

Sacred Sounds and Sacred Books:
A History of Writing in Hindi

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ABSTRACT

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Tyler W. Williams

This dissertation combines methods from literary history, book history and religious history in order to map formerly unknown regions of Hindi literary culture in early modern North India. By sketching the broad contours of the manuscript archive and also looking closely at the material aspects and histories of individual text artifacts including notebooks, anthologies, and scriptures, it reveals connections and distinctions between audiences, genres, and canons that could not otherwise be seen. As the vernacular language of Hindi gradually came to displace the cosmopolitan language of Sanskrit as the medium of literary, scholastic and religious discourse over the fourteenth through seventeenth centuries, new configurations of oral performance practices and written manuscripts came into being; these practices and manuscripts in turn helped to consolidate new networks, and eventually bring new publics into being. For the religious communities associated with *bhakti* in particular, the process of vernacularization opened up opportunities for innovation concerning genre and style: by adopting certain literary techniques and particular inscriptional practices, these groups were able to deploy their writings as literature, scholarship, scripture, or a combination of all three. The distinctions that traditions like the Sikhs, the Dadu Panth, and the Niranjani Sampraday made between these different discourses and genres are reflected in the manuscripts that they created, and in the performance modes of which those manuscripts were a part. In the process of creating physical scriptures, they also transformed themselves into a different type of textual community.

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A Note on Transliteration

Scholars who work with manuscripts of early Hindi texts are accustomed to grumbling about the orthographical inconsistencies and idiosyncrasies of the various scribes with whose handwriting we now have to contend. However, had one of those scribes encountered the multiple ways in which we currently transcribe the languages of early modern North India, they would be equally exasperated. I have therefore adopted a transliteration scheme that—I hope—balances a concern for consistency with a concern for ease of reading, and balances an attempt to conform to prevailing practices with a desire to employ a method most appropriate to the peculiarities of the material. I have used as general model the ISO 15919 transliteration scheme, making a few changes where necessary (see table below). In finding a system that can simultaneously work for Hindi, Urdu, Persian and Sanskrit, the model created by Pasha Khan for his doctoral dissertation has been of immense help.¹

The most pernicious problem has been that posed by the short vowel *a*, both as an unvoiced final (that is pronounced in Sanskrit but not in Hindi) and as an elided vowel in between consonants (e.g. *Rāmcaritmānas* instead of *Rāmacaritamānas*). In regard to the former problem involving the final *a*, I have retained it when quoting poetry, since it is essential to the measurement of poetic meter, and when using terms derived from Sanskrit which would be unpronounceable without it (e.g. *sāhitya*, *vairāgya*). I have not retained the final *a* in quotations from prose or in the citation of individual terms like *aṅg* and *pravacan*.

¹ Pasha Mohamad Khan, “The Broken Spell: The Romance Genre in Late Mughal India,” (Dissertation, Columbia University, 2013).

In regard to second problem, that of the disappearing *a* between consonants, I have retained it wherever possible (e.g. *guṭakā*), but deleted it when a scholarly precedent exists (e.g. *satguru*).

Roman	Devanagari	Perso-Arabic
r̥	ऋ	n/a
ṭ	ट	ط
ḍ	ड	ḍ
t	त	ت
d	द	د
ṣ	ष	n/a
ś	श	ش
q	क	ق
gh	ग	غ
‘	n/a	ع
ṣ	n/a	ص

Chapter One

Of books, holy and otherwise: How to approach the history of writing in the vernaculars

masi kāgada kai āsirai kyūm chūṭai saṁsāra
rām̐ma binā sūjhai nahīm dādū bharama vikāra

How can one escape *samsara*
With the help of ink and paper?
Without Ram no [solution] comes to mind,
It's just confusion and agitation, says Dadu.

Dadu, *sākhī* 13.90¹

Around the year 1600 CE, as North India was going through major political and cultural change – including the consolidation of the Mughal empire, the diversification of the Mughal ruling elite, the cultural elevation of the vernacular languages now known as 'Hindi' (including Brajbhasha, Avadhi and Marwari) and the spread of new religious groups as part of the devotional resurgence known as *bhakti* – a new devotional community began to take shape on the outskirts of Didwana, a trading town midway between Jaipur and Bikaner in the arid region of central Rajasthan. At its center was the figure of Haridas, a saint-poet who was believed to have been divinely inspired and who composed songs and sayings in Hindi in praise of the formless godhead called Niranjan. Over time, a lineage of initiated disciples came into being in order to pass on the spiritual knowledge of Haridas and his saintly brethren, and this monastic order (known as the Niranjani Sampraday, the term *sampradāy*, borrowed from Sanskrit, connoting an organized—and often monastic—tradition), along with the community of lay followers, spread to cities and towns around the

¹ In Winand Callewaert and Bart Op de Beeck (eds.) *Nirguṇ Bhakti Sāgar: Devotional Hindi Literature* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1991) 168.

region including Nagaur, Bikaner, Jodhpur, and Ajmer. Many of these initiates became accomplished poets in their own right, composing hymns and sayings in a style and ideological vein similar to that of Haridas. However, beginning in the middle of the seventeenth century, these saint-poets also began to pen highly literate, literary, and scholastic works intended to be circulated not only among members of their own community but in a broader emerging public sphere of religious and secular intellectuals located in other religious communities as well as royal courts. These compositions, including theological and philosophical treatises, commentaries, and works of literary theory, broadcast the Niranjani's thought across several textual genres, and in the process helped to re-draw the distinction between 'literary' and 'religious' writing. Such innovation was made possible by vernacularization, the process through which vernacular languages came to gradually displace the cosmopolitan language of Sanskrit as the medium of literary and scientific discourses: vernacularization opened a window for experimentation as genres, motifs, techniques and ideas were adapted from the prestigious tradition of Sanskrit into the vernaculars.² Finally, by the late seventeenth century, the Niranjani, taking inspiration from developments in the Dadu Panth and Sikh tradition, had begun to canonize the hymns, sayings, and more scholastic works of their own and other traditions, giving them the form of a unified scripture and inscribing them into a physical 'holy book'. Together the

² For a comprehensive discussion of vernacularization across South Asia in the second millennium and a comparison with vernacularization in European history, see "Part II : The Vernacular Millennium" in Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 283-494. On Sanskrit and other languages as mediums for scientific discourse, see Sheldon Pollock, "The Languages of Science in Early Modern India," in *Forms of Knowledge in Early Modern Asia: Explorations in the Intellectual History of India and Tibet, 1500-1800*, ed. Sheldon Pollock (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 19-48.

canonical anthologies of the Niranjani, Sikhs, and Dadu Panth represented a new type of scripture in North India, one to which the idea of a physical book was integral.

This dissertation looks at the multiple relationships that existed between the textual objects generally referred to in English as ‘manuscripts’ in early modern North India and the performative, social, and ideological worlds of which these manuscripts were a part.³ It attempts to paint a picture of north Indian vernacular manuscript culture as a whole between roughly 1200 and 1800 CE, but it gives the most attention to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a period during which distinctions of genre and discourse in Hindi were redrawn and distinctions of identity among sectarian religious groups were refined. Within that two hundred-year period it ‘zooms in’ on the case of the Niranjani Sampraday in order to illustrate the intricacies of the relationship between writing, performance, ideology and identity during that particular historical moment. The intention is not to establish the Niranjani as exemplary, but rather to use them as a foil to highlight general issues and phenomena in the writing culture of their time and place: as we shall see, although the Niranjani navigated a somewhat unique course in the shifting waters of vernacular literary and manuscript culture, that sea was shared with other devotional groups and intellectual communities who were faced with having to navigate the same currents and winds.

³ The term ‘manuscript’, as used to describe a “book, document, etc., written by hand, *esp.* one written before the general adoption of printing in a country” (Oxford English Dictionary Online, s.v. “manuscript.”) is itself a product of print culture, and while it is technically accurate, it obscures the variety of distinctions that peoples in pre-print cultures made between different types of inscribed objects. The two most common terms in Hindi—*pāṇḍulipi* (yellow script) and *hasthalikhit granth* (hand-written book)—are similarly not very descriptive. As the following chapters will illustrate, religious and intellectual communities in North India made distinctions between different types of written documents, and these distinctions are reflected in the terms applied to them.

This sea is worthy of exploration in its own right, and yet my purpose in mapping it is also to tell us something about the more general oceans of thinking on literacy, orality, writing and performance beyond South Asian waters. The broader intellectual project of this dissertation therefore has three goals: the first is to use the case of early modern North India to question some fundamental assumptions about orality and literacy that have been produced through the analysis of European history and philosophy, and by the tradition of critical theory that emerged from them. These include ideas about the social impact of writing, the relationship between writing and power, and indeed the distinction between orality and literacy as modes of being in the world.⁴ This dissertation therefore employs an approach that does not study orality and literacy in opposition to one another, but rather as two intertwined aspects of textual production, circulation, performance and reception. The analysis of literary and manuscript culture then becomes an analysis of the shifting relationship between these two aspects across different textual and performance traditions.⁵

⁴ Perhaps the most influential study of literacy and social change is Jack Goody, *The Logic of Writing and the Organization of Society*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986). Other important works include David Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order: Reading and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), and Brian Street, *Literacy in Theory and Practice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984). The neuropsychologist Alexander Luria's studies of literacy among central Asian peasants in the mid-twentieth century posited a radical difference between 'oral' and 'literate' consciousness; see Alexander Luriia, *Language and Cognition* (Washington, D.C.: V.H. Winston, 1981). His works in turn became the inspiration and foundation for multiple studies that attempt to establish literacy and orality as different ways of being in the world, not all of them well grounded either theoretically or empirically. The most influential among these is Walter Ong, "Literacy Restructures Consciousness," in *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 78-116.

⁵ Ruth Finnegan has suggested approaching orality and literacy as two poles, with most real-world practices falling along the continuum between them. Ruth Finnegan. "How oral is oral literature?" *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 37, no. 1 (1974): 52-64. Building on Finnegan's model, Slavica Ranković imagines the oral-literate relationship across three-dimensional space, plotting that relationship along three axes: medium, poetics, and heteroglossia. This model has been particularly helpful for thinking about literary production in early modern India, as it helps to conceptualize the perpetual feedback loop that existed between 'written' and 'unwritten' textual traditions. Slavica Ranković, "The Oral-Written Continuum

Second, this research demonstrates the importance of media—particularly writing and manuscript culture—in the fashioning and re-fashioning of boundaries between different genres and between scripture and literature as discursive spheres. As alluded to above, the process of vernacularization created an opportunity for innovation as material from the Sanskrit tradition was brought into Hindi and formerly ‘oral’ traditions and genres in the vernacular were committed to writing. Groups like the Niranjani who participated in this emerging vernacular manuscript culture were able to reshape genre distinctions not only through the innovative use of textual motifs and rhetorical techniques but also through the innovative use of manuscripts, the material form through which a text was frequently encountered.⁶ This brings us to the third and final purpose of this project, which is to make a methodological point about how we imagine, and what we do with, the textual archive. For the better part of the past century and a half, scholars of pre-colonial vernacular literature have mined the manuscript archive in order to construct a picture of early modern literary culture, but have rarely if ever given any thought or attention to the form or materiality of that archive itself.⁷ Certainly its contours, logic, and gaps—not to mention the

as a Space,” in *Along the Oral-Written Continuum: Types of Texts, Relations, and Their Implications*, ed. Slavica Ranković, Leidulf Melve and Else Mundal (Brepols: Marston, 2010), 37-68.

⁶ Francesca Orsini has highlighted similar processes and phenomena in the colonial period, in the context of the early Hindi and Urdu publishing industry. Orsini identifies the complex matrices of orality and literacy at work in early print culture, emphasizing the role that printed materials played in negotiating generic distinctions, particularly in the case of the *qissā* (prose story) and the novel. Francesca Orsini, *Print and Pleasure: Popular Literature and Entertaining Fictions in Colonial North India* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2009), 106-197.

⁷ ‘Hindi literature’ (*Hindī sāhitya*) as an object of knowledge was partly constructed through the creation of a literary archive, a project pursued by the Nagari Pracharini Sabha of Banaras and similar institutions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries through the search for manuscripts, their analysis and publication. Christopher King, “Forging a New Linguistic Identity: The Hindi Movement in Banaras, 1868-1914,” in Sandria Freitag (ed.), *Culture and Power in Banaras: Community, Performance, and Environment, 1800-1980* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 198-200. Francesca Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere 1920-1940: Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), 25-9.

details of the individual manuscripts of which it is constituted—must have something to tell us about the world of early modern literature and devotion? This study argues for treating manuscripts as active, living ‘things’ rather than as passive, dead ‘objects’ (to borrow the language of Bruno Latour) in order to understand how they, along with human agents, constituted literary, religious, and intellectual networks in early modern India.⁸ In that sense, this project has been an attempt to fuse book history, literary history and religious history in order to tell a history that is neither just material nor just intellectual.

Orality and literacy in theory and in practice

Despite decades of theoretical and philosophical thought on the nature of written language, our understanding of orality and literacy as *historical* phenomena is still underdeveloped, and the knowledge that we have produced is confined largely to Europe and the rest of the Western world.⁹ This has led to a lopsidedness in the theorization of orality and literacy as well, since most thinkers have used the empirical data of European history to construct their theories of how orality and literacy ‘work’.¹⁰ Recent studies of literate societies in East Asia, South Asia, and the Pacific, however, have begun to question

For a general history of the role of manuscripts in the construction of a Hindi canon, see Uday Shankar Dube, *Hastalikhī Hindī Granthom Kī Khoj Kā Itihās* (Allahabad: Hindustani Academy, 2009).

⁸ Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 70-82.

⁹ Representative studies of orality and literacy in the western world include Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, Jack Goody, *The Logic of Writing and the Organization of Society: Studies in Literacy, Family, Culture, and the State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), Eric Havelock, *The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy From Antiquity to the Present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), and Street, *Literacy in Theory and Practice*. Studies of orality and literacy in other cultures have generally been confined to comparisons with the western/European model; see for example Jack Goody (ed.), *Literacy in Traditional Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968).

¹⁰ Some writers, such as Ong and Goody, at least give a token nod to the possibility of ‘variations’ in non-Western societies; ironically, no such acknowledgement of radical difference is to be found in the greatly influential writings of the post-structuralists; see Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997) and *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

these assumptions and provide alternative models which complicate the idea of a linear chronological (and teleological) movement from orality to script, and from script to print.¹¹ My research contributes to this growing literature by describing how orality and literacy were mutually imbricated and worked together in northern India in the early modern period, before the introduction of print, and before the moment of colonial ‘rupture’. Studying the history of writing in South Asia has the potential to challenge ideas about language, orality and writing that – despite being based almost exclusively on Western sources – have become almost axiomatic in the academy: these include Jacques Derrida's conception of logocentrism and the Culture of the Book, Elizabeth Eisenstein's observations on the nature of print and textual stability, and Benedict Anderson's contentions regarding print capitalism and its contribution to the rise of nationalism.¹² As others have pointed out, the history of South Asia teaches us that literacy is not a historical inevitability or foregone conclusion of intellectual and civilizational development, but rather a *choice* that peoples make at a particular historical juncture for specific social, religious, political, and intellectual reasons.¹³

¹¹ A few excellent examples are Christopher Leigh Connery, *The Empire of the Text: Writing and Authority in Early Imperial China*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998), Judith Fröhlich, *Rulers, Peasants and the Use of the Written Word in Medieval Japan: Ategawa no shō 1004-1304* (Oxford: Peter Lan, 2004); Li Feng and David Branne (eds.) *Writing & Literacy in Early China: Studies from the Columbia Early China Seminar* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011), Orsini, *Print and Pleasure*.

¹² Derrida, *Of Grammatology*; Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006).

¹³ This point is made by Pollock in distinguishing the historical role of writing and literacy in India from that of Europe (*Language of the Gods*, 82-83); Christian Novetzke makes a similar observation about the conditions under which communities who used the vernacular adopted literacy in early modern Maharashtra. *Religion and Public Memory: a Cultural History of Saint Namdev in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), chapters two and three.

Writing and performance in the construction of generic and discursive boundaries

This narrative outlined in the pages that follow puts particular emphasis on the relationship between literacy, writing and performance on the one hand and the creation and reproduction of discursive and generic distinctions on the other. The distinction with which we will be most concerned is that between ‘literature’ and ‘scripture’— the first of these terms finds a ready analog in early modern Hindi in the concept of *kāvya* (poetry), but the second is not so easily delineated, being spread across such genres as *śāstra* (treatises, scientific as well as religious), *purāṇa* (narrative and expository texts), and even *mahākāvya* (epic).¹⁴ As numerous scholars have pointed out, the concept of ‘literature’ in the West (taken from Latin *litteratura*, ‘writings’, which itself is derived from *littera*, a ‘letter’ of the alphabet) is inextricably tied to writing: ‘literature’ as a discrete language art only came about after the invention of writing, and only that which was written down could be considered literature.¹⁵ Conversely, that which was not written *could not* be considered literature. The modern concept of ‘oral literature’ is therefore a contradictory one that seeks to re-establish the oral arts as being on a par with literature by tapping into the prestige on which literature has thus far held a monopoly.¹⁶ Literary historians in Hindi continue to use the concept of oral literature to this end, characterizing the unwritten vernacular traditions

¹⁴ On the concept of scripture in India, see Thomas Coburn, “‘Scripture’ in India,” in *Rethinking Scripture: Essays from a Comparative Perspective*, ed. Miriam Levering (Albany: State University Press of New York, 1989), 102-108. Mackenzie Brown, “Purāṇa as Scripture: From Sound to Image of the Holy Word in the Hindu Tradition,” *History of Religions* 26, no. 1 (August 1, 1986): 68–86. Gurinder Singh Mann, “Scriptures and the nature of authority: the case of the Guru Granth in Sikh tradition,” in *Theorizing Scriptures: New Critical Orientations to a Cultural Phenomenon*, ed. Vincent Wimbush (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 41-54.

¹⁵ Havelock, *The Muse Learns to Write*, 198; Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 78-83; Martin Irvine, *The Making of Textual Culture: Grammatica and Literary Theory, 350-1100* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

¹⁶ Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 10-15.

of pre-colonial India as *jan-sāhitya* (peoples' literature) or *lok-sāhitya* (folk literature), and positioning this literature as a parallel tradition to that of Sanskrit.¹⁷ This is partly a legacy of Hindi literary criticism during the late colonial period, during which proponents of Hindi as a national language felt the need to bring Hindi out from behind Sanskrit's shadow, sever Hindi's historical ties with courtly and feudal culture, and elevate *bhakti* traditions as an expression of popular, proto-national culture.¹⁸ The recovery of works and traditions formerly excluded from the privileged domain of 'literature' is an important and ongoing intellectual project to which my research is a small contribution; however, positing a category of *jan-sāhitya* is perhaps not the best way to go about this work, as it anachronistically muddies the conceptual waters, making it more difficult to see the historical process through which *bhakti gīt* (devotional song) became *bhakti kāvya* (devotional poetry or literature).¹⁹

The songs and sayings of many (but not all) of the saints described in this dissertation were decidedly *not* literature according to prevailing notions in early modern India, because literature was a discursive realm that was clearly defined and intimately tied to writing. Sheldon Pollock identifies the concept of '*kāvya*' in Sanskrit (lit. 'endowed with the qualities of a sage or poet', i.e. 'poetry') as the closest analog to 'literature' in the

¹⁷ “The root origin of those textual trends and poetic forms that were developed in Hindi literature's early period and *bhakti* period was not in the tradition of Sanskrit poetry, but in the peoples' culture (*jan-saṁskṛti*) and peoples' literature (*jan-sāhitya*).” Manjari Pandey, *Sāhitya Aur Itihās Dr̥ṣṭī* (New Delhi: Vani Prakashan, 2005), 114.

¹⁸ See Busch, “The Fate of *Rīti* Literature in Colonial India,” in *Poetry of Kings*, 202-239.

¹⁹ On the vernacular textual traditions before their commitment to writing, Pollock writes “Before that moment of transformation [into written literature], the existence of many vernacular languages could be conceptually registered, even in texts that promulgated the restrictive triad of literary languages [Sanskrit, Prakrit, Apabhramsha], but they were never regarded as potential media for composing literate worldly texts. On the contrary, they were located outside the sphere of literary culture, in the realm of the oral, specifically, the sung (*gīta*, *gītā*, *gīti*, *gāna*, etc.)” Pollock, *Language of the Gods*, 288.

European sense, and demonstrates that until the late first millennium CE, only expressive texts that were composed in Sanskrit and *written down* could be given the distinction of being *kāvya*.²⁰ One consequence of this close connection between literature and writing was that when vernacular languages began to displace Sanskrit as the culturally privileged medium of artistic, political and scientific discourse toward the beginning of the second millennium, creative texts in the vernaculars had to acquire a written existence before they could claim the status of *kāvya*.²¹ Pollock refers to this process through which previously ‘unwritten’ languages come to be inscribed as ‘literization.’²² However, simply writing down a text did not make that text literature; in order to attain the status of a ‘workly’ language, the discursive techniques of literature also had to be appropriated, and in the case of most South Asian languages, those came from Sanskrit:

Two decisive steps were taken, and these were historically, and necessarily, related. First, poets asserted local literary culture by acquiring— or sometimes seizing— the privilege of writing expressively after centuries of exclusion. In some cases this exclusion was the result of asymmetries of social privilege. More often it was connected with the fact already noted, that the literary and the political functions, closely correlated, were regarded as necessarily transregional in their idiom and their aspiration. Second, vernacular poets achieved literary expressivity by appropriating and domesticating models of literary-language use from superposed cultural formations. Literization, or writing the vernacular, does not on its own inaugurate the process of vernacularization; it must be combined with literarization, the creation of new literary discourse (and often, though not always, with its congener, political discourse). Making literature as such, and as something distinct from anything else— to say nothing of making history with literature— requires writing it down. But writing literarily can only emerge out of a matrix of other preexisting and dominant literatures.

²⁰ Pollock, *Language of the Gods*, 75-89.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 283-298.

²² *Ibid.*, 4.

As we will see in Chapter Two, in the case of Hindi, the work of literization and literarization was pursued across several different social, religious and political contexts, including Sufi orders, Islamicate and Rajput courts, and Hindu devotional communities, and with not only Sanskrit but also Persian as superposed literary cultures. The Niranjanis were not the first nor the most influential among the many devotional communities that participated in this process, but they were certainly innovative, and by looking closely at how they committed their works to writing and gave those works a literary form in Chapters Three and Four, we will get a chance to see the nitty-gritty details of how groups that were both literally and figuratively distant from centers of political power helped to fashion the contours of Hindi literature in its formative phases.

Like literature, the concept of scripture is bound by history, and changes with time.²³ It is also, like literature, knotted up with the notion of writing, even if this ideological emphasis on the written nature of scripture has not always reflected the historical realities of practice.²⁴ The term 'scripture' itself is derived from the Latin *scriptura* ('writing'), and cognates in most other European languages are similarly derived.²⁵ Though historically speaking all three of the major Semitic religions – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – have their roots in oral tradition, each has come to embrace an idea of its own scripture as

²³ As Wilfred Cantwell Smith writes, “To observe [a text’s role as scripture in human life] at all accurately is to recognize its fundamental historical character: its quality of changing over time – and place; of being ever enmeshed in the particular contexts of those in whose lives and societies the role has been played.” *What Is Scripture? A Comparative Approach* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 4.

²⁴ On scripture as a tradition of oral performance (even when the ‘scripture’ itself is imagined as a written artifact), see William Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). A fascinating analysis of the continuing importance of the aural dimension of scripture can be found in Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

²⁵ Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “scripture”.

essentially *written*.²⁶ The situation in pre-modern South Asia was substantially different: orality (and a particular metaphysics of the oral/aural) was integral to the earliest holy texts, the Vedas (first and second millennia BCE), as well as to the rules of their transmission – writing them was essentially forbidden, at least until the early modern period.²⁷ Even in later sacred texts like the *śāstras*, *sūtras*, *purāṇas*, and epics, orality was valorized over writing, despite the fact that writing was clearly part of the composition and circulation of these texts.²⁸

This conceptualization began to change during the early modern period, however, and an identification of canonized, sacred texts with the physical book began to gain currency.²⁹ This important shift has yet to receive sustained attention from scholars, and its causes remain largely unexplained.³⁰ I argue that the increased importance of writing to the canonization and authorization of religious scripture was the result of multiple, converging

²⁶ In Judaism, the moment of inscription is often identified with Moses, the making of the Tablets of the Law and Moses's meetings with God. This is also true for the Christian tradition, though it was not until the late medieval/early modern period that a delineated canon and sense of the scriptures as 'book' took hold. It is often remarked that the identification of scripture with writing is strongest in the Islamic tradition, partly because the Hadith literature uses the metaphor of writing so frequently not only for divine revelation, but Creation itself; thus the act of writing has been elevated for most of the Islamic tradition. Graham, *Beyond the Written Word*, 13-14, 53-55.

²⁷ Frits Staal, *The Fidelity of Oral Tradition and the Origins of Science* (New York: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1986); Staal, Frits Staal, C.V Somayajipad, Adelaide De Menil and M. Itti Ravi Nambudiri, *Agni, the Vedic Ritual of the Fire Altar* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1983).

²⁸ Pollock, *Language of the Gods*, 83.

²⁹ Buddhism may present an early exception; Gregory Schopen has argued that a 'cult of the book' existed among early Mahayana Buddhists: Gregory Schopen, "The Phrase 'sa pṛthivīpradeśaś caityabhūto bhavet' in the Vajracchedikā: Notes on the Cult of the Book in Mahāyāna," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 17, no. 3-4 (November 1, 1975): 147-81. Serious questions about this theory have been raised, however, by David Drewes in "Revisiting the Phrase 'sa pṛthivīpradeśaś caityabhūto bhavet' and the Mahāyāna Cult of the Book," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 50, no. 2 (June 1, 2007): 101-43.

³⁰ Important exceptions include Brown, "Purāṇa as Scripture"; Frits Staal, "The Concept of Scripture in the Indian Tradition," in Mark Juergensmeyer and N. Gerald Barrier (eds.), *Sikh Studies: Comparative Perspectives on a Changing Tradition. Working Papers from the Berkeley Conference on Sikh Studies* (Berkeley: Graduate Theological Union, 1979), 121-24. Sikh studies is the one area where there has been sustained inquiry into the relationship between writing and scripture; scholarly literature on this topic is addressed in Chapter Five.

trends: the first was the broader process of vernacularization, with its constituent processes of literization and literarization. Vernacularization opened up an opportunity for innovation, as genres were adapted or even invented for new literary idioms; the genre of the religious ‘*granth*’ (book) as an anthology of canonized saints was one such emerging genre. Just as individuals and communities adopted writing and appropriated elements of Sanskrit and Persian literary cultures in order to participate in the privileged discourse of literature, they committed devotional texts to writing and applied certain organizational and exegetical techniques to these texts in order to establish them as scripture. The second contributing factor was the exchange between Islamicate and Indic forms of religiosity, which began during the Sultanate period and continued during the Mughal period. This exchange eventually led to interesting innovations in the physical form of the manuscripts in which devotional texts were inscribed: as we will see in Chapter Five, the ‘holy books’ produced by different religious communities in the late sixteenth through seventeenth centuries appropriated a mix of elements from the Islamicate *kitāb* (codex) and Indic *pothī* (manuscript of loose folios). Third, the emphasis on the written aspect of scripture reflects what William Pinch and Patton Burchett have identified as an emerging notion of religion and religious publics in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century North India. This new mode of religiosity—which was closely tied to *bhakti* devotionism—located power in the figure of a distant God (as opposed to human bodies) and jibed well with the political dispensation of Mughal and Rajput states.³¹ The holy book, as a symbol of universal

³¹ William Pinch, *Warrior Ascetics and Indian Empires* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 17-20, 211-225. Patton Burchett, “Bhakti Religion and Tantric Magic in Mughal India: Kacchvahas, Ramanandis, and Naths, circa 1500-1750” (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 2012), 12-15, 36-58.

authority and of the textual community which it brought into being, became a fitting focal point of the rituals through which some groups enacted these new modes of religious being and religious community. Chapter Five looks at three such groups— the Sikhs, the Dadu Panth of Rajasthan and the Niranjani Sampraday—and demonstrates how each deployed written scriptures in a slightly different way to consolidate communal identity and establish religious authority in the context of this emerging religious-political dispensation.

The early modern period, networks, and media history

The frequent use of the term 'early modern' above necessitates a clarification of its meaning, and indeed this project touches upon some of the processes that define the early modern as a period or episteme. For the past two decades scholars have grappled with how to characterize the epistemological, social and political shifts that occurred globally in the middle of the second millennium and coalesced into certain 'modern' ways of thinking and being. During this period, new ways of imaging the relationship between the individual and society, society and the state, humankind and the cosmos emerged in tandem with new types of economic and political order.³² These changes occurred across the globe but did not proceed in the same manner – or with the same consequences – in every culture, leading to a multiplicity of modernities.³³ Theorization of this period, however, has tended to fall into the

³² Seminal studies include the writings of Jürgen Habermas, a representative body of which is found in *The Habermas Reader* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1996); Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007). Peter van der Veer, *Conversion to Modernities: The Globalization of Christian Modernities* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

³³ Sudipta Kaviraj. "An Outline of a Revisionist Theory of Modernity." *Archives Europeenes De Sociologie* 46, no. 3 (2005): 29. Bjorn Wittrock. "Early Modernities: Varieties and Transitions." *Daedalus* 127, no. 3 (1998): 21.

trap of using European modernity as a starting point or even ideal with which other modernities are compared – a project that can only result in constructing non-European modernity as a 'variation' and preserving Europe as the origin of modernizing processes. To avoid this trap, Sanjay Subrahmanyam and others have argued for a model of *connected* histories: if we are to recover early modern history in a way that does not privilege Europe, argues Subrahmanyam, then we must show how the local, regional and supra-regional intersected, and how the local itself was often far from static—thus modernity is the product of a long series of encounters and exchanges.³⁴

Many of these exchanges occurred on palm leaf and paper, through the circulation of written texts among religious, intellectual, and courtly communities. It is therefore important to see how the practice of writing and the circulation of manuscripts helped to connect the worlds of the local, regional and supra-regional. Manuscripts—made of palm leaf, birch bark, cloth, wood, copper, ivory, bone, and other materials—had been moving ideas and connecting intellectual communities in South Asia long before the early modern period.³⁵ Yet in early modern North India at least, the combination of vernacularization, religious change in the form of the *bhakti* movement, and political change including the establishment of Sultanate rule and the incorporation of North India into a broader Persianate cosmopolis resulted in the formation of new intellectual and religious networks that were connected through manuscripts, some of which included groups that had only

³⁴ Subrahmanyam, Sanjay. "Hearing Voices: Vignettes of Early Modernity in South Asia, 1400-1750," *Daedalus* 127, no. 3 (1998): 75-104.

³⁵ On the history of manuscripts in early South Asia, see Jeremiah Losty, *The Art of the Book in India* (London: British Library, 1982). On manuscripts and the transmission of knowledge in South Asia, see Sheldon Pollock, "Literary Culture and Manuscript Culture in Precolonial India," in *Literary Cultures and the Material Book*, Simon Eliot, Andrew Nash and Ian Willison (London: The British Library, 2007), 77-94.

recently gained access to literacy.³⁶ Chapter Two will devote some attention to these networks, and how different types of writing practices and manuscripts helped to bring them into being.

In this regard as well, looking closely at the case of the Niranjani may provide some insight into how geographically (and sometimes ideologically) distant communities of poets, intellectuals and saints in North India pursued discussions on everything from metaphysics to theology to aesthetics. While the Niranjani drew their primary support and membership from subaltern and merchant communities in their immediate locality (the northern-central portion of modern-day Rajasthan), the movement of individual Niranjani scholar-saints across the region to intellectual centers like Banaras and the movement of their written texts between various monastic centers and royal courts connected them to much broader ideological and religious movements. Through their writings they helped to fashion the trans-local community of devotion known as *bhakti* that spread across North India beginning in the fifteenth century, and which constituted a nascent public sphere comparable to, but quite different from, those in contemporary Europe.³⁷ At the same time, the Niranjani's participation in the emerging book culture of Mughal-ruled north India made them a part – albeit on the frontier – of the Persianate book culture that stretched as far west as the Ottoman Sultanate, not to mention the Indic manuscript culture that stretched all the way to tip of south India, eastward to Burma and Thailand, and across the Indian Ocean to

³⁶ On the incorporation of North India into the Islamicate and particularly Persianate cosmopolis, see Finbarr Barry Flood, *Objects of Translation: Material Culture and Medieval Hindu-Muslim Encounter* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

³⁷ On the public sphere in Europe, see Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989). On public spheres in colonial South Asia, see the essays in Arvind Rajgopal and Christopher Bayly (eds.), *The Indian Public Sphere: Readings in Media History* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009).

Java. This book culture predates the introduction of print to South Asia, and has a trajectory substantially different from that of Europe.

Manuscripts and the archive of Hindi literary history

Connecting texts to their lives as physical objects – i.e. as handwritten manuscripts and books, but also as inscriptions on buildings, metal plates, and other objects – in order to understand their circulation, reception and performance is still a somewhat novel approach to studying the literature and scripture of this time and place, although recently a growing number of researchers have begun looking closely at written media in pre-colonial India.³⁸ Hindi-Urdu book history has had a promising start in the form of several articles and monographs pertaining to the rise of print culture in the colonial period, particularly the work of Ulrike Stark and Francesca Orsini.³⁹ Pre-colonial, pre-print manuscript culture in

³⁸ See for example John Cort, “The Jain Knowledge Warehouses: Traditional Libraries in India,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 115, no 1 (1995): 10; Whitney Cox, “Scribe and Script in the Cālukya West Deccan,” *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 47, no. 1 (January 1, 2010): 1–28; Flood, *Objects of Translation*; Nile Green, “The Uses of Books in a Late Mughal Takiyya: Persianate Knowledge Between Person and Paper,” *Modern Asian Studies* 44, no. 2 (March 1, 2010): 241–65; Irfan Habib, “Writing and the Use of Books in the Age of Persian Manuscripts,” *Tattvabodh* 1 (2006): 22; Christian Novetzke, *Religion and Public Memory: A Cultural History of Saint Namdev in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008); Rosalind O’Hanlon, “Performance in a World of Paper: Puranic Histories and Social Communication in Early Modern India,” *Past & Present* 219, no. 1 (May 1, 2013): 87–126. Francesca Orsini, “How to Do Multilingual Literary History? Lessons from Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century North India,” *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 49, no. 2 (2012): 21. John Seyller, “The Inspection and Valuation of Manuscripts in the Imperial Mughal Library,” *Artibus Asiae* 57, no 3/4 (1997): 106; *Workshop and Patron in Mughal India: The Freer Rāmāyana and Other Illustrated Manuscripts of ‘Abd al-Raḥīm*. (Washington D.C.: Artibus Asiae, 1999). The only study of pre-colonial book culture that attempts to survey the entirety of the Indian subcontinent is Losty, *The Art of the Book in India*.

³⁹ Orsini, *Print and Pleasure*; Ulrike Stark, *An Empire of Books: The Naval Kishore Press and the Diffusion of the Printed Word in Colonial India* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2007).

Hindi, on the other hand, still awaits concerted attention, with the available scholarly studies spread between the work of art historians and literary scholars.⁴⁰

There are some clear reasons for this: the study of Indian vernacular literatures, long subordinated to the study of Sanskrit, is only now beginning to come into its own. Much of the past forty years of scholarship on early Hindi literature (which includes the study of multiple literary dialects including Brajbhasha, Avadhi and Marwari) has been devoted to recovering the texts and biographical details of some of the major literary and devotional figures of the period like Kabir, Surdas, Mirabai, Ravidas, and Tulsidas.⁴¹ Much time and energy have also gone into understanding how these figures inspired, were part of, or were appropriated by popular devotional communities of the period. It is because of the work of the scholarly giants in this field, upon whose metaphorical shoulders we are now standing, that we are able to see the broad outlines of the literary-devotional landscape of early modern India. To take this project forward, however, it is now necessary to begin studying

⁴⁰ See for example Philip Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text: Performing the Ramcaritmanas of Tulsidas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Danuta Stasik, "The Oral Versus Written? A Few Notes on the Composition of Tulsidas's *Rāmcāritmānas*," unpublished paper for The 11th International Conference on Early Modern Literatures in North India. Shimla, August 3-6, 2012. Aditya briefly addresses aspects of the manuscript tradition for Maulana Daud's *Candāyan* in *Love's Subtle Magic: An Indian Islamic Literary Tradition, 1379-1545*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). The visual elements of this manuscript tradition are addressed by Qamar Adamjee in "Strategies for Visual Narration in the Illustrated Chandayan Manuscripts," (Dissertation, New York University, 2011).

⁴¹ An excellent introduction to these poets in English can be found in John S. Hawley and Mark Juergensmeyer, *Songs of the Saints of India*, revised edition (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004.) The work of recovering these figures and building a canon of Hindi literature begins in the late nineteenth century and the work of George Grierson, the Mishra Brothers and Shiv Singh Sengar; see George Abraham Grierson, *The Modern Vernacular Literature of Hindustan: Printed as a Special Number of the Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1889). Ganeshwar, Syamavihari and Sukadevavihari Mishra, *Misrabandhu Vinod*, revised edition (Hyderabad: Ganga Granthagar, 1972); Shiv Singh Sengar, *Śivasimh Saroj*, edited by Trilok Narayan Diksit (Lucknow: Tejkumar Book Depot, 1966 (orig. 1878)). On the early period of Hindi literary historiography, see Orsini, "The Uses of History" in *The Hindi Public Sphere*, 175-242; also Allison Busch, "The Fate of Rīti in Colonial India," in *Poetry of Kings: The Classical Hindi Literature of Mughal India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 202-239; "Hindi Literary Beginnings." In *South Asian Texts in History: Critical Engagements with Sheldon Pollock*, edited by Whitney Cox Yigal Bronner, and Lawrence McCrea (Ann Arbor: Association for Asian Studies, 2011), 203-225.

how texts actually moved across locales and regions and between communities and performance contexts – and thus how they moved between genres and interpretive structures.⁴²

In fact, climbing down from those metaphorical shoulders to look closely at the ground below—at the quotidian manuscripts and other textual artifacts of early modern Hindi—might reveal a vastly different literary and religious landscape from what we were able to see from above. Modern scholarship on Hindi constructed the pre-modern literary canon as much as it revealed it; the contours of this canon were shaped by the efforts of colonial scholars like George Abraham Grierson, James Tod, and Frederick Growse, the writings of nationalist critics like Pitambardatt Barthwal, Ramchandra Shukla and Shyamsundar Das, but also by the work of scholars of religion, including Horace Hayman Wilson and Kshitimohan Sen.⁴³ These scholars of course inherited preexisting canons as well—for example the canon of saint poets created by Nabhadas of the Ramanandi Sampraday in his *Bhaktamāl* (c. 1600) and the Brajhasha literary canon imagined by Bhikharidas in his *Kāvya Nirṇay* (1746)—but in creating their own canon from these

⁴² A gesture in this direction has been made by John S. Hawley, who suggests conceptualizing the *bhakti* movement as a process of translation across geographic, linguistic, generic, and cultural boundaries. See Chapter Seven, “What Should the Bhakti Movement Be?,” in *A Storm of Songs: The Idea of the Bhakti Movement* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, forthcoming).

⁴³ Grierson, *The Modern Vernacular Literature of Hindustan*; Mishra, *Misrabandhu Vinoda*; James Tod, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan, or The Central and Western Rajput States of India*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1920); Ulrike Stark, “Translation, Book History, and the Afterlife of a Text: Growse’s *The Rāmāyana of Tulsidās*,” in Maya Burger and Nicola Pozza, *India in Translation Through Hindi Literature: A Plurality of Voices*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 155-180. Pitambardatt Barthwal, *Traditions of Indian Mysticism Based Upon Nirguna School of Hindi Poetry* (New Delhi: Heritage Publishers, 1978 (originally 1930)); Ramchandra Shukla, *Hindī Sāhitya Kā Itihās*, (Allahabad: Lok Bhāratiya Prakashan, 2003; originally 1929); Shyamsundar Das (ed.), *Kabīr Granthāvalī*, (Varanasi: Nagaripracharini Sabha, 1968). Horace Hayman Wilson, *Hindu Religions; or, an Account of the Various Religious Sects of India* (Calcutta: Society for the Resuscitation of Indian Literature, 1899). Kshitimohan Sen, *Medieval Mysticism of India*, translated by Manmohan Ghosh (London: Luzac & Co, 1936).

materials in order to provide a history to the *rāṣṭrabhāṣā* (national language) of Hindi, the choices of these scholars were driven as much by the intellectual, social and political needs of the moment as by the shape of the pre-colonial material itself.⁴⁴ Much of the research on pre-colonial Hindi literature pursued during the twentieth century was an attempt to recover the ‘authentic’ works and authorial personas of the major figures of this canon, usually through the search for the oldest available written copies of their works and the reconstruction of ur-texts.⁴⁵ These efforts were extremely productive in terms of both generating material and reflecting on methodology, but an unfortunate side-effect of this approach has been that the vast majority of the manuscript archive has remained untouched.

The emphasis on ur-texts and authenticity has led to the neglect of many early modern manuscripts for the reason that they are either ‘too late’ to be of consequence, or ‘too corrupted’ in their readings to be considered authentic versions. (However, there have been several notable exceptions to this method among recent studies.)⁴⁶ The great shortcoming of this approach is that it ignores the texts *as they were circulated and received*,

⁴⁴ Busch, “Hindi Literary Beginnings,” 205-208. H.H. Wilson, for example, made extensive use of Nabhadās’s *Bhaktamāl* in his *Sketch of the Religious Sects of the Hindus* as did Grierson in his *Modern Vernacular Literature of Hindustan*.

⁴⁵ Representative works in this vein include Das, *Kabīr Granthāvalī*, Ramchandra Shukla (ed.), *Jāyasī Granthāvalī: Arthāt, Padamāvat, Akharāvaṭ Aur Ākhirī Kalām* (Kashi: Nagaripracharini Sabha, VS 2013). The critical editions of poetry by *bhakti* saints assembled by Winand Callewaert in the 1970’s reflect an initial orientation toward reconstructing ur-texts and recovering authentic authorial personalities, but Callewaert himself states that in the research process he realized that this project must be ‘abandoned.’ “Introduction,” *The Hindi Padavali of Namdev: A Critical Edition of Namdev’s Hindi Songs with Translation and Annotation* (Delhi: Motilal Banarasiidass Publishers, 1989), 1; also “Introduction,” in Winand Callewaert and Bart Op de Beeck (eds.) *Nirguṇ Bhakti Sāgar: Devotional Hindi Literature* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1991), 9.

