *daturā* (intoxicating thorn-apple).⁷²⁷

Here several tantric specialists are summoned and try out their magic and mantras but none of it works, for—as Anantadās writes—“they did not know the secret of Hari.” Eventually, Pīpā speaks to his subjects. He urges them to abandon the Goddess and devote themselves wholeheartedly to Hari. Explaining the source of his anguish, he says, “No cheat has cheated me nor have I been possessed by a demon. Only the love of Hari has taken root in my heart.”⁷²⁸ Anantadās depicts devotion to Hari as a higher plane of religiosity, one concerned not with the transitory, illusory pleasures of goddess-worshipping Śāktas, but with the Real; one grounded in a love whose power tantric magic and mantra simply cannot touch.

All this is certainly *not* to say that the everyday people listening to performers of *bhakti* poems and stories had come to see *gāruḍīs* and other *tāntrikas* as completely powerless or ineffective. Anantadās, Pīpā, or any other *bhakta*, if bitten by a snake or possessed by a

⁷²⁶ Pīpā *parcaī* 3.7. Ibid., 147.

⁷²⁷ Pīpā *parcaī* 3.8-12. Ibid.

⁷²⁸ Pīpā *parcaī* 3.17-18. Ibid., 148.

mysterious illness, may very well have consulted a tantric healer to remedy the situation with his rituals, herbs, and mantras. The point is rather that these tantric powers and methods were being circumscribed and increasingly placed on a different, lower, and worldlier level separate from the higher plane of *bhakti* and the power of God/devotion to God. That said, we do have hagiographical instances in which tantra-mantra is rejected outright and shown to be ineffective even within the limited realm of mundane concerns that *bhaktas* may have sometimes granted it. In his commentary on Nābhādās's *Bhaktamāl*, Gaṇeśdās tells a tale about Krishnadās Payahārī's (female) disciple Gaṇgādevī (Gaṇgā), whose brother was possessed by a demon and was wasting away. Various "yantra-tantra-mantra" were tried to exorcise the demon but they all had no effect whatsoever. Only when Gaṇgādevī brought "the nectar of the feet of God" (*bhagavat-caraṇāmṛt*)—liquid poured with devotion over the feet of a saint or divine image (*murti*)—and poured it upon him, did the demon immediately leave his body.⁷²⁹

Gaṇeśdās tells a story about another of Payahārī's disciples that emphasizes the ineffectiveness of tantra-mantra in an entirely different context. According to this tale, Payahārī's disciple Haṭhīnārāyaṇ (Nārāyaṇ), while on a pilgrimage to Gujarat, encountered a *tāntrika* who wished to do him harm. The *tāntrika* tried a great deal of "tantra-mantra" but found that all of it was useless against Haṭhīnārāyaṇ. Gaṇeśdās writes, "Tantra in the face of Rām *bhakti*, and a *tāntrika* in the face of a Rām-*bhakta*, had to bow down." Haṭhīnārāyaṇ's *bhakti* had such an effect on the *tāntrika* that he left his village and began singing devotional songs to God.⁷³⁰

⁷²⁹Gaṇeśdās's commentary in Nābhājī, *Śrī Bhaktamāl*, *Uttarārdh Pratham Khaṇḍ*, *Śrī Priyādāsī kṛta Kavittamayī Bhaktiras-bodhini ṭīkā sahit*, *Bhāṣaṭīkāṅkār Gaṇeśdās Bhaktamālī and Vyākhyākār Rāmāyaṇī Śrīrameśvardās*. (Vṛndāvan: Śrīrāmānand Pustakālay, Sudāmā Kuṭī, 2008), 151-152.

⁷³⁰Ibid., 146-147. These stories told by Gaṇeśdās, a twentieth century commentator, are based on oral traditions whose antiquity is impossible to determine; nevertheless, the tales are valuable in demonstrating yet again how

Let us return now to Anantadās who, in another of his *parcaīs*, tells this story about the young Raidās. Born into the home of untouchable, Śākta parents, Raidās refuses to take milk from his mother. Crying and crying, the baby Raidās refuses to eat and is soon hovering on the brink of death. Anantadās narrates how Raidās’s family, fearing for their son’s life, “summoned many a sorcerer (*bhopā*) and healer (*vaid*) to work magic and minister potions (*jantra mantra auṣaudī karāvai*). Whoever saves this dying child (they said), will be hailed as Dhanvantari [the founder of Indian medicine and physician of the gods]. We will do whatever he says and heap things in front of him.”⁷³¹ None of these tantric healing methods work and Raidās lies there thinking, “Dying is better than living, for life without Hari is tasteless.”⁷³² It is only when the great *bhakti* saint Rāmānand arrives, sent by Hari, that the baby Raidās is healed. Rāmānand says to Raidās’s family, “If you become devotees (*bhaktas*), brothers, Hari will revive your child.”⁷³³ They accept, Rāmānand initiates Raidās, and soon afterward “everyone’s hearts were gladdened when Raidās started to suckle at his mother’s breast.”⁷³⁴ Here not only is the *jantra-mantra* of the tantric healer shown to be ineffective, but the baby Raidās is revived only when his family, explicitly marked as Śāktas, convert and become *bhaktas* of Hari. The trend is clear: it’s another loss for the Śāktas and *tāntrikas*, and another win for *bhakti*.

We move now from Raidās’s hagiography to his poetry. In a composition filled with

bhaktas came to conceive *tāntrikas* as their opponents and marked tantra-mantra as powerless, especially in relation to *bhakti*.

⁷³¹ *Raidās paricāī* 1.5-6. Callewaert, *The Hagiographies of Anantadās*, 307.

⁷³² *Raidās paricāī* 1.8. Ibid, 307-308.

⁷³³ *Raidās paricāī* 1.13. Ibid., 308.

⁷³⁴ *Raidās paricāī* 1.15. Ibid.

references to snakes and snake charming, Raidās states, “Against the snake of passionate desire, no mantra or magic avails.” The snake in this verse is not *viraha*, but the snake of *māyā* and all the sensual desire and worldly delusion associated with it. Once again tantric mantras and magic are critiqued as ineffective, but this time the critique centers on their inability to liberate one from *saṃsāra*. Let us examine the entirety of the poem. Raidās sings:

Foolish man! How can you sleep in the jaws of death, abandoning the true Rām,
contemplating countless pleasures?
His incredible patience gone, Krishna liberated (Braj) from the fury (of Kāliyā). Against
the snake of passionate desire (*madan*) no mantra nor magic (*mantra jantrā*)
avails. There is no near nor far shore for its waves of venomous fire. Your
wisdom is slain by the serpent of greed (*lobh*).
You are bewildered in the poisonous waves of the ocean of *saṃsār*. You are bound in
delusion, the *guṇs* and the senses. Call out the great snake-charming (*gāraḍī*)
mantra, place it in your ears. Awake and cry “Rām”—why are you asleep?
The Sants have told as many teachings as are told in the *smṛti*, but those supreme sages
[of *smṛti*] have not all learnt the true snake-charming art. Brahma-rishis, Nārad,
Syambha, Sanak and his siblings – only those who repeated “Rām” passed over.
[Previously,] the remedy given for this sickness was performing vedic rituals, chanting
mantras, going on pilgrimages and giving alms. But the true *nāgadamanī*
medicine (cure for snakebite) is remembering Rām. Raidās says: Consciousness,
awake!⁷³⁵

In this poem, Raidās initially describes the snake as *madan*, passionate desire or lust. He goes on to call it the serpent of greed (*lobh*) whose poison is the delusion of *samsāra*.⁷³⁶ As we have seen, against this snakebite of worldly desire and delusion, tantric mantras and magic have absolutely no power. There is but one mantra that brings liberation from this affliction: Rām,

⁷³⁵ *Raidās-Vāṇī* 23. Translation slightly adapted from Winand Callewaert and Peter Friedlander, *The Life and Works of Raidās* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1992), 116–117, 190–191. According to Callewaert and Friedlander, *nāgadamanī* is “a flowering shrub found in the Himalayas which is believed to have the power to drive out the fever caused by snake bites” (117).

⁷³⁶ Particularly for celibate ascetic *yogīs* like the Nāths (and those influenced by them, like Kabīr), the snake is also commonly used as a metaphor specifically for woman, or more accurately, for lust (engendered by women). Kabīr says (KG 30.18), “A beautiful woman is like a snake: those who touch it get bitten! But it dares not come near those enamoured of the feet of Rām.” Vaudeville, *Kabīr*, 298.

the name of the Lord.⁷³⁷ In the last verse, Raidās emphasizes that the only medicine capable of healing the snakebite of *māyā* and liberating one from its bondage is the loving remembrance (*sumiraṇ*) of Rām.⁷³⁸ Similarly, but in a more *saguṇ* vein, Tulsīdās states in his *Dohāvalī* that the only healing herb (*auṣadhi*) for the confusion brought on by *māyā*’s snakebite is devotional remembrance of Rām (i.e., Rāmcandra). He writes: “The serpent of worldly existence bites Tulsī, as if biting a mongoose, and all wisdom is stolen away; meditation on Chitrakut [the forest in which Rām, Sītā, and Lakshman resided] is the one remedy (*auṣadhi*) that revives consciousness.”⁷³⁹

Along the same lines, in two of his oldest dated poems—from the Fatehpur manuscript of 1582—Kabīr stresses that when it comes to the *sāṃsāric* poison of the snake of *māyā*, our only hope of salvation is to look with devotion to God. Calling out to the Divine, in one of these he states, “You’re the snakebite curer (*gāruḍī*). I’m a pot of poison. What will you give me, elixir-giver? The serpent of this world has bitten my body—one pain everywhere, fearsome delusions.”⁷⁴⁰ The other poem shows Kabīr, in a style all his own, critiquing “tantra-mantra” as part of the illusory realm of *māyā*. He says, “People are so dumb. Their minds just can’t get the point. The mind cannot see it’s tasting *māyā*’s fake flavor. It just doesn’t happen; the truth

⁷³⁷ Coming from a Krishnaite perspective, Rūpa Gosvāmin makes a similar point in his sixteenth-century work, the *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu*. Citing the *Garuḍa Purāna*, Rūpa writes, “A person becomes free after hearing the Vaiṣṇava mantra ‘Kṛṣṇa,’ which is the sole remedy for a life destroyed by the bite of this snake-like world” (1.2.171). David Haberman, *The Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu of Rūpa Gosvāmin* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2002), 57.

⁷³⁸ Guru Nānak expresses a parallel sentiment in verse 38 of his *Siddh Gosht* (a 16th-century hymn included in the *Ādi Granth*): “Without the Guru, one is stung by the poisonous snake of *māyā*, and dies. O Nanak without the Guru, all is lost.” See: <http://www.unp.me/f15/siddh-gosht-conversations-with-the-siddhas-159235/#ixzz1fgFhy8eG>.

⁷³⁹ *Dohāvalī* 180.

⁷⁴⁰ Fatehpur manuscript, poem 11. Hawley, *Three Bhakti Voices*, 299.

never dawns. Tantras, mantras, medicines—fakes one and all; And only Kabīr is left around to sing the name of Rām.”⁷⁴¹

While others are lost in ignorance and worldly desire, using tantric practices with no ultimate efficacy, Kabīr—like so many of the *bhakti* sants—finds the Real through the devotional practice of singing the divine Name. And it was not only the name of God that these *bhaktas* sang. We must not forget that all of the *bhakti* tales and poetic verses we have discussed typically were not read, but were sung and performed. It is no coincidence that the word for “doing *bhakti*”—*bhajan*—also means “devotional song.” With this in mind, we might say that *bhaktas* like Kabīr, Raidās, Sūrdās, and Mīrābāī were not simply critiquing tantra-mantra, but were actually *replacing* it with an altogether different use of language, one more participatory, more emotional, and more infused with devotion and humility. In some sense, in the *bhakti* movement, the paradigmatic tantric verbal practice of mantra *japa* (often an individual practice) is supplanted by the (ordinarily communal) *bhakti* verbal practices of performing poetry, telling stories, and singing songs to God.⁷⁴² Thus, when it comes to *bhakti* poems and stories about tantra-mantra and snakebites like the ones we have been examining, the medium of the critique—the song, the tale—was itself the antidote, the real cure exposing the false medicine that was the object of the critique.⁷⁴³

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⁷⁴¹ Fatehpur manuscript, poem 7. Ibid., 288.

⁷⁴² It is true that the fundamental *bhakti* practice of reciting the divine Name might be considered a form of mantra *japa*, yet—as I argue in the pages below—the devotional chanting of the Name entirely reconceived tantric notions of the mantra and oriented it within a rather different religious worldview.

⁷⁴³ I am grateful to Jack Hawley for this insight. Personal communication, December 23, 2011.

The *bhaktas* we have highlighted in the section above—Mīrābāī, Sūrdās, Rāidās, Kabīr and Anantadās—all stress the power of *bhakti*, both in terms of emotional intensity and salvific ability, while underlining the inefficacy of tantric methods. As we have seen, a number of their compositions refer to a snake, snakebite, or illness—sometimes identified as *viraha*, love in separation from God, and other times as *māyā* and its egoistic cravings and delusions. In fact, there was nothing particularly novel in this; these were traditional metaphors for illustrating the power of devotion, the nature of longing for the Divine, and the sufferings of *saṃsāra*. What does seem somewhat new in these *bhakti* sources of early modern north India, however, is the trend of specifically marking tantras and mantras, tantric healers, snake-charmers, and magicians for their ineffectiveness and worthlessness, a critique sometimes combined with denigrations of Śāktas.

~ *Anti-Śākta Sentiments* ~

While much of the devotional critique was directed at the tantric *yogī*, Śāktas were also major targets of criticism. As Heidi Pauwels has already written in depth on this phenomenon, we will only discuss it briefly here. We have just seen how Anantadās described Rāidās as being born to Śākta parents who later convert and become *bhaktas* of Hari and how he narrated Pīpā's shift from worship of the Goddess (who admits her own subordinate status) to the love of Hari. In the opening verses of his *Kabīr-paricāī*, Anantadās also remarks that Kabīr spent many days among the Śāktas, but had then become a devotee of Hari.⁷⁴⁴ Anantadās was not the only hagiographer to use the Śāktas as a contrast to highlight the devotional perspective of the great *bhakti* heroes and heroines. Priyādās, in his *Bhaktirasabodhinī* (1712),

⁷⁴⁴ *Kabīr paricāī* 1.1.

tells us that Mīrābāī's in-laws were Śāktas and that Mīrā's mother-in-law (*sāsu*) pressured her to worship the Goddess, but that she adamantly refused, maintaining that she worshipped Krishna (Giridhārīlāl) alone.⁷⁴⁵ In each of these examples from the hagiographies of Kabīr, Mīrā, Pīpā, and Raidās, we see how Śāktas and goddess worship were set up as a foil for *bhakti* devotional religion.

As Pauwels notes, "Diatribes against *śāktas* are widespread throughout North Indian *bhakti* texts, in *nirguṇa* as well as in Rāma and Krishna *bhakti*."⁷⁴⁶ To briefly get a feel for the anti-Śākta rhetoric prevalent among *bhakti* poets of early modern north India, let us look at examples from two very different devotees, writing out of very different social and geographic locations: Kabīr, a fifteenth-sixteenth century, low-caste, *nirguṇ* poet of Banaras/Varanasi; and Harirām Vyās, a sixteenth century, high-caste, Krishna poet of Vrindavan. While we have seen how *bhaktas* depicted the outlook and practices of *yogīs* and *tāntrikas* as misguided, worthless, ineffective, or inferior (to love/devotion), in *bhakti* verses on Śāktas we find an additional element of vitriol and genuine disgust. Here are two *sākhīs* of Kabīr:

Better is the she-dog of a Vaiṣṇava than the mother of Śākta:
The one keeps listening to Hari's praise and the other goes to buy sin!⁷⁴⁷

A pig is worth more than a Śākta, for he keeps the village clean!
When the Śākta, the wretch, has died nobody will take his name!⁷⁴⁸

Harirām Vyās voices a similar hostility, writing:

Paint black the face of a *śākta*, o Heart.

⁷⁴⁵ Kavitt 472-473. *Śrī Bhaktamāl, with the Bhaktīrasabodhini commentary of Prīya Dās. Exposition in modern Hindi by Sitaramsaran Bhagavanprasad Rūpālā* (Lucknow: Tej Kumar Press, 1961), 715-717.

⁷⁴⁶ Pauwels, "Who Are the Enemies," 510.

⁷⁴⁷ KG 21:10. Vaudeville, *Kabīr*, 266.

⁷⁴⁸ KG 21:12. Ibid., 267. We should note that anti-*śākta* poems can be found in all three of the major manuscript traditions of poetry attributed to Kabīr.