⁴⁶ Important exceptions include Imre Bangha, “,” in *Bhakti Beyond the Forest*, ed. Imre Banga (Delhi: Manohar, 2012), 287-303; also the forthcoming critical edition of the *Sursagar*, edited by Kenneth Bryant and John S. Hawley, from the Clay Sanskrit Library.

thus dismissing the very poets and texts that publics knew and enjoyed.⁴⁷ The great paradox is that in order to access a putative author who is often assumed to have composed ‘orally,’ scholars must reply upon written manuscripts, and yet many scholars have neglected to take these manuscripts seriously as having their own logic and importance as text-artifacts.⁴⁸

When it comes to the poetry of the *nirgun bhakti* saints in particular, a tradition of poets who composed hymns and sayings in praise of a formless Divinity, the study of textual circulation in the early modern period has been hampered not so much by limited access to manuscripts (there are, in fact, thousands of manuscripts of this poetry that have never been closely studied) but rather by an unintended outcome of disillusionment with the ur-text approach: the widespread belief that the poetry of these saints was composed and transmitted primarily—if not exclusively—through oral channels for years to centuries before being committed to writing.⁴⁹ There is no doubt that at the level of popular practice (which is well-documented in poetic, hagiographic, and other documentary sources from the period) oral recitation, particularly musical performance, was a central mode of learning, sharing, and performing this poetry.⁵⁰ However, the sheer volume of written manuscripts

⁴⁷ A critique of dominant modes of textual analysis for *bhakti* poetry, along with an intriguing model for creating comparative studies of textual history, can be found in Jaroslav Strnad, “Searching for the Source or Mapping the Stream? Some Text-Critical Issues in the Study of Medieval Bhakti,” in Tyler Williams, John S. Hawley and Anshu Malhotra (eds.), *Texts and Traditions in Early Modern North India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

⁴⁸ A particularly interesting example of this is found in Parashuram Chaturvedi’s edition of the poetry of Mirabai, *Mīrāmbāī Kī Padāvalī*, (Prayag: Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, 1966). Chaturvedi disregards later manuscripts, considering older copies to be more “authentic” (*pramāṇik*) (7-8); however, he hypercorrects the orthography of his sources, for example nasalizing vowels and interpolating retroflex *ṇa* where the readings were probably dental *na*. Thus the actual textual history of the poetry is disregarded for a constructed version of what the earliest manuscripts ‘should’ have contained.

⁴⁹ Linda Hess, “Kabir’s Life and Work,” in Kabir, *The Bijak of Kabir*, translated by Linda Hess and Sukhdev Singh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). Callewaert, *Hindi Padāvalī of Nāmdev*, 1.

⁵⁰ Charlotte Vaudeville, “*Sant Mat*: Santism as the Universal Path to Sanctity,” in Karine Schomer and William McLeod, *The Sants: Studies in a Devotional Tradition of India* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass, 1987) 31-35.

that were produced by communities like the Niranjani and which contain this poetry compel us to recognize that written texts too played an important role not only in moving ideas, but in shaping how those ideas were received.

The emphasis on the oral dimension of this devotional poetry is part of the literary taxonomy of the Hindi past that has held authority for the last century, and which stands to be critiqued through a close reading of the manuscript archive. According to the orthodox taxonomy, the Niranjani and similar communities that believed in a formless, abstract and unqualified (*nirguṇ*) Divine, occupied heterodox ideological positions vis-à-vis the caste system and Brahminical religion, and which typically drew their membership from the lower socio-economic strata of society constituted one 'stream' (*dhārā*) of *bhakti* religious poetry in the early modern period, called the *nirguṇ* stream.⁵¹ The saint-poets of this camp are largely assumed to have been illiterate and unfamiliar with the literary, aesthetic and philosophical tenets of the great Sanskrit classical tradition; as Doctor Nagendra states in his influential *Hindī Sāhitya Kā Itihās*:

nirguṇ-kāvyaadhārāk ke sant kavi... sadhanvihīn vātāvaraṇ meṁ utpann hue tathā sāhitya, bhāṣā, vyākaraṇ ādi ke anuśīlan se varṇit rahe. Isīlye unakī kāvya-bhāṣā meṁ pariṣkār, parimārjan, pariniṣṭhatā aur sāhityiktā nahīm hai.⁵²

The saints of the *nirguṇ* stream of poetry... arose in an environment without resources and were deprived of the knowledge of literature, language, grammar, etc. For this reason, in the language of their poetry there is no embellishment, refinement, standardization or literariness.

A discussion of references to communal singing and oral recitation of poetry in hagiographical texts like the *bhaktamāl* genre, the *Dādū Janm-Līla* of Jangopal and the *Paracāi* of Raghunathdas Niranjani can be found in Chapter Two, Three, and Five.

⁵¹ Shukla, *Hindī Sāhitya Kā Itihās*, 39-48.

⁵² Doctor Nagendra, *Hindī Sāhitya Kā Itihās* (Delhi: National Publishing House, 1973), 109.

This conventional wisdom regarding the literary merit of *nirgun* saint poetry (also called *nirgun sant mat*, lit. ‘nirgun saint doctrine’) is reflected in studies of particular saints and communities as well, even groups like the Niranjanis who were clearly not only literate but prolific copyists: for example, in his book on the Niranjani Sampraday Ratanlal Mishra states that, “With one or two exceptions, a common similarity is found in generally all of the poets of the *sant mat*: within them there is a lack of the poetic quality.”⁵³

In contrast, the other stream of *bhakti* poetry and thought, called *sagun* because of its emphasis on the qualified or ‘*sa-gun*’ form of God, is said to have been made up of communities that worshiped traditional, Puranic deities, took less oppositional positions toward caste and Brahmin orthodoxy, and had the intellectual backbone of classically-trained Brahmin scholars; this tradition is characterized by Ramchandra Shukla and Doctor Nagendra as carrying on the artistic and intellectual program of Sanskrit, only now in the vernacular.⁵⁴ As I have argued elsewhere, this binary classification is largely the product of modern socio-political processes including nationalism and communal politics in the writing of modern literary history.⁵⁵ This taxonomy of early modern devotional poetry does not, unfortunately, reflect the more complex realities of religious communities and their poetry in this period, and does a particular disservice to groups like the Niranjanis, the Dadu Panth and the Sikh tradition which exhibit high levels of literacy and erudition from early on in their histories.

⁵³ Mishra, Ratanlal. *Nirañjanī Sampradāy: Sādhanā Evam Sāhitya*. Navalgarh: Mahamaya Mandir, 1998. 184.

⁵⁴ Shukla, *Hindī Sāhitya Kā Itihās*, 40-41. Nagendra, *Hindī Sāhitya Kā Itihās*, 163-170.

⁵⁵ Tyler Williams, “*Madhyakālīn Bhakti Sāhitya Meṃ Nirguṇ-Saguṇ Vibhājan*,” *Ālocanā* 38, no. 2 (2009): 53-76; “Nirgun and Sagun in the Discourse of Literary Historiography: The Creation of Two Traditions.” Paper Presented at the Tenth International Bhakti Conference, Miercurea Ciuc (Romania), July 2009.

These groups also provide us with a reason to reconsider another binary distinction in Hindi historiography, that of 'bhakti' and 'rīti'. As mentioned above, *bhakti* is the term given to the popular religious movement that is said to have swept northern India between roughly 1400 and 1800 CE and the devotional poetry that was not only an expression of this religious feeling but also helped to constitute it.⁵⁶ The term *rīti* (lit. 'manner' or 'style'), on the other hand, is used to refer to a set of literary practices and texts of a more secular variety, usually associated with royal courts of the period. Until recently the spheres of *bhakti* and *rīti* were considered water-tight and separate from one another in Hindi literary historiography, with their own distinct communities of authors, patrons, and socio-political agendas.⁵⁷ The past decade has seen several scholars question this binary by highlighting texts and authors that crossed back and forth between the worlds of popular devotion and courtly sophistication.⁵⁸ Allison Busch has recently taken this project a step further by proposing a different framework for understanding textual production and circulation in this period, one that does not divide texts and authors into 'religious' or 'courtly' traditions based

⁵⁶ For a general discussion of this movement, as well as critiques of the idea of a bhakti 'movement' itself, see: John Stratton Hawley, "Introduction: The Bhakti Movement- Says Who?" *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 11, no. 3 (2007): 209-225. John Stratton Hawley and Mark Juergensmeyer, *Songs of the saints of India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004). David Lorenzen (ed.), *Religious Movements in South Asia, 600-1800* (Delhi: New York: Oxford University Press 2004); ———, "La unificación del hinduismo antes de la época colonial," *Estudios de Asia y Africa* 41, no. 1 (2006): 79-110. Krishna Sharma, *Bhakti and the Bhakti Movement: a New Perspective* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1987).

⁵⁷ *Rīti* poetry has generally been characterized as an overly baroque and ideologically degraded tradition limited to the courts of feudal lords and monarchs; for a typical description see Shukla, *Hindī Sāhitya Kā Itihās*, 159-64, and Doctor Nagendra, *Hindī Sāhitya Kā Itihās*, 273-83. A critique of this characterization of *rīti* and of the assumptions that underlie it can be found in the introduction and Chapter Six of Busch, *Poetry of Kings*.

⁵⁸ Imre Bangha, "Romantic Poetry in the Age of Convention? The Emergence of the Idea of a Rītimukt Trend Within Hindi Mannerist Literature," *South Asia Research* 25, no. 13 (2005): 17; Allison Busch, "Questioning the Tropes of about 'Bhakti' and 'Riti' in Hindi Literary Historiography," in Monika Horstmann (ed.) *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* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2006), 33-47; Rupert Snell, "Bhakti Versus Riti? The Satsai of Biharilal," *Journal of Vaishnava Studies* 3, no. 1 (1994): 8.

on some sort of ideal (and thus ahistorical) categories, but instead pays attention to the classificatory schemes used by those who produced and enjoyed this poetry.⁵⁹ This study contributes to this effort by examining how communities like the Niranjani imagined their own literary and scriptural enterprises and by observing how their texts were actually circulated and received – be it as scripture in their own community, as philosophy and theology in the context of other religious communities, or as scholarship and literature at royal courts. Before we go further, however, let us look more closely at the Niranjani, and situate them within the landscape of both Hindi literature and the history of religion.

The Niranjani: a lost page in the history of Indian religion and Hindi literature

The Niranjani Sampraday has been largely forgotten in scholarly histories of Hindi literature and Indian religion, mirroring the disappearance of the Niranjani themselves from public memory. This disappearance is remarkable because the Niranjani Sampraday was at one time an influential force in the religious and cultural world of Rajasthan. As far as can be reconstructed from available sources, the Niranjani Sampraday coalesced in the first quarter of the seventeenth century at Didwana, beginning as a small community of saint poets, their initiates, and lay followers.⁶⁰ It continued to grow in terms of both membership and influence throughout that century and into the next, and the little amount of documentary evidence available suggests that the Niranjani were still a prominent community (though never 'large' in comparison to groups such as the Dadu Panth or

⁵⁹ Busch, *Poetry of Kings*, 20-22, 244-248.

⁶⁰ For speculation on the roots and early history of the Niranjani Sampraday, see Kshitimohan Sen, *Medieval Mysticism of India*, 69-70, 120-1; Mishra, *Nirañjanī Sampradāy*, 25-60. Sources on the early Sampraday are reviewed in Chapter Three.

Ramanandis) at the turn of the twentieth century when K.D. Erksine surveyed Didwana while writing his Gazetteer.⁶¹ From there going forward, however, it seems that the Niranjani decreased in terms of both numbers and visibility, becoming increasingly Vaishnavized until by 1951 they were virtually “indistinguishable” from the sea of Vaishnava communities operating in north India.⁶² This attrition and subsumption have continued into the twenty-first century as I confirmed on a visit to the Niranjani's annual *melā* (festival), which celebrates the *samādhi* (literally focusing the mind upon the Ultimate, said of a saint when their body dies) of Haridas on the sixth day of the bright half of the month of *phālgun*. The dress, *tilak* (sectarian mark drawn on the forehead) and ritual implements of the Niranjani initiates were indeed indistinguishable from those of Vaishnava *sādhus*, and the central activity of the *melā* was a *bhāgavat kathā* (reading and explanation of the *Bhāgavat Purāṇa*, particularly the episodes relating to Krishna), which went on daily for several hours. I counted roughly one hundred followers there, and based on data collected from Niranjani informants estimated the population of Niranjani families living in the rest of Rajasthan to number somewhere between one and two hundred.

Yet manuscripts of religious poetry composed by Niranjani saints or copied by Niranjani scribes are to be found in great numbers in the manuscript libraries of Rajasthan, as well as in libraries as distant as those of Banaras and Hyderabad. Though difficult to confirm, I estimate that the number of manuscripts traceable to the Niranjani's outnumber

⁶¹ K.D. Erskine, *The Western Rajputana States Residency and the Bikaner Agency*, Rajputana Gazetteers vol. 3B (Allahabad: The Pioneer Press, 1908), 184.

⁶² Parashuram Chaturvedi, *Uttarī Bhārat Kī Santa-Paramparā*, (Allahabad: Bharati Bhandar, 1965 (originally 1951)), 347. Here, 'Vaishnava' refers to the devotional traditions centered on one or more of the incarnations of the Puranic deity Vishnu, such as Krishna and Ram. For a comparison and contrast of Vaishnava and *nirgun* styles of *bhakti*, see Vaudeville, “*Sant Mat*,” 36-40.

the manuscripts of any other *bhakti* community of this period contained in the collections of the Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute (the largest single collection in all of Rajasthan, with several branches across the state).⁶³ The question is then how the texts of such a relatively small community became so influential, finding their way into the libraries of communities like the Dadupanth, Ramasnehis, and the Sikhs, and courts like those at Jaipur, Jodhpur, and Nagaur. This question has yet to receive any scholarly attention and despite the wealth of Niranjani manuscripts at hand their poetry has barely received a footnote in histories of Hindi literature and Indian religion.

So what attention have they garnered in scholarly writing, and how have those studies located the Niranjani in the history of literature and devotion? They are conspicuously absent from Horace Hayman Wilson's encyclopedic survey of Hindu communities, *Sketch of the Religious Sects of the Hindus*, and indeed are mentioned nowhere else in religious scholarship, in either Hindi or English, from the nineteenth century. The first scholarly mention of any Niranjani is instead found in a survey of literature: Shiv Singh Sengar's *Śiv Simh Saroj* (1878). Sengar mentions Hariramdas and one other Niranjani poet, Nipat, as saint poets of note from Rajasthan, but gives no other biographical detail or description of their works.⁶⁴ George Abraham Grierson mentions Haridas in *The Modern Vernacular Literature of Hindustan* (1888), but again describes him simply as a saint and poet.⁶⁵ In their eponymous *Miśrabandhu Vinod* (1914) the Mishra brothers list Manohardas, Bhagvandas, Hariramdas and Rupdas among other saints of the period, but provide no

⁶³ This is for all manuscripts in the Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute's collections for which provenance has been established and recorded in its catalogues.

⁶⁴ Sengar, *Śiv Simh Saroj*, 275-76, 621-22, 723-24, 821.

⁶⁵ Grierson, *The Modern Vernacular Literature of Hindustan*, 81.

information about their lives or compositions.⁶⁶ We do find a mention of the Niranjani community in Erksine's *The Western Rajputana States Residency and the Bikaner Agency* (1908); Erksine describes Gādhā Dhām (the primary seat of the community), mentioning that it contains “some fine old temples and buildings belonging to the Sādhus of the Niranjani sect, and where a small fair is held yearly.”⁶⁷

The first two scholars to address the Niranjani tradition in any depth were Kshitimohan Sen and Pitambardatt Barthwal, both of whom released their findings in 1930 – Sen in the form of his seminal *Medieval Mysticism of India*, and Barthwal in the form of his doctoral dissertation, published as the equally influential *Traditions of Indian Mysticism Based Upon the Nirguna School of Hindi Poetry*.⁶⁸ Sen was primarily interested in the effect that the Niranjani had upon other communities and saints, and so his comments are limited to the Sampraday's geographical extent and connection to other groups. He posits that the community first took shape in modern-day Orissa and Bengal, where it influenced groups like the Khusivīśvāsīs, the Sāhibdhānīs, Jagamohanīs, Balarāmīs, Neḍās, Sahajiās, Āuls, Bāuls, Shāins, Samjogīs, Jadupatiās and Kartābhajās. From there, he suggests, it moved west to modern-day Rajasthan and Punjab, influencing saint-poets like Kabir and Dadu. Unfortunately, Sen gives no references or evidence for such an assertion, although he does mention that members of the Niranjani Sampraday were still active in Orissa in the late

⁶⁶ Mishra, *Mīśrabandhu Vinod*, 211, 274-75, 310, 496. The Mishras list Hariramdas twice, in both instances conflating him with another Hariramdas. There is also a possible reference to ‘Tulsidas’ (Tursidas) Niranjani (224).

⁶⁷ Erksine, *Western Rajputana States Residency*, 184.

⁶⁸ Sen, *Medieval mysticism of India*, 69-70, 120-1; Barthwal, *Traditions of Indian Mysticism*, x-xi.

1920's.⁶⁹ Barthwal, on the other hand, devotes a few pages to describing the literary compositions of the Sampraday as part of his attempt to prove that a unified tradition and community of *nirgun* thought and practice existed among the Hindi saint-poets and that vernacular Hindi was a language of intellectual exchange in pre-modern India (thus departing from the general trend of scholarship noted above in which *nirgun* traditions were seen to be outside the realm of scholastic and literary discussions).⁷⁰ In a later article titled “*Kuch Nirāñjanī Santom̄ Kī Bāñiyām̄*”, Barthwal became the first to articulate certain ideas about the Niranjani Sampraday that would become conventional wisdom in the writings of later scholars, including the belief that Haridas was the founder of the Sampraday, that he drew inspiration from (and perhaps was a direct spiritual descendent of) Gorakhnath and Kabir, and that the poet-scholar Tursidas Niranjani later organized the community's beliefs into a structured theology in the same manner that Sundardas did for the Dadu Panth.⁷¹ He also gives a brief introduction to the compositions of several Niranjani poets, including Haridas, Tursidas and Bhagvandas based on the manuscript holdings of the Nagari Pracarani Sabha of Banaras, including manuscripts that are, unfortunately, now missing.⁷² Despite the importance that Barthwal accorded to the Niranjani, no other scholar took up the writings of the community until the mid-twentieth century, when the Hindi doyens Hazariprasad Dwivedi and Parasuram Chaturvedi turned their attention to this little-known tradition.

⁶⁹ Sen, *Medieval Mysticism of India*, 69-70. Upon close examination it seems possible that Sen conflated the Niranjani community of Rajasthan with the Niranjani *akhādā* of the Dasnami sect, which is almost certainly older and has traditionally had its support base in the eastern regions of north India.

⁷⁰ Barthwal, *Traditions of Indian Mysticism*, x-xi.

⁷¹ Pitambardatt Barthwal, "Kuch Nirāñjanī Santom̄ Kī Bāñiyām̄," in Govind Chatak (ed.) *Pitambardatt Barthwāl Ke Śreṣṭh Nibandh* (New Delhi: Takshila Prakashan, 1978), 49-62.

⁷² Perhaps most importantly, Barthwal placed the Niranjani firmly in the *nirgun* saint tradition – as opposed to *sagun* Vaishnavite tradition – at a time when the distinction between the two streams was crystallizing in the writings thought of his teacher Ramchandra Shukla and others.

While Dwivedi's contribution was small (yet important), Chaturvedi created what has now become the standard account of the Niranjani Sampraday.⁷³ As part of his account of the Nath tradition, Dwivedi briefly discusses the term *nirañjan* ('free from *añjana*' or lampblack or maya, i.e. untainted, pure, clear) in the context of Nath and other Shaivite traditions, thus locating the Niranjani's theology and praxis within the broader context of yogic practices in the seventeenth century.⁷⁴ Chaturvedi, on the other hand, devotes twenty pages to a description of the Niranjani in his encyclopedic survey of *nirguṇ* saint traditions, *Uttarī Bhārat Kī Sant Paramparā*.⁷⁵ He highlights the Niranjani tradition's connection with the Nath and their practice of yoga, the uncertainty regarding the identity of the founder of the community, and the early structure of the renunciate community, and the general decline of the tradition and its subsumption within the larger Vaishnavite milieu. Though Chaturvedi was a scholar of immense breadth and prolificacy, in the case of the Niranjani he appears to have simply collated information taken from other sources, specifically the writings of Kshitimohan Sen, Pitambardatt Barthwal, Hazariprasad Dwivedi, and a contemporary informant from the Dadu Panth, Swami Mangaldas, who was at that time in the process of collating and editing the texts of Haridas Niranjani and other poets of the Sampraday. Yet his entry on the Niranjani is worth mention because it has become the standard account of the Niranjani cited (often copied or summarized without citation) in almost all later writings.

⁷³ The term *sampradāy* – from the Sanskrit *sam + pradāya*; lit. a bestower, presenter—originally meant “a tradition, established doctrine transmitted from one teacher to another” but is also used to refer to a monastic order (Monier Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, s.v. “*sampradāya*”).

⁷⁴ Hazariprasad Dwivedi, *Nāth Sampradāy* (Allahabad: Lok Bharati, 1966), 131, 159-160.

⁷⁵ Chaturvedi, *Uttarī Bhārat Kī Sant-Paramparā*, 337-350.

Less than a dozen published works regarding the Niranjani have appeared in the last fifty years, and I will forego describing them all in detail here since most are recapitulations of Chaturvedi and Mangaldas's material: although six volumes of poetry by the Niranjani saints (three for Tursidas, one for Sevadas and two for Hariramdas) have been published along with two monographs on the Niranjani's history and one bibliographic survey of Niranjani poetry, only two of these works present any new material.⁷⁶ The first is Ratanlal Mishra's *Nirañjanī Sampradāy: Sādhanā Evaṁ Sāhitya*, which, in addition to presenting new theories on the origins of the community, includes data gleaned from oral traditions, architectural remains, and a few inscriptions – all collected by Mishra himself. Though short on analysis, Mishra's account supplies interesting bits of archival information that we will have occasion to turn to in Chapters Three and Five while discussing the history of Gadha Dham, the central monastic center of the Niranjani, located on the outskirts of Didwana.⁷⁷ The second work is Bhamvar Kasana's *Nirañjanī Panth*, which records in Marwari several contemporary practices of the Niranjani community and oral histories of the tradition.⁷⁸ Though it has only minor relevance for the history of Niranjani writing discussed here, it constitutes an important resource for anyone studying the contemporary tradition. A final source of note is the critical edition of Hariramdas Niranjani's *Chandarātrnāvalī* ('The String of the Pearls of Meter') by Neha Baid—the only critical edition of any Niranjani text, and a tremendously helpful resource for this project. For almost all other Niranjani texts dealt

⁷⁶ Satyanarayan Mishra, *Sant Kavi Turasidās Nirañjanī: Sāhitya Aur Siddhānt* (Kanpur: Sahitya Niketan, 1974). S. H. More, *Sevadās Nirañjanī: Vyaktitva Evaṁ Kṛtītva: Ek Anuśīlan* (Mathura: Javahara Pustakalaya, 1977). Satyanarayan Shastri, *Santakavi Turasidās Nirañjanī: Sāhitya Aur Siddhānt* (Kanpur: Sahitya Niketan, 1974). Savitri Shukla, *Nirañjanī Sampradāy Ke Hindī Kavi* (Bhopal: Madhyapradesh Sasana Sahitya Parishad, 1974).

⁷⁷ Ratanlal Mishra, *Nirañjanī Sampradāy*.

⁷⁸ Bhamvar Kasana, *Nirañjanī Panth* (Nagaur: Pankheru Prakashan, 2003).

with in this dissertation, I have relied wholly on manuscript material, collecting available copies of each text and collating versions as necessary; in the case of a few texts for which manuscripts were not available, I have relied on the published versions included by Swami Mangaldas in his collection of Niranjani poetry discussed below. Information regarding the manuscripts consulted and relevant textual analysis has been given with the discussion of each individual text in the chapters that follow.

This brings us to a final source on the Niranjani: texts published by religious communities, including the Niranjani Sampraday itself. The community has in fact published very little, and this is perhaps one of the reasons that it has received little scholarly attention.⁷⁹ The first and most influential published collection of Niranjani poetry is the *vāṇī* (literally ‘voice’ or ‘word’) of Haridas, edited by Swami Mangaldas of the Dadu Panth and published in 1962 as *Śrī Mahārāj Haridās Jī Kī Vāṇī*.⁸⁰ As alluded to above in the discussion of Chaturvedi’s study, Mangaldas’s one hundred and nineteen-page introduction became the primary source for all scholarly writings on the Niranjani and his recensions of poetry by Haridas and twenty-nine other Niranjani poets became the *de facto* canon as far as outside scholars were concerned (but not necessarily for members of the community itself).⁸¹ Mangaldas writes that two of the manuscripts he consulted date from the eighteenth century *vikramī* (roughly 1643 to 1743 CE) and the rest from the nineteenth century *vikramī*

⁷⁹ Ascertaining the reason for the scarcity of published materials will require more research. At the beginning of the twentieth century, at least, the Sampraday did not lack the membership or resources to produce printed books.

⁸⁰ Swami Mangaldas (ed.) *Śrī Mahārāj Haridās Jī Kī Vāṇī* (Jaipur: Nikhil Bharatiya Niranjani Mahasabha, 1962).

⁸¹ On the basis of small songbook pamphlets printed by the Niranjani Sampraday in the mid-twentieth century and interviews with members of the community, it would seem that the songs of Haridas and Sevadas have become the most central texts of the community, and that many of the poets contained in Mangaldas’s collection have been forgotten.

(1743 to 1843 CE). Unfortunately, he makes no other mention of which manuscripts he uses or of his editing criteria, leaving the question of his sources open to speculation.⁸² The only edition of Niranjani texts to be published by the Niranjani community itself is a collection of Sevadas Niranjani's works, *Sant Sevādās Kī Bāñī*, edited by the current head of the community, Swami Samvardas Shastri.⁸³ It is an impressive work of research and collation, though the lack of a critical apparatus or description of the manuscripts consulted makes it of marginal utility to scholars.⁸⁴

Even though scholarly work on the Niranjani has been scant, there has been no confusion among modern writers as to where the community belongs in the canon of Hindi literature and Indian religion. Those who have written on the Niranjani place them squarely within the *nirguṇ* stream of *bhakti* literature, also referred to sometimes as '*sant-sāhitya*' (saint literature). This category of pre-colonial Hindi literature carries loud and clear ideological and aesthetic associations like the rejection of Brahminical orthodoxy, embracement of 'folk' metaphors and styles, and adoption of certain yogic practices. At first glance the Niranjani appear to fit quite comfortably into this rubric— 'on paper', so to speak, they are perfect candidates— but upon closer examination not only their positioning within this system but the entire taxonomy itself begins to break down. Therefore a brief look at

⁸² Mangaldas, "Merā Nivedan" in *Śrī Mahārāj Haridās Jī Kī Vāñī*, 1. Regardless, one very interesting detail is worth mentioning here: Mangaldas writes that he did the majority of his research in the manuscript collection of the Dadupanth, not the Niranjani Sampraday. We will have occasion later to discuss the close historical relationship between the Niranjani and the Dadu Panthis, including their intellectual and poetic exchanges.

⁸³ *Mahārāj Sevādās Jī Kī Vāñī* of Sevadas, edited by Samvardas Shastri (Navalgarh: Mahamaya Mandir, 2008).

⁸⁴ Short pamphlets and booklets of hymns have published by the Niranjani community at various times in the past century; one such booklet, *Nirañjan Nitya-Niyam Pāṭh* by Swami Nrisinghdas Niranjani (Nagaur: Shri Sumer Printing Press, 1970) is still used in the context of communal singing. Such publications are an important source for reconstructing the contemporary history and practice of the community, but are outside the scope of this dissertation, which is concerned with seventeenth and eighteenth-century texts.

how and why the community has been placed in this schema is worthwhile because it reveals some of the problems with how we approach the vernacular literature of this period, and why we need a different framework through which to understand the textual culture of groups like the Niranjani. After noting the conceptual drawbacks of current approaches to Hindi literary historiography, I will proceed to lay out a provisional framework for approaching the literature and scripture of this time and place that pays greater attention to how those who produced and enjoyed this literature understood what they were doing.

Taxonomies of Hindi literary history

A tremendous methodological hurdle confronts us when we attempt to understand the compositions of groups like the Niranjani in the history of Hindi literature and devotion: the rigid and anachronistic classificatory schema of Hindi literary historiography. The study of pre-modern (which, in the context of Hindi scholarship, most often means 'pre-colonial') Hindi literature maintains a clear taxonomy of literary traditions, and though it might be difficult for those outside of Hindi scholarship to believe, this taxonomy has not changed greatly over the past seventy years. The longevity of this schema is not evidence of a lack of theoretical innovation in Hindi scholarship, but a testament to the power and persuasiveness of the model itself. It coalesced in the early decades of the twentieth century in the writings of Hindi literature's first modern critics as they simultaneously attempted to construct a canon for 'Hindi literature' and delineate the contours of the language itself. In a sense, 'Hindi literature' comes into being with their writings as an object of knowledge, and it is perhaps for this reason that their initial formulations have proved so enduring. In any

case, the categories of *bhakti*, *rīti*, *nirguṇ*, *saguṇ* and the like that were first formulated in their writings were given their definitive shape – in the model that persists even till today – by Ramchandra Shukla in 1929 in his seminal *Hindī Sāhitya Kā Itihās*.⁸⁵ We will briefly review his schema before examining the place of groups like the Niranjānis within it.

Shukla's division of genres, movements and periods is cognitively pleasing in its simplicity and symmetry. He identifies the period from 1318 to 1843 CE (1375 to 1900 *vikram samvat*) as the *madhyakāl* (medieval period), which he then divides into two sub-periods based on what he defines as their dominant “trend of thought” (*cittāvṛtti*).⁸⁶ The first or 'early medieval' period (*pūrv-madhyakāl*; 1318 – 1643 CE) he designates as the *bhaktikāl* ('period of devotion'), characterized by an efflorescence of religious writing. In Shukla's logic, this religious writing expressed the ethos of the Indian nation while it was otherwise silenced under Muslim political domination – i.e. the Sultanate period.⁸⁷ The 'late medieval' (*uttar-madhyakāl*, 1643 – 1843 CE) he calls the *rītikāl*, or 'mannerist period', dominated by the production of highly-affected poetry depicting courtly themes and poetic manuals codifying literary expression.⁸⁸ In this binary of *bhakti/rīti* Shukla thus manages to fuse textual genre, communities of circulation, and period into one set of terms: *bhakti* was chronologically prior, constituted by popular religious movements in which saints produced devotional poetry for the general public (*janatā*); *rīti* was chronologically subsequent, constituted by court poets producing secular poetry for political elites – *bhakti* and *rīti* thus come to signify two completely separate literary realms. Shukla further divides each realm

⁸⁵ Shukla, *Hindī Sāhitya Kā Itihās*.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, xxix (“*Kāl Vibhāg*”).

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 159-64.

into two: *bhakti* into *nirguṇ* and *saguṇ* poetry, *rīti* into *rīti-baddh* and *rīti-mukt* poetry.

Leaving aside the case of *rīti* for the moment, let us look more closely at what this division between *nirguṇ* and *saguṇ* poetry implies in the case of *bhakti* literature.

In a rhetorical and ideological gesture similar to the one through which he divides *bhakti* and *rīti*, Shukla transforms the theological/ontological division of *nirguṇ* and *saguṇ* into a distinction of genre, aesthetic, and literary community – again creating two totally separate realms, which he then juxtaposes as antagonistic competitors.⁸⁹ In the early modern period, the meaning of the terms *nirguṇ* and *saguṇ* was basically restricted to an ontological or theological distinction, and though individual poets tended to invoke one or the other forms of the Divine rather than both, they often recognized the reality and legitimacy of both forms, and sometimes explicitly declared the identity of *nirguṇ* and *saguṇ* as two sides of the same coin.⁹⁰ In Shukla's thought, however, *nirguṇ* and *saguṇ* come to represent two separate literary traditions. For Shukla, the poets of a *saguṇ* bent (e.g. Surdas, Tulsidas, Mirabai, and the *aṣṭachāp* poets of the Vallabha Sampraday) were the inheritors of a purely Indic ('*bhāratiya*') tradition: they worshipped Puranic deities, and were Vaishnava in orientation.⁹¹ In this manner, Shukla presents the *saguṇ* tradition as a popular literary movement accessible to all members of society.

⁸⁹ Shukla certainly did not invent this binary and narrative by himself; as I've discussed elsewhere, he simply develops and refines these arguments as found in the writings of H.H. Wilson, Monier-Williams, George A. Grierson, the Mishra brothers, Pitambardatt Barthwal and Shyamsundar Das. Tyler Williams, "Nirgun and Sagun in the Discourse of Literary Historiography: The Creation of Two Traditions" (conference paper, *Tenth International Conference on Early Modern Literature in North India*, Mercuria Ciuc, Romania, July 2009).

⁹⁰ Take for example Tulsidas's pronouncements on the subject in the *Bāl-Kāṇḍ* of his *Rāmcaritmānas* (Gorakhpur: Gita Press, VS 2060), vv 22.1-3.

⁹¹ Shukla, *Hindī Sāhitya Kā Itihās*, 40-41.

In contrast, Shukla characterizes the *nirgun* tradition as hybrid in nature (and thus implicitly inferior), as it combines Islamic influences with folk traditions. In contrast to the ideological purity of the *sagun* tradition, the *nirgun* poets are described as mixing the non-dualist thought of the Upanishads with Islamic monotheism and Shaivite Nath thought and practice, particularly the secret science of yoga. Referred to as 'sants', these poets were scattered across north India in regions as distant as eastern Uttar Pradesh (Kabir and Ravidas) and Punjab (Guru Nanak), yet the saint tradition is acknowledged as being particularly popular in Rajasthan, a fact sometimes attributed to the strength of the Nath tradition there. In contrast to the narrative and descriptive love poetry of the *sagun* poets, *nirgun* poetry is characterized as being didactic and steeped in the oblique language of yoga and *jñān* (transcendental knowledge). Consequently, *nirgun* poetry is portrayed as generally esoteric, 'mystical' (*rahasyavādī*), and accessible only to those initiated into schools of yoga or ascetic practice—and yet paradoxically a primarily oral tradition with few written works.

One correlate to this distinction between *nirgun* and *sagun* traditions is particularly relevant to the present study: the difference in levels of literacy between the two traditions. Due to their purported connection to the Indic tradition as preserved in Sanskrit, *sagun* poets and communities are generally assumed to have not only been literate, but literate in the culturally-privileged language of Sanskrit.⁹² Shukla and later writers present these poets as reinvigorating the classical language arts of Sanskrit, like *rasa-nispatti* (production of aesthetic pleasure) and *alamkāra* (rhetoric), by bringing them into the vernacular and

⁹² An exception lying in plain sight, so to speak, is Surdas, the supposedly blind poet. However, it is not impossible that he too may have at one time, either in life or legend, been able to 'see' the written page. See John S. Hawley, "Why Surdas Went Blind," in John S. Hawley, *Three Bhakti Voices: Mirabai, Surdas and Kabir in Their Times and Ours* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 248-263.

popularizing them among the general public. To borrow a term from the South Asian linguistic tradition, *sagun* poets are portrayed as taking Sanskrit elements and rendering them as *tatsama*—pure, uncorrupted. There are indeed plenty of examples to support this characterization: saint-scholars like Jiva and Rupa Goswami who composed in Sanskrit and vernacular poets like Tulsidas whose mastery of poetic devices rival those of any other poet, modern or ancient.

The *nirgun* poets are another story. If we assume with Shukla that they drew their material from Islamic and folk sources rather than from the classical Indic tradition, then it is easy to imagine that they had no knowledge of Sanskrit, and indeed no need for a knowledge of it.⁹³ Shukla and others appear to have taken it largely for granted that the *nirgun* poets were not literate in the vernacular either.⁹⁴ There was some textual evidence on which to base such a claim, including statements made by the poets themselves: Kabir famously reported that “I have never touched ink or paper, my hand has never grasped a pen” (*masi kāgada chūvo nahīm, kalama gahī nahīm hātha*), and both he and Ravidas (assumed to be illiterate because of his caste) openly questioned the validity of knowledge contained in books.⁹⁵ More generally, the image of *nirgun* saint-poets as illiterate but inspired holy men gelled well with the notion of *nirgun* thought as essentially heterodox and anti-authority in orientation.⁹⁶ Thus to return to the linguistic metaphor, *nirgun* saints were portrayed as taking *tadbhava* terms and rendering them as, well, *tadbhava* terms.

⁹³ Ibid., 40-46.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 51.

⁹⁵ Kabir, *Bījak, sākhī* 187, in Callewaert, *Nirgun Bhakti Sāgar*, 347. See also Kabir and Ravidas’s famous pronouncements on writing in the same collection (v. 33.2 on page 302; v 47.2 on page 436).

⁹⁶ The *nirgun* saints continue to be characterized as ‘heterodox’ and suspicious of authority; see Vaudeville, “*Sant Mat*,” 23. Kabir, Ravidas, Dadu and similar *sants* were indeed critical of the contemporary religious

At first glance, the Niranjanis fit neatly into Shukla's overarching taxonomy of literature and devotion. As religious poets, their place is firmly in the realm of *bhakti* literature, and at least Haridas and the first generation of his disciples in the Sampraday fit—albeit just barely—within the upper chronological boundary of the *bhaktikāl*. And there is no disagreement among scholars that within the realm of *bhakti*, the Niranjanis are part of the *nirguṇ* tradition. As we will see later, they trace their roots to the Shaivite Nath tradition, from which they draw much of their yogic thought and practice. The Niranjanis invoke an unqualified Absolute, and the community's very name, '*Nirañjanī*', comes from the appellation *nirañjan* (untainted, pure), a term usually applied to the *nirguṇ* divine essence.⁹⁷ Much of the oral poetry of Haridas and his disciples certainly fits within the genre of didactic poetry (*upadeśātmak kāvya*) and gives ample attention to yoga and esoteric knowledge. Finally, the geographical location of the Niranjanis among similar *nirguṇ sant-sampradāy* (saint communities) in Rajasthan like the Dadu Panth, Ramsnehi Sampraday and Laldasi Sampraday puts them squarely in the center of *nirguṇ* community activity. For most scholars of Hindi this would constitute an incontestable *nirguṇ* pedigree; yet there are aspects of the Niranjanis and their texts that don't quite fit into this scheme, and which force us to question the entire taxonomy.

The first element that gives us cause for suspicion is the Niranjanis' ecumenical attitude: though most Niranjani poets sing praises to a formless god, they do not prohibit the

authorities like brahmins, *maulānas*, and *qāzīs*, but rather than questioning authority entirely appeared to have constructed an alternative system of religious authority based around the figure of the guru. See discussion in Chapter Three on the role of oral performance in the institution of guru and disciple.

⁹⁷ A discussion of this term can be found in the Chapter titled "*Nirañjan Kaun Hai*" (Who is Niranjan?) in Hazariprasad Dwivedi, *Kabīr: Kabīr Ke Vyaktitva, Sāhitya Aur Darśanik Vicārom Kī Ālocanā*, 9th ed. (New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 2002 (originally 1964)) 51-72.

worship of *saguṇ* deities, and from at least the end of the eighteenth century the Niranjanis have maintained stewardship of temples in Jodhpur and Navalgarh dedicated to the deities Ram and the Mother Goddess, respectively.⁹⁸ The second is their failure to conform to the chronological schema delineated by Shukla: though Haridas and the first generation of disciples can reasonably be said to have composed their works prior to 1643 CE, most saint-poets of the community were writing later – supposedly in the midst of the *rītikāl*. However, rather than being treated as relics of an earlier literary movement, their texts were enthusiastically received by devotees and courtly audiences alike. The final aspect which gives us reason for pause is, appropriately enough, the Niranjanis' literacy and erudition. The first evidence of this literacy is the plethora of manuscripts copied by Niranjani scribes and containing the poetic compositions of their own saints as well as the poetry of other traditions. Though Niranjani poets composed exclusively in the literary vernacular of Brajbhasha, several of them were also literate in Sanskrit and composed translations of Sanskrit texts, wrote commentaries on others, and created guidebooks to knowledge systems like Advaita Vedanta with copious references to Sanskrit works. Add to this their original compositions on metaphysics, dictionaries, and treatises on prosody and poetics, and a picture emerges not of illiterate, hoary ascetics engaged in yoga but rather of scholarly monks engaged in study and debate. In contrast to the pronouncements of Kabir and Ravidas on the value of books, these monks seem to have accorded a significant amount of

⁹⁸ Haridas himself is credited with declaring *nahīm devas sūm vairatā, nahīm de sūm prem*, “Have neither enmity nor love of the deity,” understood to be an apologetic for image worship at the initial stages of a devotee’s spiritual practice. Mishra, *Nirañjanī Sampradāy*, 213. Details regarding the Ram temple at Jodhpur (completed in 1857 CE and entrusted to the Niranjanis by Queen Pratap Kumvari) can be found in *INTACH Newsletter Jodhpur*, (Jodhpur: INTACH, 2011), 6.

importance to the physical book, creating a 'holy book' of their own, simply called the '*vāṅī*,' by the turn of the eighteenth century.

As the case of the Niranjani makes clear, the chronology and classificatory schema of Hindi literary historiography correspond less to the realities of the early modern period than to colonial and post-colonial anxieties about nation, language, and community. Without going into great detail, let us note a few of these anxieties and how they structure our view of the Hindi past. Ramchandra Shukla and his contemporaries were occupied with the colossal task of creating a literary past for Hindi out of a diverse assortment of dialects and texts; as part of his positivist reconstruction of the Hindi-speaking nation (*Hindī-rāṣṭra*), Shukla characterized his canon as the expression of a public ethos.⁹⁹ In doing so he projected the recently-consolidated 'Hindi public sphere' of his own time backwards into the pre-national (or some would argue proto-national) past; thus entire periods could be characterized by "trends of public thought."¹⁰⁰ A search for this particular type of public sphere in the history of the fourteenth through eighteenth centuries can only end in disappointment, however, as the forms of community, identity, and public during this period— though dynamic and 'modern' in several respects—correspond neither to the public sphere as articulated in Shukla's thought nor to that articulated by Habermas in his discussion of European history.¹⁰¹ We will occasionally return to the idea of publics in the chapters that follow: Chapter Two investigates how the multiple and overlapping

⁹⁹ At the very beginning of his *Hindī Sāhitya Kā Itihās* Shukla states that "Seeing as the literature of each country is the channeled reflection of the trend in the public's thought, it is certain that with changes in the public's bent of mind there will occurring changes in the form of literature." (xix).

¹⁰⁰ For more on the creation of a Hindi public sphere in the colonial period, see Orsini, *Hindi Public Sphere*.

¹⁰¹ Bhakti did, however, certainly create publics; see Christian Novetzke, "Bhakti and Its Public," *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 11, no. 3 (2007): 17. In the fourth chapter I will engage with Novetzke's ideas while analyzing how the Niranjani imagined the devotional-literary community of which they were a part.

manuscript cultures of early modern North India described in Chapter Two reflect the multiplicity of publics during this period; Chapter Four looks at the formation of one such sphere, that of religious and secular intellectuals in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and their discussions on paper; and Chapter Five surveys the creation of religious publics through *bhakti* and the deployment of holy books as symbols of community and law.

The need for a literature that could inspire and give voice to the incipient Hindi nation, its modern aspirations and anti-colonial struggle compelled Shukla and his peers to make clear valuations of past material, and in this appraisal it was *bhakti* that was valorized as the reassertion of an Indic (*bhāratīya*) nation while *rīti*, the overly-'mannered' secular poetry of the court, was dismissed as the decadent pastime of a declining feudal culture.¹⁰² Imagining the traditions of *bhakti* and *rīti* in this way leaves no room for groups like Niranjani whose texts circulated as both religious poetry and as literature (not to mention as philosophy and as scripture), or for texts that combined devotional and literary qualities. Meanwhile, non-Hindu traditions like Islam and Jainism simply 'disappear' from the history of Hindi literature, being either rolled up into the category of 'miscellaneous texts' (*phuṭakār racanāēm*) from each period or abandoned completely to be taken up by 'another literature', such as 'Urdu literature' or 'Jain literature.' Yet we cannot fully understand the works of traditions like that of the Niranjani without putting them into conversation with contemporary Sufi and Jain works. Most importantly, the taxonomy that we have inherited does not reflect the way in which those who produced, circulated, performed and enjoyed these texts actually understood them and differentiated between them. So how do we go

¹⁰² This formulation and its political valences have been analyzed in detail by Busch; see her introduction in *Poetry of Kings*, 3-18; also Chapter Six, "The Fate of Rīti Literature in Colonial India," 202-239.

about approaching these texts in a way that also pays attention to the ideological and material contexts in which they were produced and circulated?

Towards a history of the book in pre-colonial Hindi

Although it is said that one should not judge a book by its cover, when it comes to pre-colonial Hindi literature, one *should* take a look at its cover, as well as the quality of its paper, binding, ink, handwriting, and marginalia. These material dimensions of a manuscript reveal how communities thought about its contents, and whether they considered those contents to be literature, or scripture, or song, or something else entirely. Some clues as to how these composers, anthologists, copyists and audiences made distinctions between discourses and genres can be found in the form as well as content of the manuscripts they have left us, and in the details of what we can reconstruct of their performance milieu and practices.

In contrast to the conventional wisdom that the poems of *nirgun̄ sant* poets circulated for years to centuries before they were first written down, literacy and writing activity appear to have been present in the communities that performed and enjoyed this poetry from early on in their history (if not from their very beginnings). Both oral performance and writing appear to have played a role in the transmission of this poetry, although those roles could change over time and between social contexts. The Niranjani's case is testimony to this fact. By looking closely at the different types of manuscripts produced by the Niranjani over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and relating these to different

types of performance, we see that orality and literacy were always at work together in the tradition in a dialectical relationship, but that this relationship could change over time.

The metanarrative that has emerged in the writings on Hindi literary history cited above is that *nirgun* saints composed their works 'orally' and that their audiences circulated these texts 'orally' for long periods before finally committed to writing.¹⁰³ However, it is never really specified what 'orality' means in this particular historical context, and a distinction of chronology and a value judgment about authenticity is thus made regarding orality and literacy in the context of both textual history and community or sectarian development: original, ur-texts are posited to have circulated in a primary, dynamic and organic world of orality before being 'fixed' in a secondary, structured world of literacy; this is reflected in the ubiquitous narrative of the community that formed around a charismatic holy man who sang and taught orally, but which later became institutionalized and textually 'reified' as the saint's texts were written down.¹⁰⁴ This narrative is concisely captured in the title of Winand Callewaert's recent collection of articles, *From Chant to Script*.¹⁰⁵

Unfortunately, this narrative cannot imagine a situation in which orality and literacy existed simultaneously, even though many of the so-called oral texts of the bhakti canon contain elements that could only have been conceived of in the social and ideological

¹⁰³ Callewaert, *Hindī Padāvalī of Nāmdev*, 1.

¹⁰⁴ This logic is also reflected in the discomfort regarding the relationship between charismatic figures and communities that David Lorenzen critiques in his introduction to *Bhakti Religion in North India: Communal Identity and Political Action* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 1-32. However, it should be noted that Winand Callewaert has speculated at length on the social contexts of oral transmission; see his introduction in *The Hindī Padāvalī of Nāmdev*, also his introduction in *The Sarvangī of Gopaldas, a 17th Century Anthology of Bhakti Literature* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1993). An important counter-argument to idea of 'pure' oral transmission is found in Monika Horstman, "Dādūpanthī Anthologies of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," in *Bhakti in Current Research: 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), 164-166.

¹⁰⁵ Winand Callewaert, *From Chant to Script* (Delhi: D.K. Printworld, 2013).

context of writing. For example, the supposedly illiterate Kabir is credited with composing the following *sākhī* (or *dohā*):

pothī paḍha paḍha jaga muā paṇḍita bhayā na koi
ḍāī akhara prema kā paḍhe so paṇḍita hoi

Reading and reading books, the world up and died
And a wise man was made of none.
Read two and a half letters of love (*ishq*)
And so a wise man become.

Even if the attribution to Kabir is specious, the audience of the putative poet would have to had understood the Devanagari orthography for the Arabic term '*ishq*' in order to appreciate the verse (since, in Devanagari, the grapheme of the *ś* is 'halved' to form a ligature with *k* (*q*), making the letter-count 'two and a half'). Such elements can be found in the oeuvres of almost all the so-called illiterate saints. Besides failing to account for the interpenetration of orality and literacy, the aforementioned narrative does not give any explanation for why texts, after circulating orally for so long, suddenly came to be written down. A different model and methodology is needed that situates manuscripts and their human interlocutors within practices of inscription, transaction, performance, and reception.

Is South Asian manuscript culture too big for book history?

The story of written media in pre-colonial South Asia may be simply too big to fit in the rather thin volume that is 'book history,' at least as book history has been traditionally defined in Western scholarship. Book history – *histoire du livre* in French, *geschichte des Buchwesens* in German – grew out of a concern with print culture, and has gradually grown outward from print studies to incorporate the study of pre-print manuscript culture, literacy

studies, the history of reading/reception, and thing theory.¹⁰⁶ In its broadest sense, book history has great potential as a useful analytical tool for probing the history of written media in South Asia, but there is some residual, conceptual baggage of which we should remain aware.

The first is a bias toward discrete text objects reflected in the persistence of the term ‘book history’ itself: at the end of the day, most practitioners of the various sub-disciplines within book history are concerned with discrete texts and discrete textual objects (be they in the form of a book, pamphlet, poster, manuscript, etc.), the assumed unity of one mirrored in the unity of the other. Another problem is the persistence of an approach, stemming both from practices involved in creating critical editions and from print-culture mentality, that treats every ‘copy’ of a text as just that: a *copy*, an instance or iteration of a text that is still some type of stable object, rather than as a unique object and as a trace of a unique event inscription, collation, reading or performance (or of a series of such events).

Manuscripts are not books. The rich variety of portable, written objects of South Asia that we typically refer to as books—*pothī*, *guṭakā*, *kitāb*, *badī*, *būrjapatra*, *granth*, *bahī*, *muṣṭī*, etc.—represent every type of notational inscriptional, including notebooks, musical notation, registers and ritual objects. We would hesitate before calling a present day student’s class notebook a ‘book,’ and yet that is exactly what some of the manuscripts from which pre-colonial literary material is mined were. Others were notes for musical performances. Still others were never really meant to be read, but were instead intended to

¹⁰⁶ Robert Darnton, “What is the History of Books?” in *The Book History Reader*, ed. David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery (New York: Routledge, 2002), 9-26. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), 27-73. Bill Brown, “On thing theory,” *Thing theory*. *Critical Inquiry* 28(1) (2001): 1-22.

be seen and touched, as the material manifestations of divine speech. The diversity of text objects from pre-colonial South Asia call for a different, arguably broader orientation than book history can provide, one that encompasses not just books, but all written media, and along with them the oral transactions of which they were part and parcel.

There is a corresponding need to complicate the idea of a ‘scribe’ or copyist. The inscription of manuscripts in early modern North India was an activity pursued by many different kinds of people in different settings and for different purposes. The term ‘scribe’ tends to flatten all these distinctions and suggest someone whose *primary* labor or occupation was copying manuscripts. The work of disaggregating the concept of a scribe and identifying those occupational groups who were actually involved in the production, circulation and exegesis of written materials in pre-colonial India has been inaugurated by scholars working on the cosmopolitan languages of Sanskrit and Persian, and dealing with upper-caste communities and political elites (or at least those working in the service of, or in close proximity to, the state). For early modern North India in particular, groundbreaking work by Muzaffar Alam, Sanjay Subrahmanyam and Najaf Haider on *munshīs* in the Mughal empire, Rosalind O’Hanlon and Christopher Minkowski on Brahmin and kayastha communities in North India and Maharashtra, and the late Kumkum Chatterjee on *kayastha* and baidya communities in the eastern regions of Bihar and Bengal has greatly enhanced our understanding of the knowledge systems and social networks involved in the production

and transfer of information and knowledge in the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries.¹⁰⁷

However, many literate groups that pursued scribal activity as part of their occupation have yet to be studied: some of these communities stood at a bit more distance from the state (though they definitely interacted with it) and came from somewhat less prestigious socio-economic backgrounds. These include merchant communities and monastic communities, each of which possessed professional knowledge in addition to basic literacy. The Niranjani present us with an opportunity to study just these types of groups, as members of the Maheshwari caste (a merchant caste which traces its roots to Sambhar in Rajasthan) made up a significant portion of the Niranjani lay community from at least the mid-seventeenth century onward, and Niranjani initiates (mostly monks, but also some householders as well) were incredibly prolific in producing manuscripts, not only of their own tradition's works but of works from other traditions as well.¹⁰⁸ Scribal work does not appear to have been the *primary* activity of either these merchants or these monks, but was definitely an *integral* activity of their occupations.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Muzzafar Alam and Sanjay Subhahmanyam, "The Making of a Munshi," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 24, no. 2 (2004): 11; Najaf Haider, "Norms of Professional Excellence and Good Conduct in Accountancy Manuals of the Mughal Empire," *International Review of Social History* 56, no. S19 (December 2011): 263–74; Rosalind O'Hanlon, "The Social Worth of Scribes: Brahmins, Kayasthas and the Social Order in Early Modern India," *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 45 (2010): 32; Rosalind O'Hanlon and Christopher Minkowski, "What Makes People Who They Are? Pandit Networks and the Problem of Livelihoods in Early Modern India," *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 45, no. 381 (2008): 35; Kumkum Chatterjee, "Scribal Elites in Sultanate and Mughal Bengal," *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 47, no. 4 (October 1, 2010): 445–72.

¹⁰⁸ On the Maheshwari community, see Lawrence Babb, "What Makes People Who They Are?" in Lawrence Babb (ed.) *Multiple Histories: Culture and Society in the Study of Rajasthan* (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2002) 22. Sukhviri Gahlot and Banshi Dhar, *Castes and Tribes of Rajasthan* (Jodhpur: Jain Brothers, 1989) 90.

¹⁰⁹ The question of writing as an occupation is treated briefly in Chapter Four, but is also the subject of ongoing research regarding merchant literacy in the Maheshwari and Oswal Jain communities.

Modes of orality-literacy and the organization of the dissertation

The problem with much of the writing on orality, literacy, and media in history is that it treats orality and literacy as water-tight, stable, and mutually-opposed categories. This problem is both reflected in, and compounded by, the existence of two words—orality and literacy—instead of a single word that can encompass both (unless we turn for help to the term ‘media’ which, after Marshall McLuhan, is just too broad a term, and rightly so). In any society in which literacy has been introduced, orality and literacy operate as a mutually-constitutive pair—somewhat like a piece of paper that has been folded to make two facing pages. I will therefore use the somewhat inelegant term orality-literacy (or mode of orality-literacy) to designate a particular mode of textual creation, circulation and performance that is comprised of both oral and literate aspects. However, I will still use the constituent terms ‘oral’ and ‘literate’ where appropriate to distinguish between these interconnected aspects, with the acknowledgement that they constitute a ‘continuum’ rather than two different realms. Scholars working on European vernaculars in the medieval and early modern periods have made important inroads in formulating the idea of this continuum: the recent volume of essays edited by Slavica Ranković, *Along the Oral-Written Continuum: Types of Texts, Relations and Their Implications*, is an excellent example, particularly the essays by John Miles Foley, Slavika Ranković, and Leidulf Melve which theorize this continuum as marketplace, space, and debate respectively.¹¹⁰ What the writings of these scholars do is ask us to both look and listen to how oral and written discourse work

¹¹⁰ *Along the Oral-Written Continuum: Types of Texts, Relations, and Their Implications* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010).

through each other and shape each other, and to treat these phenomena as *historical*, being constantly changed by and affecting change upon social practices and institutions.

Literacy itself is a multivalent term whose conceptual baggage must be unpacked whenever it is used analytically. ‘Literacy’ rarely refers to just the technological competence required to transcribe oral language into graphic signs, decipher those signs and from them reproduce sound (although this in and of itself is actually quite a complicated process that generally deserves more attention). Literacy almost always involves discursive competency, the ability to ‘perform’ verbally according to certain rules. There are as many discursive literacies as there are discourses. Some of these multiple types of literacy, and different models of literacy, have been schematized in a broad fashion by Brian Street; closer studies of particular types of literacy and their social and historical contexts can be found in the writings of David Cressy, the essays in Rosamond McKitterick’s *Uses of Literacy in Medieval Europe*, and Brinkley Messick’s *The Calligraphic State*.¹¹¹ Those of us who study literature or devotional texts frequently forget that literary or, say, theological texts participated in only one of multiple types of literacy that were at play in a given place and time, and that they were marked off from one another in different ways. We will return to this issue in Chapter Four, in the context of the Niranjanis’ literacy, which spanned not only devotional but also literary genres, and included types of literacy particular to the occupational activities of merchants (who made up a significant portion of the early Niranjani Sampraday).

¹¹¹ Street, *Literacy in Theory and Practice*; David Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order: Reading and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); *The Uses of Literacy in Early Mediaeval Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990). Brinkley Messick, *The Calligraphic State: Textual Domination and History in a Muslim Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

The Indic tradition in general and early Hindi in particular tell us some important things about what constituted literacy in early modern North India. For example, let us take the terms most frequently used in early Hindi (i.e., Brajbhasha, Avadhi, and Marwari) to signify the act that we, in contemporary English, refer to as ‘reading’: *baṃc-*, *bāṃc-*, *paḍh-*, *pāṭh-*. The first two come from the Sanskrit *vac-*, to speak, utter, recite; the second two from Sanskrit *paṭh-*, to read, recite.¹¹² Thus speaking and recitation are implied in the very act of ‘reading’ a multivalence or ambiguity that we still find today in the Hindi verb *paḍhanā*, which means both ‘to read a text’ and ‘to study’ (which often involves ‘oral’ learning without the use of written texts).

This productive ambiguity is at play in the songs and sayings of several of the saint poets that we will be examining later on, including Kabir, Ravidas, and Dadu Dayal. A particularly illustrative example is the following *pad* (hymn) of Sundardas (1599–1689 CE), an influential poet and saint of the Dadu Panth:

paṇḍita so ju **paḍhai** yaha pothī
jā maim̐ brahma bicāra nirantara aura bāta jānaum̐ saba thothī
paḍhata paḍhata kete dina bīte bidyā **paḍhī** jahām̐ laga jo thī
doṣa buddhi jau miṭī na kabahūṃ yātaim̐ aura abidyā ko thī
lābha **paḍhai** kau kachū na hūvau pūṃjī gaī gāṃṭhī kī so thī
sundaradāsa kahai saṃmujhāvai burau na kabahūṃ mānaum̐ mo thī¹¹³

Oh pandit who **reads** this *pothī* (manuscript)!
Absorbed in constant reflection upon Brahma,
knowing all other things to be hollow,
Studying and **studying**, so many days passed,
Seeking knowledge wherever and however,

¹¹² Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, s.v. *paṭh-*, 580. See also Sundardas, Shyam. *Hindi Śabdāsāgar*, s.v. *bāṃcanā*, *paḍhanā*. Importantly, the stems *bāṃc-* and *pāṭh-* are both transitive, meaning “to make the text speak.”

¹¹³ Sundardas, *pad* 31, in Callewaert, *Nirguṇ Bhakti Sāgar*, 552-53.

Yet the defect of intellect was never overcome,
from which came still more ignorance (*abidyā*),
No benefit came of **studying**,
While the wealth in hand dwindled as well,
Sundardas says this in explanation,
Never misunderstand me!

As the highlighted words reveal, the verb *paḍh-* is used multiple times, in the first instance clearly to denote *reading* a manuscript, but in the other instances to mean study, not necessarily from written texts. This is a fascinating verse, not least because its very first line—the refrain of the hymn—imagines its own written textuality as it addresses its reader/listener: “Oh pandit who reads this *pothī*!” I say ‘imagine’, because although this verse was indeed written down and circulated widely in manuscript form, it was also ‘designed’ to be sung (something reflected in its form, as we will see in Chapter Three). So the “*pothī*” or manuscript here is as much imagined as real, and consequently the listener/reader would have ‘studied’ it as much as ‘read’ it. This creates a delightful paradox and tension in a hymn that appears to criticize superfluous study. Another example, this time taken from Namdev (a saint poet of Maharashtra whose compositions were nevertheless quite popular in the Niranjani Sampraday and its sister community the Dadu Panth), reveals the ambiguity that could attend the term *paḍh-* even in one instance:

prāṃṇīm gayā pyaṃḍa bharatā bānārasiyai basatā
muṣi beda purāṃṇa **paḍhatā** taū na tulai hari kīrati nāṃmām¹¹⁴

A person lives in Banaras,
and goes to fill up his body,
By **reading/studying** the principle Vedas, Puranas,
Still all this can’t compare to singing the name of Hari.

¹¹⁴ Namdev, *pad* 63.2, in Callewaert, *Nirguṇ Bhakti Sāgar*, 398.

By the time that the allegedly illiterate Namdev composed this verse in the 14th century (or at least by the time its was committed to writing in his name in the early seventeenth), manuscript copies of the Puranas and even the Vedas were circulating in Banaras.¹¹⁵

Nevertheless, their study and performance were carried out through ‘oral’ means like recitation and homily. Thus Namdev could speak simultaneously of reading, reciting and studying using one word, reflecting the coterminous nature of ‘reading’ and ‘reciting’ in this cultural context and drawing our attention to the mutual imbrication of literacy and orality discussed above. The term *padh-* alone reminds us that wherever there is literacy, there is orality as well. However, this very multivalence has caused some confusion among modern scholars as to whether saints like Kabir, Raidas, Dadu and the like were illiterate, anti-literate, or anti-scholastic, leading to the negative characterization of *nirgun* saint poets noted earlier. The more nuanced appraisal of their utterances in the pages that follow is partly intended to help dispel this confusion.

Recognizing that orality is always implicated in literacy also helps us to see reading and writing as embodied practices. As the examples in the following chapters will illustrate, ‘reading’ a manuscript was never simply an intellectual exercise (a transfer of information), but rather always involved the body and the senses, including the eyes, ears, mouth, hands, and ears (and other parts of the body as well in the case of musical performance). It often involved more than one body, because ‘reading’ (encompassing recitation, sermonizing, and

¹¹⁵ Callewaert, *Hindī Padāvalī of Nāmdev*, 1. A discussion of the relationship between several *purāṇas* and the city of Banaras can be found in Travis LaMar Smith, “The Sacred Center and Its Peripheries: Śaivism and the Vārāṇasī Sthala-Purāṇas” (dissertation, Columbia University, 2007), and also in Diana Eck, *Banaras, City of Light* (New York: Knopf, 1982).

musical performance) was a social act. For these reasons, we must recognize manuscripts not only as traces of texts, but as traces of events that involved human agents. Writing on multilingualism in late medieval Europe, Mark Amsler has suggested the concept of ‘affective literacy’ as a tool for understanding the different ways in which manuscripts were used in this period, and for looking at their *affectus* (experiential) and *intellectus* (cognitive) aspects together:

I use the term ‘affective literacy’ here to describe how we develop physical, somatic, and/or activity-based relationships with texts as part of our reading experiences. We touch, sense, or perceive the text or vocalize it with our eyes, hands, and mouths. Affective literacy also involves the emotive, noncognitive, paralinguistic things we do with texts or to texts during the act of reading—for example, when a pious reader touches or kisses a prayer book in a particular way... Affective literacy also entails the temporality and traces of reading, reading as marking which then transforms the book’s material ‘object-ness’ and produces a variant object for later readers... Affective literacy names the life principle, messy and complex, threading through various reading activities—the phrase gestures toward bodily economies of reading and transacting texts.¹¹⁶

While the greater variety of both manuscript forms and textual genres in South Asia requires a distinct methodology from that which Amsler employs, his concept of affective literacy is nevertheless useful for our purposes here because it draws our attention to the nature of literacy as a *practice* that is simultaneously intellectual, material, experiential and social, and to the multiplicity of such practices in a given place and time. The chapters that follow examine a few of these different practices, from communal singing in the context of *satsaṅg* (company of the good) to devotional reading groups to the tutoring of pupils at royal courts.

¹¹⁶ Mark Amsler, *Affective Literacies: Writing and Multilingualism in the Late Middle Ages* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012) 102-3.

The multiplicity of literacies, reading practices, and oral-literate modes in the world of early modern North India raises yet another question: the question of media change. Discussion on media change and its relationship to social and political change has tended to focus on civilizational changes—i.e. media change that occurred *across* a society, as opposed to within parts of a society. Examples are the introduction of writing, the move from papyrus to paper, the adoption of print, etc., and their relationship with the development of literary discourse, monastic hegemony, nationalist thought, etc. The case we are concerned with here is different: in the early modern period, the vernacular of Hindi began to be committed to writing, and certain groups that employed the vernacular began to adopt and practice literacy in new ways. Yet writing and literacy had existed in this society for over two millennia, and the addition of Persian and Arabic literacy and manuscript culture at the beginning of the Sultanate period (c. 1200) had help to establish a scene in which multiple and highly developed models of writing culture were already on hand. Literacy in the *vernacular* was new, but literacy was certainly not. How then should we characterize this type of media change, which occurs not across a society but within certain languages and communities, and how do we relate it to social and ideological change?

Some help may be found in the writings of political scientist Ronald Deibert, which, although they look at society-wide changes, emphasize the uneven and heterogeneous nature of change brought about by and through media. Deibert uses the metaphor of a qualified Darwinism to explain the relationship between media and social change, arguing that “changes in the mode of communication will 'favor' or allow for the selection among the extant symbolic forms and biases of a society, thus giving rise to a new social epistemology

– rethreading the webs of significance, in other words.”¹¹⁷ Certain practices, groups and institutions will be better-positioned to benefit from media change than others; in this study, we will examine why the Niranjani were better-positioned to benefit from vernacularization and the growing vernacular manuscript culture than other devotional communities like, say, the Kabir Panth or perhaps even the Dadu Panth. Media change in turn goes hand-in-hand with changes in social epistemology, or how we perceive social reality; this too we will observe within the space of the Niranjani community, as their adoption of new types of manuscript production and writing both reflected and affected their self-conscious participation in a trans-local intellectual community.

The Niranjani tradition constitutes an ideal case study in the relationships between media and social/ideological change, orality and literacy, and book history and literary history for a number of reasons. When the Niranjani entered the scene a little after 1600 CE, the process of vernacularization had already been underway for some time; nevertheless, the turn of the seventeenth century was an important moment because it was a period of consolidation. Devotional groups like the Gaudiyas, Vallabhites, Ramanandis, and Sikhs were beginning to construct and refine their textual canons and sectarian identities; Mughal hegemony had recently been consolidated under Akbar, and with it elite Mughal culture, including Mughal book culture; Rajput courts in Rajasthan had taken the first steps toward establishing their own courtly literatures and manuscript practices.¹¹⁸ The Niranjani joined the *mehfil*, so to speak, just as these processes of consolidation were starting, and so

¹¹⁷ Ronald Deibert, *Parchment, Printing, and Hypermedia: Communication in World Order Transformation*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 34-5.

¹¹⁸ Gopalnarayan Bahura. *Catalogue of Manuscripts in the Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum: Pothikhana Collection (a)* (Jaipur: The Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Memorial Museum, 1984) 12-15.

helped to shape them even as they were shaped by them. The larger field of textual and manuscript culture is thus reflected, to a certain extent, in the historical trajectory and record of the Niranjani.

In the textual traces left by the Niranjani tradition, we are able to view the adoption, development, and refinement of certain modes of orality-literacy, as well as the practice of multiple modes of oral-literate production and circulation side-by-side. To put it in simpler terms, in their early days the Niranjani produced and performed certain kinds of texts that were tied up with particular types of manuscripts and performance modes—specifically communal singing and sermonizing with the aid of notebook-like *gutakā* manuscripts, as we will see in Chapter Three. They never abandoned these practices, but later augmented them with the production and performance of new kinds of texts, which had their own associated manuscript types and performance modes—in particular the composition of scholarly works in *pothīs*, the subject of Chapter Four, and the creation of anthologies in the form of finely-wrought codexes, which will be the subject of Chapter Five. The Niranjani thus demonstrate that multiple modes of oral-literate cultural production can be at work in one community or tradition simultaneously, but also be staggered chronologically. The diligence with which the Niranjani dated their texts and manuscripts aids us enormously in this task.

The Niranjani also make an excellent case study because they demonstrate how big a difference literacy (and media in general) can make in terms of power. Available documentary evidence suggests that the Niranjani—both their monastic order and lay following—were never particularly large in size, at least not compared to neighboring

traditions like the Dadu Panth and the Ramanandi Sampraday. Yet they wielded enormous influence through their texts, which circulated in manuscript form among other religious orders, merchant communities, and even royal courts. Finally, their very disappearance from the scene of religious, literary and intellectual debate in the nineteenth century and their current obscurity also tell us something important about the relationship between media and power. Although the waning size and influence of the Niranjani Sampraday in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was overdetermined, appearing to have been brought about by such a wide variety of factors as the rise of Vaishnava-inflected nationalism, the transition from princely rule to a federal state, and the general decline in patronage for monastic institutions, the rise of print culture must also be recognized as a reason for the Niranjani's waning fortunes. Pre-print writing, as a technology, gave leverage to minorities like the Niranjani who possessed the technical and discursive know-how to participate in written discourses. The introduction of printing radically changed the field of textual production and circulation, and groups that were poorly-positioned or unprepared for it, like the Niranjani, were left behind.¹¹⁹ To use Deibert's language, the change in the media environment constituted by the increased vernacular manuscript culture favored groups like the Niranjani, and the change brought about by print favored other groups.

As I present a narrative of the Niranjani tradition in the pages that follow, I will highlight three different modes of orality-literacy that were at work at various times (and demonstrate how they were shared with other traditions as well). Each of these modes is

¹¹⁹ The paucity of printed texts published by the Niranjani is truly striking given their prolific production of hand-written manuscripts. Only a few pamphlets of Haridas Niranjani's hymns appear to have been published before 1962, when Swami Mangaldas of the Dadu Panth published an anthology of his and other Niranjani poets' works. This draws our attention to the very different processes through which manuscripts and printed materials were produced and circulated.

characterized by a particular type of text, manuscript form, performance mode, type of literacy, ideology of language, and textual community. The first, which is treated in Chapter 3, involves the hymns and sayings of Niranjani poets like Haridas, Khemdas, and Sevasdas and their inscription into notebook-like manuscripts called *guṭakās*. The kind of literacy at work in the inscription of these manuscripts and their use in performance is primarily *technical*, meaning that it is constituted by the technological expertise necessary to transcribe written signs and decipher their meaning. The manner of writing in this case is notational, and so the textual objects (i.e. manuscripts) that are produced are intimately connected with their human users, almost as if they were an extension of a person's memory. In the context of performance, the relationship between the written notation and the orally-performed text was relatively 'loose,' with the signs on the page prompting the reconstruction of a text but not determining it. This is partly because the 'texts' in question—hymns and sayings—were themselves performed in an ideological milieu that privileged sound as the primary medium of knowing the world and also of transcending it; the hymns and sayings were therefore important first and foremost *as sound* (as distinct from their semiotic content). This ideology (or sonic soteriology as it were) had a social dimension as well, manifested in the guru-centered community of believers. This community in turn was brought into being through oral performance of the hymns and sayings, as the faithful experienced communion with their brethren either face-to-face in the event of performance, or telesthetically by calling those brethren (be they separated by space, time, or both) into being through recitation of the texts themselves.

The second mode involves the scholarly and literary works of Niranjani saint-scholars like Dhyandas, Manohardas, Bhagvandas and Hariramdas, and their inscription into unbound manuscripts of individual texts called *pothīs*. The type of literacy at work in their compositions is not just technical but also *discursive*, meaning that they demonstrate an ability to employ (as well as manipulate) norms and forms of literary and scholastic writing, many of them adapted from the prestigious tradition of Sanskrit. Available evidence suggests that the primary mode of performance for such texts was still oral recitation, but the relationship between the manuscript and the orally-performed text was different from that mentioned above in regard to hymns and *guṭakās*. In the case of the *pothīs*, they usually contained a single work in its entirety, inscribed in such a way that multiple individuals could easily use the manuscript. Other codicological details of the manuscripts suggest that they were also utilized in more formalized performance settings than the *guṭakās*, for example in the context of religious study groups or royal courts. The texts that they contain recognize and even refer back to the sonic soteriology mentioned above, but they do not *participate* in it in the same way as the hymns and sayings; in other words, the oral/aural performance and reception of their sound was not an important part of how they ‘worked’. These texts/manuscripts *were* important, however, as objects of exchange, and in this way they reflect the distinct social system in which they helped constitute transactions.¹²⁰ Partly because of the nature of their textual content, and partly because of their form as easily transferred single works, they were circulated and performed in a variety of social and

¹²⁰ Through these transactions, described briefly in Chapter Four, we can observe how material texts (manuscripts) reshaped networks of both ideas and persons. In understanding these transactions and networks, I have made use of the ideas of Bruno Latour, in whose network theory ‘things’ like texts can ‘act’ together with human subjects. See Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 70-82.

institutional contexts, and among a variety of actors in an evolving intellectual network. Consequently, the community imagined in and brought about by these texts is not just the community of the faithful, but a public unified by participation in scholarly, literary, religious and scientific discourses.

The third and final mode involves the poetic anthologies constructed by devotional traditions like the Niranjani Sampraday, Dadu Panth and Sikh community, and their inscription into a type of manuscript that I will provisionally call a ‘holy book.’ These manuscripts were collections of hymns, sayings, hagiographies and sometimes more scholastic devotional works. They were distinct from the aforementioned *guṭakās*, however, in that their contents were arranged according to a distinctly *social* logic (as opposed to the personal logic of the owner of a *guṭakā*) and a clear ideological program: thus they were provided with apparatuses to aid navigation, aesthetic and symbolic elements like borders and illumination, and were usually bound, often in codex format, in contrast to the manuscript types given above. In this way they were clearly intended to constitute a unified textual object, a *book* with a distinct and recognizable identity. The holy books created by the Niranjani Sampraday, Dadu Panth and Sikh community were objects of beauty and focal points for ritual. We see at work in their construction and use the first ideology of language discussed above—sonic soteriology—since these holy books were employed in communal singing, liturgy, and teaching. Yet we also see another ideology at work which understood the material instantiation of language as having a distinct ontological status—this is part of how a book could become ‘holy.’ The emergence of this new type of textual artifact is coterminous with the emergence of a new type of textual community in the Niranjani, Dadu,

and Sikh traditions: a people of the (material) book, an *ahl-i kitāb* in the most literal sense. Recognizing this development in early modern, pre-colonial South Asia forces us to reconsider certain assumptions about the epistemic rupture that occurred with colonialism, as well as the question as to whether Indic religions had a notion of a holy book.¹²¹

Plan of the dissertation

Having laid out the theoretical and methodological issues at stake here in Chapter One, we will move to a wide-angle view of North Indian vernacular manuscript culture in Chapter Two. This chapter will present a brief history of manuscript and performance traditions in Hindi from the fourteenth through the sixteenth centuries, highlighting the different social and institutional contexts in which the vernacular came to be written down, and gradually fashioned into a language of literature and scholarship. The discussion covers developments up to the turn of the seventeenth century, setting the scene for the discussion of manuscript culture, performance, canonization and scriptural writing that takes place in the following chapters. Chapter Three provides a close-up view of textual and manuscript culture in the Niranjani Sampraday, focussing on the oral-literate mode represented by hymns and sayings, and the *gutakā* manuscripts in which they were inscribed. Using the poems of Haridas as a case study, I will demonstrate how this type of poetry performed in an ideological and social context that privileged orality, even if it was not purely oral in practice. Chapter Four shifts the focus to the production of literary and scholarly works by

¹²¹ There were at least a few European scholars who identified what they believed to be, or termed, the ‘holy book’ or ‘Bible’ of the Hindus; particularly germane to this study is the characterization of Tulsidas’s *Rāmcaritmānas* as such a scripture. See Stark, “Translation, Book History, and the Afterlife of a Text.”

later Niranjani poets, arguing that by adopting certain literary techniques and inscribing their works into *pothī*-style manuscripts, the Niranjani were able to participate in intellectual debates that spanned religious and secular realms. Chapter Five ‘zooms out’ to a middle distance in order to demarcate and compare the development of scriptural *granth*s (in this case, codex books) in the Sikh community, the Dadu Panth, and the Niranjani Sampraday in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In doing so it highlights the social and political transformations both outside and inside these groups that led them to anthologize, organize, and authorize their respective scriptures, and investigates the importance of the physical aspects of the manuscripts in this process. Finally, the conclusion reflects on the methodological and theoretical significance of the findings of this research for the study of pre-colonial literature in North India.

Chapter Two

The beginnings of the book: vernacular 'writing' in North India till 1600 CE

*pothī paḍha paḍha jaga muā paṇḍita bhayā na koya
dhāī akhara prema kā paḍhe so paṇḍita hoyā*

Reading and reading books the world died,
and a pandit was made of none
Study the two and a half letters of love (*ishq*),
and so a pandit become

As the above *sākhī* by Kabir attests, prior to 1600 CE not everyone in North India revered the written word— in fact, some poets appear to have been indifferent or even hostile toward it. Other poets, both devotional and non-devotional, evince in their works a reverential attitude toward writing and written artifacts. Taken together, these various pronouncements reveal an ambivalence toward writing that surfaces time and again in religious and literary thinking between 1300 and 1600 CE. Correspondingly, Hindi's written form in these centuries reflects a certain tentativeness and heterogeneity, both hallmarks of experimentation and novelty.¹²² Around 1600, however, something begins to change: more and more communities in North India, including some whose ideologies included critiques of writing, begin to participate actively in the manuscript culture of the time, taking part in the intellectual and literary exchanges that were increasingly occurring on paper.¹²³ Norms of not only literary expression but also of transcription of the vernacular

¹²² On the anxiety that attended literization and literarization of the vernacular in the shadow of the Sanskrit power matrix, see Pollock, *Language of the Gods*, 309-318.

¹²³ James Hastings speaks of “explosion” of writing activity among *bhakti* religious groups in the period between 1600 and 1650; while Hastings' contention that prior to 1600 “almost all vernacular songs and poetry” existed only in oral traditions is not supported by the inscriptional record and other historical sources, his comment on the sheer rise in quantity of written material produced by devotional communities in this

and of vernacular manuscript culture are established. If the span from roughly 1300 to 1600 is a period of beginnings, experimentation and contestation, then the start of the seventeenth century represents the consolidation of a new written dispensation for Hindi.

This chapter surveys the process of literization of the vernaculars known collectively as ‘Hindi’ (which includes the literary dialects of Brajbhasha, Avadhi and Marwari, amongst others) that began in North India around the fourteenth century in order to set the scene of vernacular manuscript culture at the turn of the seventeenth century, when the main processes to be analyzed in this dissertation begin, namely anthologization, the production of discrete written texts, the ritual use of vernacular manuscripts, and the emergence of a public sphere whose intellectual transactions occurred at least partly on paper.¹²⁴ By this time, the vernacular had already been established as a viable medium for literary, scientific, and devotional thought, and yet the process of canonization – both religious and literary – had only just begun.¹²⁵ To cite just one example of how the process of canonization was getting underway, it appears that prior to the mid-seventeenth century, most religious communities associated with the devotional movement of *bhakti*, despite having divergent ideological orientations, tended to circulate and perform many of the same hymns and sayings, or hymns and sayings from a common set of saint-poets.¹²⁶ This would change over

period is not far off. "Poets, Sants and Warriors: The Dadu Panth, Religious Change and Identity Formation in Jaipur State Circa 1562-1860 CE," (dissertation, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 2002) 16-17.

¹²⁴ On the process of literization of vernacular languages, see Pollock, *Language of the Gods*, 298.

¹²⁵ On the history of Hindi’s ‘beginnings’ and the establishment of Hindi as a language capable of carrying literary and scientific discourse, see Busch, *Poetry of Kings*, particularly Chapter One, “Keshavdas of Orchha,” 23-64; R.S. McGregor, *Hindi Literature from Its Beginnings to the Nineteenth Century* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1984) 10-44, 118-129.

¹²⁶ Tyler Williams, "Bhakti Kāvya Meṁ Nirguṇ-Saguṇ Vibhājan Kā Aitihāsik Adhyayan—A Historical Study of the Nirguṇ-Saguṇ Distinction in Bhakti Poetry" (M.Phil. dissertation, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 2007) 44-61.

the seventeenth century as sectarian identities became refined and manuscripts came to play the role of written scripture rather than simply *aides-mémoire*. This is one among several reasons that looking closely at the manuscript record for this period has the potential to shed new light on a later but nevertheless important moment in the process of vernacularization.

Yet the purpose of this chapter is not simply to recapitulate what happened in Hindi literary culture up to 1600 CE, but also to throw new light on that history by approaching it from a slightly different angle, an angle that highlights different modes of oral-literate production, writing activity, and manuscripts. By using the phenomenon of writing and literization (as opposed to, say, language or genre) as its entry point into literary history and its organizing framework, the narrative in the following pages throws into relief commonalities and differences between various textual traditions that are not otherwise easily seen. It is not intended to negate the findings of literary histories of Hindi which shine their spotlight from the angles of more traditional criteria like literary dialect or textual genre, but rather to shift the positioning of that spotlight to reveal what was hidden in the shadows.¹²⁷ One of the things revealed in the process is that there were multiple vernacular manuscript cultures at work in fourteenth- through sixteenth- century North India, and the distinctions between these cultures do not necessarily correspond to generic distinctions that have typically been employed in Hindi literary history like *rīti* and *bhakti*, or *nirgun* and *sagun*.¹²⁸ It also reveals some aspects of the history of vernacularization in Hindi that distinguish it from that of other South Asian languages, in particular the large

¹²⁷ Ramchandra Shukla, for example, uses literary genre and ideological/theological orientation as criteria for organizing the material of Hindi's archive; thus periods are divided into the *vīr gāthā kāl* (period of heroic ballad), *bhakti kāl* (period of devotion), etc. R.S. McGregor deals with the literary dialects of Brajbhasha, Avadhi and Khari Boli as separate traditions; his approach is dealt with in the discussion of method below.

¹²⁸ See Chapter One for a discussion and critique of these categories as used in Hindi literary historiography.

role played by devotional composers and audiences in driving the process of vernacularization, a phenomenon which was partly a result of the encounter between Islamicate and Indic political and devotional traditions. Finally, by putting the question of the relationship between orality and literacy first, it complicates the characterization of *nirgun sant* devotional traditions as anti-scholastic and antagonistic toward writing, showing how literacy and certain types of writing activity were present in them from early on in their formation, even while these traditions critiqued the asymmetries of power that were expressed through and perpetuated by the practice of writing.¹²⁹

As the discussion above suggests, not one but rather multiple writing cultures developed in North India, each with a distinct manuscript culture. It may be helpful to distinguish between four different arenas of literization in the late medieval/early modern North; these arenas are not geographically or even linguistically distinct, but are instead distinguished primarily by their respective modes of literary and intellectual production. The first is the Islamicate intellectual community that came to stretch from Sindh to Avadh and consisted primarily of Sufi practitioners, but also included Islamicate court poets and non-Sufi religious intellectuals. The second is constituted by the Rajput courts of Bundelkhand in the sixteenth century, and the Rajput courts of central and western India from the 16th century.¹³⁰ The third area is constituted by the *sagun* Vaishnava groups of the

¹²⁹ Another alternative method of writing the history of Hindi that emphasizes the nuances of writing culture has been proposed by Francesca Orsini, who stresses the need to approach the archive in the manner of multilingual literary history, attempting to connect different elements rather than isolate them. Orsini, “How to Do Multilingual Literary History?” esp. 242-43.

¹³⁰ This is not to suggest a seamless continuity between the literary and inscriptional activity of the Bundelas and that of the Rajputs in Rajasthan; indeed, as Dirk Kolff has shown, a wide political and cultural gap separated the Rajasthani Rajputs from their Bundela counterparts. *Naukar, Rajput, and Sepoy: The Ethnohistory of the Military Labour Market in Hindustan, 1450-1850* (New York: Cambridge University Press,

Braj region (as well as their centers in Bengal, Rajasthan and elsewhere), which were religious in orientation but also instrumental in the formation of broader literary and aesthetic norms.¹³¹ The fourth is made up of the *nirgun* bhakti-oriented saint traditions spread across modern-day Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, which includes groups like the Kabir Panth, Dadu Panth, and Niranjani Sampraday, and even Sikh tradition, and which have typically been characterized as non-literate and anti-scholastic in character.¹³² (As we will see, however, the situation was more complicated.) Each of these four constituted a network in which texts were created and circulated, and in which the work of literization was pursued in a number of different of ways, producing a variety of written artifacts: processes such as transcription, narrativization, original composition, and anthologization produced a variety of objects such as notebooks, digests, pamphlets, and codex ‘books’.¹³³

While this schema owes much to the histories of Hindi constructed by R.S. McGregor and Ramchandra Shukla, it also departs from them in critical respects.¹³⁴ Whereas McGregor traces the development of Avadhi, Brajbhasha, and Hindavi as distinct

2002), 117-58. However, the manuscript cultures of these two groups and the political programs behind them are similar enough to warrant their classification as one *type* of manuscript culture. The Bundelas will be dealt with later in this chapter while the Rajputs of Rajasthan will receive extended treatment in Chapter Four.

¹³¹ On the role of the poets of Braj in the formation of Hindi literary culture, see R.S. McGregor, "The Progress of Hindi, Part 1: The Development of a Transregional Idiom," in Sheldon Pollock (ed.) *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 919-26; Shukla, *Hindī Sāhitya Kā Itihās*, 103-131.

¹³² See the discussion of *nirgun* *sants* in Hindi literary historiography in Chapter One. For the idea of the *sants* as a trans-regional tradition that includes the Sikhs, see Schomer, *The Sants*, particularly the essays by Charlotte Vaudeville and by W.H. McLeod.

¹³³ An admitted shortcoming of this four-part division is that it does not sufficiently take into account the contributions of Jain communities, which tended to be very literate and often quite prolific in the production of manuscripts. Losty, *Art of the Book*, 44-45. John Cort, "The Jain Knowledge Warehouses: Traditional Libraries in India," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 115, no. 1 (Jan-Mar 1995): 10. The Jains will be mentioned occasionally in the discussion that follows, but a lengthier investigation Jain manuscript culture and its relationship with the manuscript cultures of other groups is still required.