I cannot stand seeing a *śākta*, whether old or for profit.
 When I see a *śākta*, I'm afraid, even more than of a lion.
 The devotee deserves my love, (but) he kills living beings, not afraid to reduce to dust.
 Worshipping garbage-pots on the eighth and fourteenth day, the poor guy is dim of
 wits.⁷⁴⁹
 Vyāsdās (says): leave such company, instead (turn) right away to worshipping Śyām
 [Krishna].⁷⁵⁰

In this poem, Vyās targets the “left-hand” tantric practice and sexual ritual of *sahajiyās* and
 Śāktas in Bengal:

Senseless *bairāgīs* perform spiritual training in Bengal.
 By the power of mineral, alchemy and herbs, [their] desire [the bodiless god of love] is
 inflamed night and day.
 [They] are not affected by the passionate bliss of Śuk's words [i.e., the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*],
 no element of doubt is dispersed.
 Perversions [and] values of the ephemeral world catch on; in pursuit of wealth,
 everybody's concentration is broken.
 Living in the woods they grasp the heavy and high breasts of alluring ladies and serve
 them.
 Considering every woman to be a *sādhū*, they leave the holy men and abandon Hari's
 lap.
 Words of desire, like arrows in every limb, [and still] the quiver bundling [more arrows]
 shines brightly.
 Vyās [says]: [Even with] the firm noose of desire on his neck, he [still] likes desire and
 passion.⁷⁵¹

In *bhakti* poems like the ones above it is not always clear whether the word *śākta* refers to
 a rival religious community whose specific practices were found objectionable or if it is a more
 generic term for a non-devotee stuck in immorality, worldly desires, and sensual temptations.
 Pauwels's study demonstrates that *bhaktas* typically associated the Śākta with goddess-
 worship, blood-sacrifice, tantric sexual ritual, and unorthodox, low-caste (impure) practices.

⁷⁴⁹ As Pauwels explains, earthenware pots are often worshipped as manifestations of the goddess on the eighth
 and fourteenth days of the lunar month. Pauwels, “Who Are the Enemies,” 530.

⁷⁵⁰ Pauwels, “Who Are the Enemies,” 530.

⁷⁵¹ Translated in Heidi Pauwels, “The Early Bhakti Milieu as Mirrored in the Poetry of Harirām Vyās,” in *Studies in
 South Asian Devotional Literature*, eds. Alan Entwistle and Francoise Mallison (New Delhi: Manohar, 1994), 37-38.

While *bhakti* opposition to these dimensions of tantric Śākta religiosity was quite real and quite strong, it is also important to note that, like the *yogīs* we have encountered thus far, to an extent the Śāktas of *bhakti* literature were caricatured figures, straw-men that helped in marking the boundaries of an emerging *bhakti* religious identity and community.⁷⁵²

Eventually, the impact of the burgeoning “*bhakti* movement” in north India would extend into the Śākta realm as well. Beginning in the mid-eighteenth century, we find a vibrant tradition of devotional poetry to the Goddess in Bengal, an intimate, emotional Śākta *bhakti* that reflects the powerful influence of Krishna *bhakti* in that region.⁷⁵³ Nevertheless, in sixteenth and seventeenth century Bengal and Assam (traditional hotbeds of goddess worship and tantric religion), Śāktism and *bhakti*—at least according to the *bhaktas*—seem clearly to have been at loggerheads.⁷⁵⁴ In his sixteenth century hagiography of Caitanya, Vṛndāvana-

⁷⁵² Complicating stereotypical descriptions of a stock Śākta are figures such as the Bengali Baṛu Caṇḍīdāsa (“servant of Caṇḍī”) who, as his name (along with other evidence) suggests, was likely a Śākta, yet tells the story of Rādhā and Krishna in his *Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtana* (c. 1350-1600?). Similarly, the 14th/15th century Maithili poet Vidyāpati, though often remembered as a Vaiṣṇava for his (in fact, rather secular) erotic poetry depicting Rādhā and Krishna as ideal lovers, was actually not a Vaiṣṇava at all (he certainly did not worship Krishna as a prime means to salvation) and much of his work lavishes attention on Śiva and the goddess Durga. The point is that both of these figures seem to have been Śāktas who also made space, in some form, for the praise of Krishna and Rādhā. In fact, these Śākta “exceptions”—if they were that—are even today quite fondly remembered by adherents of Caitanya’s Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* tradition.

⁷⁵³ Rachel McDermott has studied this tradition in depth, translating, contextualizing, and analyzing the work of major Bengali Śākta poets such as Rāmprasād Sen and Kamalākānta Bhaṭṭācārya. In her *Mother of My Heart, Daughter of My Dreams: Kālī and Umā in the Devotional Poetry of Bengal* (2001), she writes: “This new vernacular genre expressed an unprecedented love and intimacy toward Kālī and Umā, and marked a radical change in Bengali Śākta worship; after a fifteen-hundred year career in the Sanskrit religious texts as a dangerous and blood-lusting battle queen and as a Tantric deity incorporated into esoteric rituals and philosophical speculations, Kālī started to develop in the eighteenth-century Bengali poetry an additional dimension—that of a compassionate divine mother” (3). See also McDermott, *Singing to the Goddess: Poems to Kālī and Umā from Bengal* (2000).

⁷⁵⁴ Caitanya’s biographers report that on at least once occasion, Śāktas in Bengal protested against Caitanya’s followers by dumping blood from their animal sacrifice on the doors of a prominent Vaiṣṇava devotee. Stewart, *The Final Word*, 51. Furthermore, Hugh Urban writes that Śaṅkaradeva’s Vaiṣṇava devotional movement in Assam “drew intense hostility from the *brāhmaṇas* of the region, who complained to the Ahom kings. Mādhva [Śaṅkaradeva’s closest disciple] was imprisoned and another disciple was beheaded, while Śaṅkaradeva returned to the Koch kingdom, where he was initially met with hostility by king Naranārāyaṇa, who arrested and tortured two of his disciples.” Urban, *The Power of Tantra*, 150.

dāsa describes Bengal prior to Caitanya’s devotional movement as “devoid of Kṛṣṇa-Rāma bhakti ... the people sang praises of Caṇḍī (the Goddess) far into the night, and made offerings in pūjā (worship) to Vāsulī (i.e., Caṇḍī); with wine and flesh they worshipped the Yakṣas (demons/nature spirits). In the uproar ... no one heard the name of Kṛṣṇa.”⁷⁵⁵ Here Śākta religion takes on a role similar to the one it occupies in Anantadās’s *parcaīs*, serving as a foil for *bhakti*, an ignorance preceding the realization of *bhakti*’s truth, a darkness that—in these authors’ narrative ploys—allows the light of *bhakti* to shine that much more brightly. Similarly, the seventeenth century *Narottama-vilāsa* of Narahari-dāsa describes the Śāktas of Bengal, untouched by *bhakti*, as being “practiced in godless deeds, knowing nothing of true dharma and karma, and doing indescribably evil things. At the doors of their houses is the blood of goats and sheep and buffaloes. ... Lascivious women stay with them, and they use flesh and wine in their worship.”⁷⁵⁶ The atmosphere in Assam is described in much the same way. Rāmānanda Dvija, in his mid-seventeenth century biography of Śaṅkaradeva, the *Guru-caritra*, writes that before the advent of Śaṅkaradeva’s Vaiṣṇava movement in Assam, “People did not worship Kṛṣṇa or perform the deeds sacred to Hari. They, on the other hand, would fain worship Bhairava and consider it to be the greatest of religions. They made offerings of blood of tortoises and goats to that deity, and drank of it as a sacred drink (*prasāda*).”⁷⁵⁷ While there is likely more than a grain of truth in such remarks, these sorts of statements are important not so much for providing historical information as for conveying the manner in which tantric

⁷⁵⁵ Caitanya-Bhāgavata Ādi II, 86. Quoted and translated in Edward C. Dimock, Jr., *The Place of the Hidden Moon: Erotic Mysticism in the Vaiṣṇava-sahajiyā Cult of Bengal* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989 [1966]), 112.

⁷⁵⁶ Quoted and translated in Dimock, *Place of the Hidden Moon*, 112.

⁷⁵⁷ Quoted in Maheswar Neog, *Early History of the Vaiṣṇava Faith and Movement in Assam: Śaṅkaradeva and His Times* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1985 [1965]), 81.

Śāktism and Śaivism served as a demonized “other” against which *bhaktas* were forming their own devotional identity.

Śaṅkaradeva (1449-1569) of Assam seems to have shared the hostile attitude of Kabīr, Harirām Vyās, and Anantadās toward Śāktas. Śaṅkaradeva was born into a Śākta family (who kept a Cāṇḍī image in their home), but became a great devotee of Krishna who led a devotional revival that was “the first major challenge to Śākta Tantra in Assam,” fiercely rejecting its blood sacrifice, esoteric rites, mantras, and tantric yoga.⁷⁵⁸ We have already discussed his criticism of yoga, but Śaṅkaradeva also scorned blood sacrifice and, in his *Kīrttana-ghoṣa*, demonstrated a particular disdain for “left-hand Tantric worship with ‘women, wine and meat’ (*strī-madya-māṃsa sevā*), an ignorant and futile practice that only leads sinful fools to their own destruction.”⁷⁵⁹ In positioning himself against tantric Śākta religion, Śaṅkaradeva advocated a devotional practice that—just like that of so many *bhaktas* we have discussed—revolved around the recitation of the divine Name. In his *Bhaktiratnākara*, he wrote: “There is only one religious duty, the worship of this god [Hari]. There is only one *mantra*, the name of this god.”⁷⁶⁰ We have just discussed how *bhakti* poets frequently mocked, marginalized, or outright rejected tantric mantras and mantric recitation (*japa*), yet at the same time their *bhakti* seems to have possessed a rather mantric core. The remembrance of the name of God—in singing, chanting, and meditation—was a cornerstone of *bhakti* practice in early modern north India. So what was the relationship between this *bhakti* “mantra” and the tantric words of power with which it was in conflict?

⁷⁵⁸ Urban, *Power of Tantra*, 149.

⁷⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 151. Urban cites Śaṅkaradeva, *Kīrttana-ghoṣa* 3.23.

⁷⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

~ *The One and Only Mantra: The Name of God* ~

The specific messages, styles, and locations (both social and geographic) of the major *bhakti* poets were sometimes quite different, yet we have seen that the great majority of these diverse *bhaktas* came together under a common banner in criticizing the two-fold tantric Other of the *yogī* and Śākta, as well as, necessarily, the mantras that constituted such a fundamental part of their tantric religiosity. At the same time, another thing unifying the devotional poets and hagiographers of early modern north India, arrayed along a spectrum of different forms and styles of *bhakti*, was their common faith in the divine Name. As Hawley has written, “the hallmark of the whole group, from Sūr at one end to Kabīr at the other, is a trust in the absolute power of the name of God; and all agree that whatever other designations are also possible, that name can be called Rām.”⁷⁶¹

The *bhakti* saints’ emphasis on the Name, at least in part, drew on tantric conceptions of mantra, but also radically re-interpreted them by reducing all other mantras to virtual meaninglessness. Only the name of God—the one true mantra—had any real power.⁷⁶² Indeed, we have seen how this *bhakti* “mantra” was sometimes placed in explicit contrast with tantric mantras. Kabir says, “Tantras, mantras, medicines—fakes one and all; And only Kabīr is left around to sing the name of Rām.”⁷⁶³ In similar fashion, Raidās exclaims, “Against the snake of passionate desire (*madan*) no mantra nor magic (*mantra jantrā*) avails ... You are bound in

⁷⁶¹ John Stratton Hawley, *Sūr Dās: Poet, Singer, Saint* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985), 125.

⁷⁶² In light of claims that Rādhā represents the human side of the human-divine relationship, it is interesting to consider these Sūrdās verses about Krishna: “Ever since your name has entered Hari’s ear / It’s been ‘Rādhā, oh Rādhā,’ only this mantra, a formula chanted to a secret string of beads” (NPS 3399; Hawley, *Memory of Love*, 101). Might we construe this as the inverse of the human recitation of the divine Name? Just as the *bhaktas* yearn for and depend on the Divine, so God longs for and depends on the *bhaktas*’ devotion, and just as the *bhaktas* express their yearning through the divine Name, so also, perhaps, is the divine yearning expressed through a singular “mantra.”

⁷⁶³ Fatehpur manuscript, poem 7. Hawley, *Three Bhakti Voices*, 288.

delusion, the *guṇas* and the senses. Call out the great snake-charming mantra, place it in your ears. Why are you asleep? Awake and cry ‘Rām!’”⁷⁶⁴

This understanding of the divine Name grew out of a *bhakti* perspective that true, genuine salvific power resides only in God, not in properly performed ritual acts or pronouncements of “magical” words or spells. While tantric mantras may sometimes still have been granted a limited sphere of efficacy in more mundane affairs (healing, exorcisms, etc.) and while they might still have served certain practical functions (initiations, etc.), from the perspective of early modern *bhaktas*, they had absolutely no value in transcending worldly delusion and achieving spiritual liberation. In the context of a movement founded on humble, loving devotion to an all-powerful God, *real* power could not come from anywhere but God. As Guru Arjan stated in his *Sukhmanī*, a *bhakti* text devoted to praising the divine Name, “Man has no power to work his will, for power resides in God alone.”⁷⁶⁵ Writing out of the Sikh community of *bhaktas* in Panjab, Guru Arjan asserted, “Better by far than any other way is the act of repeating the perfect Name of God. ... Better by far than any other skill is endlessly to utter the wondrous Name of God.”⁷⁶⁶ It seems that reciting the name of God was meant to “actualize the aural dimension of [God]’s very being in the mind or heart of the practitioner, an act that was ultimately ontologically transformative.”⁷⁶⁷

⁷⁶⁴ *Raidās-Vāṇī* 23. Translation adapted from Callewaert and Friedlander, *Life and Works of Raidās*, 116-117, 190-191.

⁷⁶⁵ Hew McLeod, “Sikh Hymns to the Divine Name” in *Religions of India in Practice*, ed. Donald S. Lopez (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 129-130. McLeod posits that the *Sukhmanī*, a lengthy hymn included in the *Ādi Granth*, was most likely composed shortly before 1604 CE.

⁷⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶⁷ Stewart, *The Final Word*, 214-215. We should note that while there are stories—most famously those of Vālmīki and Ajāmila—in which the saying of the divine Name (sometimes accidentally) by a sinful non-*bhakta* is the trigger for an internal transformation, a purifying realization that leads to a life of devotion, the core message of these tales is *not* that simply pronouncing the Name (regardless of devotional attitude and intention) has

One might speculate that just as the idea of a single, all-powerful, loving God was making more and more sense in the context of the organized, centralized Mughal empire, so the streamlining and “centralizing” of mantric practice also made sense in this social and political context. One might also speculate that the importance of the divine Name and the value attached to reciting the name(s) of God in the Islamic tradition had something to do with this emphasis among the *bhaktas* of early modern north India.⁷⁶⁸ Furthermore, unlike tantric mantras, which were transmitted secretively and selectively, the divine Name must have held great appeal in that it was open and available for all to sing, a reflection of the “democratizing” spirit of *bhakti*. In any case, it seems clear that regardless of how tantric philosophers and theologians may have conceived them, from the *bhakti* perspective, the mantras of tantric *yogīs* and *Śāktas* were elements of a subordinate sphere of power whose validity was seriously in question. Tantric mantras functioned as elements of a world of amoral power that seemed rather foreign to the worldviews of Sufi and *bhakti* devotion. The tantric *yogī* or *Śākta* accessed his power (*śakti*) via the (proper and repeated) recitation of the mantra (among other means) and could use that power in any way he pleased, for good or evil, for selfless or selfish motives. The divine Name, on the other hand, could never be utilized in such a fashion. For *bhaktas*, the Name is not something that can be manipulated or used to manipulate. It is not an instrument of worldly power or selfish gain—never is it used this way in *bhakti* literature—but a transformative force. We might even say that it is the concentrated, aural form of the transformative force of Love—the love simultaneously expressed by the devotee and embodied

automatic salvific efficacy, but rather that the Name—as the name of God—has an inherently purifying and transforming power that both expresses divine Grace and opens the human heart to God.

⁷⁶⁸ Regarding this possible connection, it is interesting to note that, in the *bhakti* practice of reciting the divine Name, “the practitioner par excellence described in the hagiographical literature, including Kṛṣṇadāsa’s *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, was Haridāsa, a Muslim Sufi, whose recitations were legendary.” Stewart, *Final Word*, 215.

by the Divine—a power that, in contrast to the characteristically amoral power appropriated via tantric methods, is distinctly moral and distinctly good.