¹³⁴ McGregor, *Hindi Literature From its Beginnings to the Nineteenth Century* and "The Progress of Hindi"; Shukla, *Hindī Sāhitya Kā Itihās*.

literary languages, here we are more concerned with describing processes of literization, which rarely follow linguistic boundaries (in fact, they usually cross them).¹³⁵ Thus where McGregor focuses on regional literary production, the analysis that follows tends to highlight inter-regional networks because, after all, it was writing and manuscripts that helped texts travel beyond their immediate place and time. Similarly, whereas Shukla's positivist history places great emphasis upon generic distinctions—*vīragāthā* (songs of heroism), *bhakti* (devotion), *rīti-granth* (poetic handbook), etc.—our survey of writing practices and manuscript cultures will tend to cut across such distinctions, just as manuscripts of this period could, and did, contain texts of multiple genres.¹³⁶

Finally, the narrative that follows attempts to show that religion did play a role in the process of literization of Hindi, although that role could vary greatly depending on the social and political context. In the case of Hindi, the contributions of both devotional and more 'secular' courtly spheres were more synchronous and equal than in some other South Asian languages; indeed, the findings below suggest that it was their *interaction*, rather than developments in either one by itself, that pushed the process of vernacularization forward.

Vernacularization in the midst of political and cultural change

The history of Hindi in the second millennium—its initial exclusion from the world of the written, its commitment to writing, and its gradual fashioning as a language of literary and intellectual exchange—both conforms to the general model of vernacularization in

¹³⁵ See his tripartite organization of Hindi into Avadhi, Brajbhasha and Khari Boli in "The Progress of Hindi."

¹³⁶ For Shukla's scheme of periodization, see "Kāl vibhājan" and his introductions to the *bhakti-kāl* and *rīti-kāl* in *Hindī Sāhitya Kā Itihās*, xxix, 39-48, 158-164.

South Asia as described by Pollock while also differing in particulars from the histories of other South Asian languages.¹³⁷ What makes the historical trajectory of Hindi unique, even while the socio-political forces that propelled it forward were held in common with languages like Bengali, Marathi, Kannada, and Tamil? To answer this question, it is necessary to look closely at practices of writing, literacy, and what remains of the manuscript record since, as Pollock notes, “what was constituted as the literary in South Asia was profoundly shaped by written textuality— and... this alone makes it possible for us to know this history.”¹³⁸ Some of the crucial moments in this history for Hindi take place between the two processes, distinct but intertwined, that Pollock terms literization and literarization.¹³⁹ In South Asia, the former was usually inaugurated by the use of the vernacular for documentary purposes; the latter involve fashioning the vernaculars as a medium of intellectual production, particularly literary production—a ‘workly’ language.¹⁴⁰ Both were essential to vernacularization, the process through which a vernacular like Hindi could be established as a language of literature (or of scripture, as was the case for Tulsidas’s *Rāmcaritmānas*, the hymns of the Sikh gurus, and the hymns and sayings of the Niranjani saints, as we shall see). In between the initial commitment of the vernacular to writing and its fashioning as a workly language, however, lies a chronological and ideological gap, a space of contingency: even if a language like Hindi is committed to writing, it is not inevitable that it will come to be established as a literary language.¹⁴¹ This

¹³⁷ On the application of Pollock’s model of vernacularization to the history of Hindi, including areas where Hindi escapes that model, see Busch, “Hindi Literary Beginnings.”

¹³⁸ Pollock, *Language of the Gods*, 304.

¹³⁹ See the discussion of literization and literarization in Chapter One.

¹⁴⁰ Pollock, *Language of the Gods*, 298.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 309.

is a period characterized by both experimentation and hesitancy, a period that for Hindi approximates to the fourteenth through sixteenth centuries CE.

One major factor which determined the trajectory of Hindi during this dynamic and contingent phase was the encounter between Islamicate and Indic literary, religious, and political cultures, an encounter roughly contemporaneous with the initial literization and literarization of the vernacular in North India.¹⁴² This encounter and exchange (along with other factors) helped to drive vernacularization and shape its distinct course in the region. The post-Ghurid consolidation of North Indian sultanates beginning at the turn of the thirteenth century caused a rupture in the political-cultural dispensation that in turn opened up a unique space in which vernacularization could take place.¹⁴³ This rupture has three aspects: the establishment of new political and religious orders with their own ideologies of language, a new type of exchange between the political and religious spheres, and an urgent need for translation which was not only linguistic in character but also cultural and intellectual. As vernaculars elsewhere in the South Asian subcontinent were supplanting the cosmopolitan language of Sanskrit as the privileged language of *kāvya*, *śāstra*, and other intellectual discourses, in the Gangetic Plain, the matrix of language, culture and power was

¹⁴² That initial literization being the use of the vernacular in stone inscriptions, consistent with documentary impulse—see discussion below. Another important moment of literization for this period is represented by the *Uktivyaktiprakaraṇa* (Treatise on Spoken Language, 12th century CE), a text in Sanskrit which describes an early form of Avadhi (emerging from Kosali), and clearly written from its earliest period of transmission in the Devanagari script. The *Uktivyaktiprakaraṇa* and its position in the development of the written vernacular is discussed below. *Uktivyaktiprakaraṇā* of Jinvijaya Damodar, edited by Suniti Kumar Chatterjee (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1953).

¹⁴³ Pollock has also noted the role that Islamicate and particularly Persianate culture had in determining the trajectory of vernacularization in the North (*Language of the Gods*, 392-94). On the dispensation of culture-power in Sultanate North India, particularly during its formative period in the thirteenth century, see Sunil Kumar, *The Emergence of the Delhi Sultanate, 1192-1286* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2007). For a macro-level history of cultural change across the northern sultanates, see Catherine Asher and Cynthia Talbot, *India before Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 84-114.

being significantly reshaped.¹⁴⁴ As Pollock argues, vernaculars established themselves both by appropriating elements of the superposed, dominant language of Sanskrit, and by distinguishing themselves from it. But in North India, that superposed dominant language and its political-cultural hegemony were being challenged by Islamicate and particularly Persianate forms of cultural power.¹⁴⁵

How did this affect the trajectory of Hindi? A roughly-sketched timeline of the literization of North Indian vernaculars immediately reveals some interesting aspects. The first is the geographical and chronological distribution of inscriptions in the vernacular, the primary evidence on which to assert that it was used as a documentary language prior to its use as language of literature and religious scholarship.¹⁴⁶ A few bilingual inscriptions—containing both Sanskrit and a recognizably New Indo Aryan language, or written in an intermediate language combining elements of both—dating to the twelfth century CE are found in Rajasthan; they mostly record feudal grants and commemorate the enactment of *sati* by royal wives.¹⁴⁷ Similar inscriptions are found around Gwalior in Madhya Pradesh

¹⁴⁴ For example, just south in Maharashtra, the saint Chakradhar (c. 1267) was inaugurating the literary use of Marathi with his *Līlācarit*, while the Jain monk Vajrasensūri (c. 1170) and his disciple Śālibhadra (c. 1185) were establishing Gujarati with their *rāso*-like compositions. Sitamshu Yashashchandra, “From Hemacandra to *Hind Svarāj*: Regions and Power in Gujarati Literary Culture,” in Sheldon Pollock (ed.) *Literary Cultures in History* (Berkeley: University of California, 2003), 574. Shankar Gopal Tupule, *Classical Marāthī Literature: From the Beginning to A.D. 1818* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1979).

¹⁴⁵ On Persian as a cosmopolitan language that connected North India with Central Asia, see Muzaffar Alam, “The Culture and Politics of Persian in Precolonial Hindustan,” in Pollock, *Literary Cultures in History*, 131-198; Rajeev Kinra, “This Noble Science: Indo-Persian Comparative Philology, ca 1000-1800,” in Bronner, Cox and McCrea, *South Asian Texts in History*, 359-85. On the language of culture-power in Central and South Asia during this period and exchange, see Flood, *Objects of Translation*, also his article “Pillars, Palimpsests, and Princely Practices: Translating the Past in Sultanate Delhi,” *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 43 (April 1, 2003): 95–116.

¹⁴⁶ A detailed survey of early inscriptions in languages that approximate Hindi can be found in McGregor, *Hindi Literature from Its Beginnings to the Nineteenth Century*, 3-9.

¹⁴⁷ L.P. Tessitori, “A Progress Report on the Preliminary Work done during the year 1915 in connection with the Proposed Bardic and Historical Survey of Rajputana,” *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 12:1 (1915): 92-107.

(which would, beginning in the fifteenth century, become a center for the production of literary and scholastic works in the emerging dialect of Brajbhasha) from the thirteenth century.¹⁴⁸ Yet the first inscriptions in a language that, to our eyes and ears at least, approximates the literary dialects later referred to as ‘Hindi’ or ‘Hindavi’—itself not an unproblematic connection to make—are found only in 1405 CE (a Tomar inscription near Gwalior) and in 1514 CE (at Damoh in eastern Madhya Pradesh).¹⁴⁹ This comes after significant literary works had already been composed in Hindi (for example by Vishnudas in nearby Gwalior in the fifteenth century and by Maulana Daud in Dalmau during the fourteenth century).¹⁵⁰ The relative paucity of vernacular inscriptions in the intervening two to three centuries makes it difficult for us to sketch a clear chronological progression for Hindi from documentary to literary use. In the case of Rajasthan, the dialect most associated with literary production prior to late sixteenth century, Dingal, is not easily linked to the language of these inscriptions, and as we will see, though it was certainly a poetic language use at Rajput courts, it does not appear to have developed a robust manuscript tradition, and was gradually displaced by Brajbhasha—a very written, very literate tradition by that point—beginning in the late sixteenth century.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ Harihar Niwas Dwivedi, *Gvāliyara Rājya Ke Abhilekha* (Gwalior: Madhya Bharat Puratatva Vibhaga, 1947); Richard Salomon, *Indian Epigraphy: A Guide to the Study of Inscriptions in Sanskrit, Prakrit, and the Other Indo-Aryan Languages* (Cary: Oxford University Press, 1998) 102. McGregor, *Hindi Literature*, 33-38.

¹⁴⁹ Pollock, *Language of the Gods*, 394.

¹⁵⁰ R.S. McGregor, “Viṣṇudās and his Rāmāyan-Kathā,” in Alan W. Entwistle and Carol Salomon (eds.), *Studies in Early Modern Indo-Aryan Languages, Literature and Culture* (Delhi: Manohar, 1999); —, “A Narrative Poet’s View of his Material: Viṣṇudās’s Introduction to his Brajbhāṣā *Pāṇḍav-carit* (AD 1435),” in Mariola Offredi (ed.), *The Banyan Tree*, Vol. 2 (Delhi: Manohar, 2000); Aditya Behl, *Love’s Subtle Magic: An Indian Islamic Literary Tradition, 1379-1545* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

¹⁵¹ Tessitori, “A Progress Report on the Preliminary Work,” 92-107; Ziegler, Norman P. “The Seventeenth Century Chronicles of Mārāvāra: A Study in the Evolution and Use of Oral Traditions in Western India.” *History in Africa* 3 (January 1, 1976): 127–53.

Furthermore, inscriptions in Hindi are not found for this period in the region often referred to as the ‘Hindi heartland,’ the section of the Gangetic plain now mostly occupied by the state of Uttar Pradesh. From the late twelfth century until the arrival of the Mughals in the sixteenth, this area was continuously ruled by Islamicate sultanates in which Persian was the preferred language of political and other documentary inscriptions.¹⁵² However, this is also the location of some of the earliest and most prolific literary production in Hindi, much of which appropriates elements from both Persianate and Indic traditions. Consequently, two of the distinguishing features of Hindi’s history as a written language are that in the geographical-cultural area most associated with its early development as a literary language we see little evidence of a preceding, or even contemporaneous, history of use of the vernacular for documentary purposes, and within this geographical-cultural area, Persian had largely displaced Sanskrit as the cosmopolitan/trans-regional language of political power (though Sanskrit obviously remained the privileged language of various intellectual and religious discourses, and was not totally displaced from the realm of the political—a fact reflected in the patronage of Sanskrit *praśasti*-style *kāvya* by Islamicate rulers).¹⁵³

¹⁵² Though not the only language used for such inscriptions. See Flood, “Pillars, Palimpsests, and Princely Practices”; Anthony Welch, Hussein Keshani, and Alexandra Bain, “Epigraphs, Scripture, and Architecture in the Early Delhi Sultanate.” *Muqarnas* 19 (January 1, 2002): 12–43.

¹⁵³ On Persian and its relationship with the political, see Muzaffar Alam, “The Culture and Politics of Persian,” also his *The Languages of Political Islam: India, 1200–1800* (London: Hurst & Co., 2004). On Sultanate patronage of Sanskrit *kāvya*, see Aparna Kapadia, “The Last Cakravartin? The Gujarat Sultan as ‘Universal King’ in Fifteenth Century Sanskrit Poetry.” *The Medieval History Journal* 16, no. 1 (April 1, 2013): 63–88; Audrey Truscke, “Cosmopolitan Encounters: Sanskrit and Persian at the Mughal Court” (dissertation, Columbia University, 2012). Luther Obrock, “Muslim Mahākāvya,” in Williams, Hawley and Malhotra, *Texts and Traditions in Early Modern North India*, forthcoming.

As we will see shortly, much of this early literary production also took place in the interstices between devotional and courtly literary discourses, specifically within Sufi traditions and by poets that straddled both the world of the *khānqāh* (Sufi hermitage) and the *darbār* (sultanate or regional court).¹⁵⁴ It is in this aspect as well that the history of Hindi differs somewhat from that of other South Asian vernaculars. Pollock asserts that in most cases, the defiant act of writing the vernacular “was not at its core a religiously motivated challenge, as is usually assumed, not was it necessarily demotic, though both demotic and religious associations were sometimes present.”¹⁵⁵ And yet in the case of Hindi, the Muslim literati who were the first to literize and literarize Hindi were “primarily writers associated with Sufi lineages.”¹⁵⁶ How do we account for this without taking recourse to functionalist arguments that explain the use of the vernacular as part of a program of conversion, or to a type of negative logic that suggests Muslim literati developed the vernacular because non-Muslims, being captive to the ideology of Sanskrit, could not?¹⁵⁷ More importantly for this study, what did the centrality of Sufi traditions in the arena of the literization and literarization of Hindi mean for the development of manuscript culture, writing practices, and ideologies of language?

¹⁵⁴ On the position of Persian and vernacular poets in between court and *khānqāh*, see Bruce Lawrence’s introduction in Nizam ad-din Awliya, *Morals for the Heart: Conversations of Shaykh Nizam Ad-Din Awliya Recorded by Amir Hasan Sijzi*, translated by Bruce Lawrence (New York: Paulist Press, 1992) 43-46; Aditya Behl and Simon Weightman, “Introduction,” in Manjhan, *Madhumālātī: An Indian Sufi Romance*, translated by Aditya Behl and Simon Weightman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) xi-xlvi.

¹⁵⁵ Pollock, *Language of the Gods*, 310.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 392-93.

¹⁵⁷ For critiques of the idea of language as a tool of conversion, see Richard Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur, 1300-1700: Social Roles of Sufis in Medieval India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978); Tony Stewart, “In Search of Equivalence: Conceiving Muslim-Hindu Encounter through Translation Theory,” *History of Religions* 40, no. 3 (2001): 27; Shantanu Phukan, “‘Through Throats Where Many Rivers Meet’: The Ecology of Hindi in the World of Persian,” *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 38, no. 33 (2001): 25.

Manuscript culture in Islamicate North India

In the wake of the Ghurid invasions at the turn of the thirteenth century, multiple and competing sultanates were established in the northern part of the subcontinent, collectively governing the area from Gujarat to Bengal, and Punjab to the Deccan. They instituted Islamicate systems of governance and revenue, introducing a new political idiom into northern India.¹⁵⁸ A large influx of intellectuals, artisans, professionals and religious leaders from Central Asia quickly followed, bringing not only Islamic religion and Islamicate culture, but also the languages of Persian, Turkish, and Arabic.¹⁵⁹ As Richard Eaton and Tony Stewart have demonstrated, the cultural encounter between these immigrants and indigenous communities often took place at the frontiers, where the pressing need for ideological survival drove processes of translation: this ‘translation’, in Stewart’s words, was not an act of simple substitution between languages that transparently transmitted ideological content, nor was it a phenomenon of syncretism, in which two objects produced a third.¹⁶⁰ Instead, translation here means a “search for equivalence” in which actors operating in two different conceptual worlds incorporate terms from the other world into their own, gradually building a structure of associations and equivalences between terms and concepts that are never fully integrated into one another. This encounter often took place between recently-arrived Sufis and Indian monastic and ascetic communities, which

¹⁵⁸ Sunil Kumar, “Courts, capitals and kingship: Delhi and its sultans in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries CE,” in Albrecht Fuess and Jan-Peter Hartung (eds.), *Court Cultures in the Muslim World: Seventh to Nineteenth Centuries* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 123-148.

¹⁵⁹ Sunil Kumar, “The Ignored Elites: Turks, Mongols and a Persian Secretarial Class in the Early Delhi Sultanate,” *Modern Asian Studies* 43, no. 01 (2009): 45–77.

¹⁶⁰ Richard Eaton, “Approaches to Conversion,” in Richard Martin, *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1995), 106-203. ———, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204-1760*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). Tony Stewart, “In Search of Equivalence: Conceiving Muslim-Hindu Encounter through Translation Theory,” *History of Religions* 40, no. 3 (2001): 27.

shared ideas about cosmology, theology, metaphysics, and spiritual practice in the frontier lands.¹⁶¹ The area between Nagaur and Jodhpur, where the Niranjani community eventually arose, was one such frontier where the idioms of Sufi and yogic practice were slowly modified in response to one another, and this mingling is reflected in the compositions of Haridas and other saints of the early Niranjani tradition.¹⁶²

Yet if the frontier often provided the space for such encounters, it was urban areas – the city and also the *qasbah* – that became the nodes of a network consisting of literate professionals, intellectuals, poets and religious leaders who operated within royal courts and religious institutions like *madrassahs* and Sufi *khānqāhs*.¹⁶³ Interestingly, it was Sufi *silsilās* (literally ‘chain’; a tradition constituted by an unbroken lineage of teacher and disciple) that became the primary conduit for the exchange of ideas in textual form and the primary driver behind the literization of vernacular languages. In the thirteenth century Sufi *pīrs* of various orders spread out over the region, establishing their respective territories of spiritual influence (*vilāyat*). By the late fourteenth century this network connected cities as distant as Multan, Lahore, Ajodhan (Pakpattan), Ahmadabad, Nagaur, Ajmer, Delhi, Manganpur,

¹⁶¹ See Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier*; Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, Vol. I (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1978); Carl Ernst, *Eternal Garden: Mysticism, History, and Politics at a South Asian Sufi Center*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).

¹⁶² On the history of Sufis in the Nagaur-Ajmer region, see Khalil Tanvir, "Nāgaur Ke Sūfī Aur Unkā Yogadān," in Dattatreya Balakrishna Kshirasagar (ed.) *Nāgaur Kā Rājanītik Evaṃ Sāṃskṛtika Vaibhav* (Jodhpur: Maharaja Mansingh Pustak Prakash, 1998); Mohammad Halim Siddiqui, *Madhyakālīn Nāgaur Kā Itihās, 1206-1752* (Jodhpur: Maharaja Mansingh Pustak Prakash, 2001, 75-109). Mehrdad Shokoohy and Natalie Shokoohy, *Nagaur: Sultanate and Early Mughal History and Architecture of the District of Nagaur, India* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1993). For an example of the influence of Sufi thought on the Niranjanis, see the *Brahmastuti Jog Granth* attributed to Haridas (in Mangaldas (ed.), *Śrī Mahārāj Haridās Jī Kī Vāṇī*, 1-6), which borrows heavily from Sufi terminology in Persian and Arabic.

¹⁶³ On intellectual and religious debates in urban Sultanate North India, see Dipak Kumar Barua, "Libraries in Medieval India," *The Modern Review* 14, no. 679 (July 1963): 5; Sunil Kumar, "Qutb and Modern Memory," in Suvir Kaul (ed.), *The Partitions of Memory: The Afterlife of the Division of India* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 140-82. Welch, "A Medieval Center of Learning in India."

Dalmau, Jaunpur, Daulatabad, Khuldabad, and a host of other towns and *qasbahs*. These Sufis also maintained important ties to urban centers beyond South Asia, particularly the regions of modern-day Iran and Iraq, not to mention sites throughout Afghanistan.¹⁶⁴

Literacy was an important part of Sufi practice at these centers, and networks of influential Sufis and their lay followers circulated written texts quickly around the region, as evinced by references to the popularity of certain compositions in contemporary sources.¹⁶⁵ At the beginning of the sultanate period, these texts were primarily in Persian and Arabic, but when written vernacular compositions began to enter Sufi discourse in the fourteenth (if not the thirteenth) century, they found ready-made channels for their circulation.¹⁶⁶ Though direct interaction with the spiritual guide or *murshid* (preceptor) – in particular listening to his oral instruction – was privileged over learning from written sources (which was generally disparaged), we find frequent references in the *malfūzāt* literature of Sufi orders to the use of written manuscripts in the spiritual education of disciples and also in the practices of accomplished *pīrs*.¹⁶⁷ In this social and ideological context, written material was clearly

¹⁶⁴ Simon Digby, “Sufis and travelers in the early Delhi Sultanate: the Evidence of the Fawā'id al-Fu'ad,” in Attar Singh (ed.), *Socio-Cultural Impact of Islam on India* (Chandigarh: Panjab University, 1976), 171-79. Nile Green, *Making Space: Sufis and Settlers in Early Modern India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012).

¹⁶⁵ Lawrence, “Introduction,” in Awliya, *Morals for the Heart*, 3-4.

¹⁶⁶ A few verses of poetry in Hindi are attributed to Shaikh Hamid ud-din Nagauri of Nagaur (c. 1192-1274); there are some difficulties, however, in ascertaining their authenticity. The same can be said of the verses in ‘Hindavi’ attributed to Amir Khusra of Delhi (1253-1325). McGregor, *Hindi Literature from its Beginnings*, 23-25.

¹⁶⁷ Simon Digby, “Before Timur Came: Provincialization of the Delhi Sultanate through the Fourteenth Century,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 47, no 3 (2004): 319-20. Anecdotes from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries like some of those contained in the *Fawā'id al-Fu'ad* (Morals for the Heart) of Nizam ad-din Awliya make it clear that not only literacy, but also the broad study of both religious and non-religious literature were integral to the training of a Sufi practitioner; see the discussion on practices of reading and writing below. Contrary to the characterization of Sufism as ‘heterodox’ in some modern scholarship, it tended to augment, rather than negate, the principle responsibilities and practices of *sharia*; thus the ‘proper’ reading and pronunciation of Qur'ānic verses was just as important for a Sufi as it was for any other Muslim. See al-Kashani's Persian translation of Suhrawardi's *'Awarif al' ma'arif* in ‘Umar ibn

integral to the circulation of knowledge, but it was *imagined* as having a purely ancillary role to direct oral transmission.

It was the aforementioned *malfūzāt* literature that initiated the transformation of oral discourses into written texts within Sufi communities. The term *malfūzāt* (Arabic, ‘sayings’) refers to the written transcription of dialogues between Sufi a *murshid* and his *murīd* (student). Although precedents existed in the Hadith literature and in Persian collections of sayings by various Sufi *pīrs*, the *malfūzāt* was a truly South Asian invention.¹⁶⁸ The first true *malfūz* text was the *Fuwā’id al-Fu’ad*, composed by Hasan Dihlawi Sijzi from 1308 to 1322 CE. Sijzi was himself a well-respected composer of erotic verse at the courts of Ala al Din Khilji, Mubarak Khilji, Khusrau Khan and Giyath al Din Tuglaq, in addition to being a disciple of Nizam al-Din Awliya, demonstrating in his person the close link between royal courts and Sufi *khānqahs*, between worldly poetry and spiritual discourse. Sijzi recorded his sessions with the shaikh over a period of fourteen years, usually reconstructing the conversations from memory. In the *Fuwā’id al-Fu’ad*, he maintains the dialogical character of the discourse, presenting it as a series of conversations, but at the same time narrativizes the material, giving it an episodic structure and thereby ‘entextualizing’ it – i.e., adding or subtracting linguistic elements to remove the utterances from their immediate spatial-temporal context and allow them to travel in a written form.¹⁶⁹ The *Fuwā’id al-Fu’ad* became a proxy for the *pīr* as the *pīr* came to be understood as being

Muhammad Suhrawardi, *The ’Awārifu-L-Ma’ārif*, translated by H. W. Clarke (Calcutta: Government of India Central Printing Office, 1891).

¹⁶⁸ Ernst, *Eternal Garden*, 63

¹⁶⁹ On the concept of entextualization, see Greg Urban, “Entextualization, Replication and Power” in Michael Silverstein and Greg Urban (eds.), *Natural Histories of Discourse* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); also Karin Barber, “Text and Performance in Africa,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 66, no. 3 (2003): 10

embodied in the text itself, and thus this written book could give those distant from Awliya in time and space access to the Sufi master (the Shaikh even suggested that Sijzi's transcription was like the transcription of the Prophet's words, implicitly comparing the resulting text with the *hadīth* literature).¹⁷⁰ Sijzi's work enjoyed enormous popularity across northern India, and inaugurated a new genre of writing.¹⁷¹

It is in four slightly later *malfūzāt* (and similar hagiographical and logion texts about Sufi saints) that we find some of the earliest written traces of the northern vernaculars known as Hindavi.¹⁷² In the case of all four, verses in "Hindavi" are inserted into Persian prose in order to illustrate or buttress arguments made in the latter.¹⁷³ The verses themselves are composed in a language that incorporates elements of both *khadī-bolī* (a dialect of Hindi spoken in urban areas of the mid-north) and Punjabi; though their structure and style are drawn directly from Persian models of Sufi poetry, they make use of Indian figures of speech and folk culture to articulate their metaphysical content.¹⁷⁴ When the author, or speaker being quoted, wishes to clarify a point of theology or praxis, he breaks

¹⁷⁰ Ernst, *Eternal Garden*, 67, 83.

¹⁷¹ Similar compilations of dialogues were composed for the Chishti saints Nasir al Din Mahmud Chiragh-i Dihli (d. 1356) and Burhan al Din Ghari'b (d. 1337), and these were followed by a long string of texts that, while claiming to be transcriptions of dialogues, actually tended to be more panegyric in nature. Again, in the case of the *malfūzāt* of Nasir al Din and Burhan al Din, their conversations were transcribed and narrativized by poets who were not only Sufi disciples but also respected poets at local courts. Ernst, *Eternal Garden*, 65.

¹⁷² The first is the *Hidayat al-qulub wa 'inayat 'ullam al-ghuyub* of Mir Hasan, compiled from 1344 to 1367 CE. The second is the *Ghara'ib al-karamat wa 'aja'ib al-mukashafat* of Majd al-Din Kashani, compiled around 1340. The third and fourth are the *Nafai'is al-anfas and Shama'il al-atqiya* of Rukn al-Din Kabir Kashani, the first compiled between 1331 and 1337, and the second compiled around the same time. Interestingly, the only known copies of these texts are found not in the north, but in the Deccan, in the collection of the Chishti community at Khuldabad. For more on this Sufi center established by Burhan al Din Gharib and other Sufis after they moved to the Deccan with Muhammad bin Tughlaq, see Ernst, *Eternal Garden*, 9-117.

¹⁷³ The *Nafai'is al-anfas* refers to the language of one of the quoted verses as 'Hindavī'. Scanned copy of microfilm of manuscript of Nafai'is al-anfas, courtesy of Carl Ernst, folios 190-1.

¹⁷⁴ At least one of these verses can be attributed to Shaikh Farid ud-Din Ganj-i Shakkār, and appears two hundred and fifty years later in the *Ādi Granth* of the Sikh community (Ernst, *Eternal Garden*, 155-56).

out of his didactic prose and utters a verse that neatly articulates the point while also producing an emotional effect in the listener/reader.¹⁷⁵

Literization in this context occurred as the transcription of oral, vernacular poetic utterance and its deployment as ancillary support for a prose discourse in another language, namely Persian, and with it an interesting transformation has taken place. If, based on evidence within the narratives of the *malḡūzāt* themselves, we assume that this poetry was originally performed orally, and that too in the context of *sama* – ‘audition’, the highly codified performance of mystical poetry among Sufis, often accompanied by music, and meant to bring the listener into a state of higher spiritual consciousness – then here it has been removed from its original context and redeployed in a radically different one, as part of a didactic text meant to be read with the eyes, but also recited aloud, both to one’s self and to others.¹⁷⁶ Its written embodiment is a curious mix of oral and literate elements—yet further evidence that the two cannot be so readily compartmentalized: the verses are not visually distinguished from the prose text, mirroring the seamless flow of oral language, but also not replicating the changes in modulation that would signal a shift into quotational utterance during actual speech. Orthographic conventions in the Perso-Arabic script had clearly not been established yet for the Indian vernaculars, and so the alphabetic representation of the Hindavi in the manuscripts is inconsistent in some respects; this would

¹⁷⁵ Shantanu Phukan finds the same phenomenon in his study of manuscripts of the *Padmāvat* from the seventeenth century, which include body text and marginalia in both Persian and Avadhi. Shantanu Phukan, “‘Through Throats Where Many Rivers Meet’: The Ecology of Hindi in the World of Persian.” *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 38, no. 1 (March 1, 2001): 33–58.

¹⁷⁶ This is not to suggest that such poetry was not used to illustrate theological or practical points in oral discussions as well; the nature of its quotation in these written texts, however, is qualitatively different from how it is quoted in spontaneous, oral performance or conversation. (See Barber, “Text and Performance,” on the nature of quotation in oral discourse.)

in turn suggest that the reader would have needed to possess a prior knowledge of both the language and the conventions of Persian poetry in order to properly understand what they encountered visually on the page.¹⁷⁷ Indeed, not only the visual recognition of the graphemes but the oral recitation of their corresponding signs would probably have been necessary to activate the reader's memory, and so 'reading' here would have been a three-step process: visual recognition of the grapheme, oral utterance of the aural sign, and correlation of the aural sign with memory to produce meaning (See Fig. 2.1). This then is one mode of orality-literacy as conceptualized in Chapter One, i.e. a practice of oral performance and its corresponding textual artifact, both being integral to transmission of the text.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ Ernst notices this as well in the various corruptions added by successive copyists. *Eternal Garden*, 166.

¹⁷⁸ It is interesting to note that *Haqaiq-i Hindi*, which we will encounter shortly, and the rise of later Urdu *tazkirahs*, the first collections of Urdu poetry to circulate in written form during the 18th century, share with the Khuldabad texts this multilingual structure in which Hindavi verses are found situated within Persian prose. On *tazkirahs*, see Francis Pritchett, "A Long History of Urdu Culture Part II: Histories, Performances, and Masters," in Pollock, *Literary Cultures in History*, 864-911.

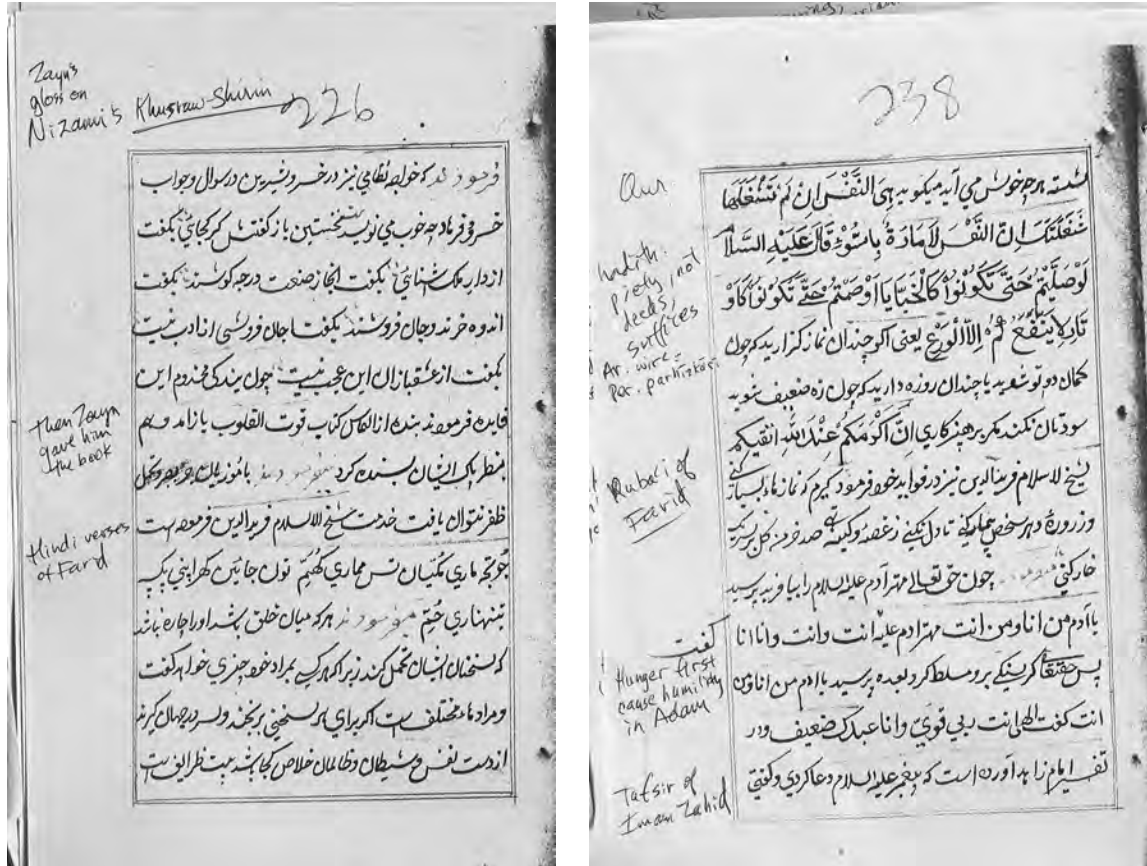


Figure 2.1 Folios from the Khuldabad manuscript of the *Nafa'is al-anfas* of Rukn al-Din Kabir Kashani containing verses attributed to Shaikh Farid. Courtesy Carl Ernst.

More than just containing some of the earliest written traces of the vernaculars, the *malfūzāt* also reveal important details about practices of reading and writing in the Islamicate religious and intellectual community of North Indian cities and *qasbāhs*. In Sufi *khānqāhs*, manuscripts were copied, corrected, exchanged, and presented as gifts.¹⁷⁹ Personal libraries, and the libraries of *madrassahs*, were highly valued wealth.¹⁸⁰ Written objects – from copies of the Quran to *malfūzāt* and paper talismans – were accorded varying

¹⁷⁹ Awliya, *Morals for the Heart*, 22-23, 26.

¹⁸⁰ The personal library of a Sufi master was sometimes part of the personal effects whose transfer accompanied the transfer of spiritual authority to his successor. On the other hand, some Sufis apparently made their books available to the wider public: we are told that Nizamuddin Awliya allowed the public to consult the books kept at his *khānqāh* in Delhi. Barua, "Libraries in Medieval India," 5.

degrees of sacredness.¹⁸¹ Manuscripts copies of popular compositions, like the *Fuwā'id al-Fu'ad*, proliferated quickly and circulated widely. Debates on points of theology and practices like *sama'* were carried out through pamphlets that circulated in manuscript form.¹⁸² In this manner, intellectual exchange between Sufis, non-Sufi Islamic scholars (particularly *qāzīs*, scholars of jurisprudence) and the court poets who were disciples of Sufi masters often took place through the medium of written manuscripts that circulated between centers as distant as Multan, Nagaur, Delhi and Khuldabad.¹⁸³ It was into this network that manuscripts containing vernacular compositions slowly began to enter and circulate starting in the fourteenth century. It is probably no coincidence that the entrance of these vernacular texts coincided with the composition of the first extended work in Hindi, the *Candāyan* (1379).

The first type of original vernacular composition was the so-called '*prem-ākhyān*', Sufi narrative poems that derived from the Persian *masnavī* genre and incorporated Indic themes and styles into allegories of the soul's relationship with the Divine. As has been demonstrated elsewhere, these romances, composed mainly in the literary dialect of Avadhi, drew heavily from oral genres of poetry and oral folk narratives.¹⁸⁴ However, they are also the earliest extant examples of what is clearly *literate* composition in North Indian vernaculars, in that they contain elements that reflect the literacy of the composer and the

¹⁸¹ On talismans, see Awliya, *Morals for the Heart*, 304.

¹⁸² Awliya, *Morals for the Heart*, 348; Digby, "Before Timur Came," 320.

¹⁸³ On Islamic institutions of learning in urban centers, see Anthony Welch, "A Medieval Center of Learning in India: The Hauz Khas Madrasa in Delhi," *Muqarnas* 13 (January 1, 1996): 165–90.

¹⁸⁴ Thomas De Bruijn, *Ruby in the Dust: Poetry and History in Padmāvat by the South Asian Sufi Poet Muḥammad Jāyasī* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2012). Ramya Sreenivasan, *The Many Lives of a Rajput Queen: Heroic Past in India C. 1500-1900* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007), esp. Chapter Two and Appendix II.

environment in which the text was conceived. The first of these texts is the *Cāndāyan* of Maulana Da'ud, completed at Dalmau in 1379. As Stuart McGregor has pointed out, Da'ud was quite conscious of the novelty of *writing* the vernacular, and that too in the Perso-Arabic (or in his words, 'Turkish') script; he himself remarks upon it, while praising his Sufi *pīr*, Shaikh Zainu'ddin, in the opening verses of the work:¹⁸⁵

Śaikh jainadi haun pathi lāvā
Dharam panthu jihahi pāpu gavāvā

* * *

Ughar nain hiye ujiyāre
Pāyo likh nau akhar kāre

Puni main akhar(i) kī sudh(i) pāī
Turkī likhī likhī hindukī(gī) gaī

Shaikh Jainadi (Zainu'ddin) brought me onto the path
Upon which I have shed my sins

* * *

He opened the eyes of my heart,
And I managed to write the nine black letters.

Then I learned the letters;
Writing in Turkish, I sang in Hinduki.¹⁸⁶

As McGregor notes, in the last line quoted above, the orality of 'Hinduki' is contrasted with Turkish literacy. Da'ud makes a distinction between the realm of sound, in which 'Hinduki'

¹⁸⁵ McGregor, "Progress of Hindi," 916.

¹⁸⁶ Maulana Da'ud, *Cāndāyan*, edited by Mataprasad Gupta (Agra: Pramanika Prakasan, 1967), vv 9.1, 3, 4 (p 8). Because of the critical issue of orthography in texts from this period – particularly in this text – I have compared Gupta's text with that edited by Muhammad Ansarullah, *Cāndāyan* (Patna: Idera-i Tahaqiqat-i Urdu), 16.

is sung, and the realm of writing, which is the domain of ‘Turki’ – i.e. the Islamicate languages of North India, Persian, Arabic and Turkish, and the Perso-Arabic writing system. The ‘letters’ that he describes himself as having learned from the Shaikh are no doubt the letters of the Perso-Arabic alphabet, but the term that he uses for them is not *huruf* (from Arabic) but *akhar*, an Indic, *tadbhav* word derived from the Sanskrit *akṣara* (lit. ‘imperishable’, i.e., letter or sound).¹⁸⁷ This is in consonance with the rest of the work, which employs relatively little Perso-Arabic vocabulary. Nevertheless, *akhar* carries with it a host of associations, not least among them yogic conceptions of sound as a primary medium of spiritual practice and of attaining metaphysical powers.¹⁸⁸ And to what is Da’ud referring when he speaks of the ‘nine black letters’? Gupta suggests that it is a reference to the *kalimah* or *shahada*, the Islamic profession of faith: “*lā ilāha illa’llāh, muhammadun rasūlu’llāh*”. It is more likely, however, that Da’ud is referring to the nine-letter talisman frequently used in Sufi practice that functions as a numeric magic square, an anagrammatic matrix for the production of various auspicious terms, and a matrix of auspicious letters with their corresponding properties:

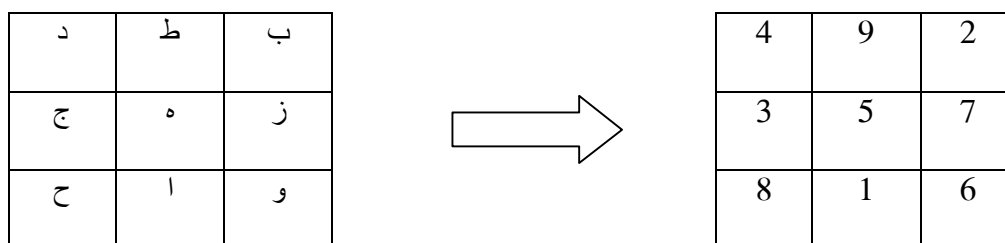


Fig. 2 The nine-cell Islamic magic square and talisman based on tenets of the *ilm ul-huruf*.

¹⁸⁷ On the valence of the term *akṣara* in Indic vernaculars and its importance in the context of vernacularization, see Pollock, *Language of the Gods*, 307-309.

¹⁸⁸ David Gordon White, *The Alchemical Body: Siddha Traditions in Medieval India*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996. 290-94. See also Guy Beck, *Sonic Theology* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993); ———, *Sonic Liturgy: Ritual and Music in Hindu Tradition* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2012).

Such letter mysticism (*ilm ul-huruf*, ‘science of letters’) was practiced in Da’ud’s Sufi tradition, and his cryptic reference to it in the opening of his text tells us that Da’ud’s written letters – including those of his own composition – had a potential power that could be activated by those with the proper knowledge. The orthography of the *Cāndāyan* reveals a certain tentativeness about committing the vernacular to writing: inconsistencies in the way some sounds are represented, ambiguities in the meaning of particular graphemes, and occasional difficulties in discerning metrical consistency (regardless of whether these originate in the composer’s choices or in the decisions taken by later copyists) suggest that conventions were still being developed for visually representing the sound of Indic languages in the Perso-Arabic script.

Finally, the long manuscript tradition for the *Cāndāyan*, which evidently began at the time of its composition, confirms that as much as it was a text intended for oral recitation, *it was also intended to travel in written form*.¹⁸⁹ And travel it did, circulating in Sufi *khānqāhs* and in sultanate and lesser courts across North India (and, notably, beyond the borders of the Avadhi-speaking region).¹⁹⁰ In manuscript form, Da’ud’s *Cāndāyan* was able to participate in the artistic traditions of contemporary courts: as the late Aditya Behl has pointed out, in the *Cāndāyan* became a canvas for the courtly arts of calligraphy and illumination.¹⁹¹ So if the text’s aural existence consisted in taking pleasure in the sound of its oral recitation, in

¹⁸⁹ McGregor, “The Progress of Hindi,” 916.