~Caveats: The Dādūpanthi Exception ~

In an environment as socially, culturally, and religiously diverse as that of India, we can expect that there will be exceptions even to the most distinctive of historical trends. When it comes to my argument about *bhakti* identity in early modern north India, this is also the case. In sixteenth-century Orissa, the Pañca Sakhā or “Five Companions” were Vaiṣṇava devotees who advocated a practice far more focused on *jñāna* (liberating knowledge) and tantric yoga than the *bhaktas* we have discussed. Influenced in part by the Buddhist tantric tradition in the region, these five poets—Balarāma Dāsa, Jagannātha Dāsa, Acyutānanda Dāsa, Yaśovanta Dāsa, and Ananta Dāsa—felt that “the single most important means to achieve liberation [was] the cultivation of a complicated yogic practice akin to what we know from scores of Tantric and Haṭha Yoga texts.”⁷⁶⁹ Similarly, the Sahajiyā Vaiṣṇavas of Bengal devoted themselves to Krishna and Rādhā, drawing heavily on the Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* of Caitanya, yet far from opposing tantric and yogic methods, they made esoteric tantric sexual rites and yogic practices central to their religiosity.⁷⁷⁰

The Dādū Panth is perhaps the most interesting of the few exceptions to the early modern north Indian *bhakti* trend toward critiquing and marginalizing *tāntrikas* and *yogīs*. We have already discussed the Dādū Panth in Chapter Four, where we saw that the Dādūpanthī *sarvāṅgīs* and Dādūpanthī *Bhaktamāl* of Rāghavdās are perhaps the only early *bhakti* texts that

⁷⁶⁹ Granoff, “The Place of Yoga in Śaṅkaradeva’s Vaishnavism,” 156.

⁷⁷⁰ See Dimock, *Place of the Hidden Moon* (1989 [1966]), for an excellent study of the Vaiṣṇava-sahajiyās.

include writings or descriptions of Gorakhnāth or any other Nāth *yogīs*.⁷⁷¹ Indeed, Dādū and his followers, unlike the vast majority of *bhakti* communities we know of, were kindly disposed to Gorakhnāth and to yogic practices.⁷⁷² The members of the Dādū Panth firmly placed themselves within a tradition of *nirguṇ bhakti* and followed Vaiṣṇava devotional thinking in many respects, yet they also heavily “emphasized the yogic tradition by referring to Gorakhnāth’s system and also to the Pātañjala-Yoga and by making it an integral part of their own theology.”⁷⁷³ In his *Kāyābelī* (*Creeper of the Body*), Dādū systematically recasts yoga into a *bhakti* frame,⁷⁷⁴ while Sundardās, in his *Jñānasamudra*, (1653 CE) asserts that the defiled heart can be purified through three means: *bhakti-yoga*, *haṭha-yoga*, and *sāṃkhya-yoga*.⁷⁷⁵ The crucial yogic dimension of Dādūpanthī devotional life comes out again in Sundardās’s *Gurukṛpā-aṣṭaka* (*The Octave of the Guru’s Grace*), a text on yogic practice that describes what the Nāth *yogī* work,

⁷⁷¹ The Dādū Panth’s positive attitude toward the Nāth *yogīs* should be kept in mind when considering trends in the content of *bhakti* poetry in Dādūpanthī manuscript traditions, particularly with regard to major *bhakti* figures claimed across sectarian lines. It is worth noting that the few poems attributed to Kabīr and Raidās that not only reference tantric yoga, but also seem to approve of its practice, tend to come from Nāth or Dādūpanthī manuscript collections. Callewaert and Friedlander point out, for instance, that while there are several pads attributed to Raidās in the Dādūpanthī manuscript tradition that contain positive references to yoga, such references are not found at all in the Sikh manuscript tradition of Raidās’s poetry. Callewaert and Friedlander, *Life and Works of Raidās*, 99.

⁷⁷² Another *bhakti* community that seems to have actively linked themselves to the Nāth *yogīs* is the Nirañjanī *sampradāy*, who claim that their founder Haridās took initiation from Gorakhnāth himself. At present, very little is known about this Rajasthani *nirguṇ bhakti* community, but a forthcoming dissertation from Tyler Williams at Columbia University will significantly remedy that situation.

⁷⁷³ Monika Thiel-Horstmann, *Crossing the Ocean of Existence: Braj Bhāṣā religious poetry from Rajasthan* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1983), 3.

⁷⁷⁴ Ingrid Schuhmann, 'The Cosmic Journey through the Body: Dādū's Kāyābelī and its Commentary', in *Bhakti in Current Research 2001-2003: Proceedings of the Ninth International Conference on Early Devotional Literature in New Indo-Aryan Languages*, Heidelberg, 23-26 July 2003, ed. Monika Horstmann (New Delhi: Manohar, 2006), 273-280.

⁷⁷⁵ Thiel-Horstmann, *Crossing the Ocean of Existence*, 15.

the *Haṭhayogapradīpikā*, teaches in its fourth chapter regarding the stages of *samādhi* and merging with the Absolute (Śiva).⁷⁷⁶

The fact that communities like the Sahajiyās and Dādūpanthīs⁷⁷⁷ clearly did not object to tantric and yogic practices in the same way that most other *bhakti* communities did (and instead, actually incorporated them) illustrates more than just the complexity of the early modern *bhakti* landscape. The point is that these “exceptions” stand out as just that, bringing into relief the phenomenon of an early modern north Indian *bhakti* identity that tended to define itself in contradistinction to tantric and yogic practices and perspectives.

* * *

In the pages above, we have not explored the many important differences between *bhaktas* such as Kabīr and Harirāmvyās, Nānak and Tulsīdās, or Raidās and Śaṅkaradev; rather, we have focused on their commonality, their mutual participation in the composition of literature critiquing and marginalizing *yogīs* and Śāktas. In urban as well as rural settings, in cities, villages, and pilgrimage centers both old and new, from Panjab and Rajasthan across the Gangetic plain into Bengal and Assam, whether devotees primarily of Krishna, Rāmcandra, or the formless (*nirguṇ*) Divine, there was wide agreement among the *bhaktas* of early modern north India that their own devotional form and style of religion was quite different from, and superior to, the religious practice, outlook, and lifestyle of tantric *yogīs* and Śāktas. As a distinctive *bhakti* identity developed in north India in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the simple, participatory devotion of *bhakti* was consistently contrasted with other forms of

⁷⁷⁶ Ibid., 147.

⁷⁷⁷ In some ways, the ascetic branch of the Rāmānandīs can also be considered an exception to the trend I have identified. As we have seen, they had a complicated relationship with tantric-yogic practice, and were far less hostile to it than that of the increasingly more mainstream devotion articulated by their *rasik* Rāmānandī counterparts. Indeed, they have been major practitioners of and contributors to the classical *haṭha-yoga* tradition.

religiosity deemed confused or unnecessary, such as Vedic sacrifice (*yajña*), almsgiving (*dān*), and brahminic learning and knowledge (*gyān/jñāna*); however, the poetic and literary moments isolated in this chapter suggest that, in many ways, the most important foil for early modern *bhakti* identity was the two-fold tantric Other of the *yogī* and Śākta.

* * *

As our examination of Indian Sufi *premākhyān* literature foreshadowed and as the next chapter will discuss in detail, the emerging religious identity of early modern *bhaktas* had a distinctly Sufi inflection. If the flavor of the *bhakti* critique of tantric *yogīs* had a certain Sufi tinge, in it we also find a hint of the modern. What I mean is this: in the *bhakti* poetry and hagiography highlighted in this chapter, we see the emergence of a constellation of different (critiqued/marginalized) practices that would later—in the modern period—be clustered together under the category of Tantrism or Tantra: the “magical” mantras, “occult” powers, and worldly goals of tantric ascetics and healers, the “senseless” austerities and “pretentious” physical gymnastics of *yogīs*, and the “immoral” blood sacrifice and “disgusting” sexual rites of Śāktas. As alluded to earlier, and as the next chapter will demonstrate, from this angle, the historical process taking place in early modern north India might productively be understood as the development of a *bhakti* “religion” constructed in opposition to a caricatured tantric “magic.”

Chapter Six

Miracles, Magic, and Sufism in the Formation of *Bhakti* Identity

This chapter analyzes a genre of episodes in Sufi and *bhakti* hagiographical literature involving confrontations and spiritual competitions with *yogīs*. Our intention is to draw out a key distinction between the categories of “miracle” and “magic” that seems to exist in both the Sufi and *bhakti* traditions. In examining this miracle/magic distinction and the conceptions of God and appropriate religious behavior linked to it in these hagiographies, we will see an area of Sufi influence on “the *bhakti* movement” while also gathering further evidence for the marginalization and “magicalization” of tantric religiosity which seems to have occurred in parallel with the rise of *bhakti* in early modern north India.

~ *Making a Place for Sufism and Tantra in the History of Bhakti* ~

As we discussed in the introductory chapter, since the early twentieth century, the history of *bhakti* has usually been told in terms of the “*bhakti* movement,” a wave of emotional devotional religiosity that gradually swept from the Tamil south across the entire subcontinent and into the north as a single, coherent movement uniting the country in shared egalitarian values and religious sentiment. This subcontinent-wide egalitarian *bhakti* movement is in fact an illusion, conjured by orientalist scholars and Indian nationalists seeking a historical source of pan-Indian Hindu cultural unity to help make their political dreams a reality, but in the process giving a false continuity and coherence to the historical development of *bhakti*, while concealing major qualitative differences in the forms and styles of *bhakti* practiced in different regions and historical periods. From the beginning, in nearly all of its features and iterations, this narrative of “the *bhakti* movement” has been a story—a

version of history—constructed by “Hindus” (of mostly north Indian provenance), for the benefit of “Hindus.”⁷⁷⁸ It is not all that surprising, then, that Islam and Sufism have often found themselves occluded from the historiography of *bhakti* and “the *bhakti* movement” in India. On the occasions when Sufism has been incorporated into historical narratives of the development of *bhakti* in north India, generally such formulations have been all too simplistic and vague, frequently centering on problematic notions of “conversion” or “syncretism” and failing to explain in any specific terms how Hindu *bhakti* authors and communities may have drawn on Sufi conceptions and traditions.⁷⁷⁹

Aziz Ahmad, for instance, writes that “In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as Sūfism penetrated into the masses of converts and semi-converts from Hinduism, the Bhakti movements rose as a popular Hindu counter-challenge to the proselytizing pull of Sūfī humanism.” He later asserts that in north India, the *bhakti* movement “came in contact with Islam, was inspired by its monotheism and stimulated by its challenge, and developed against it a system of self-defence and self-preservation for Hindu spirituality by borrowing Islam’s monotheistic egalitarianism.”⁷⁸⁰ As has often been the case, Ahmad provides no real evidence or specific instances of the influence he asserts in these vague remarks. Furthermore, he posits *bhakti* and Islam as separate, essentialized entities with rather firm boundaries, the one responding to and reacting against the other.

⁷⁷⁸ For a definitive explanation and interpretation of the historical origins, purposes, and problems of the “bhakti movement” narrative, see John Stratton Hawley’s forthcoming tome, *India’s Real Religion: The Idea of the Bhakti Movement* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, [2013]).

⁷⁷⁹ For insightful discussions of how and why the models of “conversion” and “syncretism” are flawed (and some viable alternatives to these models), see especially Tony Stewart, “In Search of Equivalence: Conceiving Muslim-Hindu Encounter through Translation Theory,” *History of Religions* 40.3 (2001): 260-87; and Carl Ernst, “Situating Sufism and Yoga,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 15.1 (2005): 15-43.

⁷⁸⁰ Aziz Ahmad, *Studies in Islamic Culture in the Indian Environment* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 136; 140.

In our consideration of Sufism and *bhakti* in north India, we must remember that the interaction between *bhaktas* and Sufis was not simply a dialogue—an exchange between two essentialized entities—but an engagement of people with diverse identities in what Laurie Patton and Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad have called an “interlogue,” an exchange “between people in various, multiple, complex and changing” circumstances, an exchange that implied “transformation through conversation.”⁷⁸¹ Sufis and *bhaktas* of all different types and with all different proclivities interacted and shared religious symbols without giving up their own identities in the process, even if those identities were almost necessarily transformed in the encounter. In the north Indian socio-religious world of the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries, even the most contrasting, competing religious visions shared the same metaphoric and real worlds, the same cultural and geographical terrain, and drew on a shared pool of symbols, concepts and images.⁷⁸² How do we talk about the formation of a new and distinctive *bhakti* identity—and the Sufi influence upon that process—while also fully acknowledging these often very blurry, fluid boundaries between religious identities and communities?

There are no easy answers, but in contrast to the simplistic, essentializing conceptions of confrontation and the vague, unsupported assertions of influence found in much of earlier scholarship, the work of scholars such as Aditya Behl, Francesca Orsini, Thomas de Bruijn, and Heidi Pauwels has conceived Sufism-*bhakti* interactions in far more sophisticated terms, and opened up new vistas for understanding and articulating Sufi contributions to the *bhakti* movement. Behl has argued persuasively that Muslim Sufi writing in the three centuries prior

⁷⁸¹ Laurie L. Patton and Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad, “Hinduism With Others: Interlogue,” in *The Life of Hinduism*, eds. John Stratton Hawley and Vasudha Narayanan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 289.

⁷⁸² Aditya Behl, “Presence and Absence in *Bhakti*: An Afterword,” *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 11.3 (2007): 324.

to the *bhakti* poet-saints was, in fact, fundamental in shaping the poetic, metrical, and narrative conventions—even the motifs and images—that *bhakti* poets used in their own writings. Providing one illustration of this point, Behl explains that “the great aesthetic and philosophical move that allows the resources of Sanskrit criticism to be used by the *bhakti sampradāyas*”—the reformulation of *ṣṛṅgāra-rasa* as *bhakti-rasa*—is in fact a move “anticipated by the Ṣūfī poets, who emphasize the central value of *prema-rasa* as the linchpin of their narrative romances” as early as the late fourteenth century.⁷⁸³ Similarly, in the last chapter, we saw how the Sufi *premakhyāns*’ treatment of the Nāth *yogīs* and snakebite-curing tantric healers paralleled and even anticipated religious attitudes toward, and literary uses of, these figures in *bhakti* poetry. As these examples would suggest, Indian Sufi romances—which actually preceded the *bhakti* saints’ much acclaimed vernacular poetry as the first substantial body of devotional and narrative literature [written] in pre-modern Hindi⁷⁸⁴—were, in de Bruijn’s words, “instrumental in establishing a shared religious idiom that blended elements from the cult of the spiritual charisma of the sufi saints with Indian devotional attitudes.”⁷⁸⁵

While Behl and de Bruijn’s work focuses on the genre of Hindavi Sufi romances, this chapter contributes to an improved understanding of the Sufi role in the *bhakti* movement through a focus on the genre of hagiography. As we will see, the hagiographical tradition of Indian Sufis precedes and heavily informs the later *bhakti* hagiographies. Simon Digby has pointed out that “Vaishnava *bhaktamālas*, Sikh *janamsākhīs* and other *vitae* of non-Muslim men of religion repeat the emphasis and structure of Sufi anecdotes, particularly regarding contests

⁷⁸³ Ibid., 321–22.

⁷⁸⁴ Ibid., 320–21.

⁷⁸⁵ Thomas de Bruijn, “Many Roads Lead to Lanka: The Intercultural Semantics of Rama’s Quest,” *Contemporary South Asia* 14.1 (2005): 45.

of superiority, magical displays, and a general lack of charity towards opponents and doubters.”⁷⁸⁶ Bruce Lawrence remarks further how the Sufi tradition of hagiographical literature was well-established and flourishing prior to the north Indian *bhakti* movement and was clearly influential in molding the hagiographical writing of early *bhakti* communities. As he explains it, there is one realm in which north India’s *bhakti* movement was “indisputably dependent on, and indebted to, the Sufis: the concept of a hagiographical tradition.”⁷⁸⁷ While these similarities and influences have been noted by Digby and Lawrence, to my knowledge, no scholar has yet taken the time to draw them out or make a sustained argument about their significance. In the pages below, we begin that project through a comparative analysis of Sufi and *bhakti* miracle stories.

If the role of Sufism in the historical development of *bhakti* has not been adequately understood, in previous chapters we have seen that the same can also be said for the role of tantric religiosity, and more specifically, tantric *yogīs* and Śāktas, who often seem to have served as a crucial foil for emerging conceptions of *bhakti* self-identity. In order to highlight the vital, but very different, roles played by both Sufis and tantric *yogīs* in north India’s *bhakti* movement, in what follows we build on the work not only of Digby and Behl but also of William Pinch, one of very few scholars to have addressed the presence of an important tension between *bhaktas* and *yogīs* in early modern north India. As he explains, for the *bhaktas*, the yogic pursuit of immortality and power through mystical knowledge or ascetic discipline was greatly mistaken because the only valid spiritual path was that of *bhakti*, “the rapturous and

⁷⁸⁶ Simon Digby, “The Sufi Shaikh as a Source of Authority in Medieval India,” in *Islam et Société en Asie du Sud: Collection Puruṣārtha* 9, ed. Marc Gaborieau (Paris: EHESS, 1986), 60.