¹⁹⁰ Aditya Behl, *Love’s Subtle Magic*, edited by Wendy Doniger (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012)

¹⁹¹ Aditya Behl, *Love’s Subtle Magic*, 59-61. For an excellent study of the rich variety of illumination traditions that were applied to Sheikh Manjhan’s *Madhumālatī*, a later Sufi *prem-ākhyān* which continues the tradition initiated by the *Cāndāyan*, see Qamar Adamjee, “Strategies for Visual Narration in the Illustrated Chandayan Manuscripts,” (dissertation, New York University, 2011).

whole or in part, at *khānqāhs*, courts, and even smaller private gatherings, its material existence consisted in savoring its physical and visual aspects: its calligraphy, illumination, illustrations, the texture of the paper, and the richness of the bindings.¹⁹² It was in this way that the text, as written object, also became a symbol and currency of wealth.

Later Sufi romances continued to participate in this double system of circulation and performance: they were performed orally at courts and hospices and pieces of them circulated through oral channels (as evidenced by the inclusion of independent verses from these works among other texts in notebook-like manuscripts); at the same time, they also circulated across great distances in manuscript form and became the object of artistic virtuosity and courtly connoisseurship.¹⁹³ Among these are the *Mṛgāvatī* (1503 CE) of Qutaban, the *Padmāvat* (1540 CE) of Malik Muhammad Jayasi, and the *Madhumālatī* (1545 CE) of Mir Sayyid Manjhan Rajgiri.¹⁹⁴ On the one hand, all three drew from and contributed back to oral folk poetry and narratives in the Avadhi-speaking region. On the other hand, they were also transmitted through stable manuscript traditions and became objects for the elite book arts. Among them the *Madhumālatī* is particularly remarkable

¹⁹² Banarasidas (1586-1643) relates that at one time he would recite Manjhan's *Madhumālatī* and Qutaban's *Mṛgāvatī* to enthusiastic gatherings of friends in Agra. Banarasidas, *Half a Tale: A Study in the Interrelationship between Autobiography and History: The Ardhakathanaka*, edited by Mukund Lath, (Jaipur: Rajasthan Prakrit Bharati Sansthan, 1981), v 335-36. Regarding illustrated manuscripts, art historian Debra Diamond has commented that we are often unaware of the importance and effect of aspects like 'motility' (the reflectiveness of materials like gold and silver leaf) when viewed from different angles, since manuscript folios are typically displayed on walls or in cases, where these effects cannot be observed). The texture and motility of paper, ink and paint were extremely important to patrons of this period. Personal communication, January 29, 2013.

¹⁹³ Sreenivasan, *Many Lives of a Rajput Queen*, 30, 233.

¹⁹⁴ Kutban, *Mṛgāvatī*, in Shiv Gopal Mishra (ed.), *Kutuban Kṛta Mṛgāvatī*, (Prayag: Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, 1963); ———, *The Magic Doe: Qutban Suhravardī's Mirigāvatī: A New Translation*, translated by Aditya Behl, edited by Wendy Doniger (New York : Oxford University Press, 2012). Malik Muhammad Jayasi, *Padmāvat* (Allahabad: Bharati Bhandar, 1963). Mir Syed Manjhan Rajgiri, *Madhumālatī* (Rampur: Rampur Raza Library, 2005); ———, *Madhumālatī: An Indian Sufi Romance*, translated by Aditya Behl and Simon Weightman, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). On the *Padmāvat*, see also de Bruijn, *Ruby in the Dust*, and Sreenivasan, *Many Lives of a Rajput Queen*.

because neither could its structure have been conceived, nor its full meaning understood, without literacy and a visual component. Simon Weightman has shown (indeed in the literal, *visual* sense) that the circular structure of Manjhan’s narrative and the radial symmetry of its episodes is not at all an accident, but a carefully calculated architecture meant to convey a secret symbol.¹⁹⁵ The text is in verse form, and each verse is numbered sequentially; when plotted around the shape of a circle, the verses that contain the critical moments in the narrative perfectly form a complex, *maṇḍala*-like diagram. This diagram simultaneously visualizes tantric/yogic psychology (which Manjhan symbolizes elsewhere in the text as well), Shattari Sufi cosmology (the tradition of which Manjhan was a disciple), the relationship between the soul and God in the more general Sufi worldview, and the stages of spiritual practice and their relationship with one another in the journey of a Sufi adept.¹⁹⁶



Fig. 2.3 An illustrated manuscript of the *Padmāvatī*; in this folio, Nagmati, the first wife of the protagonist, speaks to her parrot.

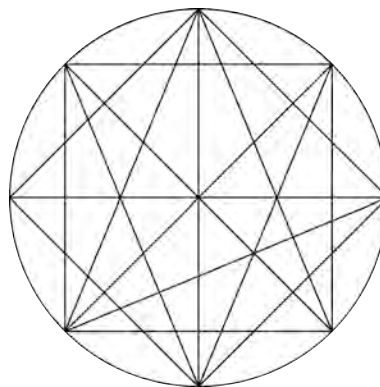


Fig. 2.4 Diagram of the narrative structure of the *Madhumālātī*. Each point corresponds to an interval in its 539 verses. Courtesy Simon Weightman.

¹⁹⁵ Simon Weightman, “Afterword,” in Manjhan, *Madhumālātī: An Indian Sufi Romance*, 230-41.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

Prem-ākhyāns are not the only genre in which we find traces of experimentation with the new possibilities offered by writing the vernacular. Jayasi, whose allegorical romance *Padmāvat* is mentioned above, also penned an alphabetic poem, the *Akharāvaṭ* (latest 1505 CE), in which he gives a brief description of creation and the history of humanity.¹⁹⁷ Jayasi takes his basic theological outline from the Quran and the broader Islamic tradition, but the poem is also full of Indic religious terminology and concepts, including the deities Brahma, Shiva and Vishnu.¹⁹⁸ The form of his poem is also hybrid: framed as a dialogue between *pīr* and disciple, it is also a *kakaharā*, an alphabetic poem in which each verse begins with a letter of the alphabet.¹⁹⁹ This alphabet, however, is not that of the Perso-Arabic script, but rather that of the North Indian Indic scripts, including Devanagari, and the style is consistent with the conventions of the Indic *kakaharā* genre.²⁰⁰ This in itself does not establish the ‘literate’ nature of the work, but rather is an example of how muddy the waters of the oral-literate distinction are: it appears that, although alphabetic poems had been part of the literate and literary tradition of India for centuries, they were also composed and performed by ‘illiterate’ poets and singers—an example of the literate feeding back into the oral.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁷ 1505 CE is the date given in the colophon of the Maner Sharif manuscript (Khuda Bakhsha Library), suggesting that year as the latest in which the *Akharāvaṭ* could have been composed.

¹⁹⁸ Malik Muhammad Jayasi, *Akharāvaṭ*, v 1, in *Jāyasī Granthāvalī: Arthāt Padamāvat, Akharāvaṭ Aur Ākhirī Kalām* edited by Ramchandra Shukla (Kashi: Nagari Pracharini Sabha, 1956, originally 1924).

¹⁹⁹ Specifically, it contains fifty-four verses consisting of one *dohā*, one *sorṭhā*, and seven *arddhaliyās*, except for the last verse, which contains no *arddhaliyās*.

²⁰⁰ The *kakaharā* genre is part of a broader tradition of alphabetic poetry in the subcontinent, which includes *varṇākṣara* in Sanskrit and *cautisa* in Oriya, Bengali, Hindi, Punjabi and Sindhi, and the *paṭī* in Punjabi. See Ali S. Asani, “Sufi Poetry in the Folk Tradition of Indo-Pakistan,” *Religion & Literature* 20, no. 1 (April 1, 1988): 81–94; Debi Pattanayak and Bichhanda Patnaik, “Sanskrit Literary Forms and Oriya Literature,” *Mahfil* 7, no. 3/4 (1971): 229–33; Gurinder Singh Mann, *The Making of Sikh Scripture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) 112.

²⁰¹ On the *kakaharā* as an ‘oral’ tradition of composition and performance, see Scott Marcus, “Parody-Generated Texts: The Process of Composition in ‘Biraha’,” *Asian Music* 26, no. 1 (1994-1995): 95–147.

Alphabetic poems are attributed to ‘illiterate’ poets such as Kabir in addition to literate poets like Guru Nanak

What does establish the importance of literacy to the constitution and reception of the text are particularities of orthography: for example, the use of the grapheme 'ja' in place of 'ya', 'sa' for 'śa', and 'kha' for 'ṣa' reveal a knowledge of contemporary orthographic conventions in Devanagari. Thus when Jayasi orders his verses 'alphabetically', the order reflects the alphabet not as it was spoken, but as it was written. (For example, the verse that should begin with 'ṣa' instead begins "khā khelahu..." which would have been written the same as śā ṣelahu but pronounced differently.)²⁰² Add to this Jayasi's own emphasis on the act of *writing* the letters and *reading* his work, and the literate nature of his endeavor becomes clear:

Kahaum̄ so jñāna kakaharā
Saba ākhara maham̄ lekhī
Paṇḍita paḍa akharāvaṭī
Ṭūṭā jorehu dekhi

Thus I speak knowledge in the form of a *kakaharā*
Writing in each letter
Wise ones, **read/recite** the Akharāvaṭī
Having seen [it], join what is broken (i.e. fix any errors you may find)

The *Akharāvaṭ* reveals just how complex an event of literarization and literarization can be: the composer, fluent in Persian, chooses to compose in the vernacular of Avadhi; though models of alphabetic poetry exist in the Persian tradition (like the *ālīfanāmah*), he chooses to compose in a local genre based on the Indic alphabet; this alphabet reveals slippages between the oral phonemes and their written graphemes; despite this connection of the

(but whose alphabetic poem is conspicuously absent from early manuscripts). *Kakaharās* were also penned poets from much more elite backgrounds, like Vishwanath Singh, king of Riwan. Nagendra, *Hindī Sāhitya Kā Itihās*, 386.

²⁰² In Shukla, *Jāyasī Granthāvalī*, 293.

structure of the poem with the Nagari (or a Nagari-derived) script, we find manuscript copies of this text written in the Perso-Arabic script.²⁰³

The earliest written specimens of the vernacular produced within the Islamicate intellectual and literary sphere of the sultanate world reveal that the process of literization occurred in at least two different types of activities: the first is transcription and quotation, in which utterances in the vernacular were recorded within texts whose primary discursive work took place in the cosmopolitan language of Persian. The second activity through which Hindavi was committed to writing was original composition, in which the composer was not simply transcribing oral discourse (which involved a process of matching up of graphic signifiers to aural signifiers), but creating a written and *literate* work from the very outset.

The transition from the oral to the written was thus never a straight or transparent reproduction of the oral text in graphic form. Committing a text to writing gave it a different ontological and performative existence, and this transformation was heavily influenced by beliefs about the written sign that circulated in sultanate India and the wider Islamicate world as they came into contact with Indic beliefs and practices of writing—beliefs and practices that will be explored in the next section.²⁰⁴ Written language – the material manifestation of the ephemeral utterance – was characterized by a certain sacredness, a metaphysical and often soteriological potential that is difficult for us to imagine in our post-print, post-digital age of infinite reproducibility and un-embodied

²⁰³ Ms. of Maner Sharif *khānqah* library. Shukla, *Jāyasī Granthāvalī*, 3. Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bombay 39, 1-2: 10-40.

²⁰⁴ On the relationships between scripture, writing, inscriptions and architecture in Sultanate India, see Anthony Welch, Hussein Keshani, and Alexandra Bain, “Epigraphs, Scripture, and Architecture in the Early Delhi Sultanate.” *Muqarnas* 19 (January 1, 2002): 12–43.

electronic text. This sacredness originated with the Qur'an, with its central metaphors of Creation as an act of writing and the importance of the divine Word, and extended in varying degrees to other written texts.²⁰⁵ At the very historical moment that the sultanates were established in North India, debates were underway in the Islamic world (including in the Ghurid territories) over the ontological status of written language: was historical Word identical with eternal God?²⁰⁶ Did its material (i.e. written) form also partake in that eternal, divine essence? Was this divine quality restricted to those words contained in the Qur'an, or did it extend to any text that made use of them, to any object on which they were inscribed? Though these debates among the *ulema* were inconclusive, historical sources reveal that at the level of popular practice, written objects were generally regarded as having a potent transcendental power. From Qur'anic inscriptions on mosques and minars – which have been likened to icons in the Christian religion – to talismans containing surahs, written embodiments of powerful language were believed to partake in the power of the utterance to which they gave form.²⁰⁷ This belief was not restricted to the words of the Qur'an or even to 'canonical' texts: new compositions – be they poetic, eulogistic or supplicatory – could be determined to have metaphysical efficacy, and written copies employed for a variety of

²⁰⁵ George Atiyeh, "Introduction," in George Atiyeh (ed.) *The Book in the Islamic World: The Written Word and Communication in the Middle East* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995) xiv; Mohammad Yusuf Siddiq, "Calligraphy and Islamic Culture: Reflections on Some New Epigraphical Discoveries in Gaur and Pandua, Two Early Capitals of Muslim Bengal," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 68, no. 1 (January 1, 2005): 21–58.

²⁰⁶ Finbar Barry Flood, "Islamic Identities and Islamic Art: Inscribing the Qur'an in Twelfth-Century Afghanistan," in Elizabeth Cropper (ed.) *Dialogues in Art History, from Mesopotamian to Modern: Readings for a New Century* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2009), 100; Franz Rosenthal, "Significant Uses of Arabic Writing," *Ars Orientalis* 4 (1961): 9.

²⁰⁷ B.N. Goswamy, *The Word Is Sacred, Sacred Is the Word: The Indian Manuscript Tradition* (New Delhi: Niyogi Books, 2006), 38; Rosenthal, "Significant Uses of Arabic Writing," 17.

palliative and protective uses.²⁰⁸ Thus even vernacular compositions had the potential to become sacred through inscription.

The vernacular composers cited above, and the Sufi orders of which they were members, most certainly participated in these beliefs regarding the written word. The *Fawā'id al-Fu'ad* mentions the practice of writing paper talismans in the Chishti tradition, and the Chishtis and Shattaris both practiced the *ilm ul-haruf* or 'science of letters'.²⁰⁹ The *ilm ul-haruf* attributed particular metaphysical properties to each of the letters of the Arabic alphabet and was at work in the concept of the 'nine black letters' mentioned by Da'ud and the circular structure of Manjhan's *Madhumālatī*. Meanwhile, written texts could take on the spiritual authority of their composers, even in traditions where direct contact with the preceptor was emphasized: as we have seen in the case of the *Fawā'id al-Fu'ad*, a *malfūzāt* was understood to be the embodiment of the *pīr* himself.²¹⁰ By no means did this sacredness extend to all writing, and certainly not all religious writing was considered to be of equal sacredness.²¹¹ Yet it is clear that a belief in *powerful utterance*, whether in spoken or written form, permeated popular Islamic culture.

²⁰⁸ See, for example, Suzanne Stetkevych on the "*Qaṣīdat Al-Burdah*" (Mantle Ode) of Al-Būṣīrī (d. 1294-7), a poetic text that came to be deemed metaphysically potent in both spoken and written forms. Suzanne Stetkevych, "From Text to Talisman: Al-Būṣīrī's "*Qaṣīdat Al-Burdah*" (Mantle Ode) and the Supplicatory Ode." *Journal of Arabic Literature* 37, no. 2 (2006): 45.

²⁰⁹ Awliya, *Morals for the Heart*, 304. Ja'far Sharif, *Qanoon-E-Islam, Or, The Customs of the Moosulmans of India; Comprising a Full and Exact Account of Their Various Rites and Ceremonies, from the Moment of Birth till the Hour of Death* (London: Parbury, Allen, and Co., 1832), 11-12, 137

²¹⁰ Ernst, *Eternal Garden*, 67, 83.

²¹¹ Destruction of written material appears to have been as common in the South Asian Islamic culture context as it was in the wider Islamic world, and sometimes carried important political significance. C.f. Franz Rosenthal, "'Of Many Books There Is No End': The Classical Muslim View," in George Atiyeh, *The Book in the Islamic World: The Written Word and Communication in the Middle East*, edited by George N Atiyeh. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995.

Indic traditions of writing and the question of media change

The Islamicate practices of writing and manuscript culture introduced into North India after 1200 CE did not enter a vacuum—at the time of their arrival there was already a robust and long-standing manuscript culture, and a variety of inscriptional practices in the spheres of architecture, public records, and art objects. Over the previous millennium, the Sanskrit tradition had produced a large and extremely sophisticated body of thought on the nature of language: this thought was distributed across the discourses of *vyākaraṇa* (grammar), *mīmāṃsā* (lit. ‘investigation’, a tradition of hermeneutics), *nyāya* (‘recursion’, roughly analogous to logic) and *alaṅkāra śāstra* (which included the Western categories of poetics and rhetoric). Meanwhile the religious traditions of Shaivism, tantra, and yoga had developed various metaphysics of sound that played a central role in their ritual practices, and some of these ideas were appropriated by emerging bhakti traditions, particularly by those traditions associated with *nirguṇ sant* doctrines.²¹² This thought was reflected in the manuscript practices of the Subcontinent and the relationship between these practices and various modes of oral performance. These traditions were certainly affected by the encounter with Islamicate culture, but the effects of the encounter were not uniform across all of them. Before dealing with each of the three major divisions of Indic manuscript culture – i.e. the Vaishnava manuscript culture of Braj, the courtly manuscript culture of Rajput elites, and the manuscript practices of nirgun saints traditions – it will be helpful to make a few observations regarding media change, literacy, and cultural encounter.

²¹² See David Gordon White, *The Alchemical Body: Siddha Traditions in Medieval India* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996); Hazariprasad Dwivedi, *Nāth Sampradāy* (Banaras: Naivedya Niketan, 1966); ———, *Kabīr* (New Delhi: Vani Prakashan, 2001, originally 1964); Vaudeville, “*Sant Mat*,” 27, 38.

The introduction of Islamicate manuscript culture – in particular the notion of the codex ‘book’ (*kitāb*), the Persian book arts, and new mediums of written communication, notably paper – would eventually change manuscript culture in the Subcontinent, and with it ideology and social epistemology.²¹³ Yet these changes took place very gradually, and very unevenly across different regions, communities, and traditions. As we will see in the case of ‘holy book’ manuscripts in Chapter Five, some of these effects become pronounced only in the seventeenth century, and even then only in select traditions.

Two scholars have recently raised the issue of media change and manuscript culture in early modern India, suggesting possible avenues for further research. The first is Rosalind O’Hanlon, who has pointed out the impact that paper had on textual traditions and their circulation, arguing that the introduction of paper shortly after the establishment of the North Indian sultanates ‘amplified’ textual circulation and led to the flourishing of new genres of texts.²¹⁴ In the North (where it was difficult to grow Palmyra, the source of palm leaves for manuscripts) paper was relatively cheap and easy to produce in comparison to palm leaf, and so the expansion of paper production meant that copies of a text could proliferate, enabling oral performance across greater areas and thus amplifying the text’s transmission. Using the example of *purāṇa* literature among Brahmin communities, O’Hanlon demonstrates how the medium of paper manuscripts made possible extensive debates between authors and groups separated by great distances (and time). Francesca

²¹³ A theoretical discussion of the relationship between change in media, social structure, and social epistemology can be found in the first chapter of Deibert, *Printing, Parchment, Hypermedia*. Deibert stresses that changes are inter-generational: it takes the passing of multiple generations for a new type of media – say vellum, or paper, or radio – to become naturalized, to become so established as part of everyday practice as to appear to be part of a ‘natural’ social order. Deibert, *Printing, Parchment, Hypermedia*, 35.

²¹⁴ Rosalind O’Hanlon, "Performance in a World of Paper: Puranic Histories and Social Communication in Early Modern India," *Past & Present* 219, no. 1 (2013): 40.

Orsini, on the other hand, has emphasized the breadth of communities that participated in this new manuscript culture: in laying out a methodology for approaching the multilingual literary history of the period, she argues that the traditional focus on the production of written texts at only two *loci* – the court and the hermitage or monastery – prevents us from seeing the variety of literate communities – like merchants, scribes, and provincial administrators – who fit into neither category, yet were clearly participating in the manuscript culture of the time, using a variety of scripts and languages.²¹⁵

There is a slight danger, however, in drawing too close a causal relationship between the introduction of new communication media and changes in literary culture, or in reading the bibliophilia and profusion of written documentation of the Mughal period too far back into the sultanate period.²¹⁶ Contemporary sources suggest that, at least in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, manuscripts were not as important in political and religious cultures as they were to become in the late sixteenth century.²¹⁷ The extant manuscripts dating from this period reveal that not nearly as many resources were put toward the book arts as would later be the case in the Mughal period, an impression confirmed by the relative lack of symbolic or monetary importance accorded to books in the aforementioned contemporary

²¹⁵ Orsini, “How to Do Multilingual History?” 228-37.

²¹⁶ Orsini rightly emphasizes the multilingual nature of literary culture in the sultanate period, but when discussing manuscript culture draws some of her examples from the later Mughal period. Orsini, “How to Do Multilingual History,” 233 n. 29, 234. As we will see in Chapters Four and Five, the Mughal elite did much to establish a new and popular ‘book culture’, and so reading the manuscript practices of the Mughal period onto sultanate material poses some danger of anachronism.

²¹⁷ Persian chronicles from sultanate-era courts, for example, give little attention to manuscripts in comparison to their Mughal-era counterparts, which note the production or exchange of manuscripts as events of significance. C.f. Barani’s *Tarīkh-Ī Feroz-Shāhī*, in Ziya’ al-Din Barani, *The Reign of ‘Alāuddīn Khiljī*, translated by A. R. Fuller and A. Khallaque (Calcutta: Pilgrim Publishers, 1967).

sources.²¹⁸ The change brought about by the introduction of paper actually took centuries to become manifest: when it was ‘introduced’ at the beginning of the thirteenth century by the Ghurid sultanate (it had actually been introduced in the 6th century and again in the 8th century, both times from Tibet to an apparently tepid response), it made relatively little impact on the manuscript traditions of either Indian devotional communities or Hindu royal courts.²¹⁹ Its adoption in the lands from which the Persianate nobility of the sultanate had migrated was still a relatively recent memory, and parchment was still being used in the Ghurid sultanate.²²⁰ As paper was gradually employed by more and more communities in northern India, media like palm leaf and even birch bark continued to be used. In fact, even while paper gradually came to eclipse palm leaf as a writing medium by the fifteenth century in Western India, in other areas of the subcontinent the use of palm leaf actually increased: after being brought to India from eastern Africa in the late twelfth/early thirteenth century, the Palmyra (*borassus flabellifer*) palm proved itself to be a hardier plant and better writing material than the indigenous talipot, and came into wide use by 1500 CE.²²¹

The relationship between media and tradition is always a dialectical one: the effects of introducing a new medium into a society will be mediated by the particularities of the traditions and groups it encounters therein. To again use the ecological metaphor suggested by Diebert, introducing a new medium into the communication environment is like

²¹⁸ Losty, for one, attributes the low level and patronage of book arts to a lack of political stability and state income during the Sayyid and Lodi dynasties. Losty, *Art of the Book*, 39.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

²²⁰ Flood, “Islamic Identities and Islamic Art,” 99.

²²¹ Losty, *Art of the Book*, 6. Elaine Fisher has documented the written exchanges between Nilakantha Dikshita of Madurai and North Indian pandits in the seventeenth century, in which Nilakantha wrote on palm leaves while the North Indian pandits wrote on paper. This exchange vividly illustrates the differences in the dominant writing technologies of north and south India as late as the seventeenth century. Personal communication, October 22nd, 2013.

introducing a new element into an ecosystem, forcing adaptive, evolutionary change: the changed environment will benefit some social groups more and others less, depending on the particular ‘fit’ of the new medium and a group’s ideological and social structure. The process is, in a certain sense, arbitrary – the aforementioned ‘fit’ can never be predicted beforehand, and groups that introduce changes into the communication ecology themselves often lose out in the restructured environment. Approaching media, communication and social change in this manner helps us avoid making broad positivist assumptions about how change in media – like the introduction of paper, or the coming of the concept of the codex book to India – affects social and ideological change.

To return to the case of South Asia and the effect of paper and the Islamicate ‘book,’ the view that emerges from a survey of the existing manuscript record for the thirteenth through early sixteenth centuries is one in which different communities and institutions were affected in different ways and to varying degrees. There is not one manuscript culture, but several. In the case of the Islamicate literary culture described above, it was indeed paper that was most often used for manuscripts, and the codex book, bound at the middle between wood, cardboard, or leather, was a common object.²²² For Vaishnava groups in North India, however, the initial impact of paper was marginal: they continued to write on palm leaf manuscripts into the sixteenth century, and when paper gradually began to replace palm leaf as a writing surface, it was still in the form of *pothīs* – wide-format folios that imitated the archetype of the palm leaf manuscript. Still other groups, including those of *nirgun sant* persuasion, produced copious amounts of paper manuscripts in both *pothī* and

²²² However, other materials were still used, including cloth. For example, the famous *Hamzanāmā* manuscript commissioned by Akbar was, in fact, written and painted on cloth. Losty, *Art of the Book*, 9.

codex format.²²³ Then again, even within a community or tradition, there was also a connection between the type of text, its medium, and its commitment to writing – hymns that are now understood to make up the ‘core’ of *bhakti* tradition do not appear to have been generally written during the pre-Mughal period by any *bhakti* group, but other texts, like theological treatises and hagiographies, certainly were. In regard to media change, the Jain community should also be mentioned—indeed, a detailed study of Jain manuscript culture is badly needed as the Jain poets and copyists (many of them monks or *yatis*), not only at courts like that of Gwalior but also at ‘provincial’ cities like Jaunpur and Nagaur, were prolific in the production of written works and manuscripts. The Jains were perhaps the first Indian community to widely embrace paper, and there is no question that they were the most prolific producers of manuscripts during the sultanate period.²²⁴ In provincial cities as well as larger urban centers Jain monks (often aided by *kāyasthas*, a Hindu caste of scribes) produced large numbers of stereotyped manuscripts, many of them illustrated.²²⁵ The scribal culture of the Jain monastic tradition along with the institution of *jñān bhaṇḍārs* – ‘knowledge warehouses’, in the words of John Cort – was to have a great influence on the Niranjani tradition in particular, as it arose in the middle of a region heavily populated by Jain merchants and administrators.

²²³ The ateliers of Rajasthan’s Rajput courts also produced codex manuscripts in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; see Chapter Five.

²²⁴ Losty, *Art of the Book*, 44; Cort, “Jain Knowledge Warehouses”; Asher and Talbot, *India Before Europe*, 94-96; Norman Brown, *A Descriptive and Illustrated Catalogue of Miniature Paintings of the Jaina Kalpasūtra as Executed in the Early Western Indian Style* (Washington: The Lord Baltimore Press, 1934).

²²⁵ The remarkable similarity between copies of many Jain manuscripts suggests stereotype or mass production. Losty, *Art of the Book in India*, 44-5.

Before we turn to the Niranjani and their nirguni forebears, however, let us first look at the very different culture of writing and manuscripts among their *sagun* brethren, the Vaishnavas of Braj, then the Rajput courts of Central India.

Vaishnava writing in Brajbhasha

The second sphere of textual production in which the vernacular came to be literized and literarized was the realm of the Vaishnava poetry, part of the broader devotional-aesthetic movement known as *bhakti* that began in South India around the tenth century. The true efflorescence of Vaishnava *bhakti* in the North, however, began with the reclamation of Braj as a site of Krishna worship at the turn of the sixteenth century – on the eve of the Mughal conquest – and reached its height during the early years of the Mughal Empire. The entry of the Mughals onto the scene of North India, rather than being disruptive to the developing religious culture of the Braj region, ended up being a tremendous boon, both economically and politically.²²⁶

Even though Braj, and particularly Vrindavan, were doubtless major centers of this emerging Vaishnava literature in the language of Brajbhasha, it would be misleading to focus exclusively on Braj to the exclusion of other centers of literary production and consumption.²²⁷ Like their Sufi counterparts, the saint-poets, religious scholars, and their

²²⁶ Margaret Case (ed.), *Govindadeva: A Dialogue in Stone*, (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts, 1996). Alan Entwistle, *Braj, Centre of Krishna Pilgrimage* (Groningen: E. Forsten, 1987).

²²⁷ It should be noted that the name 'Brajbhasha' was not even in currency in the sixteenth century when the efflorescence of vernacular literary activity began in Braj; rather, it was simply called '*bhākhā*', 'spoken' or vernacular language. The narrow fixation with the Braj region as the site of the emergence and development of Brajbhasha literature has been an enduring legacy of Hindi scholarship; McGregor and Busch do much to expand the focus to other sites like Rajput courts, the Mughal imperial court, and the Mughal nobility. McGregor, "The Progress of Hindi," 917-19; Busch, "Poetry of Kings," 23-201.

audiences were spread out geographically but connected by a network of bodies and texts – it was this network that made manuscripts necessary in the first place, something that is taken for granted in the case of cosmopolitan languages like Sanskrit, but often forgotten in the case of trans-regional vernaculars like Brajhasha. From Puri in the east to Dwarka in the west, the songs, discourses and life stories of the saints of Braj reached their disciples in faraway places, partly through the medium of palm leaf and paper.²²⁸

From the start, the textual traditions of the movement were variegated and complex. Though several of its important composers had ties to royal courts and elite or Brahminical traditions of scholarship, the milieu and ethos of the movement were clearly of popular devotion. The literary environment of Braj (and Banaras, which will figure prominently in this narrative later on) was a multilingual one in which both Sanskrit and *bhāṣā* (vernacular language) were used. Beginning fairly early in the tradition, both poetic and scholastic texts were composed, and, as was so often the case in South Asia, oral and written modes of circulation and performance were intertwined.

Several of the primary actors in the reclamation of Braj came from highly literate backgrounds, both scholarly and courtly. Vallabhacarya – founder of the Pushtimarg and author of several works including the *Subodhinī*, a Sanskrit commentary on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* – came from a well-educated Telugu Brahmin family; Rupa Goswamin – foundational thinker of the Gaudiya Sampraday and author of the *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu*, which re-articulated rasa aesthetic theory in terms of bhakti – and his brother Sanatana had

²²⁸ The communities themselves were quite conscious of their identity as networks, and often imagined and plotted these webs of connection in fascinating ways. See for example Tony Stewart’s study of the Gaudiya *maṇḍala*, “Replicating Vaiṣṇava Worlds: Organizing Devotional Space through the Architectonics of the *Maṇḍala*,” *South Asian History and Culture* 2, no. 2 (2011): 300–336.

studied at the famous educational center of Navadweep and served as officials at the court of Hussain Shah, ruler of Bengal; Hit Harivamsh, *bhāṣā* poet and founder of the Radhavallabhi tradition, was born into a Gauda Brahmin family, the patriarch of which was in the service of a local ruler.²²⁹ Hagiographical and other sources link the poet Hariram Vyas to Madhukar Shah, ruler of Orcha (r. 1554 – 1592), who was himself a *bhakta* and is believed to have possibly been Vyas's patron.²³⁰ The compositions of poets like Hariram Vyas and Nandadas also reveal a high level of literacy, even if few details are known about the authors' backgrounds.²³¹ As these saints, poets and scholars shaped the culture of devotion in Braj, their literacy in not only the vernacular but also Sanskrit (and in the case of the Goswamis, Persian as well) would exert noticeable influence on the textual practices of their various traditions.²³²

The hagiographical literature regarding these and other saints of the Braj Vaishnava movement reveals a world full of manuscripts and written documents. Though the historical

²²⁹ Richard Barz, *The Bhakti Sect of Vallabhācārya* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1992) 22-6; Entwistle, *Braj, Centre of Krishna Pilgrimage*, 143-6. As reported by Uttamadas in his *Hit-caritra* (1683-88 CE), the identity of the ruler or court is not known. For a summary of Uttamadas's text and analysis of the possible identity of the patron of Hit Harivamsh's father, see Rupert Snell, "Introduction," in Hit Harivamsh, *The Eighty-Four Hymns of Hita Harivamsa: An Edition of the Caurasi Pada*, edited and translated by Rupert Snell (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1991) 19-20, 33-4.

²³⁰ Madhukar Shah is eulogized as an exemplary devotee and is catalogued among other great saints in the seminal *Bhaktamāl* (c. 1600 CE) of the Ramanandi poet Nabhadās. Nabhadās, *Bhaktamāl*, in Narendra Jha (ed.) *Bhaktamāl: Pāṭhānuśīlan Evarṇ Vivecan* (Patna: Anupam Prakashan, 1978). The references linking him and Hariram Vyas are suggestive but unfortunately not conclusive; see Heidi Pauwels, *Kṛṣṇa's Round Dance Reconsidered: Hariram Vyas's Hindi Rās-Pañcadhyayī* (Richmond: Curzon, 1996) 6; ———, *In Praise of Holy Men: Hagiographic Poems by and About Hariram Vyas* (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 2002) 19-20; Snell, *The Eighty Four Hymns of Hit Harivamsa*, 307-9. For a description of Madhukar Shah's court and its literary traditions, see Busch, *Poetry of Kings*, 28-9, 46-7.

²³¹ One detail from a later hagiography of Hariram Vyas does, however, does make reference to his literacy and his use of manuscripts. In the *Rasikamāl* (c. 1680) of Uttamadas, one finds the following line: *pothī lāye vana mai lādi hitajī ke darasana kauṇ āye*, "[Hariramvyas] brought his books, and loaded with them arrived in the forest to have *darśan* of Hit Harivamsh." Pauwels, *In Praise of Holy Men*, 302.

²³² On the Goswamis' early participation in Persianate court life, Entwistle, *Braj, Centre of Krishna Pilgrimage*, 146.

veracity of some of the narratives may be questionable, the attention they pay to written manuscripts and communication is telling (even more so if we consider such narratives to be invented), as it reveals the importance of writing in the value system of these traditions. For example, the *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* (c 1600-1612) of Krishnadas Kaviraj relates multiple episodes in which Caitanya’s disciples compose their texts on palm leaves. Consider the following passages from the *Antya Līlā* section of the text:

72. He wrote this *śloka* on a palm leaf, and put it in the roof of his cottage, and Rūpa Goswāmin went to bathe in the sea. At that very time, Prabhu (Caitanya) was coming to meet him, and [looking] up into the roof, he found the *śloka* and began to read it.

* * *

84. One day Rūpa was writing his drama, when Mahāprabhu arrived unexpectedly. 85. In respect both arose and bowed, and embracing them both Prabhu sat down on a seat. 86. Taking a leaf he asked, “What manuscript are you writing?” And when he saw the script, the heart of Prabhu was pleased. Rūpa’s letters were like a string of pearls, and, being charmed, Prabhu raised his hand. Prabhu saw the *śloka* on the leaf, and while reading it he was overcome with *prema* (love).²³³

In these passages Krishnadas evokes a textual world and establishes its authority. Rupa composes his text in writing from the first: not on paper but on palm leaf, the traditional medium of Sanskrit texts. In both passages Caitanya, the supreme authority, reads the letters and is pleased, giving the text his sanction. As Alan Enwistle and Tony Stewart have argued, the flurry of literary activity that occurred in Braj following Caitanya’s death was a conscious attempt to give the fledgling tradition an organized textual foundation that drew

²³³ Edward Dimock and Tony Stewart, *Caitanya Caritāmṛta of Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1999) 785-86.

upon the power of the Sanskritic tradition.²³⁴ This involved a “a complex process of capturing and extending—that is appropriating—the authority of high culture, of revelation, as mediated through Sanskrit, to create a new devotional world.”²³⁵ This authority extended to writing, or to be more exact, the act of writing – in a particular manner that derived from traditions of Sanskrit scholarship and culture – was perceived to be one of the constitutive elements of that authority.²³⁶

The spiritual power and ideological importance of the written texts thus produced are nowhere more dramatically presented than in the *Premavilās* of Nityanand Das (mid-seventeenth century).²³⁷ The text records the journey of three Gaudiya ascetics, Srinivasa, Narottamadasa, and Syamananda, as they conveyed the works of the Goswamis from Braj to Bengal. Their mission was to take the new scriptures and spread them among Caitanya’s followers in Bengal; it is clear from the exhortations of Jiva Goswami (the nephew of Rupa and Sanatana, and head of the community at that time) that it is the ‘books’ (*granth*) that will lead the members of the community in the new system of devotion that has been so carefully constructed:

Take the books of Rupa and make them known throughout Bengal. I can think of no one in this world better suited to the task. Promulgate the righteous life of *dharma* according to the writ of those books – but take care

²³⁴ Enwistle, *Braj, Centre of Krishna Pilgrimage*, 146; Tony Stewart, "One Text from Many: Caitanya Charitāmṛta as 'Classic' and 'Commentary,'" in Winand Callewaert and Rupert Snell (eds.), *According to Tradition: Hagiographical Writing in India* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1994), 233-35.

²³⁵ Stewart, "One Text from Many," 235.

²³⁶ Pollock notes how this authority is reflected in narratives of acts that defy that very authority, particularly in the ubiquitous motif of the vernacular manuscript consigned to water. Pollock, *Language of the Gods*, 309-318.

²³⁷ My analysis here relies heavily upon the partial translation and excellent analysis of the *Premavilās* by Tony Stewart in *The Final Word, The Caitanya Caritamṛta and the Grammar of Religious Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), to date the only study in English to deal with the text in any detail.

to mind your personal obligations and conduct. Instruct everyone according to the strategies I have taught you before...²³⁸

The *Premavilās* makes it clear that the stakes of their mission are extremely high— to lose the books would be to lose the tradition altogether. Yet that is exactly what happens: despite conveying the books in carts with an escort of ten armed men (not unlike the transportation of a royal personage from one place to another), the three monks manage to lose the books to the bandits of an evil king. When they approach the king in his court to reclaim the books, a debate with the king’s pandit ensues, during which Srinivasa reads from one of the manuscripts. Before he even begins to read, the very act of ‘opening’ the manuscript (by untying the ribbon that held the loose folios together) transforms the atmosphere of the gathering and ‘transports’ those assembled. As he reads from the text, the king is transformed from sinner to penitent devotee. In a final demonstration of the power of the book, Srinivasa uses copies of the holy texts to initiate the king into the fold of the Gaudiyas:

Seating the *rājā* next to him, he spoke the name of Hari [Kṛṣṇa], then bestowed on him the *mahāmantra* of the name of Hari. He next touched him with the books and slipped a garland around his neck...²³⁹

In this passage we see two mediums through which spiritual power is exercised and transformation is effected: the oral/aural, through which Srinivasa conveys the syllables of the Gaudiya *mahāmantra*, and the material/written, in the form of the manuscripts with

²³⁸ Nityanand, *Premavilās*, v 12, quoted in Stewart, *The Final Word*, 3.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, v 13, quoted in Stewart, *The Final Word*, 41.

which Srinivasa touches the king.²⁴⁰ A kind of transubstantiation is taking place through both the sound and the physical substance of the Word, of powerful utterance. As Stewart notes, this episode of loss and recovery then becomes the reason for a prolific regime of manuscript copying and distribution within the Gaudiya Sampradaya.²⁴¹

Hagiographies of the Pushtimarg of Vallabhacarya similarly construct the image of a literate environment, even if they do not invoke the idea of sacred writing in the same manner as the Gaudiya texts. The *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan Kī Vārtā*, attributed to Gokulnath (1551-1647) but collated and edited by Hariray (1591-?), contains numerous references to manuscripts and written communication.²⁴² Vallabhacarya himself is described as taking out a book and reading from it when asked by his followers to recite a *prasaṅg* (vignette); Gosaiji counsels a fellow devotee, Govind Dube, by writing a *śloka* on paper and having it sent to him; the Mughal emperor Akbar and his various agents, who make several appearances in the text, carry out much of their business on paper documents such as summons and *farmāns*.²⁴³ (As we shall soon see, this detail had a basis in the historical reality of the Mughal court's relations with the communities of Braj.) The view that obtains from the *vārtās* (accounts) is of an environment in which orality and literacy are intertwined and complementary: texts may be written, but they are 'read out' to an audience (as in the case of Vallabhacarya cited above); their semiotic content may be communicated in written form (as in the case of Gosai ji's *śloka*) but their emotional impact is achieved through oral

²⁴⁰ The *mahāmantra* consists of the names of Krishna and is believed to transform the initiate substantively.

²⁴¹ Stewart, *The Final Word*, 42-3.

²⁴² Barz, *The Bhakti Sect of Vallabhācārya*, 48-9.

²⁴³ Gokulnath, *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan Kī Vārtā*, in Dwarkadas Parikh (ed.), *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan Kī Vārtā (Tīna Janma Kī Līlā Bhāvavā Vālā)* (Mathura: Dwarkadas Parikh, 1960) *vārtā* 37, *prasaṅga* 2, (212). For an example of communication through written letters in the *Vārtā*, see page 216 of the same edition.

recitation. The *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan Kī Vārtā* itself was originally composed and circulated orally, being transcribed and collated not by its primary author Gokulanath but by his grandnephew Hariray.²⁴⁴

What little historical documentation exists for this period would seem to confirm the ubiquity and importance of writing and manuscripts as depicted in the hagiographical material. We get a glimpse of this in a Mughal imperial *farmān* of 1636 CE, which details the items to be inherited by Jiva Goswami from his uncles Rupa and Sanatana. Succession of leadership in communities like the Gaudiya Sampraday was often a contentious affair, and inheritance of the personal property – especially liturgical and ritual items – of the former guru was critical to making claims of authority. In such scenarios, members of communities like the Gaudiyas often appealed to the imperial state to legitimize and safeguard the transfer of this property through imperial decree. In the case of the succession from Rupa and Sanatana to Jiva, the *farmān* specifically states that the books (*postak-hā*) and documents (*tammasuk-hā*) of the former two should be transferred to the latter.²⁴⁵ This decree, issued from the highest authority in the land, reflects the understanding of books as markers of spiritual authority, as vessels of a spiritual power that could be transferred from one holder to another. Traces of more quotidian textual artifacts also exist, such as a letter dating from 1567 CE that appears to have been written by Haridas of the Radhavallabhi community, confirming that written documents played an important role in transmission

²⁴⁴ Barz, *Bhakti Sect of Vallabhacarya*, 102.

²⁴⁵ Irfan Habib, “A Documentary History of the Gosā’ins (Gosvāmīs) of the Caitanya Sect at Vṛndāvana,” in Margaret H. Case (ed.), *Govindadeva: A Dialogue in Stone* (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 1996), 144. It is worth noting that the term for used ‘books’ is ‘*postak*’ from the Sanskrit *pustaka*, but with the Persian plural marker ‘*hā*’ appended. This would suggest recognition that the Indic palm leaf manuscript (or the paper counterpart made to mimic it in size and form) was a discreet written artifact, distinct from the Persian/Arabic *kitāb*.

across networks.²⁴⁶ This is no small detail – the epistolary was a highly-valued rhetorical skill during this period, and became even more so with the rise of Mughal power and the growth of document-based administration.²⁴⁷ Furthermore, as noted in the previous chapter, textual artifacts like letters and *farmāns* were important not simply because of their textual content, but also because they were understood to contain and convey some of the ‘substance’ of authority.²⁴⁸

So far the majority of the manuscripts and documents we’ve considered (with the important exceptions of the *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan Kī Vārtā* and parts of the *Caitanyacaranāmṛta*) are those penned in Sanskrit. What of the vernacular, Brajbhasha? Did the Vaishnava saints’ compositions in *bhākhā* also make it into the realm of the written? The answer is a complicated one, and depends primarily on the *type* of text in question – its genre, its intended audience, its performance tradition, and ultimately its corresponding ‘nature’ as primarily an oral or literate textual creation. I say ‘primarily’ because no text in this place and time could ever be purely ‘oral’ or ‘literate’; each sphere of textual production and performance was always penetrated by the other. Yet we can still make a general distinction about whether a text was more ‘oral’ or more ‘literate’ in terms of its internal structure, logic, and performativity. Therefore the ‘type’ of text – whether it was a hymn, narrative, hagiography, or more scholastic text – was closely related to whether and

²⁴⁶ Ludmila Rosenstein, *The Devotional Poetry of Swami Haridas: A Study of Early Braj Bhasa Verse* (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1997), 9. Ludmila L. Rosenstein, *The Devotional Poetry of Svami Haridas: A Study of Early Braj Bhasa Verse*, Groningen Oriental Studies ; V. 12. (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1997), Book Holdings Information.