⁷⁸⁷ Bruce Lawrence, “The Sant Movement and North Indian Sufis,” in *The Sants: Studies in a Devotional Tradition of India*, eds. Karine Schomer and W.H. McLeod (Berkeley: Berkeley Religious Studies Series, 1987), 371-72.

captivating love of God.” To requote Pinch’s articulate words, “*bhaktas*’ conflict with tantric *yogīs* was thus not simply an argument about style. It reflected a profound disagreement about the very nature of God: and whether men could legitimately aspire to be gods. As such, it reflected a deep disagreement about the meaning of religion.”⁷⁸⁸

It is this chapter’s focus on miracle stories, especially those involving competitions with *yogīs*, that will allow me to join together here several trajectories of scholarship—those on *bhakti*, Sufism, and tantra—that have until now been rather distinct, but which must be connected if we are to better understand the history of *bhakti*. As we will soon see, these miracle narratives prove especially valuable in demonstrating Sufi-*bhakta* parallels regarding the perception and designation of an important difference between devotional “religion” and tantric-yogic “magic.”

~ *The Devotee versus the Tantric Yogī: Setting the Stage* ~

The story of Krishnadās Payahārī’s confrontation with Tārānāth at Galta, a popular oral tradition we discussed in detail in Chapter Two, illustrates the aforementioned themes particularly well. Let us briefly recount the story. The Kacchvāhā king Pṛthvīrāj (r. 1503-1527) was initially a disciple of the Nāth *yogī* Tārānāth, who resided in the hills of Galta. When the king pressured his wife to become a disciple of this Nāth *yogī*, she contacted her own guru, the ascetic Rāmānandī *bhakta* Krishnadās Payahārī, for help. Payahārī immediately made his way to Galta where a confrontation ensued between him and Tārānāth. Using his yogic powers, Tārānāth took the form of a ferocious tiger to attack and frighten Payahārī away. With the tiger about to leap upon him, Payahārī remarked, “What a jackass (*gadhā*)!” and Tārānāth was

⁷⁸⁸ William Pinch, *Warrior Ascetics and Indian Empires* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 195.

immediately transformed from a tiger into a donkey. Payahārī sent the defeated Nāth *yogī* off into the forest as a donkey, then entered a nearby cave and began to meditate. Later, searching for his missing guru at Galta, Mahārāj Pṛthvīrāj came upon Payahārī in his cave and inquired as to the whereabouts of his guru. When Payahārī explained what had happened, the king ordered him to bring Tārānāth back and reinstate him to his human form. Once restored to his human self, however, Tārānāth told the king, “This Krishnadās Payahārī is far more powerful than me. From now on, he is your guru. And I too will be his disciple.”

A crucial dimension of this story that we have not yet discussed is *how* and *why* Payahārī is able to defeat Tārānāth. In many important respects, these two resembled each other—both were ascetics capable of effecting supernormal powers—however, they differed importantly in that one’s power issued from God, the result of devotion (*bhakti*) to an ever-present, all-powerful divine, while the other’s came from himself, the fruit of tantric yoga and the ascetic practice of *tapas*. Both Krishnadās Payahārī and Tārānāth possessed *siddhis*, but Payahārī’s attitude toward these *siddhis* had roots in the Vaiṣṇava devotional tradition represented in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (*BhP*), which tended to see these powers as gifts bestowed by the Supreme God. *BhP* XI.15.2, for instance, describes God as “the Bestower of *siddhis* on the *yogīs*” and in XI.15.35, the Lord states, “I am the Custodian and Controller of all *siddhis*.” The Nāth *yogīs*, on the other hand, saw these powers as personal attainments due to the yogic divinization of their bodies or as the automatic results of tantric ritual, mantric recitation, or *tapas*. Pinch explains:

The key difference that separated them was the manner in which they conceived of and related to God. Tārānāth affected a yoga-tantric asceticism, the sole purpose of which was to cultivate supernormal power within – in effect, to turn himself into a God. Paihari Krishandas, by contrast, only appeared to conjure Tārānāth’s transformation into a jackass. In fact, this was the work of a distant yet ever-present Lord, God as a

thing apart, God with an upper-case ‘G’ – a being who inspired total self-abandonment, and offered a sheltering refuge of love in return.⁷⁸⁹

In other words, this tale depicts the extraordinary acts of Payahārī as “miracles” from God, while essentially labeling Tārānāth’s similar feats as forms of “magic,” a mode of power issuing forth from one’s self, acquired through individual ritual/ascetic action, and thus inherently inferior to that from God. It is exactly this sort of distinction—in both *bhakti* literature and earlier Sufi sources—that I want to analyze in this chapter.

The dramatic confrontation between Payahārī and Tārānāth points toward the expanding sphere of *bhakti* “religion” and is symbolic of its historical confrontation with, and social and political marginalization of, the sphere of tantric “magic” represented most prominently by the pervasive Nāth *yogīs*. As Pinch states, “For their part, *bhakti* reformers were adamant in their disdain for yogis who claimed special powers by virtue of their hathayogic and/or tantric prowess. The *bhakti* literature is rife with examples of puffed up yogis who are deflated and sent packing by humble, God-loving sadhus.”⁷⁹⁰ In the pages to come, we draw out this point more fully through an examination of miracle narratives in *bhakti* hagiographies and their Sufi precursors.

~ *Sufis and Nāths: Miracles in the Context of Competition* ~

Interaction between Sufis and local religious practitioners has a long history in India. The first Sufi centers in north India were built in the wake of Ghaznavid rule over the Punjab in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. At the beginning of the thirteenth century the Delhi

⁷⁸⁹ Pinch, *Warrior Ascetics and Indian Empires*, 19.

⁷⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 211.

Sultanate was established and Sufi orders (*silsilas*) began to expand, in the process encouraging and promoting beliefs and practices held in common by Hindus and Muslims.⁷⁹¹ Digby writes that from the thirteenth to early sixteenth century Indian Islam was “permeated by Sufi influence, to the extent that it is almost impossible to find a non-Sufi writer or writer hostile to Sufi thought in the corpus of the surviving literature of the Delhi Sultanate.”⁷⁹² In this environment, popular Sufi religiosity seems to have attracted Hindu as well as Muslim devotees, encouraging both conversation and competition among *bhakti* and Sufi communities. As de Bruijn explains:

From the earliest days of Muslim presence in India, the *dargahs* (centres) of the Islamic mystics thrived on popular devotion to the charismatic figure of the *pir* (holy man). The *dargahs* were doctrinal centres where pupils of the saint were initiated, but also attracted an audience of Hindu and Muslim devotees who visited the shrines of the *pirs*. This attendance gave the centres an established position in the landscape of north Indian popular religion. The stature of a particular *pir* reflected on the connected sufi order, and gave the centres great political and economic importance. ... The sufi and the *bhakti* centres gradually started to occupy similar positions in the field of popular devotion, and were equally dependent on patronage and political influence by local nobility and rulers.⁷⁹³

If Sufis helped to create a shared religious space for, and an interlogue between, some Hindu *bhaktas* and Muslim devotees, it is well documented that Indian Sufis also frequently interacted with *yogīs*. Carl Ernst remarks that, “The Nath *yogīs* did not observe the purity restrictions of Brahminical ritual society, and were free to drop in for meals at Sufi hospices, which in turn were open to any and all visitors.”⁷⁹⁴ As Satish Chandra states, “[*Yogī*] presence

⁷⁹¹ Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam: India 1200-1800* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2004), 82.

⁷⁹² Simon Digby, “Encounters with Jogis in Indian Sufi Hagiography” (unpublished paper presented at the Seminar on Aspects of Religion in South Asia, University of London, January 1970), 2.

⁷⁹³ De Bruijn, “Many Roads Lead to Lanka,” 45.

⁷⁹⁴ Carl Ernst, “Situating Sufism and Yoga,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 15.1 (2005): 23.

in the gatherings of Sufis was considered quite normal” and “their presence in the *khanqahs* [Sufi hospices] and the *jamaat khana*s [Sufi gathering/worship places] added further to the prestige of the Sufis among the Hindu masses.”⁷⁹⁵ Yogīs and Sufis shared a generally *nirgun* conception of the Divine as well as “a comparable status outside the pale of Hindu and Muslim orthodoxy” and “appear to have found a degree of stimulus and support in each other from the time when they first came into contact in north India.”⁷⁹⁶ Furthermore, these two groups “shared overlapping interests in psycho-physical techniques of meditation”⁷⁹⁷ and, as Rāmcandra Śukla has noted, along with a host of other scholars, many Sufis learned yogic breathing methods and other physical and mental techniques from Indian yogīs.⁷⁹⁸ It has often been pointed out that a Nāth treatise on *haṭha-yoga* practices, the *Amṛta-Kunda* (or *Pool of Nectar*), was translated into Arabic and then into Persian as early as the thirteenth century.⁷⁹⁹ Indeed, it was especially the Nāths with whom Sufis seem to have regularly interacted and whose practices—such as breath control techniques and visualization-based meditations on the subtle body—they most frequently adopted and “Islamized.” Shaman Hatley, for example, has discussed how Sufism in Bengal “adapted to itself the basic template of the yogic body as formulated by the Nātha cult and reconfigured it within the parameters of Indo-Islamic thought.”⁸⁰⁰ This element of reconfiguration was central, for just as we saw Agradās

⁷⁹⁵ Satish Chandra, *Historiography, Religion and State in Medieval India* (New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications, 1996), 136.

⁷⁹⁶ R.S. McGregor, *Hindi Literature From Its Beginnings to the Nineteenth Century* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1984), 22.

⁷⁹⁷ Ernst, “Situating Sufism and Yoga,” 23.

⁷⁹⁸ Rāmcandra Śukla, *Hindī Sāhitya kā Itihās* (Jaipur: Devanagar Prakashan, 2009 [1929]), 63.

⁷⁹⁹ On the history of this text, *The Pool of Nectar*, which, in multiple versions and translations, made available to Muslim readers certain practices/teachings associated with the Nāth yogis, see Carl Ernst, “The Islamization of Yoga in the Amrtakunda Translations,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, III, 13.2 (2003): 199–226.

appropriating and repurposing tantric methods within a *bhakti* paradigm in the late sixteenth century, in similar fashion but even earlier, Sufis were taking up tantric techniques and entirely resituating them in the context of their devotional goals and attitudes.

While Sufis and Nāth *yogīs* interacted productively and shared certain things in common, they were also in clear competition with each other. In order to win over and spread their influence among the masses, Sufi *pīrs* and *fakīrs* had to confront *siddhas* and *yogīs*, as is attested in the numerous Sufi hagiographical stories in which a Sufi saint encounters and defeats a *siddha* or *yogī* in a “miracle battle.”⁸⁰¹ The sheer number of these types of stories indicates an atmosphere of religious competition between *yogīs* and Sufis, for as Nile Green has pointed out, while such stories “are ostensibly demonstrations of the strength of the saintly victor, they are by their very existence in fact testament to insecurity and potential weakness. After all, real power is about the absence of competition. Such narratives therefore flourish most in societies in which different religions co-exist.”⁸⁰² Richard Davis echoes this view, positing that stories of miracles most often “occur in situations of conflict, where differing systems of belief compete and questions of faith and power are directly at issue. This is when supernatural communications are most needed.”⁸⁰³ Any miracle story thus conveys a message that depends on and elucidates the specific context within which that story was written, giving insight into the contentious religious issues of the day. While miracle stories, broadly construed, certainly existed in India well prior to the Sufi presence and reflected the religious

⁸⁰⁰ Shaman Hatley, “Mapping the Esoteric Body in the Islamic Yoga of Bengal,” *History of Religions* 46.4 (2007): 353.

⁸⁰¹ Śukla, *Hindī Sāhitya kā Itihās*, 63.

⁸⁰² Nile Green, “Oral Competition Narratives of Muslim and Hindu Saints in the Deccan,” *Asian Folklore Studies* 63.2 (2004): 222.

⁸⁰³ Richard H. Davis, “Introduction: Miracles as Social Acts,” in *Images, Miracles, and Authority in Asian Religious Traditions*, ed. Richard H. Davis (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 6.

competitions and debates of the time of their writing (e.g., the value of temple ritual, caste, intellectual knowledge, and mystical absorption), the point to keep in mind here is that after the thirteenth century, Indian miracle stories increasingly reflected a heightened tension and conflict between the perspective of devotees (Sufis, and later, *bhaktas*) and that of tantric *yogīs* and ascetics.

~ *Sufi Miracle Stories (I): God-Power Beats Yoga-Power* ~

A fourteenth century example of a miracle contest between a Sufi and a *yogī* appears in what is perhaps the earliest authentic collection of descriptions of Indian Sufi saints,⁸⁰⁴ the *Fawā'id al-fuwād* (or *Morals of the Heart*),⁸⁰⁵ in which the poet Amir Hasan records the conversations of Shaykh Nizam ud-Din Auliya of Delhi:

The conversation that occurred on 5 Safar 710/4 July 1310 turned on the topic of levitation. ... [Nizam ud-Din] recalled how a Jogi had come to the town of Ucch (in the Panjab) to dispute with Shaykh Safi al-Din Gazaruni. The Jogi challenged the Shaykh to display any powers which he could not equal. To this the Shaykh replied that it was the Jogi who was advancing a claim and he should show his accomplishment first. The Jogi rose from the ground into the air until his head reached the ceiling, and then he came down to the ground in the same fixed position, and then he invited the Shaykh to show his power. The Shaykh turned his gaze towards heaven, and he said: "O Lord! You have given this power to one who is a stranger to You! Bestow upon me this grace!" The Shaykh then rose from his place and flew away towards the *qibla*. From there he flew to the North and then towards the South, and he finally came back to his own palace and sat down. The Jogi was astonished, and, laying his head at the Shaykh's feet, said: "I can do no more than rise straight upwards from the ground and come down in the same way. I cannot go to the right and to the left. You turned whichever way you wished! This is true and from God: my own powers are false."⁸⁰⁶

⁸⁰⁴ S.A.A. Rizvi, "Sufis and Natha Yogis in Mediaeval Northern India (XII to XVI Centuries)," *Journal of the Oriental Society of Australia* 7.1-2 (1970): 127.

⁸⁰⁵ I am grateful to Pasha Mohammad Khan for his generous assistance with the Persian sources referenced in this chapter.

⁸⁰⁶ Digby, "Encounters with Jogis in Indian Sufi Hagiography," 4-5; Sijzi, *Fawā'id al-fuwād* (Lahore, 1966), 84. Raziuddin Aquil offers this key background about such Sufi miracle tales: "[T]he notion that the miracle stories were later concoctions by the shrewd keepers of the shrines that sought to exploit the credulity of ignorant

As this tale indicates, Indian Muslims generally took it for granted that *yogīs* could perform extraordinary feats and demonstrate supernatural powers. The issue, however, was the source and level, or quality, of these powers. The crucial line comes at the very end of the story when the *yogī* marks the Sufi's display as "true" and "from God" while labeling his own levitation powers as "my own" [i.e., not from God] and "false." In Rivzi's translation of this same line, the *yogī* accepts his defeat and says, "Your miracle was possible because of Divine Grace; mine was the result of human efforts."⁸⁰⁷ Note that, in contrast to the *yogī*, the Shaykh calls on God to bestow upon him the grace to perform the miraculous feat of flying. Furthermore, the Shaykh's "levitation" is not only superior to the *yogī*'s, but dramatically so; in this way the miracle reveals the unbounded power that is God. While *yogīs* may obtain powers through their austerities and ascetic practice, they are hard earned and limited, unlike the infinite power of God for which the Sufi is a conduit.

In these hagiographies, the Sufi saints' miracles are typically marked by a specific word, used in contradistinction to the term employed to identify the magic powers of the *yogīs*. An example of this occurs in Nizam Yamani's *Laṭā'if-e-Ashrafī*, which tells a story from the late fourteenth century in which Jamal al-Din Rawat, the disciple of Shaykh Ashraf Jahangir, is sent to compete against a *yogī* named Kamal, who is occupying the site where Ashraf Jahangir means to establish a *khanqah*. Jamal al-Din arrived at the site and said to the *yogī*, "We do not

followers is not at all supported by the sources. On the contrary, the leading Sufis themselves believed that the *auliya* or the friends of God, who had followed the mystic path (*tariqat*) could acquire supernatural faculties. In their opinion, however, the mystics were expected to refrain from flaunting the power that they were supposed to have attained. However, sustained provocation from any antagonist or the miserable condition of a devotee could legitimately induce him to perform miracles[.]" Raziuddin Aquil, "Miracles, Authority and Benevolence: Stories of *Karamat* in Sufi Literature of the Delhi Sultanate," in *Sufi Cults and the Evolution of Medieval Indian Culture*, ed. Anup Taneja (New Delhi: Northern Book Centre and Indian Council of Historical Research, 2003), 129.

⁸⁰⁷ Rizvi, "Sufis and Natha Yogis in Mediaeval Northern India," 126; Hasan al-Sijzi, *Fawā'id al-fuwād* (Buland Shahr, 1855-56), 57-58.

think it becoming to give a display of miracles (*karāmāt*). Nevertheless we will give an answer to each of the powers (*istidrāj*) that you display!” Jamal al-Din then easily dealt with a series of attacks conjured by the *yogī*, including columns of black ants from all directions and an army of tigers. Next, “[w]hen the Jogi had exhausted his tricks, he said: ‘Take me to the Shaykh! I will become a believer.’” The *yogī* said the profession of faith before the Shaykh and he and all his five hundred disciples became Muslims and burned their religious books.⁸⁰⁸ In this story, we see the Sufi referring to the feats that he can bring to bear as “miracles” while he marks the *yogī*’s abilities as mere “powers.” Both Digby and Rizvi note that in the Sufi contest anecdotes of the Sultanate period, the term most frequently used for the display of powers by *yogīs* is *istidrāj*,⁸⁰⁹ while the separate term *karāmāt*, “a beneficence, or special grace,” is reserved for the miracles of the Sufi shaykhs.⁸¹⁰ The essential point here about the *karāmāt*—something attributed only to saints and never to *yogīs*—is that it is not performed by the saint, but rather *through* divine grace.⁸¹¹

If this account does not make the common Islamic distinction between miracle and magic clear enough, it is made explicit by the authoritative North African Sunni scholar, Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406). In his best-known work, the *Muqaddimah* (1377), Khaldun explains the

⁸⁰⁸ Digby, “Encounters with Jogis in Indian Sufi Hagiography,” 9-10. Regarding this story, see also Bruce Lawrence, “Early Indo-Muslims Saints and Conversion,” in *Islam in Asia. Volume 1: South Asia*, ed. Yohanan Friedmann (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1984), 116-18.

⁸⁰⁹ The word *istidrāj* typically refers to abilities, good fortune, etc. bestowed by God upon a sinner who, despite these divine gifts, continues to live sinfully, ignorant of the error of his/her ways. God is thought to give these gifts (*istidrāj*) in accordance with his own plans, commonly interpreted as deliberately increasing the sinners’ arrogance and pride in order to destroy them.

⁸¹⁰ Digby, “Encounters with Jogis in Indian Sufi Hagiography,” 4; Rizvi, “Sufis and Natha Yogis in Mediaeval Northern India,” 128.

⁸¹¹ As Mohammad Ishaq Khan states, “it needs to be emphasized that *karāmāt* is not wholly a supernatural feat performed by the saint, but springs from human action through divine grace.” Khan, *Kashmir’s Transition to Islam: The Role of Muslim Rishis* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 1994), 206.

difference between the miracle worker, who “is supported in his activity by the spirit of God,” and the magician, who “on the other hand, does his work by himself and with the help of his own psychic power, and, under certain conditions, with the support of devils.”⁸¹² Khaldun goes on to explain that, “Miracles take place with the support of the spirit of God and the divine powers. Therefore, no piece of sorcery can match them. One may compare the affair of the sorcerers of Pharaoh with Moses and the miracle of the staff. Moses’ staff devoured the phantoms the sorcerers produced, and their sorcery completely disappeared as if it had never been.”⁸¹³ Here Khaldun refers to a time-tested story, and to conceptions of God and the miraculous, shared by Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In that story from Exodus 7:8-13, Moses and Aaron confront the sorcerers and magicians of the Pharaoh, and through the power of God, easily overcome them. As we can see from the use of this same story by Augustine of Hippo (354-430) over a thousand years earlier, this miracle/magic distinction is part of an old Abrahamic tradition. In his *City of God*, Augustine commented on the story of Moses and the Pharaoh’s sorcerers in trying to establish a clear-cut boundary between Christian miracle-working and gentile magic.⁸¹⁴ As Noel Brann explains:

Augustine interpreted the miraculous feats of Jesus as springing from a supernatural power of the kind which was also granted to the Hebrew patriarch Moses. Whereas Pharaoh’s magicians ‘worked the kind of sorceries and incantations to which evil spirits or demons are addicted,’ declared Augustine, Moses performed his miracles in a state of holiness ‘and helped by the angels.’ At a further stage in the providential plan of world history laid down by God, according to Augustine, the miracles of Jesus and of His apostles ‘occurred in order to encourage the worship of the one true God and to put a stop to polytheistic practices.’ To still any suggestion that they might have anything in

⁸¹² Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal, Vol. 3 (New York: Bollinger Foundation, 1958), 167.

⁸¹³ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁸¹⁴ Noel L. Brann, *Trithemius and Magical Theology: A Chapter in the Controversy Over Occult Studies in Early Modern Europe* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 15.

common with sorcery, Augustine added that '*they were wrought by simple faith and pious trust, not by spells and incantations inspired by the sacrilegious curiosity of the art of magic—vulgarly called goetia and, more politely, theurgy.*'⁸¹⁵ [italics mine]

This distinction between magic and miracle, the one being the work of one's own self (or evil demons/spirits), the other being the work of all-powerful God (and/or faith in that God), is then not only an Islamic one, but a larger Abrahmanic conception. Interestingly, as we will see below, it is exactly this distinction that we find throughout the early modern *bhakti* literature.

~ *On Miracles: Historical and Cultural Context* ~

A very specific genre of stories—that dealing with miracles—occupies center stage in this chapter and is deserving of some preliminary comments, particularly considering that the category of the 'miracle' is not South Asian in origin and seems to have no exact counterpart in Indian sources prior to the thirteenth century. The word "miracle" comes from the Latin *mirari* "to wonder at," and *mirus* "wonder-ful." At the most basic level then, a miracle is an event, incident, or action that inspires wonder. The "miraculous" has this broad sense of "evoking wonder" when we use it in everyday expression, e.g., the "miracle on the Hudson," the "miracle of birth," or a "miraculous play" in a basketball or football game. The event described as "miracle" defies easy explanation and throughout history has usually connoted, even if only by hyperbole, the intervention or assistance of the divine. The word marks an action or occurrence as beyond our ordinary human, worldly capacity to accomplish or understand and as something that therefore must be referred to an alternate, higher realm. Ordinarily, scholars may employ the term "miracle" in this general sense without any problem; however, in the context of scholarly writing on the wondrous acts so common in

⁸¹⁵ Ibid.

religious scriptures, myths, and hagiographies, this term ought to be used with heightened precision. We must be attentive to the fact that this word has a distinct history in which it has been invested with specific meanings by the Abrahamic religious traditions in order to distinguish a certain brand of extraordinary powers and occurrences (“miracles”) from other similar but unapproved ones (“magic”).

In discussing miracles in *bhakti* hagiography or in Indian literature of any kind, it therefore becomes critical to note that, in fact, “there are no precise equivalents in Indic languages for the semantic field occupied by the term ‘miracle’ in the West.” While “[s]ome Sanskrit approximations stress the unusual character (*alaukika*) of an event, some emphasize the response of wonder and astonishment (*adbhuta*, *ascarya*, *vismaya*) it evokes, and still others might be chosen to point to divine or non-human agencies (*daiva*, *apauruseya*, *amanusya*) believed to cause the marvel,” none equate to the meaning inherent in Islamic, Christian, and Judaic conceptions of the miracle.⁸¹⁶ In contrast to Abrahamic understandings of the miraculous, Richard Davis explains that, “For the most part, Indians did not seek a single agency to account for all miracles, but rather recognized a multiplicity of possible agents: gods, various categories of semi-divinities, and unusually accomplished humans.”⁸¹⁷ As he goes on to say, “Indians considered powers such as those Patānjalī [author of the *Yoga Sūtras*] and his commentators describe to be inhering human capacities theoretically available to all, rather than special gifts from God or other divinities.”⁸¹⁸ Even those with a theistic orientation “located this transforming moment of divine favor within a lengthy program of learning, ritual

⁸¹⁶ Davis, “Introduction: Miracles as Social Acts,” 8.

⁸¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁸¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

activity, and devotional exercise necessary to ready the novice for grace, and an even more rigorous program after God's power had fallen."⁸¹⁹ In other words, with respect to the meanings historically embedded in the term *miracle*, it seems that prior to the Sufis and north Indian *bhaktas*, the "miracles" of Indians were, strictly speaking, not really miracles at all. Thus we can say that the Abrahamic notion of miracle as a category established in contradistinction to magic, as the wondrous act of an all-powerful God wrought through the pious faith of a devotee, seems to be one generally absent in Indian literature prior to Sufi presence in the subcontinent, and one not present in Hindu sources in any significant way until the hagiographies of the north Indian *bhakti* movement.⁸²⁰

~ Sufi Miracle Stories (II): The Superfluity of Yogic Powers ~

Before moving on to the *bhakti* sources, we must note one other important type of miracle story in the Sufi hagiographical tradition. In many anecdotes, the Sufi shows his superiority to the *yogī* by performing a miracle from God; however, perhaps even more commonly, after witnessing the *yogī*'s display of power the Sufi shaykh responds simply by demonstrating the superfluity of such magic to true religion. In other words, while some

⁸¹⁹ Ibid., 10-11.

⁸²⁰ Comparison with several medieval Sanskrit miracle tales discussed by Phyllis Granoff seems to confirm this point. In the pre-fifteenth century Sanskrit hagiographical literature she examines, there are critiques of tantric "black magic," but the critiques do not have a devotional tenor. Moreover, while these stories do sometimes include supernatural abilities and wondrous events made possible by the power and assistance of gods, devotion is rarely their cause and the Abrahamic binary of miracle versus magic never presents itself as it does in the early modern *bhakti* sources. In the medieval instances I have found where devotion is praised as the force behind a wondrous occurrence, the nature of the devotion and the nature of the miraculous are not placed in contradistinction to tantra/yoga and magic in the same way it is in the Sufi and *bhakti* hagiographies (rather it is contrasted with intellectual knowledge, temple ritual, etc.). See Phyllis Granoff, "Scholars and Wonder-Workers: Some Remarks on the Role of the Supernatural in Philosophical Contests in Vedānta Hagiographies," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 105.3 (1985): 459-67; and Granoff, "Halāyudha's Prism: The Experience of Religion in Medieval Hymns and Stories," in *Gods, Guardians, and Lovers: Temple Sculptures from North India A.D. 700-1200*, eds. Vishakha Desai and Darielle Mason, 67-92 (New York: The Asia Society Galleries, 1993).

stories show that because the Sufis' power comes from God it is always stronger than yogic powers, other stories emphasize that such powers are utterly trivial since devotion and humble submission to God are what really matter.

A particularly revealing episode of this kind occurs in the *Jawāmi' al-kalīm* of Sayyid Muhammad Akbar Husayni, a text recording the conversations of his father, the great Chishti Shaykh Sayyid Muhammad Gesudaraz, after he left Delhi in 1398 in the wake of Timur's invasion. This story relates the sheik's refusal of a series of gifts proffered by the Nāth yogī Balgundai in the year 1400. We see the kinds of magical materials and powers popularly attributed to such yogīs as the visiting Nāth successively offers the secret of alchemy (*rasāyan*), knowledge to preserve the shaykh from his enemies, a substance that gives invisibility to its wearer, and a drug for the retention of semen during intercourse. Finally, he offers to make the shaykh's cot move by itself. Realizing that such yogic gifts can only lead to corruption and away from God, the shaykh promptly rejects all of them, to which the Nāth responds, "Listen! I have come from far away, and I am being put to shame. You have accepted nothing of mine." The shaykh replies, "Why are you ashamed? You have told well all that you can do, but why should I stretch forth my hand for what is of no use to me? What is the use of superfluities?" Later, the shaykh relates a similar encounter with another yogī who, after having his gifts denied, said "Why are you turning me away from your door? The whole world is mad about me!" The shaykh responded, "As God is my Refuge, why should I take a thing which is of no use to me?"⁸²¹ The message here is clear: God is the source, the goal, and the refuge – these other powers are not *from* God and not *for* God; they are superfluous.

⁸²¹ Digby, "Encounters with Jogis in Indian Sufi Hagiography," 5-6.

Another example of this perspective on yogic magic comes from the narrative poem *Shajarat al-Atqiyā* describing an encounter between the Chisti Sufi Amin al-Din A'la (d. 1675) and a Hindu *saṃnyāsī* (renunciant). The *saṃnyāsī* presents a philosopher's stone to Amin al-Din after having demonstrated its gold-producing qualities, but Amin al-Din merely throws it into a large reservoir of water. When the *saṃnyāsī* begins weeping for his lost philosopher's stone, Amin smiles and says, “ ‘Go in the water and find the stone, And if you find it take it.’ The *saṃnyāsī* went there and discovered that many philosopher's stones were in the water. Thereupon he became a believer in Amin and having said the *kalima* [the Muslim confession of faith] he became his *murīd* [disciple].”⁸²² This story is mirrored by a nearly identical one in the seventeenth century *Siyar al-aqṭab* in which a *yogī* gives a philosopher's stone—that he had discovered “after a thousand exertions and labors” and fancied as infinitely valuable—to Shaykh Jalal al-Din Kabīr al-Auliya (c. 14th century), who considers it worthless and promptly throws it into a stream. When the *yogī* goes to retrieve his stone in the stream he finds “thousands upon thousands of Philosopher's Stones were lying there” and, amazed, asks the shaykh to teach him how to get beyond such desires, recites the *kalima*, and becomes his disciple.⁸²³

To foreshadow the argument to come, we might note here that the *bhakti* hagiographer Mahipati's eighteenth century *Bhaktavijay* (or *Victory of the Devotees*) tells a strikingly similar story in which the *bhakti* poet-saint Nāmdev takes away the philosopher's stone of a man named Parisa Bhagavat⁸²⁴ and throws it into the river. Once very poor, this man had achieved

⁸²² Richard Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur, 1300-1700: Social Roles of Sufis in Medieval India* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1996 [1978]), 167.

⁸²³ Digby, “Encounters with Jogis in Indian Sufi Hagiography,” 12-13.

⁸²⁴ The Marathi word *parisa* actually means “philosopher's stone.”

great wealth with the stone but had come to live a greedy, duplicitous life. For this reason, Nāmdev finds a way to acquire the stone and then promptly throws it into the river. Greatly angered, Parisa Bhagavat goes to the river to find his stone; however, when he pulls his hands out of the riverbed they are filled with philosopher’s stones, causing him to realize the superiority of Nāmdev’s spiritual path—that of *bhakti*—and the superfluity of, and potential corruption in, magic and alchemy.⁸²⁵ In this *bhakti* story, then, we would seem to have evidence of a specific narrative trope borrowed from the earlier Sufi hagiographical tradition. As we will see below, these sorts of shared literary tropes and themes emerge persistently in the tales from the *bhakti* hagiographies, reflecting key attitudes and beliefs held in common by *bhaktas* and Sufis regarding the nature of God and proper religious behavior.

~ *Bhakti Miracle Stories (I): Marathi Materials* ~

We turn now to the *bhakti* hagiographical literature, keeping our gaze upon the miracle/magic distinction we have seen in the Sufi sources, but also keeping in mind the increasing tension between the perspectives of *bhakti* and tantric-yogic religiosity. The *bhakti* literary sources we will draw on range in date from the late sixteenth century to the second half of the eighteenth century and come from Rajasthan, the Gangetic plains, Panjab, and Maharashtra.⁸²⁶ We begin with Mahipati (1715-90), the Maharashtrian author of several *bhakti*

⁸²⁵ Christian Novetzke, *Religion and Public Memory: A Cultural History of Saint Nāmdev in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 66-67. Alchemy is a practice closely associated with the Nāth Siddha tradition. On this subject, see David White, *The Alchemical Body* (1996).

⁸²⁶ The examples I present do not proceed chronologically, but this is of no real import as they all post-date the Sufi literature we have discussed and all fall in a nearly two hundred year period (c. 1600-1775) that saw the explosive growth of *bhakti* communities across north India, western-central India, and Bengal.

hagiographical collections.⁸²⁷ While Mahipati writes from Maharashtra in the mid-late eighteenth century, he seems to have largely recycled stories already in circulation, including many from north India. In fact, Mahipati relies considerably on Nābhādās's *Bhaktamāl* (c. 1600) and explicitly cites that foundational hagiographic text, written in Rajasthan, as a model for his own. Jon Keune and Christian Novetzke have both remarked on how Mahipati made a conscious effort to affiliate Maharashtrian *bhakti* with north India in order to enhance the Marathi *bhaktas*' legitimacy and prestige.⁸²⁸

In his *Bhaktavijaya* (1762), Mahipati relays the following story about Nāmdev, the great *bhakti* poet-saint, and Jñāndev (or Dnyāndev), a thirteenth century saint who was a Nāth yogī as well as the author of the *Jñāneśvarī*, a vernacular verse commentary on the *Bhagavadgītā*. Nāmdev and Jñāndev were traveling together in an arid land and became intensely thirsty. The text relates the incident as follows:

[B]eing overcome with thirst they searched about for water to drink. Suddenly they spied a deep well and as they looked down into it they could not determine its depth. They were puzzled to know what device to adopt to obtain some water. Then Jñāndev said to Nāma, 'There is a method which is possible for me.' Saying this he reduced his own size through his yoga powers and went down into the well. Having drunk the water he quickly came out again. Nāma was now extremely thirsty but could think of no way of obtaining the water. Jñāndev then said to him 'Why is your heart troubled? I will bring the water and give it to you at once. You know nothing of the methods of mystic yoga power by which one can reduce his size.'⁸²⁹

⁸²⁷ For more information on Mahipati and his first hagiographical work, the *Bhaktavijaya*, see: Jon Keune, "Gathering the Bhaktas in Marāṭhī," *Journal of Vaishnava Studies* 15.2 (2007): 169-88.