²⁴⁷ On the importance of *insha*’ or epistolary in Mughal India, see Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "The Making of a Munshi," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 24, no. 2 (2004): 11.

²⁴⁸ Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 18-9.

how it was committed to writing – i.e., whether it was originally composed in writing, transcribed from oral sources, collated, or anthologized, and how long it took for these processes to occur.

Collective singing of hymns – *bhajan* and *kirtan* – constituted the textual core and ritual and social focal points of the various Vaishnava bhakti communities; yet despite the theoretical likelihood that writing and manuscripts of some kind were at least part of their transmission, evidence of their existence in manuscript form comes surprisingly late. That the poems of Sur, Kumbhandas, Haridas, Hit Harivamsh, Hariram Vyas and other poets associated with Braj devotionalism were composed orally and intended for oral circulation and performance is revealed by the internal structure, ‘sound effects’ and other devices employed by the composers (aspects that we will look at in detail in the context of Haridas Niranjani’s works in Chapter 3). Hagiographies of these saints and poets also depict the composition, sharing, and performance of poems as a largely oral affair, and though the historicity of these narratives can be questioned, the fact that they emphasize the oral nature of composition and circulation in clear contrast to the emphasis on *written* composition and dissemination in the case of the Sanskrit texts cited above is revealing.²⁴⁹

The epistemological and aesthetic world in which these poems did their ‘work’ was fundamentally oral/aural in character: the poets themselves, as well their hagiographers, constantly implore the addressee to ‘listen’, ‘take to heart’ (which means both to internalize

²⁴⁹ This is not to suggest that oral performance was any less important in other settings like royal courts. There to, internal evidence and other documentary sources point to a culture of oral recitation, including musical performance. See Busch, *Poetry of Kings*, particularly Chapter One, “Keshavdas of Orchha.” For instances of the oral performance of poetry in hagiography, see Anantadas, *The Hagiographies of Anantadās: The Bhakti Poets of North India*, edited by Winand M. Callewaert (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2000); Gokulnath, *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan Kī Vārtā*; Jangopal, *Dādū Janm-Līlā*, in Winand Callewaert, *The Hindi Biography of Dadu Dayal* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988).

in terms of behavior but also to memorize the poem's semantic content), and recite the poems to others.²⁵⁰ The poems themselves encode the logic that liberation (*mokṣa*) from the world of *saṃsāra* and from the cycle of birth and death depends upon hearing the praise, stories, or words of the Divine (in this case, most often Krishna or Vishnu) and singing them oneself.²⁵¹ The soteriological efficacy of these texts therefore depended upon their oral performance and aural reception. Closely linked to this belief in the efficacy of the sound of the Lord's names, qualities and deeds is a belief in the palliative effects of 'the company of good people' (*satsaṅg*). The redeeming power of such poetry was multiplied when sung or heard in the company of other believers, as the poets themselves often stress in their compositions.²⁵² These were certainly not 'texts' in the sense suggested by written textual artifacts – i.e. a material object outside of the devotee and constant through time and space. On the contrary, they were 'events', as Kenneth Bryant has so eloquently demonstrated, whose power and urgency were directly linked to their temporal immediacy.²⁵³ Their aesthetic effect as well – and we will see in Chapter Three how essential this aesthetic dimension is to religious experience – could only take place through sound, and in time. Meter, alliteration, rhythm, rhyme and the various 'special effects' crafted by virtuoso poets like those listed above only worked when the poems were recited and experienced out loud.

²⁵⁰ The imperatives *ur dhār* (take to heart), *sun* (listen), *gā* (sing, recite, especially in the case of the God's qualities) are ubiquitous in both Vaishnava and *nirguṇ bhakti* poetry. On the perceived soteriological potency of reciting poetry about God and the saints out loud, see Guy Beck, *Sonic Liturgy: Ritual and Music in Hindu Tradition* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2012), 127-99. ———, *Sonic Theology* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), 183-203. Philip Lutgendorf has suggested that poetry in contexts like that of the Vaishnavas becomes 'self-performing' in the listener/reciter. Philip Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text: Performing the Ramcaritmanas of Tulsidas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991) 37.

²⁵¹ See Phillip Lutgendorf's discussion of *phalśruti* in *The Life of a Text*, 38.

²⁵² See Fn 126 above.

²⁵³ Kenneth Bryant, *Poems to the Child-God: Structures and Strategies in the Poetry of Sūrdās* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 40-2.

Such effects, far from being just ‘window dressing’ (or ‘ornament’, as their Sanskrit term, ‘*alamkāra*’, might accidentally suggest), actually helped to bring about a state of spiritual ecstasy in the devotee (or meditative mood, or feeling of awe, or sense of reverence, etcetera).²⁵⁴ When the devotee participated in singing these songs, the sonic resonance occurring in her/his body and the confluence of her/his voice with the voices of fellow devotees produced other effects, not least of all a sense that one had transcended their own body and melded with a larger, communal being.²⁵⁵

The apparent time lag between the composition and inscription of these hymns suggests that they may have circulated orally for quite some time before being committed to writing, or to be more exact, before being written down *as literature* (*kāvya*). Hagiographic sources, along with manuscripts from Vaishnava groups of Vrindavan that date from the seventeenth century, suggest that written notes of some kind were likely used as aids in oral performance and transmitting the texts.²⁵⁶ (For example, several of the seventeenth-century manuscript collections of verses, organized by *rāg*, suggest that they were following a pre-existing pattern.) Such *aides-mémoire* were probably never determinative of performance, as Novetzke has demonstrated for the tradition of Namdev’s poetry, and as we shall see in

²⁵⁴ Beck, *Sonic Liturgy*, 161. Whitney Sanford has argued that in the poetry of Paramananddas of the Pushtimarg, for example, literary effects are used to help the devotee ‘see’ Krishna and episodes from his life, thus crossing from the mundane world into the eternal world of Braj. Whitney Sanford, *Singing Krishna: Sound Becomes Sight in Paramānand’s Poetry*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008). A similar explanation of how oral devotional poetry constructs a visual icon can be found in Bryant, *Poems to the Child-God*, 72-112.

²⁵⁵ An analysis of this phenomenon in contemporary India can be found in Sudhir Kakar’s essay, “Radhasoami: The Healing Offer,” in John S. Hawley and Vasudha Naryanan, *The Life of Hinduism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006) 185-6.

²⁵⁶ Pauwels, *In Praise of Holy Men*, 24.

the later case of the Niranjani's *guṭakā* manuscripts.²⁵⁷ They were never meant to be 'authoritative' versions, and performers would improvise greatly in the order, wording, and 'stitching together' of individual verse or even entire compositions. This type of notation or transcription was decidedly not literature. The very absence of manuscripts from this period suggest that writing was unimportant *ideologically* even if it was important *in practice*, reminding us of the Sufi example cited earlier in which written notes were ubiquitous but subordinated in importance to the direct teaching of the *pīr* himself. So even if manuscripts were used in this context and later lost, the fact that no organized collection of works—either by a single poet or by multiple poets—comes to us from this period is telling. The actual time it took for these hymns to be written down in a form that was preserved or reproduced varied widely. In the case of some of Surdas's *pad*s, this may only have been a matter of decades; in the case of Hariram Vyas's eulogies, it appears that the better part of a century elapsed.²⁵⁸

The place, time and manner in which these poems were written down *as texts* per say, is equally striking, because it does not appear to be where or by whom we might expect. The earliest written copies of a many Vaishnava poets' compositions may be found not in the sectarian communities that claim spiritual descent from them, nor even in the region of Braj, but far away in the manuscript collections of the ideologically distinct communities of the Sikh tradition and Dadu Panth, beginning in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth

²⁵⁷ Christian Novetzke, *Religion and Public Memory: A Cultural History of Saint Namdev in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008) 99-131.

²⁵⁸ The earliest written record of Sur's poetry is the Fatehpur manuscript of 1582, which has been published as *Pad Sūradāsajī Kā: The Padas of Surdas*, edited by Gopalnarayan Bahura and Kenneth Bryant (Jaipur: Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum, 1984). On the dating of manuscripts of Hariram Vyas's poetry, see Pauwels, *In Praise of Holy Men*, 24-33.

centuries respectively.²⁵⁹ Thus the earliest written copies of poems by Surdas, Paramanandadas (a poet associated with the Pustimarg – though evidence of this association is limited) and Hariram Vyas (not to mention other prominent Vaishnava *bhaktas* like Ramanand) are found in Rajasthani and Punjabi anthologies.²⁶⁰ These anthologies (which will be addressed in Chapter Five) predate any manuscripts containing the works of a single poet, raising the fascinating possibility that literization went hand-in-hand with anthologization or canonization of some sort, and that too in anthologies that tended to include a wide range of saint-poets from different traditions, both Vaishnava and non-Vaishnava.

There are, however, exceptions to this pattern. In the case of the poetry of Hit Harivamsh, for example, the earliest manuscripts of his works are indeed held by the Radhavallabhi community of Vrindavan that he is believed to have founded, and these manuscripts contain compositions by him and no other poet.²⁶¹ The process through which these compositions were organized and canonized seems to have proceeded more quickly than in other communities, and by the eighteenth century at latest his poems (in the form of the *Caurāsī Pad* or ‘Eighty-four Hymns’) had in fact become the central scripture of the sect (though other texts continued to be recognized and performed in the community).²⁶²

²⁵⁹ An important exception is the Fatehpur manuscript (1582), which was inscribed in a courtly context and includes verses by several Vaishnava poets. It is discussed in the next section on courtly manuscript culture.

²⁶⁰ On the earliest known written collections of poetry by these saints, see Winand Callewaert, *The Sarvangi of the Dadupanthi Rajab* (Leuven: Department Orientalistiek, 1978); ———, *Nirguṇ Bhakti Sāgar: Devotional Hindi Literature: A Critical Edition of the Panc-Vani or Five Works of Dadu, Kabir, Namdev, Raidas, Hardas with the Hindi Songs of Gorakhnath and Sundardas* (New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1991). *Srī Guru Granth Sahib: With Complete Index* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1996). Gurinder Singh Mann, *The Goindval Pothis: The Earliest Extant Source of the Sikh Canon* (Cambridge: Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies, Harvard University, 1996).

²⁶¹ Snell, *Eighty Four Hymns of Hit Harivamsa*, 47-77.

²⁶² *Ibid.*

Eventually the other Vaishnava communities of Braj would follow suit, transcribing and anthologizing the compositions of those poets they perceived as constituting their tradition and thus canonizing them, but this occurred later, after the establishment of the Mughal Empire and a new dispensation of writing and book culture, which will be described in Chapter Five.

Vernacular hagiographical texts were similar to hymns in terms of both their epistemological-performative logic and the process through which they became literized. These stories of the saints were performed orally, being recited in the case of prose narratives like the *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan Kī Vārtā* and sung in the case of eulogistic verses such as those composed by Hariram Vyas.²⁶³ Like *bhajan* and *kirtan*, their power to purify a devotee’s heart and release them from the profane world depended upon hearing them performed, taking them to heart, and performing them for others.²⁶⁴ Their eventual commitment to writing appears to have served the purpose of aiding that oral performance, as was the case with hymns. The earliest available manuscript of the *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan Kī Vārtā*, copied in 1640 CE, concludes with just such an injunction, included as part of the colophon: *jo bāñce sune sunāve tākuñ bhagavata smaraṇa* – “those who **read**, listen to, and recite [these stories] remember the saints”.²⁶⁵ This terse statement conveys instructions on how to use the manuscript: the verb *bāñc-* (translated here as ‘read’) is derived from the

²⁶³ Meilu Ho, “Connecting Histories: Liturgical Songs as Classical Compositions in Hindustānī Music,” *Ethnomusicology* 57, no. 2 (May 19, 2013): 207–35. ———, “A True Self Revealed: Song and Play in Pushti Marg Liturgical Service,” *The World of Music* 51, no. 2 (January 1, 2009): 23–43. Pauwels, *In Praise of Holy Men*, 24–34.

²⁶⁴ It should be emphasized that the imperative to recite the tales of saints to others was not simply a practice of proselytization but, as we shall see, a way of amplifying, relaying, and echoing the sound of the qualities and deeds of the saints (and ultimately God) to create a kind of ceaseless echo-chamber of holy sound.

²⁶⁵ MS 9812, Kāmkaraulī Vidhā Vibhāga, Rajasthan. Colophon *saṃvat* 1697 (1640 CE).

Sanskrit *vac-*, to speak, recite; the suggestion then is to read the text *out loud*, to listen to it, to recite it. This manuscript is remarkable in that it was copied not long after the composition of the various narratives that constitute the *Vārtā* – maybe even within the lifetime of the composer, Gokulanath. Yet like the hymns described above, it was transcribed and collated not by the original composer but by someone else, in this case Gokulanath’s grand-nephew Hariray. While it is difficult to say with any certainty why this collection of hagiographical narratives took so much less time to be transcribed than most of the hymns discussed above, it seems likely that the prose character of the texts made them much more susceptible to corruption and loss than the hymns, whose verse structure, rhyme, and musical aspects – rhythm and melody – helped to ensure that they were both remembered and reconstructed accurately.

Not every vernacular text associated with the devotional movement in Braj followed this pattern of oral composition and subsequent written transcription. A few works appear to have been composed in writing, and circulated in manuscript form from very early on (for example, the *Rāmcaritmānas* of Tulsidas, c. 1600). It is probably no coincidence that these poems are more scholastic in nature than the previously mentioned texts, and also participate in the world of *rīti-kāvya* (the highly ornate and scholastic poetry usually associated with royal courts). Among these are the works of Nandadas (died ca. 1600 CE), a gifted poet in Brajbhasha who was also proficient in Sanskrit (though he never composed in it), as attested by several of his trans-creations of Sanskrit works.²⁶⁶ As R.S. McGregor

²⁶⁶ McGregor, “Progress of Hindi” 924-5; ———, *The Round Dance of Krishna, and Uddhav’s Message* (London: Luzac, 1973); see also Nandadas, *Nandadās Granthāvalī*, edited by Babu Vrajaratan (Varanasi: Nagari Pracharini Sabha, 1958).

has pointed out, Nandadas’s very intention in some of these works was to give those illiterate in Sanskrit access to its lexicon: in the opening of his *Anekārthamañjarī* (Bouquet of Multiple Meanings) Nandadas states, “I have intelligently composed examples in the vernacular (*bhākhā*), with clear meanings, for the benefit of those who cannot pronounce Sanskrit and are not proficient in its meaning.”²⁶⁷ His other scholastic works include a lexicon, the *Mānamañjarī* (Bouquet of Synonyms), a theological treatise, the *Siddhāntapañcādhyayī* (Five Studies of Doctrine), and the *Rāsapañcādhyayī*, which is both a translation and commentary on the episode of the tenth book of the *Bhāgavata Purāna* in which Krishna and the gopis perform the *rās* dance. (Nandadas also composed a separate *bhasha* translation of the tenth book – though incomplete – known as the *Bhāṣādaśamaskandh*). His *Rasamañjarī* (Bouquet of Rasa), which treads into the *rīti* territory of *rasa* theory and *nāyikā-bhed* (typology of heroines) while locating it within a general Vaishnava devotionalism, gives explicit instructions for its use, which includes ‘reading’:

*ihi bidhi yaha rasa mañjarī, kahī jathāmati nanda
paḍhata baḍhata ati copa cati, rasamaya sukha kau kanda*

In this manner Nandadas has told of the Bouquet of Rasa
Thus says Nandadas according to the power of his intellect
One **reads/recites** with eager mind and grows

²⁶⁷ Ucāri sakata nahim saṁskṛta, artha jñāna asamartha / tina hita nanda sumati jathā, bhākhā kiyo suātha. Nandadas, *Anekārthamañjarī*, v 3, in *Nandadās Granthāvalī*, 41.

The cloud of happiness consisting of *rasa*²⁶⁸

The *Rāsapañcādhyāyī*, perhaps Nandadas's most famous work, also combines the poetic techniques of *rīti* virtuosity with fervent devotionism, and it too appears to have circulated widely in manuscript form, influencing bhakti poets like Agradas in locales as distant as Rajasthan.²⁶⁹ (We shall have reason to return to Agradas's appropriation of Nandadas's thought, and its influence on the Niranjani, in chapter five). The *Rāsapañcādhyāyī* also draws our attention to two possible reasons for the strongly literate bent of Nandadas's works and their early circulation in manuscript form – reasons that would eventually influence Brajbhasha literary production more generally.

The first of these is the importance of the *purāṇa* tradition in the Vaishnava culture of Braj. As mentioned above, the *Rāsapañcādhyāyī* was a translation of and commentary on the round dance of Krishna and the gopis in the tenth book of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*; Nandadas both expands the poetic description of this dance and gives it a clear theological interpretation.²⁷⁰ The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* was a central text for all fledgling devotional communities in Braj, and many of Nandadas's contemporaries similarly reinterpreted various episodes of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* in their poetry. An important aspect of this Puranic culture in Braj that has yet to be studied, however, is the complex relationship of the oral and the written in the constitution of the *purāṇas* as sacred scriptures and in their

²⁶⁸ Nandadas, *Rasamañjarī*, v 339, in *Nandadās Granthāvalī*, 141.

²⁶⁹ R.S. McGregor, "The *Dhyān Mañjarī* of Agradās," in R.S. McGregor (ed.) *Devotional Literature in South Asia: Current Research, 1985-1988, Papers of the Fourth Conference on Devotional Literature in New Indo-Aryan Languages*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992); also McGregor, "The Progress of Hindi," 924.

²⁷⁰ For more on Nandadas's ideological and aesthetic program in the *Rāsapañcādhyāyī*, see McGregor, *The Round Dance of Krishna*, 39-46.

performance. At the moment when the devotional culture of Braj was taking shape, the writing and copying of the *purāṇas*, not to mention their existence as material text-artifacts, had recently been established as important aspects of their divinity and ritual performance: the *Agni Purāṇa* and *Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, for example, contain clear instructions for copying and disseminating the various *purāṇas* (including the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*) as *dān* (religious gifts), and the spiritual merit to be accrued from such acts.²⁷¹ They also mention the auspicious effects of the presence of a written copy of the *purāṇa* in one's home. References in other contemporary Sanskrit sources to the spiritual merit (*puṇya*) and auspicious effect of copying, gifting, and keeping copies of the *purāṇas* confirm the popularity of these beliefs (which were partly a continuation of earlier practices).²⁷² By the sixteenth century the performance tradition of the *purāṇas* had also developed into a sophisticated mix of the written and oral: recitation from the Sanskrit text would act as the prompt for the ritual reciter to then give a commentary in the vernacular and enter a discussion of other, related texts.²⁷³ References in the hagiographical texts discussed above reveal that reading from and commenting upon sections of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* in this manner was part of the practices of groups like the Vallabhites and Gaudiyas.²⁷⁴ Nandadas's emphasis on the need to read from, recite from, hear, and repeat his works, not to mention

²⁷¹ Mackenzie Brown, "Purāṇa as Scripture: From Sound to Image of the Holy Word in the Hindu Tradition" *History of Religions* 26, no. 1 (Aug 1986): 76-78. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is still worshipped in a manner similar to a religious icon in different parts of India; a particularly beautiful example is found in the Ekaśaraṇ Vaishnava community of Assam. In the many of the Namghars (Name-Houses) of the sect's monasteries, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is placed on a *guru āsana* (throne of the Guru) and worshipped in place of images of the deity. See B.N. Goswamy, *The Word Is Sacred, Sacred Is the Word: The Indian Manuscript Tradition* (New Delhi: Niyogi Books, 2006) 24.

²⁷² Kali Kumar Data, "The Ritual of Manuscripts," *Our Heritage: Bulletin of the Department of Post-Graduate Training and Research, Sanskrit College, Calcutta* 19, no. 1 (1971): 29.

²⁷³ O'Hanlon, "Performance in a World of Paper," 97.

²⁷⁴ See for example the Gokulnath, *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavana Kī Vārtā*, ed. Kamla Shankar Tripathi (Lucknow: Uttar Pradesh Hindi Sansthan, 2008), 55. Entwistle, *Braj, Centre of Krishna Pilgrimage*, 76, 148.

his explicit references to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* as the source of his compositions (he begins the *Rāsapancādhyāyī*, for example, by invoking Śuka, the narrator of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*) suggests that he intended his own poems to be performed and sacralized in the same fashion. Over the next half century, this would indeed become the general model for written sacred texts and their ritual performance in the Vaishnava tradition, beginning with the *Rāmcaritmānas* of Nandadas's contemporary Tulsidas and continuing with works assembled later, like the *Caurāsī Pad* of the Radhavallabi Sampraday. Certain elements of this Puranic model also show up in the sacred books of the Rajasthani sant traditions – the Niranjani Sampraday and the Dadupanth – though on the whole, the concept and place of holy books in those communities contrast markedly with that of the groups in Braj. At the same time, the tenth and eleventh chapters of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* itself become important texts in these sant traditions, but again for reasons very different from those held by the Vaishnava communities of Vrindavan. We shall turn to both of these appropriations of Puranic ritual and content in Chapter Four.

Courtly manuscript traditions in the vernacular

The second aspect to which Nandadas's *Rāsapancādhyāyī* (and several of his other works, especially the aforementioned *Rasamañjarī*) draws our attention is the shadow-like presence of the courtly poetic tradition in these Vaishnava works, and in the manuscript culture in which they eventually circulated. The influence of courtly poetry – its aesthetic values, its scholasticism, its roots in Sanskrit systems of thought – was present from the earliest days of the Braj devotional movement, observable in the biographies of several of

the composers cited above, and in both Sanskrit texts (like the *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu*) and Brajhasha texts (like those of Nandadas, but also the poetry of Hit Harivamsh, Haridas and Hariram Vyas) alike.²⁷⁵ This presence doubtless influenced the manuscript culture of Braj as well. In fact, just as several scholars have pointed out that the distinction between *bhakti* and *rīti* traditions in literary historiography bears little correspondence to actual patterns of literary production and reception in the early modern period, so too the *a priori* assumption of difference in the manuscript cultures of popular devotional and elite courtly realms misses the critical point that it was often manuscripts that helped to join these worlds together.²⁷⁶ While we can indeed observe differences in the manuscript cultures of, say, Braj Vaishnavism, Rajasthani saint communities, and the Rajput courts of Central and Western India – differences that I will take up in Chapters Four and Five – we must also recognize that manuscripts are some of the best evidence we have of which texts moved back and forth between these spheres. Furthermore, a binary distinction between devotional and courtly spheres of manuscript production and consumption ignores the great multiplicity of writers, copyists, and consumers of manuscripts across classes, communities and regions during this period – groups like merchants, *kāyasthas*, petty nobles and local administrators.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁵ David Haberman, "A Selection from the *Bhaktirasamritasindhu* of Rupa Goswamin: The Foundational Emotions (Sthayi-Bhavas)," in Edwin Bryant (ed.) *Krishna: A Sourcebook* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

²⁷⁶ In fact, vernacular works of devotional character, particularly poetry related to Krishna like the *Sūr Sāgar* or Surdas and the *Rasikapriyā* of Keshavdas, became one of the central sites for the development of the book arts in regional courts. Andrew Topsfield, "Court Painting at Udaipur: Art under the Patronage of the Maharanas of Mewar," *Artibus Asiae. Supplementum* 44 (January 1, 2002): 3–327.

²⁷⁷ Some of these groups and their participation in manuscript culture will be addressed in Chapter Four.

For the time being, let us note that the literary world of Vaishnava Braj was contemporaneous with (if not preceded by) the establishment of Brajbhasha as a language of poetry and scholarly discourse at Gwalior in the south, a development that most definitely took place in writing, and in a court where literacy and manuscripts were evidently important. It begins in Gwalior with the poet Manik's Avadhi translation of the Sanskrit *Vetālapañcaviṃśati*, and Vishnudas's Brajbhasha translations of the *Mahābhārata* (*Pāṇḍavacarit*, 1435 CE) and *Rāmāyaṇa* (*Rāmāyaṇakathā*, 1442 CE).²⁷⁸ Though all three show evidence of being intended for oral performance at court, they were also clearly composed (and transmitted) in writing.²⁷⁹ Vishnudas is followed by Keshavdas, a figure who in some ways exemplifies the intertwined nature of devotional and courtly literature in this period. Self-consciously attempting to fashion Brajbhasha as a literary language by bringing in aspects of Sanskrit literary culture, Keshavdas composed *rīti granths* (poetic handbooks) like the *Rasikapriyā* (1591) and *Kavipriyā* (1601) that evince a Vaishnava sensibility while treating the epic of Ram in a sophisticated literary style in his *Rāmacandrikā* (1601).²⁸⁰ Manuscripts of Keshavdas's works, particularly the *Rasikapriyā*, quickly became canvases for the arts of miniature painting and embellishment.²⁸¹ Keshavdas was a contemporary of Indrajit of Orcha, son of the king Madhukar Shah (r. 1554 – 1592), who we encountered earlier as the possible patron of Hariram Vyas (yet

²⁷⁸ McGregor, *Hindi Literature from its Beginnings*, 122; "Viṣṇudās and his Rāmāyan-Kathā," in Alan W. Entwistle and Carol Salomon (eds.), *Studies in Early Modern Indo-Aryan Languages, Literature and Culture* (Delhi: Manohar, 1999); —, "A Narrative Poet's View of his Material: Viṣṇudās's Introduction to his Brajbhāṣā *Pāṇḍav-carit* (AD 1435)," in Mariola Offredi (ed.), *The Banyan Tree*, Vol. 2 (Delhi: Manohar, 2000).

²⁷⁹ They also suggest the possible influence of Apabhramsha versions of the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa* epics by Jain composers in the fifteenth century near Gwalior. McGregor, *Hindi Literature from its Beginnings*, 33.

²⁸⁰ Busch, *Poetry of Kings*, 23-64.

²⁸¹ Busch, *Poetry of Kings*, 37-8.

another link to Braj). Indrajit's *Vivekadīpikā* (c. 1600), a Brajbhasha prose commentary on the *Nītiśataka* and *Vairāgyaśataka* of Bhartrihari shows evidence of a long and relatively stable manuscript tradition.²⁸² It is also notable for being the earliest example of a Brajbhasha commentary on a Sanskrit text, and its occasional use of Sanskrit along with Brajbhasha for its commentarial work anticipates what we find in later commentaries.²⁸³ As we will see in Chapter Four, commentaries in *bhāṣā* were an important genre that has yet to be properly studied, and in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries this genre was one of the primary modes through which poets and scholars built a library of scholarly literature in the vernacular (another modality of superposition). This includes a seventeenth-century Niranjani commentary on the *Vairāgyaśataka*, the same text that Indrajit had chosen to comment on at the turn of the century. Finally, the *Vivekadīpikā* draws our attention to a type of manuscript that has been almost wholly ignored in modern scholarship, that is manuscripts containing two languages, especially Sanskrit and a vernacular, whether Brajbhasha, Marwari or 'Hindavi'. Such manuscripts give us invaluable insight into literacy and reading practices of the period, and are a unique piece of 'material evidence' of the shared history of cosmopolitan and vernacular literatures (as will be discussed in Chapters Four and Five). The manuscript culture and writing and reading practices of Orcha and of the court of Man Singh Kacchwaha at Amer were likely known in Braj from the early days of *bhakti* activity there.²⁸⁴ The consolidation of the Mughal Empire in the mid-sixteenth

²⁸² R.S. McGregor, *The Language of Indrajit of Orchā: A Study of Early Braj Bhāṣā Prose* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1968) 11-15.

²⁸³ Roughly contemporaneous examples include Tulsidas's Sanskrit verses in the opening of his *Rāmcāritmānas*, Keshavdas's frequent use of Sanskrit in his *Vijñānagīt*, and Amrit Rai's use of Sanskrit in his *Mān Carit* (1595).

²⁸⁴ On the relationship between the Kacchwahas and Braj, see Entwistle, *Braj, Centre of Krishna Pilgrimage*.

century, and the establishment of new and close relationships between the Mughal nobility, Rajput rulers and the devotional communities of Braj would have encouraged the spread of Brajbhasha literature to Western India and with it this emerging vernacular manuscript culture.²⁸⁵

Changes in the medium of communication – specifically the introduction of paper into the subcontinent in the early thirteenth century – did not immediately or quickly bring about changes in manuscript culture, or in practices of writing and reading, as the use of palm leaf (and its paper equivalent, the *pothī*) continued well into the seventeenth century.²⁸⁶ On the other hand, Persian sources reflect a recognition of the Indic *pothī* or *pustak* as a distinct written artifact from the Islamicate *kitāb*.²⁸⁷ The use of a shared terminology (*pustak*, *granth*) and a shared format (that of the horizontally-oriented *pothī*) suggests that the Vaishnava culture of Vrindavan and the courtly culture of Gwalior represent not two manuscript cultures, but one, and this manuscript culture had no dearth of sources from which to draw its archetype of the written volume: the *purāṇas* (whose physical form as manuscripts was becoming increasingly important), the epics (which foregrounded the act of transcribing oral speech in their narrative frames), and the iconography of Saraswati herself, the Goddess of Speech, who is depicted by Vishnudas in the opening of his *Pāṇḍavacarit* holding a manuscript.²⁸⁸ This shared manuscript culture is reflected in the

²⁸⁵ This is discussed in greater depth in Chapter Four.

²⁸⁶ B.N. Goswamy, *The Word Is Sacred, Sacred Is the Word: The Indian Manuscript Tradition* (New Delhi: Niyogi Books, 2006). pp 28-35

²⁸⁷ The term *pothī* is closely ‘bound’ with the idea of a palm leaf manuscript: it comes from the Sanskrit *pust-* ‘to bind’ (as does the other word for manuscript, *pustak*), as palm leaf folios were bound together with a cord or string.

²⁸⁸ On the importance of the *purāṇas* as physical manuscripts, see Brown, Mackenzie. ‘Purāṇa as Scripture: From Sound to Image of the Holy Word in the Hindu Tradition’, *History of Religions*, xxvi (1986). 76. This is

Fatehpur Manuscript of 1582 CE, copied by one Ramdas Ratan for Prince Chitarji, son of Narharidas, at Fatehpur, Rajasthan. Containing *pad*s by Surdas, Paramanand, Kanha, Ravidas, and Kabir (none a courtly poet), it is the earliest known copy of many of their works.²⁸⁹ Despite being copied in a courtly milieu, the format of the Fatehpur *pothī* is indistinguishable from that of the small *pothīs* containing the same or similar poets and copied within devotional communities in both Rajasthan and the Braj region in the first half of the seventeenth century.²⁹⁰ It is possible that the manuscript was used for didactic purposes, to teach the son of the local ruler about poetic composition; it is equally possible that it was used in performance, simply for aesthetic enjoyment. In either case, its physical form and other details (including the notation of raga for each *pad*) do not point to differences with the manuscript culture of devotional communities, but rather to commonalities.

There appears to be a connection between the act of translation and the practice of writing. Those texts for which we find the earliest manuscript traditions tend to be those in which translation – in its broadest sense – figures in the creation of the work. This includes Visnudas’s vernacular re-creations of the Sanskrit epics, which were intended to be iconic translations, Nandadas’s *bhāṣā* versions of episodes in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, which used elements of the original for extended theological and poetic description, Keshavdas’s

also taken up by O’Hanlon in “Performance in a World of Paper.” On the image of transcription in the epics and on the image of Saraswati, see Pollock, *Language of the Gods*, 305-6. On the image of Saraswati, see McGregor, *Progress of Hindi*, 918.

²⁸⁹ Published as *The Padas of Surdas*. Edited by Kenneth Bryant and G.N. Bahura. Jaipur: Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum Trust, 1982. The characterization of the setting at Fatehpur as ‘courtly’ should be explained: it was the participation of the house of the local ruler Narhardas in Rajput martial (and material) culture that truly made it courtly in character; in terms of actual wealth or political power, it was quite modest in comparison to the courts of the Kachwahas at Amber and the Rathores at Jodhpur.

²⁹⁰ E.g. RORI JAI 11583 (VS 1693), 15756 (VS 1700).

rendering of the *Rāmāyaṇa* epic (not to mention his trans-creation of poetic concepts from Sanskrit), and Indrajit’s commentaries on Bhartrihari’s philosophical works, which explain the original Sanskrit verses while also offering original intellectual contributions. This bilingualism is another common element shared between the process of literization in the Vaishnava devotional and Rajput courtly spheres (and mirrors the phenomenon of bilingual texts we observed earlier in the Islamicate tradition).

These texts equally suggest a connection between genre and writing. The earliest vernacular texts to be transcribed, if not composed originally in writing, belong to one of several genres: *prabandha kāvya* (longer narrative poetry), like the *Rāsapañcādhyāyī* of Nandadas, and the *Pāṇḍavacarit* and *Rāmāyaṇakathā* of Vishnudas; *lakṣaṇ granth* (poetic handbooks), like the *Rasamañjarī* of Nandadas; *ītkā* (commentary), like the *Vivekadīpikā* of Indrajit, and perhaps also *gadya* (prose), like the *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan Kī Vārtā* of Gokulanath. On the other hand, there does not appear to have been a particularly great importance given to the inscription of *pads* (verse in a variety of meters, generally meant to be sung as part of *bhajan* or *kirtan*), as few early written examples of the *pad* survive. Instead, its primary (though certainly not exclusive) mode of performance and transmission was communal (often antiphonal) singing. Again we see a parallel with the Islamicate manuscript tradition, where the genres of narrative poem – the *masnavī* – occasioned written composition while shorter poems sung in the context of *sama*’ tended to circulate orally for years before being properly transcribed.

Writing, reading and manuscript culture in *nirgun sant* traditions

The poets and traditions being dealt with here under the title of *nirgun* fall within a broad ideological and aesthetic tradition, and most importantly for our purposes here participated in a shared modes or oral performance and manuscript culture. We must be careful when using the term *nirgun* to refer to a tradition, since for early devotional poets in Hindi like Kabir and Ravidas, the term simply signified an aspect of the Divine, not a unified system of thought or a religious aesthetic. (It did eventually take on these connotations, however, in the thought of Sundardas of the Dadu Panth and Tursidas of the Niranjani Sampraday, discussed in Chapters Four and Five.) Yet groups like the Dadu Panth, Niranjani Sampraday, Kabir Panth, as well as smaller movements in Rajasthan like the Ramsnehis and Laldasis, clearly saw saints like Gorakhnath, Kabir, Ravidas, and later Dadu Dayal and Haridas as forming a tradition, even if they did not give that tradition a specific name.²⁹¹ For this reason, and because these devotional communities shared distinct ideological positions, ritual practices, and—importantly for us here—a common writing and manuscript culture, they will be dealt with together so that their commonalities stand out.

In the early twentieth century scholars reconstructed the textual history of these saints and the communities that developed around them not only by collecting material from

²⁹¹ The inclusion of Gorakhnath into the canons of these groups is not uniform or without qualification: although his poems (or rather, poems attributed to him) are part of the canons of these traditions, and although he is praised as an ideal *bhakta* in their poetry (particularly the poetry of Haridas and the Niranjani), his ascetic practice is also depicted as being inferior to the *bhakti* of saints like Kabir (particularly in the *goṣṭhī* or dialogue genre of texts). More work is needed to understand the way in which Gorakh has been appropriated by these traditions, but an excellent analysis of the manner in which his figure has been constructed as antithetical to Vaishnava *bhakti* can be found in 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, no. 4 (October 1, 2010): 509–39, and in Burchett, “Bhakti Religion and Tantric Magic in Mughal India,” 166–76, 238–256.

contemporary oral traditions but also through the collection and study of manuscripts.²⁹² In the case of scholars like Shyamsundar Das, Mataprasad Gupta and Parasnath Tiwari, significant attention was given to textual analysis and understanding manuscript traditions.²⁹³ Nevertheless, literary historians (beginning with Ramchandra Shukla but including such diverse scholars as Parashuram Chaturvedi and Dr. Nagendra) have tended to emphasize oral transmission in these traditions without looking for evidence of practices of writing and literacy.²⁹⁴ This has facilitated a general characterization of these saint poets as being antagonistic toward book-knowledge and anti-scholastic in outlook, a characterization that is encouraged by declarations of illiteracy attributed to the poets themselves and the harsh critiques of book-learning (in the absence of personal experience) that is indeed central to the tradition as a whole.²⁹⁵

However, an overly literal reading of this critique obscures the early presence of writing and literacy in the tradition, a presence confirmed by evidence from within the saints' poetry itself and from hagiographic accounts. It also draws out attention away from the fact that it was these very traditions—particularly the Dadu Panth and Sikh tradition—that were the first to transform the Brajbhasha songs of the saints into scripture proper by anthologizing them and giving them the form of stable text-objects, *granth*s, as opposed to the type of notional inscription and manuscripts used in communal singing that we saw

²⁹² Shyamsundar Das, *Kabīr Granthāvalī* (Kashi: Nagari Pracarini Sabha, 1968); Mataprasad Gupta, *Kabīr Granthāvalī* (Agra: Pramanik Prakashan, 1969); Hazariprasad Dwivedi, *Kabīr: Kabīr Ke Vyaktitva, Sāhitya Aur Darśanik Vicārom Kī Ālocanā*. 9th ed. (New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakshan, 2002, originally 1964).

²⁹³ See their editions of the poetry of Kabir: *Kabīr Granthāvalī* edited by Shyamsundar Das, (Varanasi: Nagari Pracarini Sabha, 1968); *Kabīr-Granthāvalī* edited by Mataprasad Gupta, (Agra: Pramanik Prakashan, 1969); *Kabīr Vāñī Saṅgrah* (Allahabad: Lokbharati Prakashan, 1970).

²⁹⁴ Shukla, *Hindī Sāhitya Kā Itihās*, 46, 50. Parashuram Chaturvedi, *Uttarī Bhārat Kī Sant Paramparā* (Allahabad: Bharati Bhandar, 1965, originally 1951). Nagendra, *Hindī Sāhitya Kā Itihās*, 109.

²⁹⁵ Vaudeville, "Sant Mat," 22-24.

earlier in the case of Vaishnava communities (and will discuss in greater detail in Chapter Three). These *granth*s, like the *Sarvāṅgīs* of the Dadu Panth and *Vāṇī* of the Niranjani Sampraday presented the hymns that they contained as part of a body of liturgy, as we will see in Chapter Five.

Even if some of the early *nirguṇ* saints did not possess the technological knowledge of writing, their compositions evince an intimate acquaintance with writing and manuscript culture. The critical edition of compositions by Kabir, Namdev, Ravidas, Dadu, and Hardas contained in Callewaert's *Nirguṇ Bhakti Sāgar*, for example, contains no less than fifty-six unique references to writing and one hundred and twenty-three references to reading (in addition to references to writing paraphernalia like paper, styluses, *granth*s and *pothīs*).²⁹⁶ More important than the frequency with which they speak of writing though is what they have to say; here we find a more nuanced message than is typically attributed to these iconoclastic saints. Ravidas, for example, packs quite a sophisticated critique into just two lines of a *pad*:

tara tāri apavitra kari manī-ai re jaise kāgarā karata bīcāraṁ
bhagati bhāga-utu likhī-ai tiha ūpare pūjī-ai kari namasakāraṁ²⁹⁷

Having considered the *tāḍī* tree ritually impure,
It is revered as paper when thoughts are placed in it.
And having written words of devotion upon it,
People bow before it and worship it.

²⁹⁶ Callewaert, *Nirguṇ Bhakti Sāgar*. The quantitative analysis was first completed using electronic versions of the texts with the help of Callewaert's word index; I then manually checked the references to remove any duplicates and to verify that the terms *padh-*, *banic-*, etc. actually refer to the act of reading written material, and not just recitation.

²⁹⁷ In Winand Callewaert, *The Life and Works of Raidās* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1992) 203. (Originally recorded in the Sikh *Ādi Granth*, in *rāg malār* 1).

Ravidas's critique is directed against the idea of trans-substantiation, that the profane and ritually impure matter of the *tādī* tree (impure because its juice is a source of liquor) can be transformed into a pure and powerful object simply by changing it into paper and writing upon it. Implicit in this is a critique of writing as an act of authorization, as an act that simultaneously gives authority to utterance and a new ontological status to the written object. For Ravidas, writing neither elevates devotional utterance (*bhagati bhāga-utu*) nor the status of that on which it is inscribed. This verse must also of course be read in the context of Ravidas's identity as a *chamār*, a member of the subaltern leather-working caste. In this reading, if the impure *tādī* tree can be made pure just by inscribing devotional words onto it, then why can't the 'impure' body of Ravidas be made pure through the utterance of devotional words?²⁹⁸

Kabir is famous for attacking the practice of reading to obtain spiritual knowledge, a criticism he levels at practitioners of Islam and Hindu traditions alike. He says ironically of contemporary Sufis—

Bahutaka dekha pīra auliyā paḍai kitāba kurānā
Kai murīda tadavīra batāvai unamaim̐ uhai jo gyānā

I see so many *pīrs* and Awliyas reading/reciting from books and the Qur'an,
And telling so many disciples techniques from the knowledge within them.

Kabir repeatedly emphasizes *anubhav*—direct experience of the Divine—as being essential to the apprehension of knowledge. In contrast to the intellectual activity of reading,

²⁹⁸ Ironically, perhaps, this *pad* comes to us through one of the earliest written records of Ravidas's poetry and a book that is worshipped in just the manner that Ravidas critiques, the *Ādi Granth* of the Sikhs, revealing that the import of Ravidas's words did not prevent people from inscribing them.

anubhav is both cognitive and emotional in nature. What Kabir is attacking is the role of writing and literacy in the monopolization of knowledge, a monopoly that he counters by proposing what Purushottam Agrawal has called an ‘alternative epistemology’ which locates all knowledge within the Self. However, in articulating that epistemology, he invokes the metaphor of writing just as often as he critiques the actual practice of writing. For example, he says:

yahu tana jala-uṃ masi kara-uṃ likha-uṃ rāma kau nā-uṃ
lekhanī kara-uṃ karaṅka kī likhi likhi rāṃma paṭha-uṃ

I shall burn this body and make it into ink,
And write the name of Ram.
I shall make my bones into a pen,
And writing on and on, I shall send it to Ram.