⁸²⁸ Keune also points out that, despite Maharashtra's lack of distinctive geographical boundaries with Karnataka to the south, Mahipati and the Marathi *bhaktas* remain rather oblivious to south India and seem to have been somewhat disconnected to (or uninterested in) southern religious happenings. Jon Keune, "Gathering the Bhaktas in Marāṭhī," 84-85; Christian Novetzke, *Religion and Public Memory*, 37.

⁸²⁹ Justin Abbott and Narhar Godbole, *Stories of Indian Saints: Translation of Mahipati's Marathi Bhaktavijaya* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1982 [1933]), 187-88; *Bhaktavijaya* 12:8-13.

At this point, Nāmdev cried to Viṭṭhal (a local form of Krishna), going deep into prayer and imploring him for help. According to the text, the very moment that he heard of Nāmdev’s need, Krishna “hastened more quickly than thought. Just then the well with a rumbling noise became filled, and began to overflow. As Jñāndev saw this miracle, he thought to himself, ‘This is a most remarkable deed. I do not understand how Nāma has made God his debtor.’ Then awakening Nāma to consciousness, he lovingly embraced him and said, ‘Krishna has come to your aid, and has shown us this seemingly impossible miracle.’”⁸³⁰ Not only are Nāmdev and Jñāndev supplied with water but the well flows over with such vigor that it provides much-needed water to the entire drought-stricken village. Here, as in our earlier Sufi tale, the power of God, and of devotion to God, is shown as dramatically superior to the powers of yoga. Again we see the boundlessness of God revealed through the miraculous, this time in the image of the overflowing well. The tale ends with Jñāndev admitting the superiority of *bhakti* over his own mystical yogic knowledge (*jñāna*). As Christian Novetzke explains, “Jñāndev’s yogic powers serve only him; though he might perform a service for someone else, he commands this power. This is not a social power. However, in Nāmdev’s case, his plea for help transcends individual ability, and the result, likewise, extends far beyond his own needs.”⁸³¹

In Mahipati’s third hagiographical collection, the *Bhaktalīlāmṛt* (*Nectar of the Divine Play of the Devotees* [1774]), he tells another fascinating story involving Jñāndev, this time in his role as *bhakti* saint. Jñāndev’s dual identity as both a Nāth *yogī* and a *bhakti* saint speaks to the regional situation of Maharashtra in the thirteenth century, one seemingly quite different from that in early modern north India in that the degree of difference and tension between

⁸³⁰ Ibid., 190; *Bhaktavijaya* 12:38-40.

⁸³¹ Christian Novetzke, *Religion and Public Memory: A Cultural History of Saint Nāmdev in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 62.

tantric *yogīs* and *bhaktas* was not so pronounced.⁸³² Catharine Kiehnle has argued that the songs attributed to Jñāndev “reflect the opinions of what one could call a school of Nātha Vaiṣṇavas” in thirteenth and fourteenth century Maharashtra, a group of *yogīs* among whom *bhakti* was quite central, even if that *bhakti* was quite different in nature than that associated with and advocated by poet-saints like Nāmdev, Sūrdās, Nānak, Kabīr, and Mīrābāī.⁸³³ While Jñāndev and his peers may have practiced both tantric yoga and an intellectual, mystical variety of *bhakti* devotion (and have been praised for both), Mahipati’s hagiographies (written centuries later) indicate clearly the superiority of love and humble reliance on God to any yogic powers. In contrast to the story involving Nāmdev and the well (where Jñāndev plays the role of Nāth *yogī* foil), in the tale now at hand, Mahipati places complete emphasis on Jñāndev’s *bhakti* dimension in his encounter with a famous Nāth *yogī* named Changdev.

Having learned of Jñāndev’s miraculous abilities, the *yogī* Changdev states “[T]hough I have performed wonders by dint of superhuman power, this power (of Jñāndev’s) is not in me.”⁸³⁴ Riding a tiger and using a snake as a whip, Changdev sets off to visit Jñāndev, who miraculously causes a wall to leap forward to meet the fast-approaching *yogī*. Mahipati writes:

[Changdev] had studied the fourteen sciences, he had mastered the sixty-four arts, he had protected his body for fourteen centuries, and by his power he had conquered death. But all his power had vanished at the sight of Dnyāndev [Jñāndev], just as the stars disappear at dawn; just as one, who is proud of knowing by heart some poems, feels ashamed in the presence of a saint who has inspiration. ... In the same way was it

⁸³² In what we might construe as evidence of the *bhakti* movement’s enduring and pervasive success, in Maharashtra today, the Nāth side of memories about Jñāndev are quite played down. He is remembered to have been a Nāth, but usually with no other related information beyond the word itself. While the Nāths are not demonized by the Marathi *bhaktas*, they are thoroughly (and seemingly intentionally) neglected. Personal communication with Jon Keune, December 2009.

⁸³³ Catharine Kiehnle, “Love and Bhakti in the Early Nāth Tradition of Mahārāṣṭra: The Lotus of the Heart” in *Bhakti Literature in South Asia*, eds. M.K. Gautam and G.H. Schokker (Leiden: Kern Institute, 2000), 256.

⁸³⁴ Justin Abbott, N.R. Godbole, and J.F. Edwards, *Nectar from Indian Saints: An English Translation of Mahīpati’s Marāthī Bhaktalīlāmrit* (Poona: United Theological College of Western India, 1935), 51; III:183.

with the power of Dnyāndev, for he had made the wall of lifeless stone to move a mile from Ālandī, and at that sight Chāngdev was overcome with shame. Dismounting from the tiger, he let go of the snake he had used as a whip. With an unusually reverent attitude and with loving devotion, he rolled himself with delight at Dnyāndev's feet.⁸³⁵

At this point in the text, Mahipati mourns those *yogīs* like Changdev who have achieved profound mystical absorption but do not know the pleasures of *bhakti*, lauding Jñāndev as a rare exemplar of one who possesses knowledge of non-duality while also delighting in loving devotion to the *saguna* form of God.⁸³⁶ The tale resumes with Changdev asking Jñāndev how he was able to move the wall, a feat that, despite his own superhuman powers, he calls “beyond the power of all understanding.” Jñāndev responds by explaining that:

If God wills to do a thing, what is there that He will not do? ... Ants will forever subsist on the rays of the sun, and even crops will grow on a fiery tableland, but all this is only by the power of Shrī Hari. [Vishnu] pervades the movable and the immovable creation; everything in creation is His form, and it was He who by His prowess easily moved the wall. ... He it was who in order to fulfill your longing made the wall move by His own power. The Husband of Rukmini [Krishna] alone knows that it was not our power at all.⁸³⁷

Here we have a theme that emerges repeatedly throughout the *bhakti* hagiographies and the earlier Sufi literature: the notion that the devotee's power is so great—and so much better than that of the *yogī*—because it is not his power at all; it is the power of God, who can accomplish anything. A final tale from Mahipati's writings further illustrates this point.

In a rather bizarre story from the *Bhaktalīlāmṛta* (1774), the Maharashtrian *bhakti* saint Eknāth (c. 1533-99) harshly rebukes an ascetic *yogī* by the name of Śrīpad for displaying yogic powers to the public by responding to a challenge from a group of brahmins to raise a donkey from the dead. Ashamed of his behavior, Śrīpad volunteers to be buried alive as penance.

⁸³⁵ Ibid., 67-8; IV: 153-59.

⁸³⁶ Ibid., 69-70; IV: 173-76, 182-83.

⁸³⁷ Ibid., 70-71; IV: 188-96.

Eknāth buries the *yogī* alive but then finds himself confronted by brahmins accusing him of killing Śrīpad out of jealousy at not possessing such yogic power (*siddhāi*) himself. The brahmins threaten to excommunicate Eknāth on the charge of murder if he does not perform a miracle by having the stone image of Nandī eat *kadabā* stalks from his hands. When the stone bull devours a sheaf of stalks before their eyes, they are filled with amazement and free Eknāth from the penalty of excommunication. They remark to each other, “This miraculous deed performed by Eknāth is an act that cannot be acquired through the practice of Yoga. This astonishing deed comes from *Bhakti*. Because of his former devotion to his Guru, his service to saints, and his loving worship of Śrī Hari, Pāṇḍuraṅg [Krishna] has become pleased with him, and protects him moment by moment.” All seems well until another group of brahmins arise, claiming that they did not see the supposed miracle and that unless he can perform it again, he will still be excommunicated. Eknāth prays to Nandī to find a way to remove these brahmins’ doubts and as soon as he utters the prayer, the stone bull rises up, runs, and jumps into a deep hole in the Godavari River. The brahmins finally believe Eknāth’s holiness, saying, “[This] is a deed that does not belong to man,” and then, “There is now no excommunication for you. You may return to your home. Blessed is your loving devotion. You have brought life to a stone Nandi. The God-of-Gods is pleased with you. We now recognize the real meaning of what has happened.” The reader is left free to decide upon exactly what this “real meaning” is, but one key message seems clear: God’s power (not man’s) is greatest and *bhakti* is the only way to access this boundless power. As the text states, such a miraculous feat “cannot be acquired through the practice of Yoga,” but is a deed that “does not belong to man” and comes only from loving devotion to God.⁸³⁸

⁸³⁸ Justin Abbott, *The Life of Eknāth* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1981 [1927]), 128-34; v. 19:19-99.

* * *

Before proceeding to more *bhakti* miracle tales, it is important to note that while the nature, content, and heightened intensity of early modern Indian (Sufi and *bhakti*) critiques of tantra, yoga, and magic was distinctive, criticism of transgressive tantric ascetics certainly had precedents in Indian literature. There is, for instance, a long history of mocking and negatively marking *tāntrikas* and black magic, as evidenced by depictions of Kāpālika ascetics in early medieval Sanskrit dramas. One notable precedent to the north Indian *bhakti* movement's miracle stories comes from Gulura Siddhviranaryaru's edition of the *Śūnyasampādane* (c. 1510 CE), a collection of Kannada prose poems (*vacanas*) about the Vīraśaiva saints.⁸³⁹ In one section, this text tells the tale of Allama Prabhu, a saint in twelfth century Karnataka who encounters, defeats and converts Gorakṣa (Gorakh), the leader of the Siddhas.⁸⁴⁰ In the story, Gorakṣa professes to have conquered death, as evidenced by his diamond-hard body. To prove the claim, he asks Allama to strike him with a sword, but when Allama swings the sword, it clangs against Gorakṣa's adamantine body. Gorakṣa laughs with pride and Allama, amused at his vanity, responds with a *vacana* mocking his yogic powers: "Go to; your yōga of trickery and fraud with roots and fibres, is no yōga! Go to; it is no yōga to have the trance of body, senses and the soul! The real and natural is Guhēśvara [Śiva, 'Lord of the Mystics']!"⁸⁴¹ After explaining to Gorakṣa that *siddhis* actually take one away from the one true Reality, Allama then invites Gorakṣa to swing the sword at him; however, when he does so the sword simply swishes through Allama's body as if it were pure space. Seeing this, Gorakṣa is

⁸³⁹ R. Blake Michael, *The Origins of the Vīraśaiva Sects* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1992), 29.

⁸⁴⁰ I am grateful to Gil Ben-Herut for his assistance familiarizing me with scholarship on this particular story.

⁸⁴¹ *Śūnyasampādane*, Vol. V, eds. M.S. Sunkapur and Armando Menezes (Dharwar: Karnatak University, 1972), 390.

stunned and humbled and he asks Alama to initiate him into Vīraśaivism. Allama says to the defeated yogī: “With your alchemies, you achieve metals, but no essence. / With all your manifold yogas, you achieve a body, but no spirit.”⁸⁴² The critique of yoga and its “magical powers” is clear in the story, but devotion is not here exalted in the same way that it is in the Sufi and north Indian *bhakti* hagiographies. Rather, a form of non-dual mystical knowledge is what is praised and contrasted with yogic powers. While Vīraśaivism is typically considered a form of Śaiva *bhakti* and a southern precedent directly linked to the *bhakti* that would develop in the north, we see here how such south-to-north “*bhakti* movement” narratives gloss over substantial qualitative differences in the form and style of *bhakti* that was being practiced.

~ *Bhakti Miracle Stories (II): Panjabi & Hindi (Braj) Materials* ~

Let us now turn to a story from the *bhakti* hagiographical literature of the Sikhs. That Panjab was not only home to the Sikhs but was also a major center of Nāth presence can be seen in the large number of compositions that Guru Nānak addresses to Nāth yogīs. As W.H. McLeod writes:

The part played by Gorakhnāth in the *janam-sākhī* traditions reflects a substantial reputation, one which is surpassed only by a few distinguished disciples of Baba Nānak. Anecdotes in which he or other Nāths appear also imply a considerable awe, and although Baba Nānak invariably overcomes them he sometimes has to contend with an impressively fearsome display of magical powers. The Nāth yogīs who wandered through sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Pañjāb must have been held in some dread by the people for their alleged possession of such powers. They must have commanded both fear and a grudging respect, for the asceticism of the Nāth order cannot go entirely unrecognized.⁸⁴³

⁸⁴² A.K. Ramanujan, *Speaking of Śiva* (London: Penguin Group, 1973), 145-47.

⁸⁴³ W.H. McLeod, *Early Sikh Tradition: A Study of the Janam-sākhīs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 145.

In the *Vārāṇ Bhāī Gurdās*, a Sikh text from the early seventeenth century, Guru Nānak confronts and debates a group of *yogīs* and *siddhas* led by a figure named Bhaṅgarnāth. Challenging Nānak, these *yogīs* invoke their tantra-mantra, transform themselves into tigers, fly around like birds, hiss like cobras, and shoot out fire from their bodies.⁸⁴⁴ The *siddhas* mockingly prod Nānak to respond to their display with a miracle (*karāmāṭi*), but he says, “I have nothing worth showing to you. I have no support except God (*Guru*), the community (*saṅgati*) and the Word (*bāṇī*).” Hearing this, the *yogīs* “exhausted themselves with tantra-mantra but the Word of the Guru would not allow their powers to come forth.” Realizing they are out of their league, the *yogīs* submit themselves before Nānak. The text then states, “The Guru [God] is the giver and no one can gauge his bounties.”⁸⁴⁵ Here we have a message closely mirroring that of the Sufi tales: Why display supernormal powers? They serve no real purpose and have no real authority, for true power comes from (i.e., is given by) God alone and cannot be accessed by paltry means such as tantra-mantra.

In the B-40 *janam-sākhi*, written in the 1730s, a very similar incident (in fact, likely another account of the same incident) is related in which Nānak visits the Nāth *siddha* location of Achal in Panjab, where he has a confrontation with the same *yogī*, Bhangarnāth. Bhangarnāth calls in “the eighty-four Siddhs, the nine Naths, the six Jatis, the unseen and the visible, demons of the air and dwellers on the earth, the fifty-two Virs, and the sixty-four Yoginis” to engage Baba Nānak in spiritual competition.⁸⁴⁶ The *siddhas* showcase their supernormal powers by causing deerskins to fly, stones to move, and walls to walk, but Baba

⁸⁴⁴ *Vārāṇ Bhāī Gurdās* 1.41. Jodh Singh, *Vārāṇ Bhāī Gurdās*. Volume One (Patiala & New Delhi: Vision & Venture Publishers, 1998), 71. This text’s author, Bhāī Gurdās, was the nephew of Guru Amar Dās, the third Sikh Guru.

⁸⁴⁵ *Vārāṇ Bhāī Gurdās* 1.42. Ibid., 72.

⁸⁴⁶ W.H. McLeod, *The B40 Janam-Sakhi* (Amritsar: Guru Nānak Dev University, 1980), 137-38.

Nānak is unimpressed and challenges them to a match of hide-and-seek. The *siddhas* hide first and Nānak easily finds them. It is now Nānak's turn to hide and he becomes invisible by merging into the four elements. Unable to find him, the *siddhas* finally acknowledge their defeat. As soon as they make their submission, Baba Nānak reappears and utters the following lines from stanza 19 of the *Vār Mājh*:

If I were to clothe myself with fire, build my dwelling in the snows, and subsist upon a diet of iron;
 If I were to turn all suffering into water and drink it, [or] reduce the [entire] world to my command;
 If I were to lay the heavens upon scales and weigh them against a copper coin;
 If I were to distend [my body] to infinite dimensions, [or] bind all in subjection;
 If my mind possessed such power that I could act and command as I chose, [all would be profitless].
 Just as He, the Lord, is glorious so too are His gifts glorious, gifts which he bestows in accordance with His will.
 He upon whom the [Lord's] gracious glance rests—he it is, Nānak, who acquires the glory of the True Name.⁸⁴⁷

Here Nānak stresses that yogic powers and austerities are profitless; they are utterly futile in comparison with the glorious gifts of God. True power comes not from tantric incantations and bodily regimens but from God alone, and when God bestows His gifts—not in response to ritual action, ascetic feats, or recitation of mantras, but only in accordance with His will—then the limitless power of the divine makes itself known in the miracle.