Such beautiful metaphors involving not only writing but reading as well come up repeatedly in Kabir’s poetry. Even if Kabir as an authorial personality claims to be illiterate and conveys distrust of the written dispensation of knowledge in his social context, he (or those who composed in his name) evince some knowledge of literacy: references to the number of *akṣar* (syllables) used in writing the name of deities (“two-and-a-half”) and particular mantras (a blessing of forty-two syllables) suggest a familiarity with the graphemes and ligatures of the Nagari script; this is in addition to frequent references to the fifty-two letters of the alphabet.²⁹⁹ Even if such elements could be passed on through oral transmission, they could only make sense in a social and cultural context of literacy.

²⁹⁹ Kabir, *sākhī* 33.1, *pad* 21, from the *Kabīr Granthāvalī*; *sākhī* 117, *ramainī* 24, 25, from the *Bījak*; In Callewaert, *Nirguṇ Bhakti Sāgar*.

That literate social context is occasionally depicted in the hagiographical texts of *nirguṇ sant* traditions. The *Dādū Janm-Līlā* (c. 1620) of Jangopal, which tells the story of Dadu Dayal and the founding of the Dadu Panth, is particularly noteworthy in this regard. Although Jangopal makes no mention of literacy in the case of Dadu (who is believed to have come from a subaltern caste of cotton-carders), he lists among Dadu's early followers a *kāyasth* (member of the scribal caste) named Ben and a merchant named Mohandas Daftari.³⁰⁰ Mohandas's very appellation suggests his literacy and occupation: a *daftari* (from Persian *daftar* or 'register') was not only an accountant, but was also responsible for ruling (making lines, margins, etc.), binding, and maintaining written registers. References to Mohandas's scribal activities in the *Dādū Janm-Līlā* and elsewhere suggest that one of his duties was to transcribe the sayings and hymns of Dadu as the guru uttered them; he is listed in the *Dādū Janm-Līlā* as one of the disciples that constantly accompanied Dadu:

kesau arū bābā bhagavāṃnūṃ mādhau santadāsa pravāṃnūṃ
sikha mohāna daftarī bāṃcau hari guna likhe re gura sūṃ sāmcau³⁰¹

Keshav, Baba, Bhagvan, Madhav and Santdas, all loyal,
And the disciples Mohan Daftari spoke of the qualities of Hari, writing them
according to the Guru.

Thus even while the allegedly illiterate Dadu composed and recited his hymns and sayings without the aid of writing, writing aided their transmission from the very beginning of the tradition. Jangopal emphasizes the institutionalization of the Dadu Panth as a monastic order within Dadu's lifetime, which strengthens the likelihood that the transcription and

³⁰⁰ Jangopal, *Dādū Janm-Līlā*, vv 14.8,9.

³⁰¹ Jangopal, *Dādū Janm-Līlā*, v 13.25. For more references to Mohandas Daftari, see Swami Narayandas, *Śrī Dādū Panth Paricay* (Jaipur: Dadu Mahasabha, 1978) 680-94; also Monika Horstmann, "Dādūpanthi Anthologies of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," 164-166.

copying activity that would have been necessary to produce the Dadu Panthi anthologies of the early seventeenth centuries began early. The *Dādū Janm-Līlā* is populated with book-carrying *qāzīs*, *farmān*-copying pandits, and letter-writing merchants, and Jangopal makes distinctions between different types of written texts, for example using the term *kateb* (*kitāb*) when referring to the Qur'an.

Transcription and the use of written notes to aid oral performance appear to have been practiced in communities like the Dadu Panth, Niranjani Sampraday, and Sikh tradition from early on in their histories.³⁰² The most common form in which we find such notes is the *guṭakā*, a small-format manuscript that is often bound and which was used by members of these communities like a notebook for recording hymns, sayings of the guru, and any other type of textual or graphic information.³⁰³ This is a practice that they shared with the Vaishnava groups of Braj and their counterparts in North Indian cities like Banaras, Ayodhya, and Jaipur.

However, the Sikhs and Dadu Panthis also appear to been the first to have truly treated these hymns and sayings as scripture, or to have made them such, by collecting them and canonizing them in the form of organized, textually-stable anthologies. The earliest examples of this anthological activity are to be found in the Goindwal Pothis (1572 CE) and the *Ādi Granth* (1604 CE) of the Sikh tradition.³⁰⁴ The *Ādi Granth* in particular bears the hallmarks of a unified textual object: commissioned by Guru Arjun, it organizes its material

³⁰² See Horstmann, “Dādūpanthī Anthologies”; Gurinder Singh Mann, *The Making of Sikh Scripture* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001). The early transcription of poetry in these traditions and their later anthologization is dealt with in detail in Chapter Five.

³⁰³ See Chapter Three.

³⁰⁴ Mann, *The Making of Sikh Scripture*; Pashaura Singh, *The Guru Granth Sahib: Canon, Meaning and Authority* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000). Issues of dating the early *pothīs* of the Sikh tradition are discussed in Chapter Five.

according to thematic and musical rubrics, and makes clear distinctions of status in the canonicity of different poets. (In the case of the Goindwal Pothis, there are traces of the editorial labor involved in making such distinctions, including the excising of entire texts.)³⁰⁵ Almost contemporaneous examples are to be found in the anthologies of the Dadu Panth, including the *Pañc Vāñī* (Five Voices, c. 1600 CE), the *Sarvāṅgī* (Anthology of Themes, c. 1620 CE) of Rajjabdas and the *Sarvāṅgī* (1627 CE) of Gopaldas. Each of these anthologies organizes its material on the basis of author, raga (in the case of *pads* or hymns) and theme (in the case of *sākhis* or sayings), and is framed by introductory verses that praise God, the saints and their devotees. These are not simply notes, but rather were clearly intended to be seen as unified *granths*—the term *granth* suggesting something which has been tied together, which has a discrete identity. These types of manuscripts and the textual communities that they reflect will be discussed in Chapter Five.

Conclusion

This broad survey of the processes through which the vernacular of Hindi was literized from the fourteenth to the turn of the seventeenth century reveals not one but multiple cultures of writing and manuscripts. The contours of these cultures do not correspond any one element: sometimes they cut across language, genre, and social and religious context, at other times they are partly defined by them. What they definitely correspond to are networks of groups, individuals and institutions that produced and circulated them.

³⁰⁵ Gurinder Singh Mann, *The Goindwal Pothis: The Earliest Extant Source of the Sikh Canon* (Cambridge: Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies, Harvard University, 1996), 29-58.

The textual artifacts that they produced tell us something of the variety of oral-literate practices of which they were a part. In the case of Islamicate manuscript culture, the earliest written traces of the vernacular appear as the transcription of poetry and song embedded within prose works in the superposed language of Persian. They are quickly followed by the composition of an entire work in the vernacular (the *Cāndāyan*) which emulates the literary model of Persian and, to a certain extent, Sanskrit; this formally inaugurates not only a genre of poetic narrative but also a rich manuscript tradition for the vernacular in the manner of the Persianate *kitāb*. Within the Vaishnava communities of Braj, the Sanskrit tradition and the figure of the *purāṇas* provided a model not only for poetry but also for manuscript culture, with the earliest written vernacular poetry being the more scholarly works that engaged with the puranic tradition like those of Nandadas (but also prose hagiographical texts like the *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan Kī Vārtā*). The transcription of other vernacular hymns (like those of Surdas) did not apparently produce any textual objects that stood the test of time, suggesting that inscription of such works was notational, and not part of a project of literarizing them. At Rajput courts, on the other hand, the very first experiments with writing the vernacular were full-blown attempts at creating literary and scholastic texts. In the case of literary works like those of Keshavdas, these quickly gave rise to a vernacular manuscript culture that emulated the visual culture and the prestige of the Sanskrit tradition. Finally, the endeavor of *nirguṇ* sant communities to produce scriptural anthologies drew from earlier transcriptions of hymns and sayings, but produced a radically different textual artifact, a vernacular *granth*.

Tyler Williams

Let us now move from a bird's eye view of manuscript culture in North India to a close-up analysis of practices on the ground, in the context of the Niranjani Sampraday of Rajasthan.

Chapter Three

Origins and Orality in the Niranjani Sampraday

This chapter looks closely at certain types of compositions—hymns, sayings, and poems especially oriented toward oral recitation—and the types of manuscripts in which we find them. These are not manuscripts in which the texts ‘circulated,’ but rather manuscripts which were primarily accessories to oral recitation, and which had a particular relationship with the memory of their users. We will be looking at such compositions and manuscripts in the context of the Niranjani community, so it will first be necessary to speak a little bit about who they are, especially since this is the first time their origins and development are being discussed outside of scholarship in Hindi. Consequently, the first part of the chapter is devoted to a brief discussion of what we know about the early Niranjani Sampraday and its beginnings in the seventeenth century. We will then look closely at the figure and poetry of Haridas Niranjani, not only because he is the putative founder and central charismatic figure of the tradition, but also because his poetry reflects salient elements that we see in the Niranjani poets who followed him like Sevadas, Manohardas, and Tursidas. The discussion of the poems themselves will be followed by a consideration of the manuscripts in which his compositions are found, because these too are representative of a certain type of inscriptional activity and manuscript culture that was practiced in the Niranjani Sampraday from at least the mid-seventeenth century until the early twentieth century. We will close the chapter by speaking more generally about the ideological and social context in which this poetry was performed and circulated, and the type of textual community to which it corresponded.

The Niranjani community: a brief history

It may be helpful to first tell the story of the Niranjani as they tell it themselves, in other words by relating the narrative of their history as they tell it today, a narrative that is based on the collective memory encoded in texts, objects and events over the past four hundred years. This is a very rich and detailed tradition of memory, residing in oral and written narratives, paintings, buildings, wells, blankets, and even in geographic features like mountains. While pursuing fieldwork in Rajasthan during May-August 2009 and July 2011-August 2012, I had the opportunity to live and speak with members of the Niranjani community, visit their temples and shrines in Didwana and Jodhpur, and observe their rites of individual and communal worship.³⁰⁶ On the basis of the information collected during that research, comparison with written sources, and comparison with the oral narratives recorded by Swami Mangaldas of the Dadu Panth in the 1960's and Bhamvar Kasana in the early 2000's, I present an extremely abbreviated origin narrative of the Niranjani below.³⁰⁷ Despite differences in the level of detail from one telling to the next, there is an overall consistency in all the major details of the narrative.

Together the sources tell us that the Niranjani Sampraday was founded by the saint poet Haridas, who was born and lived the first half of his life in the village of Kapadod near the trading center of Didwana. Different accounts place him in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries, but all agree that he began life as a dacoit or highway robber, robbing

³⁰⁶ This fieldwork was completed with the support of US Fulbright-Hayes Program, the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, and the Department of Middle Eastern, South Asian and African Studies at Columbia University.

³⁰⁷ Mangaldas, "Bhūmikā (Introduction)," in *Śrī Mahārāj Haridās Jī Kī Vāñī*, 1-113; Bhamvar Kasana, *Nirañjanī Panth* (Didwana: College Book House, 2006) 30-96.

and killing his victims in the hills west of Didwana.³⁰⁸ One day he attempted to rob a passing holy man (who is variously described as an anonymous ascetic, Gorakhnath, or Shiva himself) only to be converted by him to the worship of Niranjan, the highest and abstract form of the supreme being. After meditating for several years in a cave at the top of Tikhi Dungari (Fig. 3.1), a mountain close to Kapadod, Haridas settled on the outskirts of Didwana and began to teach there to a quickly-growing community of followers. He left for some years, wandering in central Rajasthan, teaching the faithful and performing miracles, but eventually returned to Didwana, where he remained until his death. The monastic lineage of the Niranjani Sampraday began there at the burgeoning Niranjani settlement of Gadha Dham, but his disciples quickly spread out and founded *maths* (monasteries) around the region, from Bikaner in the north to Jodhpur and Ajmer in the south.

Many saint poets followed Haridas in the tradition; among them Sevadas, Manohardas, Tursidas, Bhagvandas and Hariramdas are particularly prominent. Yet all look back to Haridas as their primary guru, and like him espouse devotion to a *nirgun* Divine whom they often call 'Niranjan.' Deriving from the Sanskrit *nirañjana* (unpainted, spotless, pure, simple), the use of this appellation for the Divine is shared not only with Shaivite and Nath traditions, but also with the Sufi and Ismaili traditions of Western India with whom the Niranjanis quite likely had direct contact.³⁰⁹ Let us now turn to the textual

³⁰⁸ There is a small Niranjani ashram at Kapadod, and the well in which Haridas is believed to have deposited the stolen goods (or alternatively, the bodies) of his victims is part of the sacred geography of the area.

³⁰⁹ On the term *nirañjan* in Shaivite traditions, see Hazariprasad Dwivedi, *Kabīr*, 51-72; *Nāth Sampradāy*, 159-60. On *nirañjan* in the Ismail tradition, see Ali Asani, *The Būjh Niranjan: An Ismaili Mystical Poem* (Cambridge: Harvard Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 1991). Didwana itself was a significant center of Sufi activity and Islamic intellectual activity; even more so were Ajmer and Nagaur, both cities where the Niranjanis had a major presence. On the history of Sufis in the region, see Khalil Tanvir, "Nāgaur Ke Sūfī Aur Unkā Yogadān," in Dattatreya Balakrishna Kshirasagar (ed.) *Nāgaur Kā Rājanūtik Evaṃ Sāṃskṛtika*

record of the Niranjani's early history, a task which requires a significant brushing off of textual sediment in order to make it once again 'nirañjan.'

Sources on the early Niranjani community

The earliest source of information about the Niranjani Sampraday comes not from the Sampraday itself, but from another devotional community: the geographically and ideologically proximate Dadu Panth. This is important, as the Niranjani Sampraday and Dadu Panth came into being around the same time and grew together, sharing ideas, texts, manuscripts and, as we will see in Chapter Four, a common social base in the Maheshwari merchant community. The Dadu Panth was founded by the saint poet Dadu Dayal (1544/45-1603 CE), and quickly built up a following among subaltern castes and merchants in the eastern and central regions of Rajasthan.³¹⁰ The tradition, which centered on the hymns and sayings of Dadu and several other saint poets of the Panth, combined worship of a *nirguṇ* Divine with Vaishnava tropes, and maintained a monastic order in addition to the community of lay followers.³¹¹

Dadu's second-generation disciple Raghavdas makes the earliest known reference to the Niranjani community and its saints in his *Bhaktamāl* (1660 CE), a hagiographical

Vaibhav (Jodhpur: Maharaja Mansingh Pustak Prakash, 1998); Siddiqui, Mohammad Halim. *Madhyakālīn Nāgaur Kā Itihās, 1206-1752* (Jodhpur: Maharaja Mansingh Pustak Prakash, 2001, 75-109). Mehrdad Shokoohy and Natalie Shokoohy, *Nagaur: Sultanate and Early Mughal History and Architecture of the District of Nagaur, India* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1993).

³¹⁰ Dates and other information on Dadu's life can be found in the *Dadu Janm-Līlā* of Jangopal, edited by Winand Callewaert as *The Hindī Biography of Dādū Dayāl* (Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass, 1988). See also the introduction in Monika Horstmann, *Crossing the Ocean of Existence: Braj Bhasa Religious Poetry from Rajasthan, A Reader* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1983) 5-11.

³¹¹ Sources on the history of the Dadu Panth community include Swami Narayandas, *Śrī Dādū Panth Paricay: Dādū Panth Kā Itihās* (Jaipur: Shri Dadu Dayalu Mahasabha, 1978), and James Hastings, "Poets, Sants and Warriors: The Dadu Panth, Religious Change and Identity Formation in Jaipur State Circa 1562-1860 CE" (Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 2002).

compendium that eulogizes the lives and works of roughly two hundred saints and religious figures (some human, some divine or semi-divine). Raghavadas appears to draw substantial stylistic inspiration from the Ramanandi sādhu Nabhadās's *Bhaktamāl* (c. 1600 CE), and so many of his verses are telegraphic to the point of being difficult to decipher without some type of intertextual context. Nevertheless, they provide some crucial details about the poets we will be discussing and, perhaps as importantly, reflect how the Dadu Panth imagined the Niranjani's place in the devotional world of the time.

More than halfway through his work and after describing the saints of the prominent Vaishnava traditions, Raghavdas turns to his own geographical and ideological milieu, the *nirguṇ*-oriented communities of Northwest India. He introduces his subject by presenting the Sikh tradition, Kabir Panth, Dadu Panth and Niranjani Sampradāy as constituting a type of *catuḥ-sampradāy* or Four Traditions of *nirguṇ* devotion, along the model of the *catuḥ-sampradāy* of Vaishnavism (the Ramanuji, Madhva, Nimbarka and Vallabha *sampradāy*).³¹² He compares the founders of these *nirguṇ* traditions (whom he calls 'mahants,' the superior of a monastery roughly comparable to an abbot) with the founders of the Vaishnava traditions, the four great *ācāryas* Ramanuja, Madhva, Nimbarka and Vallabha:

chapai

vai cyāri mahanta jyūṃ catura byūha tyuṃ catura mahanta nṛguṇī pragāṭa
saguna rūpa guna nāma dhyāna una bibidhi batāyau
ina ika aguna arūpa akala jaga sakala jitāyau

³¹² On the concept of the *catuḥ sampradāy* and its place in the *bhakti* imaginary of early modern North India, see John S. Hawley, "The Four *Sampradāys*—and Other Foursomes," in *Bhakti Beyond the Forest: Current Research on Early Modern North Literatures in North India, 2003-2009*, ed. Imre Bangha (New Delhi: Manohar, 2013), 21-50.

nūra tejā bharapuri joti tahāṃ buddhi samāi
nirākāra pada amila amita ātmāṃ lagāi
niralepa nirañjana bhajana kauṃ sampradāi thāpī sughaṭa
vai cyāri mahanta jyūṃ catura byūha tyuṃ catura mahanta nrigunī pragaṭa³¹³

chapai

Like those four *mahants* who were the Four Manifestations,³¹⁴
Four *Nirgunī Mahants* appeared.
Meditating on the *sagun* form, the qualities and the Name,
those told of their multiplicity;
These conquered the entire world with wisdom
of the One, the Unqualified, the Formless.
Filled with brilliant light (*nūr*),
the radiance (*joti*) pervaded there in the intellect.
They became absorbed in the unbound, unmatched state of the Formless
They established beautiful *sampradāys* for serving Untainted Niranjana.
Like those four mahants who are the Four Manifestations,
Four *Nirgunī Mahants* appeared.

This is a striking formulation for several reasons, not least among them the fact that this is the first time we find any articulation of *nirgun* thought as a unified tradition or theology in Hindi.³¹⁵ We will have cause to look at this formulation in more detail in Chapter Five. For now, let us see how Raghavdas characterizes each of the individual ‘*mahants*’:

chapai

nānaka kabīra dādū jagana rāgho paramātma jape
nānaka sūraja rūpa bhūpa sārai parakāse
maghavā dāsa kabīra ūsara sūsara baraṣāse

³¹³ Raghavdas, *Bhaktamāl*, v 341.

³¹⁴ “*Catura byūha*” = *catura vyūha*, “four manifestations.” This term refers to the four manifestations of Vishnu: Vāsudeva, Śaṅkarṣaṇa, Pradyumna and Aniruddha. (See the *Bhāgavat Purāṇa* v 11.5.29-30.)

³¹⁵ Raghavdas composed his *Bhaktamāl* around the same time that two other poets with whom he was familiar—Tursidas of the Niranjani Sampradaya and Sundardas of his own tradition, the Dadu Panth—also expressed the idea of *nirgun* thought and practice as a discrete tradition. Since Tursidas is praised in Raghavdas’s text, we can assume that Tursidas probably preceded or perhaps was contemporaneous with him. Sundardas articulated his ideas in the *Jñān Samudra* (Ocean of Knowledge) about seven years before Raghavdas finished the *Bhaktamāl*. As we will see in Chapter 5, although these two poets probably articulated the idea of a *nirgun* ‘*panth*’ (lit. ‘path’) before Raghavdas, Raghavdas was the first to present the idea of these various *sectarian communities* (*sampradaya*) constituting a unified *nirgun* public or tradition. On the concept of the Four

dādū canda sarūpa amī kari saba kauṃ pokhe
barana nirañjanī manauṃ triṣā hari jīva santoṣe
ye cyāri mahanta cahuṃ cakka maim cyāri pantha nirguna thape
nānaka kabīra dādū jagana rāgho paramātma jape³¹⁶

chapai

Oh Ragho! Nanak, Kabir, Dadu and Jagan chanted the Supreme Spirit.
Nanak in the form of the sun, illuminating the entire earth.
Kabir as the rain, raining a lake upon the fallow earth.
Dadu in the form of the moon, making *amṛt* and nurturing all
Niranjani was like a drop that quenched [the thirst] of those beings thirsty for
Hari.
These four *mahants* established four *nirguṇ panths* in all four directions.
Oh Ragho! Nanak, Kabir, Dadu and Jagan, chanted the Supreme Spirit.

The very first line reveals a potential problem for our narrative of the Niranjanis' history: among the names of the four *mahants* there is no mention of Haridas as the founder of the Niranjani Sampraday, and instead we find the name 'Jagan.' The fifth line deepens the mystery: whereas the previous three lines compare Nanak, Kabir and Dadu to the sun, rain and moon, this line compares 'Nirañjanī' to a drop that quenches the thirst of beings thirsty for Hari (God). It is possible that *nirañjanī* here refers back to Jagan as the 'one of Nirañjan' or 'the one of the *Nirañjanī panth*'—i.e. a shortened appellation to someone typically referred to as 'Jagan Niranjani.' Then again, if '*barana*' is taken to be a *tadbhav* form of *varṇa* (appearance, color, class) instead of 'drop,' its referent becomes even more obscure. The line would then translate as "It was as if those of the class of Niranjani quenched the thirst of those beings thirsty for Hari." Could this be Raghavdas's way of referring to all members of the Niranjani Sampraday, instead of one individual? This seems unlikely, and instead we are left to assume that this line refers back to the Jagan mentioned in the first and final lines of the verse.

³¹⁶ Raghavdas, *Bhaktamāl*, v 342.

Who is this Jagan? Raghavdas's *Bhaktamāl* is the only place we find mention of him; he does not appear in any Niranjani hagiographies or guru-disciple lineages. There is, however, another reference in Raghavdas's *Bhaktamāl* to a 'Jaganāth Lapaṭyā,' again in the context of the Niranjani Sampraday. After introducing the Four Mahants in the manner described above and singing the praises of major figures from the Sikh, Kabir, and Dadu *panths*, Raghavdas arrives at the topic of the Niranjani *panth*, where we again find mention of Jagan among the *mahants* of the tradition:

chapai

aba rākhahi bāva kabīra ko ima yete mahanta nirañjanī
lapaṭyau jū jaganātha syāṃma kānhaḍa anarāgī
dhyānadāsa aru khemanātha jagajīvana tyāgī
turasī pāyau tata āṃna so bhayo udāsā
pūraṇa mohanadāsa jāṃni haridāsa nirāsā
rāgho saṃmratha rāṃma bhaji māyā añjana bhaṃjanīm
aba rākhahi bāva kabīra ko ima yete mahanta nirañjanī

manahar (kavitt)

Lapaṭyau jaganāthadāsa syāṃmadāsa kānhaḍadāsa
bhaye bhajanīka atī bhikṣā maṅgī pāī hai
pūraṇa prasidhi bhayau haridāsa hari rata
turasīdāsa pāyau tata nīkī bani āī hai
dhyāṃnadāsa nātha aru ānandāsa rāṃma kahyau
jaga sūṃ udāsa hvai kai svāsoṣvāsa lāī hai
jagajīvana khemadāsa mohana hride prakāsa
nṛṅṅa nirāṭa bṛti rāgho mani bhāī hai³¹⁷

There are some ambiguities in these two verses, and so let us first render a translation that accords with how Hindi scholars have understood their content thus far:

chapai

Now keep the idea/character of Kabir,

³¹⁷ Ibid., v 429-30.

in the manner of these Niranjani *mahants*
Lapatyau Jaganath, Syam,
Kanhad and Anaragi
Dhyandas and Khemanath,
and Jagjivan were renouncers.
Tursi attained *tattva* (the real nature of things),
Ana, he became unattached,
Puran, Mohandas, knowing Haridas is without desire.
Ragho, fully realized and serving Ram,
they destroyed the *añjan* (lampblack or sty) of Maya
Now keep the idea/character of Kabir,
in the manner of these Niranjani *mahants*.³¹⁸

manahar (kavitt)

Lapatyau, Jaganathdas, Syamdas and Kanhadadas,
became extremely good singers of bhajans,
and asking for alms obtained them
Puran became famous, Haridas was engrossed in Hari,
Tursidas attained *tattva*, and became good/beautiful.
Dhandas and Anandas spoke of Ram,
Becoming detached from the world
they brought controlled breath (*svāsośvās*)
The hearts of Jagjivan, Khemdas, and Mohan were illuminated,
Ragho's heart is pleased [hearing] the expositions on the lone *Nirguṇ*

The few scholars who have studied Raghavdas's text have assumed that this refers to twelve *mahants*: Jaganath Lapatya, Syam, Kanhad, Anaragi, Dhyandas, Khemnath, Jagjivan, Tursi, Anandas, Puran, Mohandas, and Haridas, whose descriptions and locations are given in the fifteen verses that follow.³¹⁹ Twelve is a pleasingly even number, various multiples of which have significance in Indic religions, and we do in fact find mention of twelve Niranjani *mahants* in the *Paramārth Satasāi* (Seven Hundred Verses on the Highest Truth,

³¹⁸ Ibid., v 429-30.

³¹⁹ The editor of the one published edition of the *Bhaktamāl*, the eminent Agarchand Nahata, actually provides numerals next to each of the names in the verse to facilitate identification (Raghavdas, *Bhaktamāl*, 202). Parashuram Chaturvedi and Ratanlal Mishra both accept this interpretation, and Mishra elaborates upon it at length (*Nirañjanī Sampradāy*, 95-100).

c. 1768-1777 CE) of Hariramdas Niranjani.³²⁰ (Most, but not all, of the individuals enumerated in Hariramdas's text conform to those in Raghavdas's list, as we shall see shortly). Indeed, manuscripts of Raghavdas's *Bhaktamāl* conclude the section on the Niranjani with the line “*dvādaśa nirañjanyāṃ ke nāṃma gāṃma gāye haiṃ*” ([I] have sung the names and villages of the twelve Niranjani), which would appear to confirm the reading given above.³²¹ As the three modern scholars who have written on this line point out, according to such a reading Raghavdas accords the same importance to all twelve individuals (an impression reinforced by the equal space he gives to each in the following verses), and if the order of mention is taken to connote primacy, then Jagannath Lapatya should be taken as the preeminent saint in the tradition, not Haridas (who comes last).³²²

However, there are some problems with this reading. The first is that the only mention of the number twelve (*dvādaś*) in Raghavdas's text, the final line of the section mentioned above, is not part of any verse, but rather stands as an independent line. Such clarifying rubrics were often added by copyists and redactors rather than by the composer himself, which raises questions about the authenticity of this line. The second problem concerns the identification of names in the very first verse on the Niranjani, verse 429. Given the context, the terms *lapatyau*, *anarāgī*, and *āṃna* could just as easily be understood as participles, adjectives, and pronouns rather than names of individuals. Consequently, the verse could be read in the following manner:

³²⁰ On dating the *Paramārthasatasaī*, see Neha Baid's introduction in Hariramdas, *Chandarātnāvalī*, edited by Neha Baid (Rajasthani Granthagar, 2011) 46-7.

³²¹ On page 206 of Nahata's edition, after verse 444.

³²² Chaturvedi, *Uttarī Bhārat Kī Sant Paramparā*, 338-40; Mishra, *Nirañjanī Sampradāy*, 95-100.

Now keep the idea/character of Kabir,
in the manner of these Niranjani *mahants*.
Jaganath, Syam, and Kanhad,
being absorbed, were devotees,
Dhyandas and Khemnath
and Jagjivan were renouncers.
Tursi attained *tattva* (the real nature of things),
he was unattached to anything else.
Know Puran, Mohandas and
Haridas to be without desire.
Ragho, fully realized and serving Ram,
they destroyed the *añjan* (lampblack or sty) of Maya.
Now keep the idea/character of Kabir,
in the manner of these Niranjani *mahants*.

This reading gives us ten *mahants*. Does this number and list square up with the descriptions of the individual *mahants* that follow? Again, not completely. The very next verse (430, translated above) again mentions “*lapatyau jaganāthadās,*” and “*ānandās,*” giving support to the reading of these as names of individuals, and in the case of Anandas, two subsequent verses (431-2) invoke him again. However, we see no “*anarāgī*” in this verse, or any other verse for that matter. Furthermore, verse 430 appears to add another name, ‘nāth,’ right after Dhyandas (“*dhyāndasa nātha aru ānandāsa rāṇma kahyau*”). This Nath receives a verse of praise all to himself shortly after (v 441). So these two introductory verses (429 and 430) appear to give two slightly different lists of Niranjani *mahants*, both totaling eleven individually, but when combined appear to refer to thirteen different persons.

The subsequent verses that deal with each of the saints individually do not make the picture much clearer. The verse dedicated to Jaganath Lapatyau is not, in fact, part of Raghavdas’s original *Bhaktamāl*, but rather part of the *ṭīkā* (commentary) composed by Chaturdas of the Dadu Panth in 1800 CE. Out of the twelve remaining saints, each receives

a full verse; Anandas and Syamdas, however, are also mentioned together in an additional verse. The order in which the saints occur in these verses does not correspond to their order of mention in the two introductory verses (the verse on Haridas, for example, comes right in the middle). The section on the Niranjanis closes with the following verse:

manahar (kavitt)

thirolī maim̐ jaganātha syāṃmadāsa dattavāsa,
kānhāḍa ju cātasū maim̐ nīkaim̐ hari dhyāye haiṃ
āṃnadāsa dāsa livālī mohana devapura,
serapura turasī ju bāṃṇī nīkaim̐ lyāye haiṃ
pūraṇa bhambhora rahe khemadāsa sivahāḍa,
ṭoḍā madhi ādinātha jū parama pada pāye haiṃ
dhyāṃnadāsa mhāri bhaye ḍīḍavāṇai haridāsa,
dāsa jagajīvana su bhādavai lubhāye haiṃ³²³

manahar (kavitt)

Jaganath in Thirolī, Syamdas in Datwas,
and Kanhad in Chatsu meditated well upon Hari.
Anadas in Das-Livalī, Mohan in Devapur,
and Tursidas in Serpur brought well-wrought *vāṇīs*.
Puran stayed in Bambhor, Khemdas in Sivahad,
and Adinath in Toda obtained the highest state.
Dhyandas and Haridas were in my Didwana,
[the people of] Bhadva were enamored of Jagjivandas.

These are the same eleven names found in verse 430, which include among them Nath but not Anaragi. There is also a discrepancy in the order of the names. The verse is remarkable in its listing of locations for every saint, which is unique in the context of the *Bhaktamāl* itself and rarely found (if at all) other hagiographies in Hindi. The locations named, most of them being small *qasbahs*, were most likely where these saints hailed from or pursued their spiritual practice, since none but Didwana have any recorded presence of a Niranjani

³²³ Raghavdas, *Bhaktamāl*, v 444.

monastery. The verse also gives us an important clue about Raghavdas: that Didwana was ‘his,’ i.e. either he originally hailed from there, or composed the *Bhaktamāl* there. In either case, it is a reminder of how closely the Dadu Panth and the Niranjani Sampraday were intertwined.

So what does all this tell us about the Niranjani’s history up to 1660 CE? First, it suggests that, at least from Raghavdas’s vantage point in the Dadu Panth, there was no clear order (at least in terms of prestige) among the prominent saints of the Niranjani Sampraday. His treatment of the Sampraday certainly does not privilege Haridas above the other *mahants*. However, like Parasuram Chaturvedi and Ratanlal Mishra, I do not believe that Raghavdas’ text presents the figure of Jaganath as the founder of the Sampraday either.³²⁴ Let us revisit verse 341, which posits Nanak, Kabir, Dadu and ‘Jagan’ as the four *mahants* of the *nirgun sampradāys*. In contrast to the lines regarding the Sikh, Kabir and Dadu *panths* (in which Nanak, Kabir and Dadu are mentioned by name), the line regarding the Niranjani *panth* is ambiguous: Jagan is not mentioned, and it is not even clear whether Raghavdas is referring to an individual, or to the Niranjani as a whole. We unfortunately do not have enough evidence to either link or dissociate this Jagan from the Jagan Lapatya mentioned later in the description of the Niranjani Sampraday. The fact that Raghavdas did not compose a verse about Jagan (the verse dedicated to Jagannath included in Nahata’s edition was composed one hundred and forty years later by Chaturdas) when he did so for twelve other saints of the Niranjani Sampraday makes it seem doubtful that he considered

³²⁴ Caturvedi, *Uttarī Bhārat Kī Sant Paramparā*, 338-40; Mishra, *Nirañjanī Sampradāy*, 95-100.

Jagan Lapatya to be any more prestigious than the other *mahants*, much less the founder of the tradition.

What seems more likely is that Raghavdas's description simply reflects the decentralized structure of the monastic wing of the Niranjani community, for which we find evidence elsewhere as well. As mentioned earlier, the eighteenth-century Niranjani poet Hariramdas lists twelve 'mahants' in his *Paramārthasatasaī*, giving all (or at least most) equal importance:

manahar (kavitt)

jana haridāsa hari sumira dāsa turasī tata pāyā
śyāma lahī saba syāmatā pada pūraṇa dhyāyā
dhyāna dharata hari mile nātha mila nātha hī gāyā
kānhaḍadāsa kṛpālu khema puni khema samāyā
mohana bhaji murāra dāsa jagajīvana sidhavara
ānadāsa jagannātha bhaye ye prabhu ke anucara
ghāṭa vādha ina meṃ nahīm adhikārī nijadhāma ke
dwādaśa mahanta nirañjanī ura basahu sadā harirāma ke³²⁵

manahar (kavitt)

Janharidas remembered Hari,
Tursidas obtained the *tattva* (knowledge of things as they are),
Syam took everything with detachment,
Puran meditated on [Hari's] feet.
Dhyan took Hari to heart and found Him,
Nath found the Lord (*nāth*) and sang to Him.
Kanhaddas was merciful,
Then Khem was filled with bliss (*kṣema*).
Mohan was devoted to Murari (Krishna),
Jagjivandas was a great accomplished soul.
Anadas and Jagannath
Were attendants of the Lord.
There is no trickery or obstruction among these abbots (*adhikārī*),
Each of their own monastery (*nijadhām*).
The twelve Niranjani *mahants*

³²⁵ Quoted in Mangaldas, *Śrī Mahārāj Haridāsji Kī Vāṇī*, Part II, 179.

Will always dwell in Hariram's heart.

This is an unambiguous reference to twelve *mahants*, and it is clear which individuals Hariramdas includes among them.³²⁶ Yet the verse that follows this one in the *Paramārthasatasāī* as well as references in his other works—among them the *Dayāl Jī Kī Pañc Paracāī* (c. 1760-70 CE), an extensive hagiography of Haridas—tell us that Hariramdas understood these individuals to have been chronologically dispersed and that he revered Haridas as the guru of all. Records of guru-disciple lineages and the *adhikārīs* (‘authority’; here used synonymously with *mahant*) of various *maṭhs* within the Niranjani Sampraday confirm that by the time that Hariramdas was writing there existed somewhere between seven and twelve *maṭhs* that operated more or less independently of one another.³²⁷ Seven of these are still recognized in the Niranjani community: Didwana, Shekhawati, Merta, Bikaner, Nagaur, Jaipur, and Jodhpur. These records suggest that most of the individuals mentioned above were neither the founders nor *mahants* of these various branches, but may indeed have been associated with them.

³²⁶ What is lost in translation is the cleverness of Hariramdas’s verse: with five of the twelve *mahants*’ names Hariramdas creates puns (*śleṣa*). Haridas/Hari, Syam/*syāmatā* (detachment), Dhyān/*dhyān* (meditation), Nath/*nāth* (the Lord), Khem/*khem* (= *kṣema*, bliss), Mohan/Murari (both epithets of Krishna). Thus, for example the second line can be read as “Dhyān took Hari to heart and found Him and Nath found the Lord and sang to Him” or “He meditated (*dhyān*) and found Hari, and finding the Lord, Nath sang.” As we will see in Chapter Four, Haridas was one of the later Niranjani poets who considered himself to be a professional poet in addition to being a devotee, and he employs a wide range of poetic devices in his verses. On *śleṣa* as a poetic device in this period, see Yigal Bronner, *Extreme Poetry: the South Asian Movement of Simultaneous Narration* (Columbia University Press, 2010).

³²⁷ Swami Mangaldas compiled a summary of those records which he had seen in his *Śrī Mahārāj Haridāsji Kī Vāñī (ḍa- ca)*. There are discrepancies, however, between this and the records of individual Niranjani centers. One such record is the *kīrti stambh* (monumental pillar) erected by Paramandas, former *mahant* of the Gadha Dham *maṭh*, which purportedly lists forty-one disciples of the original *mahants* of the Sampraday.

Still later the Niranjani poet Pyareram eulogized the saints of his tradition in his own *Bhaktamāl* (1826-27 CE), written on the directive of his guru Darshandas.³²⁸ Pyareram gives the greatest amount of attention to Haridas, whom he treats first in his text. After Haridas, he devotes the majority of space to seven other Niranjani saints who fall within his own guru-disciple lineage and all of whom, it should be noted, are associated with the Niranjani monastic community at Didwana (i.e. Gadha Dham).

There is one other possible reference to the Niranjani Sampraday worth noting here, which dates from the mid-seventeenth century. The Dadu Panthi poet Sundardas (1599–1689 CE) mentions a Haridas in his *Savaiyā Granth* (terminus ante quem 1686) in the context of sectarian disputes:

savaiyā

kouka gorakha ko gurū thāpata kou datta digambara ādū
kouka kaṁthara kouka bharathara kou kabīra ko rākhata nādū
kou kahe haridāsa hamāro yo kari ṭhānata vāda vivādū
ora to santa sabai sira ūpara sundara ke ura hai gurū dādū³²⁹

savaiyā

Some establish Gorakh as their guru, some Digambar Dattatreya.
Some call out Kabir, some Bhartrihari, some Kanthari,
Some say that Haridas is ours, and in behaving like this
commit themselves to disputation.
Sundar reveres all the knowers of truth, [but] Dadu is the guru in his heart.

There is a high likelihood that the Haridas mentioned here is Haridas of the Niranjani Sampraday. The other saints mentioned in the verse are important devotional figures for communities with which Sundardas's Dadu Panth was in close contact, and at times

³²⁸ Mangaldas, *Śrī Mahārāj Haridāsji Kī Vāṇī*, 243-47. Mangaldas writes that he copied the text from a manuscript located in Sinthal village (near Bikaner). I have not yet been able to locate that or any other copy.

³²⁹ Sundardas, *Savaiyā Granth*, v 1.5, in *Sundardas Granthāvalī*, edited by Swami Narayandas (Jaipur: Sri Dadu Dayal Mahasabha, 1989)130.

competition as well: the Naths, Jains, and Kabir Panth.³³⁰ It seems likely that Sundardas would have included among these groups the nascent Niranjani Sampraday, especially because the close similarities between the Dadu Panth and Niranjani Sampraday would have made the task of distinguishing them all the more imperative. Furthermore, most of the saints given here—Gorakh, Kabir, Bhartrihari, Dattatreya, Kantharinath—were also important figures in the Dadu Panth itself, and in the *nirguṇ sant* tradition more broadly.³³¹ This makes it unlikely that the Haridas mentioned here is the Haridas of Vrindavan (d. 1575-95 CE), the founder of the Haridasi Sampraday.³³² If this is indeed Haridas Niranjani, then Sundardas’s observation that some refer to Haridas as their guru would reinforce the impression that Haridas was the central charismatic figure of the Niranjani tradition as early as the mid-seventeenth century.

The centrality of Haridas to the early tradition is also suggested by the age and extent of architectural and inscriptional evidence at Gadha Dham near Didwana, the sites associated with his narrative. Although this evidence is admittedly fragmentary, consisting of a few stone and copper plate inscriptions recording land grants and the estimated date of

³³⁰ As Heidi Pauwels and Patton Burchett have noted, the Naths were some of the prime recipients of *bhakti* saints’ critiques, reflecting a competition for followers, patronage and power between the Naths and groups like the Ramanandis and Dadu Panth. Heidi Pauwels, “Who Are the Enemies of the Bhaktas? Testimony about ‘Śāktas’ and ‘Others’ from Kabīr, the Rāmānandīs, Tulsīdās, and Harīrām Vyās,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 130, no. 4 (October 1, 2010): 509–39. Burchett, “Bhakti Religion and Tantric Magic in Mughal India.”

³³¹ For example, all are eulogized in Raghunathdas’s *Bhaktamāl*: v 125-26, 267, 275, 279-80, and works attributed to Gorakhnath and Kabir are included in the *Sarvāṅgīs* (early 1600’s) of Rajjab and Gopaldas of the Dadu Panth (see Chapter Five).

³³² Nor is it likely to be ‘Hardas’ of the *Pañcavāṇī* anthology compiled by the Dadu Panth in the first part of the seventeenth century. Bajrangdas Shastri and Ratanlal Mishra speculate that this could refer to Kabir’s fifth disciple, also named Haridas. Sundardas, *Savāiyā Granth*, edited by M. Bajrangdas Shastri (Jaipur: Sri Daduvani Parishad, 2007), 3. Although Kabir’s disciple Haridas was known in the Dadu Panth, his relative unimportance (as reflected by his brief mention in Raghavdas’s *Bhaktamāl*, v 353) makes it seem unlikely that he was understood to be a major figure by the Dadu Panth, or any other *panth*. On the oeuvre of Hardas in the *Pañcavāṇī*, see Callewaert, *Nirguṇ Bhakti Sāgar*, 31.

buildings associated with the Niranjani Sampraday, it nevertheless points to the strong possibility that there was a substantial Niranjani settlement at Gadha Dham around the turn of the seventeenth century and covering approximately a quarter of a square kilometer (sixty acres).³³³ This settlement would then predate the smaller monastic and community complexes that were built at Nagaur, Merta, Bikaner, Jodhpur and Navalgarh over the following century and a half.³³⁴ These include temples that were ‘donated’ to the Niranjani and which house Vaishnava deities like Ram and Krishna.³³⁵ If the Niranjani Sampraday formed at Gadha Dham/Didwana and spread from there, it would lend weight to the idea that Haridas founded the community, or at least played a central role in its genesis.

Finally, the sources quoted above suggest that the dates of the various compositions attributed to the thirteen Niranjani saints distribute their lifespan across almost a century. The most reliable calculation of Haridas’s dates tells us that he died around 1644 CE; at the other end of the chronology, Tursidas wrote into the early eighteenth century. The internally-dated works of some of the other saints together with details of their guru-disciple lineages allow us to date them at various intervals in between.³³⁶ The lineages, as noted earlier, suggest that these saints were not necessarily *mahants* or *adhikārīs* in the sense of

³³³ Stone and copper plate inscriptions at Gadha Dham record land grants dating back to 1603 CE. Inscription on stone marker dated VS 1682 *mīī bhādav sudi 13* (September 14, 1625), outside Bhandari Temple at Gadha Dham; inscription on copper plate dated VS 1659 (1602-3 CE) at *Loṭaṅ Jī Kā Bādā*.