Gilbert Pollet's extensive analysis of the *Bhaktamāl* of Nābhādās confirms this same *bhakti* conception of the miraculous. Pollet states that Nābhādās mentions fifty-three miracles in his text and that "In 42 of [those] 53 instances, the deity itself is at the origin of the

⁸⁴⁷ Ibid., 139.

miraculous event.”⁸⁴⁸ He notes that in the other eleven cases, the miracle is performed by a devout human and that no divine intervention or presence is mentioned explicitly, but that “the very nature of the miracle and the religious attitude of the *bhakta* refer ultimately to a supernatural power;”⁸⁴⁹ that is, the miracle is done through the power of devotion to God.

For our next example from the *bhakti* hagiographies we look to Priyādās’s *Bhaktirasabodhinī* (1712), composed in Vrindavan as the indispensable commentary on Nābhādās’s *Bhaktamāl*.⁸⁵⁰ While this story does not involve an encounter with a *yogī*, it speaks directly to the set of themes we have been addressing thus far. Priyādās tells the tale of the *bhakti* saint Tulsīdās’s visit to the Mughal emperor in Delhi. Upon arrival, the emperor (who remains unidentified, but would have been Akbar or Jahāngīr) states that Tulsīdās is world-renowned for his miraculous powers and demands that Tulsī perform a miracle for him. Tulsī replies by stating that such powers are nonsense; i.e., it is a lie that he is responsible for such miracles, and only God (Rām) should be recognized.⁸⁵¹ Angered, the emperor locks Tulsī in prison. Tulsī then prays to Hanumān who answers his devotee’s call by sending an army of monkeys to wreak havoc upon the palace, “scratching eyes and noses,” “tearing clothes off the emperor’s women,” and “heaving down bricks from the ramparts.”⁸⁵² Realizing what is happening, the emperor falls at the poet’s feet and begs for mercy, to which Tulsī replies,

⁸⁴⁸ Gilbert Pollet, “The Mediaeval Vaiṣṇava Miracles as Recorded in the Hindī *Bhakta Māla*,” *Le Museon* 80 (1967): 476.

⁸⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 478.

⁸⁵⁰ On the relationship between Nābhā’s *mūl* text and the commentary by Priyādās that nearly always accompanies it, see James Hare, “A Contested Community: Priyādās and the Re-Imagining of Nābhādās’s *Bhaktamāl*,” *Sikh Formations* 3.2 (2007): 185–98.

⁸⁵¹ Nābhājī, *Śrī Bhaktamāl, with the Bhaktīrasabodhini commentary of Prīya Dās. Exposition in modern Hindī by Sitaramsaran Bhagavanprasad Rupkala* (Lucknow: Tejkumar Press, 1961), 768–69. The line is “*jhūṭh bāt ek rām pahicāniyai*” (ka. 515), which William Pinch translates as “It’s a lie, all I know is Ram.” Pinch, *Warrior Ascetics*, 218.

⁸⁵² *Ibid.*, 769–70 (ka. 516); Pinch, *Warrior Ascetics*, 218.

“enjoy the miracle [*karāmāt*] a little bit longer.”⁸⁵³ Finally, with the emperor “drowning in shame,” Hanumān’s assault ends.⁸⁵⁴

In this story, we see a trope common in both Sufi and *bhakti* miracle stories: the refusal of the miracle worker to perform a marvel requested of him. In the eyes of both Sufis and *bhaktas*, displays of magical powers are considered futile since they are done for man’s ends, not out of love for God; they are superfluous and trivial because devotion and humble submission to God are what really matter. Tulsī refuses to perform a marvel for the emperor but the miraculous power of God nevertheless manifests itself when God sends Hanumān to Tulsī’s rescue out of tender mercy and sincere love for his supplicant’s devotion. In the miracle, then, as opposed to the magical display, attention shifts from the individual to God—and equally perhaps, to devotion to God—as the source of genuine power. As Pinch states, “Those who would claim supernormal abilities as a function of their own human effort – in other words, those who would claim to be gods – were, in the eyes of the newly pious, whether *bhakta* or Muslim, simply tricksters. Hence Priyādās’ need to deride such claims as “*jhuthi karamat*” – false marvels.”⁸⁵⁵ Pinch goes on to say that “Tulsīdās scoffed at the very idea of performing a marvel for the emperor not simply because ‘all I know is Rām’ but because he did not dabble in the kind of marvel the emperor was interested in witnessing.”⁸⁵⁶ For Tulsī and

⁸⁵³ Ibid., 771. The line is “*karāmāt neku lījiyai*” (ka. 517).

⁸⁵⁴ Ibid. (ka. 517). The ending of this Brajbhāṣā *kavitt* is extremely difficult to interpret and neither Pinch’s nor Rūpkalā’s explanation/translation—which posit that the emperor prays to Rām for protection—seems justifiable to me based on Priyādās’s text.

⁸⁵⁵ Pinch, 218–19.

⁸⁵⁶ Pinch, *Warrior Ascetics*, 218. In this way, Pinch interprets the tale as “a Vaishnava *bhakti* response to the legacy of Akbar’s fascination with esoteric yogis and the mysteries of *hathayoga*” (219).

devotees like him, tantric rites, mantras, ascetic physical regimens, and magical displays were worthless in the authentic religious life of devotion to the Lord.

We now shift out attention to the hagiography of Kabīr, arguably the most famous *bhakta* of them all. In his late sixteenth century Kabīr *parcāī*, the Rāmānandī Anantadās tells a story of in which the Lord sends an *apsarā* (a heavenly nymph) to test the firmness of Kabīr's devotion with various temptations, all of which Kabīr resists in his unwavering devotion to Hari. In reward, Keshav (Vishnu) presents himself before Kabīr, first offering him wealth and worldly enjoyments, then lordship over the world, and finally, all of the *siddhis*, "in short, every aspiring [tantric] *yogī*'s dream."⁸⁵⁷ The great *bhakta* Kabīr, however, has no interest in these magical powers, treasures, or pleasures. He tells Vishnu, "I will request nothing, King of the Three Worlds. ... How can an ant lift up a mountain? How can a firefly outshine the moon?"⁸⁵⁸ In other words, how could such powers compare to the power of God? Kabīr here proves himself a model of firm, intense, and humble devotion that (like that of the Sufi saints) has no use for yogic powers or the arrogance and misplaced priorities bound up with seeking and displaying them.⁸⁵⁹

⁸⁵⁷ Heidi Pauwels, "Who Are the Enemies of the *bhaktas*? Testimony about 'śāktas' and 'Others' from Kabīr, the Rāmānandīs, Tulsīdās, and Harirām Vyās," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 130.4 (2010): 522.

⁸⁵⁸ Kabīr *parcāī*, section 11-12. David Lorenzen, *Kabīr Legends and Ananta-das's Kabīr Parachai* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 119-124.

⁸⁵⁹ It is important to note that while the miracle/magic distinction is a common and consistent one, there are certainly stories that present famous early modern north Indian *bhaktas* as being clearly more powerful than their opponents but which do not necessarily *explicitly* locate that superiority in the practice of devotion as opposed to some other unnamed spiritual power. For example, there are stories in the oral tradition in which Kabīr has confrontations with Gorakhnāth but in which the miracle/magic distinction we have been emphasizing does not seem to be present. In one, Gorakh invites Kabīr to a miracle contest in which he plants his iron trident in the ground, rises up and sits on one of its prongs, then challenges Kabīr to come up and sit on one of the other prongs. Kabīr responds by taking out a ball of thread and, holding one end, throwing it up into the air. He then rises up and takes a seat on the other end of the thread, far above Gorakh on his trident. In another story, Gorakh challenges Kabīr to find him in a pond. He changes into a frog and dives into the water, but Kabīr finds and grabs him easily. Kabīr then asks Gorakh to find him and, entering the pond, converts himself into water itself. Gorakh

In another section from the *Kabīr parcaī*, Anantadās tells the tale of how Shah Sikander Lodi once came to Kashi (Banaras) where a delegate of Muslim judges (*qāzīs*) and clerics (mullahs), brahmins, and merchants together approached him with a complaint about Kabīr. This heterogeneous group explains to Sikander that Kabīr has abandoned the customs of Muslims and Hindus, scorned the sacred places and rites, and in this way has corrupted everyone and tarnished the reputation of both Hindu and Muslim religious authorities. Sikander orders that Kabīr be brought before him to be killed. Standing before the Shah, Kabīr states, “If Rām is my protector, no one can kill me. Badashah, I am not afraid. Whatever God does, that is what will be.” To this, Sikander replies, “You are a fool not to fear me. Now let’s see a true miracle (*karāmāt*). Tie Kabīr’s feet and bind him with chains. Drown him in the water of the Ganges.” This is done, but as soon as Kabīr is dropped into the river, his chains inexplicably come loose and he begins to float. Enraged, Sikander then ties up Kabīr, throws him into a house, and sets it on fire. However, when Kabīr recites the name of God the fire becomes “cool as water” and he emerges unscathed. In describing this incident, Anantadās writes, “The gods and men witnessed a true miracle (*sācī karamātī*).”⁸⁶⁰ Angered, the *qāzīs* and brahmins tell Sikander that Kabīr has used “magic arts” and thus his apparent miracle must not be accepted as such. Sikander next calls upon a frenzied elephant famed for its ferocity in battle. The elephant is brought and made to attack, but Kabīr does not budge, feeling no fear as he remains there “absorbed in the love of Ram.” At this point Keshav (Krishna) appears in

is unable to find him and, again, loses the miracle contest. These stories are briefly discussed in Lorenzen, *Kabīr Legends and Ananta-das’s Kabīr Parachai*, 54-55.

⁸⁶⁰ It is interesting to note that both Anantadās and Priyādās make frequent use of the Persian word *karāmāt* to refer to miracles in their hagiographies, suggesting that words from the Sanskritic lineage perhaps did not convey as precisely the desired meaning. However, Nābhādās consistently uses the Braj word *acaraja*, from the Sanskrit *āścarya*, to denote miracles.

the form of a lion and seats himself in front of Kabīr, causing the elephant to flee backward and refuse to advance. When Sikander sees the lion he is astounded and says, “Elephant driver, take the elephant away. A miracle (*karāmāt*) has just occurred.” Sikander humbly admits the power of Rām (“the true God”) and begs Kabīr to spare his life. In the end, Kabīr returns home, saying “Bhakti to Hari destroys millions of sins. Hari comes running for his devotees. ... Without bhakti to Hari, no work can prosper. I recognized the guru and Govinda [Krishna] through devotion. That is why Sikander could do nothing to me.”⁸⁶¹

As in the Tulsīdās story, the focus here is completely on God. Kabīr does not actually *do* anything—other than remain absorbed in devotion to God—rather it is God who does everything. The pro-*bhakti* message could hardly be more explicit. All one needs is devotion to the Lord, who provides power and protection greater than any magic art or yogic discipline could possibly offer. Kabīr refuses to perform a marvel himself, yet nevertheless not one, not two, but *three* miracles occur in the story as God repeatedly protects his cherished devotee.

* * *

In examining the hagiographical episodes above this chapter has sought to suggest that with the rise of *bhakti* devotional religiosity in sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth century north India, we increasingly see the articulation of two separate spheres paralleling the Western/Abrahamic categories of “religion” and “magic.” Early modern *bhakti* literature’s new and heightened emphasis on the distinction between miracle and magic seems to be a function of the influence of Sufi perspectives regarding the nature of the Divine and the proper human relationship to that Divine. We might say, then, that it was in significant part through the influence of Sufism that Hindu devotional practices and attitudes—those viewing

⁸⁶¹ Kabīr *parcaī* sections 7-9. Lorenzen, *Kabīr Legends and Ananta-das’s Kabīr Parachai*, 107-15.

the divine as the sole source of power—increasingly took on the tenor of the "religious," while tantric and yogic-ascetic modes of practice—those viewing the human being as the primary source of power—increasingly came to be represented as something akin to the "magical" with all that term's typical negative connotations.

As stated at the outset of this chapter, it is productive to approach the interaction between Sufis and *bhaktas* that led to this change in perspective as an "interlogue" in which people with multiple identities came together in various and changing circumstances to engage in *conversation*—broadly and etymologically construed as "living with," or "having dealings with"—that left them with a transformed yet uncompromised religious identity. This exchange between Sufis and *bhaktas* was, in Patton and Ram-Prasad's words, "an actual exchange, or 'change outwards' to a new form of relationship."⁸⁶² For *bhaktas*, the "change outward" was not only to a new form of relationship with Sufis but also to a new and Sufi-inflected form of relationship *with God*. Considering the immeasurably rich history of Hindu thought and practice, it would be foolish to say that the way in which early modern *bhaktas* related to the Divine was entirely new or entirely a function of Sufi influence; however, there is no doubt that the Islamic presence in north India after the thirteenth century, mediated at the popular level especially via the Sufis, brought to the fore and distinctively colored those tendencies in Hindu devotion that resonated most with Islamic religious attitudes and approaches.⁸⁶³ In any case, there is no doubt that when it comes to the *bhakti* of Kabīr, Tulsīdās,

⁸⁶² Patton and Ram-Prasad, "Hinduism With Others: Interlogue," 289.

⁸⁶³ Pinch makes a related point, stating that there was a "new brand of Hindu devotionalist belief that shared certain traits with its Islamic counterpart despite obvious differences. Most importantly, both conceived of God (with an upper-case G) as distant, inscrutable, all-powerful, but ultimately merciful and caring," and going on to say that "the dominant north Indian *bhakti* Hinduism that was being institutionalized in the seventeenth century articulated in religious form values that many Muslims and non-Muslims, nobles as well as ordinary folk, found important and meaningful. These values included charity to the poor, ethical universalism, humility, social

Nābhādās, and all of the other great devotee-saints, there is a great deal that was new and distinctive to the specific social, political, and religious environment of early modern north India. As we have repeatedly highlighted, one thing new was the early modern *bhakti* attitude toward tantric paradigms of religiosity that had ruled the day for at least seven hundred years of India's history but in the wake of Sufi-Hindu interlogue were now increasingly being critiqued as "magic."

equality before God, and techniques of spiritual upliftment and enlightenment that kept in check the dangers of individual hubris." Pinch, *Warrior Ascetics and Indian Empire*, 219-221.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion: The Invention of “Tantra”

The religious landscape of present-day India attests to the enduring success of early modern north India’s *bhakti* movement, for mainstream Hindu religiosity there today is dominated by the practices, attitudes, temples, narratives, and symbols of *bhakti*, and especially, Vaiṣṇava *bhakti*. Tantric traditions, on the other hand, grouped together under the thoroughly modern rubric of “Tantra,” have not fared nearly so well. As David White states, “many Hindus in India today deny the relevance of Tantra to their tradition, past or present, identifying what they call ‘*tantra-mantra*’ as so much mumbo-jumbo.”⁸⁶⁴ Hugh Urban adds, “In most vernacular languages today, the term *tantra* is typically associated with a whole range of intense associations, usually relating to the darker realms of the magical, the immoral (sometimes the illegal), and the occult.”⁸⁶⁵ While the marginalization and stigmatization of tantric practices and perspectives as “magical” is typically attributed to the British colonial importation of Western post-Enlightenment, post-Reformation categories, in fact, the early modern *bhakti* attitudes toward tantric *yogīs* and Śāktas that we have discussed show clear

⁸⁶⁴ David Gordon White, *Kiss of the Yoginī: “Tantric Sex” in its South Asian Contexts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 262. Lutgendorf has made the important insight that Vaiṣṇavism’s success and its corresponding devotionalization and sanitization of tantric Śaiva and Śākta traditions have not at all been complete. He discusses the modern proliferation of Tantric literature and iconography of Hanumān, which “disseminates purportedly esoteric techniques and images aimed at individual satisfaction and empowerment and places allusions to Vaiṣṇava narrative within a ritual context that is squarely Śaiva/Śākta.” This, he explains, “might as well be characterized as an example of the ‘Tantrification’ of Vaiṣṇavism, reflecting a yearning among many mainstream, Sanātani Hindus in North India for access, through a feisty demigod with squarely populist associations and a reputation for delivering the goods, to sources of transformative power associated with potent and esoteric paths.” Philip Lutgendorf, “Five Heads and No Tale: Hanumān and the Popularization of Tantra,” *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 5.3 (2003): 287. The larger point is that, in the same way that magic, as the constitutive Other of religion, constantly haunts the realm and authority of religion, so does “Tantra,” as the foil for *bhakti*’s self-identity, ever remain present, whether resisting *bhakti*’s hegemony or attending to religious needs *bhakti* simply cannot properly satisfy.

⁸⁶⁵ Hugh Urban, *Tantra: Sex, Secrecy, Politics, and Power in the Study of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 38.

Indian precedents for this kind of thinking. Indeed, in *bhakti* criticisms and caricatures of these tantric figures we see indigenous roots—that paved the way for and later combined with certain colonial/orientalist conceptions as well as certain Indian nationalist agendas—for the way in which many aspects of tantric religiosity came to be isolated and discarded as illicit, sinister, and irrational “magic.”

Post-modern and post-colonial scholarship has been inclined to focus exclusively upon discontinuities between the pre-colonial and the colonial/post-colonial periods and, in historicizing the forms of Indian modernity, has placed heavy emphasis on the impact of the “epistemological disruptions” brought about by British colonialism. As William Pinch remarks, “One of the epistemological disruptions the British are thought to have occasioned is in the area of religion, namely, in massaging Indian religion into a shape that conformed to their Enlightenment dispositions.”⁸⁶⁶ Orientalist characterizations of *bhakti* and Tantra would seem to offer evidence of just this. As Krishna Sharma has aptly demonstrated, influential late nineteenth and early twentieth century Western scholars like Monier-Williams, H.H. Wilson, Albrecht Weber, Franz Lorinser, and George Grierson drew on native Christian—and especially Protestant—conceptions of religion as monotheistic, personal, and faith-oriented to identify *bhakti* first with Krishna worship and later with the larger category of Vaiṣṇavism. In the process, they characterized this *bhakti* religion as a kind of reformed Hinduism (i.e., reformed from earlier less “worthy” forms of Hinduism), an Indian instance of Christian-like monotheistic devotion to a personal God.⁸⁶⁷ Tantric forms of Hindu tradition, on the other hand, with their focus on power and homologies between worldly and divine, as well as their

⁸⁶⁶ William Pinch, *Warrior Ascetics and Indian Empires* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 17.

⁸⁶⁷ Krishna Sharma, *Bhakti and the Bhakti Movement: A New Perspective: A Study in the History of Ideas* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1987).

sometimes bloody and erotic imagery and rites, served as the “magical” foil to *bhakti* “religion” and were “quickly singled out as India’s darkest, most irrational element—as the Extreme Orient, the most exotic aspect of the exotic Orient itself.”⁸⁶⁸ The work of Monier Monier-Williams (1819-1899) is a perfect illustration of this point. He wrote that *bhakti*, which he identified with Vaiṣṇavism, “is the only Hindū system worthy of being called a religion”⁸⁶⁹ and stated furthermore that *bhakti* “alone [among Hindu religious forms] possesses the essential elements of a genuine religion. For there can be no true religion without personal devotion to a personal God.”⁸⁷⁰ When it came to Tantra, however, Monier-Williams had an entirely different opinion. It was he who first used the term “Tantrism” as “a singular, monolithic class,”⁸⁷¹ remarking disparagingly that Tantrism “is Hinduism arrived at its last and worst stage of medieval development” and asserting that “the Tantras are generally mere manuals of mysticism, magic, and superstition of the worst and most silly kind.”⁸⁷² Here *bhakti*, with its more familiar (“rational” and Christian-like) devotional approach, is clearly defined as “religion” in opposition to Tantra, which is, with its unfamiliar and un-approved perspectives and practices, labeled as “magic” and “superstition.” As the story typically goes, these Western colonial perceptions were appropriated by Indian reformers of Hinduism from Rammohun Roy to Bhāratendu Hariśchandra to Swami Vivekananda who raised up *bhakti* and

⁸⁶⁸ Hugh Urban, *Tantra: Sex, Secrecy, Politics, and Power in the Study of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 3.

⁸⁶⁹ Monier Monier-Williams, *Brāhmanism and Hindūism: Or, Religious Thought and Life in India, as Based on the Veda and Other Sacred Books of the Hindūs*. 4th ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1891), 96.

⁸⁷⁰ Monier Monier-Williams, “The Vaishnava Religion, with Special Reference to the Śikshā-Patrī of the Modern Sect Called Svāmi-Nārāyana,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 14 (1882), 295-96.

⁸⁷¹ Urban, *Tantra*, 51.

⁸⁷² Monier Monier-Williams, *Hinduism* (London: Society For Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1890), 123, 129.

Vedantic philosophy while criticizing “Tantra” as a corrupt tradition of magic and superstition that needed to be cleansed from Hinduism.

While Protestant Christian biases and colonial classifications of knowledge certainly played their part in the construction of the modern Hinduism, this study has demonstrated that present-day Indian perceptions linking devotion with proper religious practice and “Tantra” with power, black magic, and nefarious activity can not be said to come solely from orientalist/colonial influence. The origins of these understandings of *bhakti* religion and tantric magic actually lie in the early modern period, before the British had any significant presence in India. Indeed, while there is no doubt that *bhakti* attitudes and viewpoints regarding tantric religiosity were exaggerated and supplemented in important ways by European Orientalist scholars and British colonialists, nevertheless, in many ways modern-day South Asian conceptions of Tantra have their roots as much in the rhetoric of the *bhakti* saints and hagiographers as anywhere else. Tantra, as popularly conceived in India today, might be considered the invention of the *bhakti* reformers, a “magical” Other necessary for the successful constitution of their own new devotional “religion.”

More work remains to be done to determine to what degree, and precisely how, these pre-existing *bhakti* perceptions informed colonial and orientalist thought, but regardless, we can say that the trend to think of *bhakti* and (aspects of) tantra as two distinct and opposed forms of thought and practice, with characteristics mirroring the western religion-magic distinction, really first emerges during north India’s *bhakti* movement in the early modern period. It may have been Western classificatory zeal that generated the label and category of “Tantrism” or “Tantra,” but it was early modern *bhakti* authors who laid the groundwork for this event.

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Recent trends in scholarship, for good reason, have sought to highlight the collaboration, dialogical interaction, identity-blurring, and shared spaces and idioms between Muslims and Hindus in the Sultanate and Mughal periods. At the same time, as we have mentioned, a great deal of post-colonialist scholarship has put a critical spotlight on the powerful influence of the British colonial presence upon the development and form of Indian modernity. Both of these scholarly trends cannot be entirely separated from politically liberal, anti-imperialist agendas concerned with Western impact on the cultural and political life of South Asia, and deeply critical of Hindutva political goals and strategies (and the Hindu-Muslim violence they often generate). While I am quite sympathetic to these social and political agendas, the academic trends linked to them have tended to occlude a crucial historical fact: When Muslim Turks came to dominate north India in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, this was no less disruptive (to existing Indian paradigms) and no less profoundly generative (of new forms of Indian thought and practice) than when the British came to dominate in the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. With this in mind, this work has sought to demonstrate that it was largely in response to and productive interaction with this new Islamic presence that many of the unique features of north India's *bhakti* movement emerged.

We have seen that the arrival and eventual dominance of Muslims in north India was a momentous event that brought about major changes in India's social and religious landscape. While a tantric paradigm had permeated medieval Indian religious and political life since roughly the sixth century, by the beginning of thirteenth century and the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate, Muslim military and political dominance had resulted in the collapse of most

of the infrastructure sustaining institutionalized and brahminical forms of tantric religion. Non-institutionalized, non-elite tantric forms would adapt, persist and—in the case of the Nāth *yogīs*—even flourish in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in a religious culture that allowed for boundary-blurring collaboration, borrowing, and interlogue among diverse religious practitioners. With the Mughal Empire, and particularly the reign of Akbar in the second half of the sixteenth century, a Mughal-Rajput political alliance formed and led to the development of a Mughal-Rajput court culture and religio-political idiom in which Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* institutional forms became valuable symbols of power and deportment for aspiring Hindu rulers and thus *bhakti* communities became the beneficiaries of extensive patronage.

While the rise of *bhakti* was linked to all of these socio-political developments, it was also intertwined with and contingent upon the successful formation of a new *bhakti* identity, or to use Novetzke's terms, a new *bhakti* public among whom a common core of values, attitudes, narratives, and symbols circulated in text and performance. We devoted two lengthy chapters of this work to an analysis of the Rāmānandī devotional community at Galta, comparing and contrasting them to the Nāth *yogīs* in order to highlight the development of this new *bhakti* identity in early modern north India, one formed especially in contradistinction to certain key perspectives and attitudes of the tantric tradition. In the process, we had occasion to challenge some popular scholarly notions of *bhakti* and yoga and to reconceive them in improved, historically contextualized and contingent form. We singled out the early Rāmānandīs of Galta because their community of yoga-practicing ascetic *bhaktas* and literature-producing *rasik bhaktas* serves so effectively to challenge the boundaries of modern-day conceptions of *bhakti* and yoga, and to show us the initial unravelings of the once closely interwoven threads of *bhakti*, tantra, and yoga. In the work of Agradās (and his disciple

Nābhādās), we saw the critical role of *bhakti* literature—with its artful combination of heartfelt sentiments and strategic considerations—in articulations of *bhakti* identity and representations of *bhakti* community designed to attract both a popular following and elite patronage. After this specific case study of an important but relatively unknown Rāmānandī figure, we shifted to a much broader examination of early modern *bhakti* poetry and hagiography in order to highlight the rise of new *bhakti* attitudes toward certain key aspects of tantric and yogic religiosity, and to show how these new *bhakti* perspectives had a clear Sufi inflection. In this investigation, we saw how *bhakti* authors with different theological positions and from a wide range of social and geographical locations all seem to have come together in asserting a devotional identity and a conception of religion that were in fundamental conflict with ordinary tantric-yogic approaches, and much more closely aligned with Sufi notions regarding the nature of God and the meaning of religion. Indeed, the parallels between themes, symbols, and literary strategies of *bhakti* and Indian Sufi devotional works strongly suggest that Sufi-*bhakta* interlogue played a key role in the formation and expression of notions of *bhakti* “religion” and tantric “magic” in early modern north India.

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In the history and culture of the Indian subcontinent, few things if any are clear-cut or universal, and the argument being made by this work is certainly no exception; nevertheless, the evidence compiled here suggests that in north India’s early modern period—prior to the advent of any significant Western presence—there was a definite trend in which Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* poets and institutions were carving out an authorized sphere of “religion” for themselves in opposition to a marginalized and unauthorized sphere of tantric “magic.” We have seen this phenomenon in the miracle/magic distinctions and critiques of tantric *yogīs* and

Śāktas articulated in *bhakti* poetry and hagiographical literature. Of course, in many respects, these critiques and polemical distinctions were simply a way of giving intellectual substance and rhetorical weight to what, for many people—both kings and commoners—amounted simply to a choice of whose supernatural service was more effective, whose power was most powerful. As we have learned in the preceding chapters, throughout north India, beginning in the sixteenth century, especially in the new socio-political conditions of the Mughal empire under Akbar, Vaiṣṇava devotional forms increasingly took the place of previously dominant tantric Śaiva-Śākta traditions and came to be considered the most proper and effective way for both kings and paupers to achieve their varied desires. In addition to the beauty and contagious emotion inherent in their poetry and its performance, *bhaktas* achieved this coup in part through a clever appropriation of certain tantric methods of practice, but much more so through a Sufi-inflected critique of key tantric attitudes and perspectives, a tantric magic against which they defined their new *bhakti* religion.

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Appendix A

LIST OF AGRADĀS COMPOSITIONS FOUND**

**The following in no way claims to be a comprehensive list of Agradās's compositions, but is a record of the findings of my own manuscript searches in some of the archives and libraries of north India.

In my research, I discovered these anthologies of poetry containing verses by Agradās:

- v.s. 1670 – *Pad Sangrah* – Jodhpur RORI #13498 (2)
- v.s. 1718 – *Rāg Pad Sangrah* – Udaipur RORI #3785 (9) (Agradas, Surdas, etc)
- v.s. 1731 – *Sphuṭ Pad Sangrah* – Jodhpur RORI #15613 (18) (Surdas, Agradas, Gadhaddhar, Vyas)
- v.s. 1742 – *Pad Sangrah* – Sanjay Sharma Museum #918/939/11 (Hitramray, Nanddas, Tulsidas, Ramdas, Surdas, Kabir, Agradas, etc.)
- v.s. 1742-43 – *Sphuṭ Sādhū Padāvalī* – Vidyā Bhūsaṅ Sangrah – Jaipur RORI #12 (12) (Surdas, Pipa, Jangopal, Sundardas, Rajjab, Agradas, etc)
- v.s. 1754 – *Agradās Padāvalī* – Sanjay Sharma Museum #960/734/2
- v.s. 1774 – *Sphuṭ Pad* – Udaipur RORI #4242 (1) (Kabir, Agradas, Tulsi, Parmanand, etc)
- v.s. 1796 – *Cauḥīs Avatār Kavīt* – Vidyā Bhūsaṅ Sangrah – Jaipur RORI #91 (13) (Agradas)
- 18th century – *Pad Rāmājanma kā* – Sanjay Sharma Museum #848/833
- 18th century – *Agradās ke Pad* – Jodhpur RORI #12380 (24)
- 18th century – *Rāg Pad Sangrah* – Jodhpur RORI #24426 (Tulsidas, Agradas, etc)
- 18th century – *Sphuṭ-Kavitt* – Udaipur RORI #4325 (5) (Agradas, Gosain Ramgiri, Sur, Kabir)
- v.s. 1840 – *Agradās kī Vāṇī* – Jodhpur RORI #14473

In my research, I found the following compositions attributed to Agradās:

- *Dhyān-mañjarī*
 - v.s. 1818 – Nāgarī Pracāriṇī Sabhā #772
 - v.s. 1872 – Jodhpur RORI #25307
 - v.s. 1873 – Jodhpur RORI #12226 (2-3)
 - v.s. 1876 – Jaipur City Palace #2156 (36)
 - v.s. 1891 – Jaipur City Palace #3001
 - v.s. 1894 – Udaipur RORI #2127
 - 19th century – Sanjay Sharma Museum #715/179
 - 19th century – Sanjay Sharma Museum #1553/450
 - 19th century – Jaipur RORI #2565 (incomplete)
 - 19th century – Udaipur RORI #3196
 - 19th century – Udaipur RORI #3096 (48)
 - v.s. 1907 – Nagari Pracarini Sabha #2268
 - v.s. 1911 – Udaipur RORI #1867
 - v.s. 1914 – Nagari Pracarini Sabha #543
 - v.s. 1931 – Vrindavan Research Institute #9680
 - Undated
 - Vrindavan Research Institute #14187 (incomplete, fair)
 - Vrindavan Research Institute #9094 (complete, poor)
 - Vrindavan Research Institute #10180 (incomplete, poor)
 - Vrindavan Research Institute #10446 (incomplete, damaged)
 - Nagari Pracarini Sabha #3156
 - Nagari Pracarini Sabha #692
 - Nagari Pracarini Sabha #872
 - Nagari Pracarini Sabha #885
 - Nagari Pracarini Sabha #1898

- *Kuṇḍaliyā (Hitopadeśa-bāvanī)*
 - v.s. 1692 – Jaipur City Palace #1489 (15)
 - v.s. 1739 – Jaipur City Palace #3676 (1)
 - 19th century – Jaipur City Palace #197 (4)
 - 19th century – Jodhpur RORI #13511 (29)
 - Undated – Jaipur City Palace #3320
 - Undated – Vrindavan Research Institute #4418-C (complete, good)
 - Undated – Nagari Pracarini Sabha #3312
 - Undated – Nagari Pracarini Sabha #1658
- *Nām-pratāp*
 - v.s. 1758 – Jaipur City Palace #1541 (2)
 - v.s. 1813 – Jaipur City Palace #2469 (6)
 - v.s. 1821 – Jaipur City Palace #1334 (2)
 - v.s. 1876 – Jaipur City Palace #2156 (25)
 - v.s. 1930 – Sanjay Sharma Museum #759/944/14
- *Prahlād-caritra*
 - v.s. 1724 – Jodhpur RORI #12380 (23)
 - 18th century (c. 1750 v.s.) – Jaipur City Palace #1194 (2)
 - 18th century – Jaipur City Palace #1406 (6)
 - v.s. 1859 – Jaipur City Palace #3524 (13)
 - 19th century – Jaipur City Palace #1935 (49)
 - Undated – Jaipur City Palace #3519 (9)
- *Dhruv-carit*
 - 18th century (c. 1750 v.s.) – Jaipur City Palace #1194 (1)
 - Undated – Jaipur City Palace #3319 (3)
- *Caturviṣati-avatāranāmāni (Sanskrit work!)*
 - Undated – Jaipur City Palace #3090 (2)
- *Bhāgavat pad prasang* (contains over 300 poems of Agradās)
 - v.s. 1742 – Jaipur City Palace #1616 (3)
- *Sītārām-nāmlīlā*
 - 19th century – Udaipur RORI #1927 (2)
- *Rāmji kī Badhāi*
 - 19th century – Alwar RORI #6017 (2)
- *Nāmamāhātmya*
 - Undated – Vrindavan Research Institute #4343 (complete, good)
- *Gurujī-aṣṭa*
 - Undated – Vrindavan Research Institute #16882-A
- *Rānīmangau*
 - v.s. 1799 – Vrindavan Research Institute #8089-C
- *Sītā-Svayamvar-Gīt*
 - Undated – Chaupāsānī Shodh Sansthān #11984