³³⁴ For the locations and history of other Niranjani sites, see Mishra, *Nirañjanī Sampraday*, 87-106.

³³⁵ In 1857, Queen Pratap Kumvari (widow of Man Singh) assigned stewardship of a Vaishnava temple in Jodhpur in 1857) to the Niranjani *mahant* from Nagaur. *INTACH Newsletter Jodhpur*, (Jodhpur: INTACH, 2011), 6.

³³⁶ See Chapter Four for dating of various Niranjani saints. See also Mishra, *Nirañjanī Sampradāy*, 87-106.

official posts, nor were most of them the founders of individual guru-disciple lineages (or *maṇḍalas*, as they are sometimes called in the Niranjani community).³³⁷

Taking all of this into account, it seems that the idea of twelve Niranjani *mahants* was primarily a way of canonizing major figures in the tradition. The twelve historical individuals in question were not necessarily part of the same generation or lineage, and slight variations in the roster of twelve *mahants* occur in the compositions of different hagiographers.³³⁸ This formulation does tell us who the Niranjani (and their brethren in the Dadu Panth) considered important in their tradition, and a number of them indeed play important roles in the story of devotion and literature that we will pursue in the pages that follow, particularly Haridas, Dhyandas, Khemdas, and Tursidas. Others, like Purandas, Jagjivan, and Kanhaddas continued to be remembered for some time, but their relatively small textual output meant that their legacy was primarily as figures of devotion, rather than as poets.³³⁹ Again others, like Jagannath, Nath, and Syamdas appear to have had no oeuvre at all, and so all we know of them is what is given in the references above. So even if a saint like Jagannath played an important role in the consolidation or expansion of the Niranjani Sampraday, the lack of a poetic corpus caused him to fade from prominence fairly quickly.

On the other hand, the popularity of Haridas's compositions caused him to remain central to the Niranjani imaginary and eventually to occupy the position of a founding figure

³³⁷ Swami Mangaldas gives guru-disciple lineages in his edition of Haridas's *vāṇī*; see Mangaldas (ed.), *Śrī Haridās Jī Kī Vāṇī*, ṅa-cha. Also Mishra, *Nirañjanī Sampradāy*, 221-230.

³³⁸ Compare sources in Fn. 31 with Hariramdas, *Paramarthatasatī*, in Mangaldas, *Śrī Haridās Jī Kī Vāṇī*, Part II, 179 (under the heading *prakīṛṇ racanā*).

³³⁹ For example, none of these poets' compositions appear in twentieth-century songbook pamphlets of the Sampraday, nor do any of their songs appear to have been preserved in the memory of members of the community.

(if he did not occupy such a position from the beginning). Similarly, Didwana as a place became intimately tied up with the story of the Niranjani community, for reasons we will see in this and the following chapter. In this way Didwana/Gadha Dham managed to remain the gravitational center of the Niranjani Sampraday even as the Sampraday spread over an increasingly broad geographical area in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.³⁴⁰

Haridas Niranjani: from sinner to saint

Although the lack of more complete textual evidence makes it difficult to ascertain with complete certainty whether Haridas was *the* founder of the Niranjani Sampraday, or whether he shared that distinction with other Niranjani saints, it is clear that by the mid-seventeenth century (and probably within one to two generations after his death) he had become the most central figure of the community. A narrative about his life and sainthood had also begun to take shape which intimately tied Haridas and the Niranjani Sampraday to the geographical and cultural space of Didwana. Consequently his life story (*paracāī*), just like his poetry, evokes something that is distinctly local even while it participates in a trans-local *bhakti/sant mat* aesthetic and thus speaks to a broadly-imagined audience of the faithful beyond the borders of the Niranjani community.³⁴¹

³⁴⁰ The concept of sacred geography has been explored in detail in the case of Vaishnava traditions from this period, particularly for the Braj region; see for example David Haberman, *Journey through the Twelve Forests: An Encounter with Krishna* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Entwistle, *Braj, Centre of Krishna Pilgrimage*. However, the idea of sacred geography for *nirgun* traditions like the Niranjani, Dadu Panth, Ramsnehis and the like has yet to receive sustained attention. Some thought-provoking steps toward understanding the notion of sacred geography in such traditions which does not reduce the recognition of sacred sites to an ‘aberration’ in belief can be found in the case of the Sikh tradition; see Harjot Oberoi, “Popular Saints, Goddesses, and Village Sacred Sites: Rereading Sikh Experience in the Nineteenth Century.” *History of Religions* 31, no. 4 (May 1, 1992): 363–84.

³⁴¹ David Lorenzen has highlighted how the hagiography of Haridas shares a common structure with the narrative cycles of Dadu Dayal and other similar saints. See David Lorenzen, *Who Invented Hinduism: Essays*

As is the case with so many saint poets of this period, dating Haridas is not an easy task. Of the three earliest sources to mention Haridas—Raghavdas’s *Bhaktamāl*, Sundardas’s *Savaiyā Granth*, and Hariramdas’s *Dayāl Jī Kī Pañc Paracāī*—none gives any dates for Haridas. The first mention is in the Niranjani poet Raghunathdas’s hagiography of Haridas, the simply named *Paracāī* (Life Story, c. 1800 CE). Raghunathdas composes the following verse on Haridas’s death:

caupāī

prathama vahauta dina yūṃ hī ga-iyā baraṣa camālatai cetana bha-iyāṃ
camāla varaṣa vairāga kamāyā tā pāche hari māṃhi samāyā
samvata solaha sai ju saikā ṛtu vasanta ānandamaikā
phagaṇa sudi ṣaṣṭamī jānāṃ jana haridāsa hari māṃhi samānā

caupāī

First many days passed just like that,
in the forty-fourth year he became conscious.
Forty-four years he practiced non-attachment
and after that became absorbed in Hari.
In *samvat* sixteen hundred,
the spring season was blissful.
Know that on the sixth day of the bright half of the month of Phalgun
Jan Haridas became absorbed in Hari.

This presents a pleasingly symmetrical picture of Haridas’s life: he passed forty four years ‘just like that,’ i.e., in an unrealized state, and forty-four years in a state of enlightened non-attachment, before he joined with God. Leaving aside the question of whether or not such a timeline is idealized, let us consider the date given for Haridas’s death (or rather *samādhi*): the 6th of the bright half of Phalgun, VS 1600, or February 29, 1544 CE (or so it would seem). The problem is the word ‘*saikā*’: it could be read as ‘and one’ (*sa-ikā*), or as

on Religion in History (New Delhi: Yoda Press, 2006) 17. On the development of a pan-*bhakti* aesthetic and a ‘vulgate Vaishnavism’, see Hawley, “The Catuḥ Sampradāy and Other Foursomes”; “Kabīr in His Oldest Dated Manuscript,” in Hawley, *Three Bhakti Voices*, 290-304.

‘hundred’ (Marwari *saīk* or *saīkau*)³⁴². The first reading renders a date of VS 1601 / 1545 CE. The second reading, which has been suggested by Neha Baid on the basis of a similar usage in a later hagiographical text, would render a date of VS 1700 / 1644 CE.³⁴³ While there is currently no evidence upon which the earlier date of 1545 could be definitively rejected, there is also little evidence of the Niranjani community’s existence prior to 1603, making it difficult to substantiate such an early date. On the other hand, the later date of 1644 jibes somewhat better with other available information: first, it makes possible the assertion in Niranjani tradition that Dhyandas, Khemdas, Naridas and Tursidas (all of whom composed in the mid-seventeenth century) were direct disciples or contemporaries of Haridas. Second, it projects a lifetime for Haridas that overlaps with the establishment of a settlement and building activity at Gadha Dham, cited above as linked in later hagiographies to Haridas’s merchant followers in Didwana. Finally, this later date still respects the *terminus ante quem* for Haridas established by Raghavdas’s *Bhaktamāl*: when he composed his verses in or prior to 1660, Raghavdas employed the past tense in regard to Haridas, suggesting that Haridas had already passed.

The later hagiographer Purandas writes that Haridas was born in 1477-78 and died in 1538-39; again, though we do not have evidence on the basis of which to firmly reject such an early date, it does not fit with the dates of Haridas’s disciples, nor does it overlap with the

³⁴² Pathak, Padmadhar. *Rājasthānī-Hindī Saṃkṣipt Śabdakoś*. Jodhpur: Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute, 1987. 698. Kishori Lal, in his *Rītikāvya śabdakoś*, gives the same meaning (one hundred, *śata + eka*) and provides another example from Gang Kavi: *tere hī parosa kosa saika ke sarosa hvai, hvai kaisī kaisī senā kīnī katalū paṭhāna kī*. (*Rītikāvya śabdakoś*, Indore: Manasvi Prakashan, 2011, 306) There are also possible readings that separate *saīka* into two words, etc, but none of these render likely meanings.

³⁴³ Baid, Neha. “*Bhūmikā*.” In Hariramdas, *Chandarātnāvalī*. Jodhpur: Rajasthani Granthagar, 2011. 20-21.

architectural and inscriptional record of activity at Gadha Dham.³⁴⁴ Niranjani hagiographers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as well as scholars in the twentieth century, have either reiterated or rejected these dates; since they do not propose any alternative dates, we will not go into the debate here.³⁴⁵ Instead, let us simply note that the most likely candidate follows from Baid's reading of Raghunathdas, which works out to 1644.

So what do these various texts tell us about Haridas's life? Our earliest source on Haridas, Raghavdas's *Bhaktamāl*, does not give too many details:

manahar (kavitt)

jata sata rahiṇi kahiṇi karatūti baḍau
hara jūṃ kahara haridāsa hari gāyau hai
brikata vairāgī anarāgī liva lāgi rahai
arasa parasa cita cetana sūṃ lāyau hai
nṛmala nṛbāṃṇī nirākāra kau upāsavāṃna
nṛguṇa upāsi kai nirañjanī kahāyau hai
rāgho kahai rāṃma japi gagana magana bhayau
mana baca krama karatāra yaum rijhāyau hai³⁴⁶

manahar (kavitt)

He prospered through the struggle for truth, in his manner of living, speaking, and deeds

Hari is Boundless, Haridas sang of Hari.

He remained absorbed in a state of non-attached renunciation,

He brought consciousness, having touched pure consciousness (*cita*).

Worshipping the pure, empty (*nirvāṇa*), formless,

Performing *nirguṇ* spiritual practice (*nirguṇ upāsi kai*) he has been called Niranjani.

Says Ragho, chanting the name of Ram, he became immersed in the void.

In this manner, with his word, thought and deed he has pleased the Creator.

³⁴⁴ See Fn. 28 above and also Mishra, *Nirañjanī Sampradāy*, 83-84.

³⁴⁵ Summaries of the debate on Haridas's dates can be found in Mishra, *Nirañjanī Sampradāy*, 61-78, and Baid's introduction in *Chandarātnāvalī*, 20-21.

³⁴⁶ Raghavdas, *Bhaktamāl*, v 436.

The most suggestive line, at least for our purposes here, is the third, which asserts that because of his dedication to spiritual practice focused on the *nirguṇ* godhead, Haridas was called ‘Niranjani.’ Could there be a connection between this appellation, and the name of the Sampraday? Although Raghavdas does not make that connection, Niranjanis and scholars in the modern period certainly do, asserting that it was Haridas who first earned this title, a title he bequeathed to his devotional order.³⁴⁷

One manuscript of the *Bhaktamāl*, dated VS 1886 / CE 1829-30, gives an additional verse for Haridas:

chappai

prathama pīpalī prasiddhi silā nagaura bisekho
nayo gayada ajamera phuniṅga ṭoḍai paṇi paikhau
gira sūṃ gāgari girī nīra rākhau ghaṭa sārau
devī kau siha karī jyāyau biṣa bithra udhārau
sidha praco āṃbera rāba rājā saba jāṃnaim
agamga bipra pantha calyau sāha suta jīyau sidhāmṇai
sira pari kara priyāgadāsa kau gorakhanātha kau mata layau
jana harīdāsa nirañjanī ṭhaura ṭhaura paracau dīyau³⁴⁸

chappai

First the pipal tree became famous,
then the stone of Nagaur was described.
The bowing elephant in Ajmer,
Then the serpent in Toda were seen.
The water pot fell from the mountain,
all of the water was kept inside spilled out.
He made the goddess his disciple,
he revived the poisoned and liberated the fearful.
News of his spiritual attainments reached Amber,
the kings and nobles all knew of him.
A lame brahmin was made to walk,
The kings’ sons were brought back to life.

³⁴⁷ Hiralal Maheshwari, *History of Rājasthānī Literature* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1980); Motilal Menaria, *Rājasthānī Bhāṣā Aura Sāhitya: Rājasthān Ke Kaviyom Dvārā Racit Brajabhāṣā Sāhitya Kā Itihās* (Jodhpur: Rajasthani Granthagar, 1999).

³⁴⁸ Raghavdas, *Bhaktamāl*, v 429, Fn. , 204.

He took Prayagdas as his guru,
and adopted the teachings of Gorakhnath.
Jan-Haridas Niranjani,
everywhere his story has been told.

What is going on in this rather obscure and telegraphic verse? The final line gives us a clue: “everywhere [Haridas’s] story has been told.” The composer of this verse (who was most likely *not* Raghunathdas, for reasons that will be revealed shortly) assumes that his audience already knows the story of Haridas, and so his verse recapitulates that story by simply indexing its major episodes. Each half-line refers to an individual episode: “first the pipal tree became famous,” “he made the goddess his disciple,” etc. It finishes with the striking assertion that Haridas accepted Prayagdas (a disciple of Dadu) as his guru, striking because it presents Haridas as an inheritor and extension of the Dadu Panth tradition, rather than as a recipient of a more ‘direct’ revelation or initiation from Gorakhnath or from God himself. By extension, it casts the entire Niranjani tradition as an outgrowth of the Dadu Panth, imagining the Niranjani as spiritual cousins of the Dadu Panthis. Even as it draws the Niranjani and Dadu Panthi traditions closer by asserting a familial relation of sorts through guru-disciple descent, it also appears to curb the prestige of the Niranjani tradition by suggesting that it is essentially an offshoot of the Dadu Panth. If the Dadu Panth and Niranjani Sampraday were competing for followers or patronage—a competition made all the more sharp by the fact that the two traditions were so similar—this would have been one strategy for establishing one’s own *panth* as spiritually ‘primary’ and therefore superior.

However, this verse probably dates from a period later than the actual composition of the *Bhaktamāl*. The first bit of evidence suggesting that this is a later interpolation is the

existence of an earlier copy of the *Bhaktamāl* (dated 1804-5 CE) that does not include this verse.³⁴⁹ The second is the matter of symmetry: Raghavdas gave each of the twelve Niranjani *mahants* one verse in keeping with their equal prestige, so the existence of two for Haridas appears suspect. Finally, the episodes to which the verse obliquely refers are found in two Niranjani hagiographies, the *Dayāl Jī Kī Pañc Paracāī* of Hariramdas and the *Paracāī* of Raghunathdas, datable to the early eighteenth century and the turn of the nineteenth century respectively. What all this seems to suggest is that Raghavdas's original *Bhaktamāl* contained only the first and more 'general' descriptive verse about Haridas, and that in the century and a half that followed the hagiographic traditions that grew up around this charismatic saint were recorded and elaborated by poets like Hariramdas and Raghunathdas. These in turn furnished the material for the second and later verse, which lists the episodes of the narrative in a synecdochic fashion and makes Haridas the disciple of Prayagdas.

So what do these two Niranjani hagiographies have to say about Haridas?

Hariramdas's *Dayāl Jī Kī Pañc Paracāī* (*The Five Stories of Dayāl*, composed between 1738 and 1779 CE), a relatively short hagiographical poem of forty verses in *dohā*, *sorāṭhā* and *bhujāṅgī* meters, recounts the travels of Haridas in five episodes.³⁵⁰ The saint's wanderings are described like a mini-*digvijaya* (conquering of the four directions, a common trope in hagiographical literature), but here the geography is local: Haridas visits the nearby cities of Nagaur, Ajmer, and Jobaner instead of 'conquering' the larger subcontinent like some of his

³⁴⁹ Details of the manuscript history for the *Bhaktamāl* can be found in Agarchand Nahata's introduction to the edited text. Raghavadas, *Bhaktamāl*, pages *sa-kṣa*.

³⁵⁰ RORI JOD 24778, dated 1817 CE.

more well-known Vaishnava counterparts, including Vallabhacharya.³⁵¹ Raghunathdas's *Paracāī* (c. 1800 CE) is a much longer work comprised of fifteen chapters (*viśrām*) and describing Haridas's early life as a dacoit, his conversion by Gorakhnath to the worship of *nirguṇ* Niranjana, his disciples at Didwana, and the miracles performed by Haridas on his travels.³⁵² Both works appear to reference and anthologize pre-existing narratives, and where their contents overlap they agree in almost all details. In the case of this shared content, Raghunathdas simply adds more detail to the narratives as told by Hariramdas. Given this agreement, and the lack of space here, let us review the major details of the composite life story that they create for Haridas, noting where relevant any material given in one but not the other.

After beginning his text with an invocation to the *satguru* (true guru), praise for various saints and the injunction to worship *nirguṇ* or unqualified Niranjana in the first *viśrām*, Raghunathdas turns to the narrative proper. He begins by describing Haridas's life as a robber, and his meeting with Gorakhnath:

dohā

prathama dīḍapura pragaṭai āī
barasa camāla gṛha māṃhi rahaī
pachima disā bhākhara hai soī
tahāṃ jangala mem rahate joī
eka dināṃ prabhukī gati bhaī
antara jāmi āgyā daī
gorakha gyāna daina kūṃ āe

³⁵¹ On the trope of the *digvijaya* and the wandering of holy figures, see Lorenzen, *Who Invented Hinduism*, 17-19; Winand Callewaert and Rupert Snell, *According to Tradition: Hagiographical Writing in India* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1994). On Vallabhacharya's *digvijaya*, see Shandip Saha, "Creating a Community of Grace: A History of the Puṣṭīmārg in Northern and Western India, 1493-1905 (Dissertation, University of Ottawa) 107-118; also

³⁵² In Mangaldas, *Śrī Mahārāj Jī Kī Vāñī*, Part II, 217-242.

apaṇe jāni kṛpā kari dhāye³⁵³

dohā

First he appeared in Didapur (Didwana),
For forty-four years he remained at home (as a householder).
To the west there is a mountain,
There he lived, in the jungle.
One day an act of God happened:
The Inner One gave a command
That Gorakh go and give wisdom.
Mercifully taking [Haridas] to be his own, [Gorakh] departed.

When Gorakhnath arrives at the mountain, Haridas demands his clothes and possessions. Gorakhnath replies by telling him first to go and ask his wife and children if they share the burden of the sins that he commits and, if so, to return with their love and take what he pleases. Haridas goes home and asks his family if they share his burden, and when he receives a negative reply, runs back to Gorakhnath. Upon seeing Gorakhnath this time Haridas's mind and heart are transformed (*darasaṇa karata phiri mati*).

Haridas leaves his family and takes up residence in a cave at the top of Tikhi Dungari, a mountain to the west of Didwana (Fig. 3.1). There he meditates for many days, until one day while searching for him his 'people' find him there, engrossed in meditation upon Hari. When asked why Haridas does not return to his home, Haridas responds that the world is an illusion and that without devotion to Ram, one 'drowns' in this false world:

taba ina kahyo jhuṭha saṃsārā, putra kalatrā rāja darabārā
sabai naraka kī hai nīsānī, rāma bhagatī vina būḍe prāṇī³⁵⁴

Then he said "This world (*saṃsārā*) is false,
Children, wife, and royal courts—

³⁵³ Raghunathdas, *Paracāī*, v 2.1-2.

³⁵⁴ Raghunathdas, *Paracāī*, v 2.10.

All are marks of hell.
A person drowns [in it] without devotion to Ram.

This dismissal of worldly pleasures and bonds and the assertion that devotion to Ram alone saves is at the core of Niranjani thought. (Although the direct reference to royal courts is less commonly found in this genre of poetry, and has a suggestive resonance with ideas of religious polity that will be explored in Chapter Five.) Raghunathdas uses the rest of this *viśrām* to elaborate upon the transitory illusion of *samsāra* before moving on to the stories of Haridas's first two disciples, the goddess Padma Devi and the merchant Dwarkadas in sections three and four. The fifth *viśrām* recounts the story of the pipal tree; these two sections will be discussed in the next chapter as they shed light on the composition and culture of the early Niranjani community. Raghunath then turns to Haridas's travels for the rest of his text, and it is here that the content of the two hagiographies overlap.



Fig. 3.1. Tikhi Dungari. The structure at the top is a *samādhi* built over the cave where Haridas is believed to have meditated for several years after being converted by Gorakhnath.

The story of Haridas's wanderings across central Rajasthan and the miracles that he performs ties into a broader narrative and aesthetic tradition of sainthood and spiritual power in South Asia. Haridas first travels to Nagaur, where he rids the area of a fearsome spirit (*vitra*). He enters the ghouls' cave and proceeds to meditate; the ghouls then try every means available to scare him away, but eventually must concede defeat and ask the immovable Haridas for initiation and instruction in how to attain liberation. The figure of the immovable saint, impervious to mental and physical assaults, has a pedigree that goes all the way back to the stories of the Buddha and the Jain saint Mahavira. Yet this archetype was also finding new articulations in the early modern period, for example in Nabhadās's narrative of Krishnadas Payohari of the Ramanandi Sampradaya at Galta (near Jaipur), who resisted the machinations of Nath yogis as he sat in meditation among them.³⁵⁵ Haridas then travels to Ajmer, where he quells a mad elephant who is terrorizing the city and gives spiritual advice to Ajaypal (the seventh-century Chauhan ruler of Ajmer) before visiting an unnamed village where he subdues a serpent. Control over such animals is something that Haridas shares with other major figures of the time as well as mythical figures: Jangopal describes in his *Dādū Janm-Līlā* (1620) how Dadu Dayal, the founder of the Dadu Panth, brings a mad elephant under his control at Sambhar.³⁵⁶ Abu Fazl relates in the *Akbar-namah* (1596) that the young Emperor Akbar managed to bring the untamable elephant

³⁵⁵ See Burchett, "Bhakti Religion and Tantric Magic in Mughal India," 65.

³⁵⁶ Jangopal, *Dādū Janm-Līlā*, v.3.6-7. Given the close contact of the Dadu Panth and the Niranjani Sampradaya and the correspondence of Dadu Dayal and Haridas as the founders of their respective traditions, it seems likely that the hagiography of the former influenced that of the latter, though more research is needed in this regard.

Hawa'i under control.³⁵⁷ The god Krishna subdues the serpent Kaliya in the *Bhāgavat Purāṇa* by dancing on its head, and the ability to control snakes was one measure of spiritual power in the discourse of the tantrik Naths of the region at the time, and of the *bhakti* poets who sought to displace them in terms of spiritual authority.³⁵⁸ One of the animals that Haridas encounters on his travels is no animal at all, but rather a Nath *yogi* at the town of Todaraisingh, who transforms himself into a lion and attacks Haridas.³⁵⁹ Haridas turns the Nath into a donkey, after which the Nath repents and receives *dīkṣā* (initiation) from Haridas. Not only is this episode identical to that which Nabhadās gives for his Ramanandi forbearer Krishnadas Payohari, but works according to the same *bhakti* logic: the power that Haridas wields is not his but God's, and can easily trump the tantrik powers accumulated by yogis like the Naths.³⁶⁰

Haridas's biography thus participates in the general critique of tantrik, *smārta* brahminical, and orthodox Muslim forms of religiosity by the *bhakti* poets of his day.³⁶¹ After these encounters with local fauna, Haridas heads to Jobaner where a false *vairāgī* (renunciate) tries to poison him, but Haridas turns the poison into nectar (*amṛt*). This immediately recalls the famous *pad* attributed to the female saint Mirabai of Merta in which says that "the king sent a cup of poison / Mira drank it and laughed."³⁶² Haridas's next

³⁵⁷ Abu al-Fazl ibn Mubarak, *Akbar-namah*, in *The Akbar Nāmā of Abu-L-Fazl* edited by H. Beveridge (Delhi: Low Price Publications, 2010).

³⁵⁸ *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa: With Sanskrit Text and English Translation* (Gorakhpur: Gita Press, 2008) V 16.10; Patton Burchett, "Bitten by the Snake: Early Modern Devotional Critiques of Tantra-Mantra," *The Journal of Hindu Studies* 6, no. 1 (May 1, 2013): 1–20.

³⁵⁹ Raghunathdas, *Paracāi, viśrām* 10.

³⁶⁰ Burchett, "Bhakti Religion and Tantric Magic," 64–70.

³⁶¹ See Pauwels, "Who Are the Enemies of the Bhaktas?"

³⁶² In Parashuram Chaturvedi (ed.), *Mīrāmbāi Kī Padāvalī* (Prayag: Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, 2003) v 36 (107).

destination is Amber (the seat of the Kacchwaha Rajput dynasty), where he tames a tiger that has been eating the inhabitants, and then Manjhari, where he teaches a *faqīr* (Sufi practitioner) about *haṭha yoga*, the divine Name, and the teachings of Namdev and Kabir. In doing so he resembles several other *bhakti* saints like Kabir, Dadu, Krishnadas Payohari who not only tame animals, but tame their spiritual ‘other’, i.e. the Nath yogi, the Muslim *qāzī* and the Hindu Brahmin, through miracles and religious disputation.³⁶³ At each place that he stops, news of Haridas’s deeds spreads and people come in droves to hear him teach; the merchants (*mahājan*) of each city also serve him in various ways (usually through offerings of food) and receive his instruction. Finally, Haridas returns to Didwana where a community of followers forms to learn from and serve him.

There are more ways in which this narrative ties local places, persons and events to trans-regional discourses of devotion and power: the conversion narrative through which Haridas is transformed from a robber into a saint is immediately recognizable as an archetype inherited from the Buddhist story of Angulimala and the story of Valmiki, the *ādi kavi* (original or first poet) and the composer of the *Rāmāyaṇa*.³⁶⁴ That the agent of conversion in this case is no less a figure than Gorakhnath reflects the Niranjani’s understanding that they were part of a tradition that began with Gorakhnath and could be

³⁶³ See Burchett, “Bhakti Religion and Tantric Magic,” 247-318.

³⁶⁴ The Uttarakhaṇḍ of the *Rāmāyaṇ* relates the poet, to whom is credited the invention of *kāvya*, began life as a robber. He attacks the sage Narada on the road, who orders him to ask his family if they share in his sins. When they refuse to share the burden of his evil actions, he returns to Narada and is instructed by him in the worship of God. Valmiki, *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki: An Epic of Ancient India*, edited by Robert Goldman, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990). Angulimala, on the other hand, begins life as a promising student but through a series of events becomes a highway robber; he one day attacks the Buddha only to be converted by him into a Buddhist monk. See W. Stede, “Angulimāla and Liberation,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 20, no. 1/3 (January 1, 1957): 533–35.

traced through Kabir.³⁶⁵ (Haridas refers to both of these saints as his ‘gurus’ in his poetry, as we will see below.)

The frequent mention of merchants is also something shared with hagiographies of other saints, and draws our attention to merchants’ importance as a source of potential followers and patrons. Like Raghunathdas’s *Paracāi*, Jangopal’s *Dadu Janm Līlā* frequently mentions how Dadu is invited, welcomed, and entertained by merchants at various points in his travels, and like Haridas, Dadu is described as imparting his wisdom to these communities in return.³⁶⁶ (As we will see in the next chapter, both the Niranjani Sampraday and the Dadu Panth indeed drew a significant portion of their lay followers from the same local merchant communities, raising the question of whether they were competing for these wealthy merchants’ patronage.) Merchant patronage is featured prominently in the *vārtās* of the Pushtimarg, which records, for example, Purnmal Khatri’s financing of the temple for Srinathji from 1499-1519.³⁶⁷

The second is the mention of Haridas’s and Dadu’s notoriety among the Rajput royals at Amber. In the case of Dadu, such familiarity is a historical possibility given the early presence of a Dadu shrine at Amber said to commemorate Dadu’s presence there in

³⁶⁵ As we will see in Chapter Five, poetry attributed to Gorakhnath figures prominently in the anthological collections of the Niranjani Sampraday. Interestingly, the annual *melā* (festival) at Gadha Dham that commemorates Haridas’s death and which is celebrated on the 6th of the month of *phalgun* begins with a procession of Niranjani initiates to a nearby Nath *math* (monastery), where they present a coconut in offering to the *mahant*. Although we unfortunately do not have records of this practice earlier than the late nineteenth century and can only speculate as to when it began, it is a clear sign that the Niranjanis continue to see their tradition as an inheriting much of its thought and practice from the Nath. Personal communication with Niranjani initiates, March 2012.

³⁶⁶ Jangopal, *Dādū Janm Līlā*, v 3,22, 4.2, 8.17-19, 9.10-22.

³⁶⁷ Hariray, *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan Kī Vārtā*, *vārtā* 30 (161-63). On the Pushtimarg’s courting of merchant communities, see Saha, “Creating a Community of Grace,” 107-118.

the late sixteenth century.³⁶⁸ It is less likely for Haridas, whose area of activity was more geographically distant, and whose tradition did not establish a presence near Amber until later in the seventeenth century. In either case, the similarity between the two traditions suggests that they were vying for prestige and patronage in an overlapping geographical and religious domain.

The story of Haridas, and by extension the early Niranjani community, is thus very much tied to place—in this case, the region of central Rajasthan. At the same time, it also invokes ideas and motifs that span the trans-regional *bhakti* tradition and beyond, like the archetype of conversion and the completion of a spiritual *digvijaya*. Let us now see how, in a similar manner, Haridas's poetry participates in an idiom that spans the world of *bhakti*, employing form and content found across *nirgun* and Vaishnava traditions, but at the same time inflects this *bhakti* idiom with a distinctly local element, at the level of both language and content.

The hymns, poetry and sayings of Haridas

Haridas's poetry and the manuscripts in which we find it represent one oral-literate mode of textual production, circulation and reception as defined in Chapter One. If, following the models of Ruth Finnegan Finnegan and Slavica Ranković, we were to plot Haridas's poems on a spectrum that stretches between the abstract poles of oral and literate, then they would fall somewhere more toward the oral than the scholarly poetry and

³⁶⁸ Horstmann, *Crossing the Ocean of Existence*, 6-7.

anthologies that we will discuss in Chapters Four and Five.³⁶⁹ Yet things are also a bit more complicated than two dimensions can convey. Haridas's poetry immediately strikes us as being part of a tradition, which is to say that it shares its content, form and aesthetic with the compositions of previous, contemporaneous, and later *nirgun*-oriented saints, from the fifteenth-century Kabir to Dadu to his own disciple Tursidas. Poetic composition in this social and aesthetic context occurred in an aggregative fashion in which authorial charisma stemmed from innovative and evocative use of existing material as opposed to invention of new material. This is of course true of many literary traditions in South Asia, including ones in which literacy was prominent (and Haridas's poetry does indeed a few things in common with non-devotional courtly poetry and Vaishnava devotional poetry, in addition to the *nirgun* 'stream').³⁷⁰ However, the oral orientation—both in terms of thought and practice—makes the repetition of certain motifs, phrasings and ideas even more pronounced in this oral-literate mode.³⁷¹ Haridas's poetry performed in an ideological and social context that emphasized the metaphysical and soteriological power of sound and spoken utterance (as opposed to an abstract notion of language or text as an object.)³⁷² Consequently the manuscripts in which we find his poetry (at least before the formation of the Niranjani holy book called the *Vāṇī*) appear to have functioned as notation to help re-create the *event* of the

³⁶⁹ Finnegan, "How oral is oral literature?" 52-64. Ranković, "The Oral-Written Continuum as a Space," 37-68.

³⁷⁰ For a discussion of the notions of innovation and invention in a literary culture very near to that being discussed in this dissertation, see Frances Pritchett, "The Art and Craft of Poetry," in *Nets of Awareness: Urdu Poetry and its Critics* (New Delhi: Katha, 2004 (originally 1994)) 91-105.

³⁷¹ Some of the analysis here draws from the ideas of Milman Parry, *The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected Papers of Milman Parry*, edited by Adam Parry (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), but also Kenneth Bryant, *Poems to a Child God*.

³⁷² See Annette Wilke and Oliver Moebus, *Sound and Communication: An Aesthetic Cultural History of Sanskrit Hinduism* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 738-750.

poem, an event that was transformative for performer and listener (who were often the same).³⁷³

What sources do we have for constructing a picture of Haridas's poetry? The earliest written copies of Haridas's poetry that I have been able to locate are found in two *guṭakās* dating from 1672 and 1687-96 and held at the Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute in Jodhpur.³⁷⁴ They most likely date from the time of the first or second generation of Haridas's disciples, making them the most reliable sources we have for Haridas's poetry. Several more *guṭakās* containing Haridas's poems, as well as his so-called '*jog-granth*' (treatises on yoga), date to the eighteenth century CE, in addition to *Vāṇī* manuscripts which anthologize his compositions together with those of other Niranjani poets, Kabir, Gorakhnath, and select poets of the Dadu Panth.³⁷⁵ A slightly greater number of such manuscripts are found dating to the nineteenth century.³⁷⁶ The primary published source for Haridas's works is Swami Mangaldas's *Śrī Mahārāj Haridās Jī Kī Vāṇī*, published in 1962. As mentioned above, although Swami Mangaldas had access to fairly early manuscripts of the Niranjani's works that were in the possession of the Dadu Panth, he gives no information about the sources he uses or his editorial method. Consequently, his edition is of limited utility for reconstructing Haridas's early oeuvre. For the purposes of this study then I will concentrate on the contents (and form) of the two earliest manuscripts, as many

³⁷³ Lutgendorf has noted the complexity of distinguishing 'performer' from 'audience' in devotional texts of this period; see *The Life of a Text*, 39.

³⁷⁴ MS #11583 (1672 CE), MS #26334 (1687-96 CE).

³⁷⁵ RORI JAI 2165, RORI JOD JOD 22452, 12561.

³⁷⁶ RORI JOD 12226, 14340, 14359, 14716, 14741, 22452, 22463. This does not include manuscripts kept at the Niranjani temple in Navalgarh, or undated manuscripts. If these two groups were factored into the analysis, the chronology of manuscripts might change; however, their contents do not vary greatly from that of the datable manuscripts, and so the textual analysis that follows would remain unaffected.

of these poems show up repeatedly in subsequent manuscripts all the way into the early twentieth century, and the *guṭakās* themselves are representative of this class of manuscript in the Niranjani tradition.

Haridas's poems—mostly *pads* (hymns), *sākhīs* (diptyches) and *cāndrāyaṇ* (quatrains)—are full of yogic imagery, passionate yearning for union with the Divine, rejection of worldly pleasures and bonds, and an urgent appeal to listeners to dedicate their attention and faith to God, lest they be consumed by the fickle world of *saṃsāra*. In this regard his poetry is reminiscent of several of his saint poet predecessors, especially Kabir. Haridas himself acknowledges Kabir and Gorakhnath as his spiritual and poetic forbearers by referring to them as his 'gurus'.³⁷⁷ Such a declaration should probably not be read literally, but as a self-conscious statement about the theological, ideological and aesthetic tradition in which Haridas understood himself to be taking part.

The form of Haridas's compositions tell us that they were geared toward oral performance and participated in performance genres that were shared with other devotional and folk traditions. *Sākhīs* (from *sākṣī*, literally 'witness') are couplets in the *dohā* meter, coming from the Apabhramsha tradition, which are typically employed to convey a didactic message and produce an emotional effect in a very condensed manner. As Karine Schomer writes, the *sākhī* was one of the primary, and very effective, vehicles of saint teachings, being a pithy, easily-memorized and easily-transmitted epigram.³⁷⁸ It is also a hallmark of the *nirguṇ*-oriented saints, being used by Kabir, Ravidas, Dadu, Nanak and similar poets.

³⁷⁷ The best known example is the *sākhī*- *guru hamāre gorakha boliye pādā hamāre celī*, "My guru is called Gorakh, Pada (Devi) my disciple."

³⁷⁸ Karine Schomer, "The *Dohā* as a Vehicle of Sant Teachings," in Schomer and McLeod, *The Sants*, 61-90.

(Of course, the *dohā* was also used widely by Vaishnava poets like Nandadas and Tulsidas, court poets like Keshavdas and Bihari, and the bards of Rajasthan itself in their heroic ballads, the *rāso*. Whether the *sākhī* constitutes a separate genre on the basis of form or use, or whether it was constructed as such through the process of anthologization, will be touched upon briefly in Chapter 5.) *Pads*, on the other hand, were ideal for singing, and formed the bulk of songs performed not only by *nirguṇ*-oriented communities like the Kabir Panth, Dadu Panth, and Niranjani Sampraday, but also Vaishnava communities like the Vallabha Sampraday, Radhavallabhi Sampraday, and Gaudiya Sampraday. They also formed a substantial portion of the vernacular lyrics performed at royal courts in North India, particularly in the *dhrupad* style.³⁷⁹ The *pad*'s longer format allowed the poet space to develop a narrative, theme, or emotional flavor. For devotional groups communities like that of the Niranjani, *pads* were at the center of the community's ritual and social life being sung communally and in fulfillment of the religious directive to remember the Divine (*smaran* or *sumiran*) and speak of his glories (*guṇ gān* or *yaś gān*). Finally, the *cāndrāyaṇ* is a verse form that is also found in more courtly tradition and Vaishnava traditions, but which was particularly popular among the *nirguṇ* saint traditions of Rajasthan. It was employed so often by Haridas, other Niranjani poets, and Dadu Panthi poets that Niranjani and Dadu Panthi manuscripts tend to group a poet's *cāndrāyaṇs* together in the same manner as they do a poet's *sākhīs* or *pads* (and occasionally refer to a poet's *cāndrāyaṇs* as constituting a *cāndrāyaṇ granth*, or 'book of *cāndrāyaṇ*, the term *granth* suggesting a unified work).

³⁷⁹ Meilu Ho, "Connecting Histories: Liturgical Songs as Classical Compositions in Hindustānī Music," *Ethnomusicology* 57, no. 2 (May 19, 2013): 207–35; Busch, "Hidden in Plain View: Brajbhasa Poets at the Mughal Court," 272-81; Katherine Schofield, "Reviving the Golden Age Again: Classicization," Hindustani Music, and the Mughals." *Ethnomusicology* 54, no. 3 (2010): 84-517.

The oral performance context of Haridas's poetry is also reflected in the form or rather the sonic dimension of the verses themselves, especially the sing-able *pads*: these poems are intended to *sound* good, with plenty of alliteration, internal rhyme, rhythmic ordering of words, and the employment of subtle 'sound effects' like the use of 'harsh' sounds (e.g. *ka, ca, ṭa*) and 'soft sounds' (e.g. *ba, ma*) in particular contexts. While Haridas's poetry does not exhibit many of the types of *alaṃkāra* (such as sophisticated similes, metaphors and puns) that would have established a text's identity as *kāvya* or literature proper in this period, it is nevertheless aurally effective and affective, using sound to produce an emotional mood that 'resonates' with its content. To achieve this, Haridas utilizes the evocative sounds of the local dialect of Marwari, integrating them into the trans-regional literary dialect of Brajbhasha (as we will see in the discussion of individual *pads* below). This is another important facet of Haridas's compositions: there is something distinctly local about his poetry, something that cannot be said of the more scholastic (and linguistically 'pure') compositions of some later Niranjani poets. His language, though recognizably Brajbhasha, is heavily inflected by Marwari phonology and morphology, and his verses frequently make use of folk motifs from central and western Rajasthan.

A few examples will help to illustrate these sonic and local dimensions while simultaneously demonstrating some of the elements that make Haridas's poems part of a larger tradition. The first example, a *pad* in the *soraṭhī* raga, comes from the 1672 CE manuscript, and participates in the sub-genre of *vinaya* (appeal/petition). It was an extremely popular genre, and one that cut across boundaries of *nirguṇ sant* and Vaishnava

bhakti aesthetics.³⁸⁰ The *vinaya* was extremely evocative, while still being suitable for a formless God:

rāṃma rāi maṃgau bhagati tumhārī
so tau tribadhi tāpa taim nyārī (ṭeka)
ridhi na māṃgau sidhi na māṃgau mukti na māṃgau devā
ādi anti tuma syoṃ mili khelaum yahu ārambha yāha sevā (1)
nirmala gyāṃna dhuni nirmala pema prīti parakāsā
āsaṇa acala tahāṃ nihacala tuma ṭhākura maim dāsā (2)
saṃjama sīla sāca sati sumiraṇa pati syoṃ prīti āṇerī
janaharīdāsa kūṃ āsa na dūjī āsa anāhada terī (3)

King Ram! I ask for devotion to you
Which is far from the three kinds of burning (*trividhi tāpa*).³⁸¹ (Refrain)

I ask not for success, nor wealth, nor liberation, oh God!
From beginning to end, meeting you I play –
 this is the beginning, this is service!
That which is pure knowledge, pure meditation, the pure Sound (*dhuni*),
 the light of love and devotion –
I place my steadfast mind in your sturdy throne (*āsana*),
 You are the Master and I your servant!
The honest wife, her senses under control,
 acting rightly and remembering you,
Brings devotion to her husband.
Janharidas has no second desire; his desire for you is endless.

I have included in the transcription and translation above the words *ṭek* and its English equivalent ‘refrain’ because the word is included in the manuscript itself—telling the performer which part of the poem could be repeated or inserted in between other lines, and generally used to build up the feeling and thematic consistency of the *pad* in musical performance. This then is a clue about oral performance ‘written into’ the poem itself (at least on paper). Lost in translation however are the rolling rhythm and rhyme of the verse:

³⁸⁰ On *vinaya* and its pan-*bhakti* popularity, see John S. Hawley, “*Vinaya* Crossovers: Kabir and Sur,” in Hawley, *Three Bhakti Voices*, 305-17.

³⁸¹ The “*tribadhi (trividhi) tāp*” refers to the three forms of suffering: *daivika*, *daihika*, and *bhautika*.

there is a word break (and usually a rhyme as well) at every fifth syllable, which is further emphasized by word repetition (*māṅgau*, *nirmala*, *āsa*) and internal rhyme (*ridhi/sidhi*, *acala/nihacala*). Haridas uses liberal amounts of alliteration (*‘rāṅma rāī,’ ‘tau tribadhi tāpa taiṅ,’ ‘pema prīti parakāsā,’ ‘saṅjama sīla sāca sati sumiraṅa’*) and pairs words in such a way so that, if word breaks are ignored (which is often the case in sung performance), a similar sound is produced (e.g. *āsaṅa acala*, *āsa na*, and *āsa anāhada*, all contain *āsa+na*).

Despite the use of the appellation *rāī* (king), Haridas is not speaking of Ramchandra, the Ram of Valmiki’s epic, but rather of the *nirguṅ* Ram familiar from the poetry of Kabir, Ravidas, Guru Nanak, and similar poets. As is the case with these earlier poets, Ram’s unqualifiable and indescribable essence does not prevent Haridas from articulating his faith in terms of more human relationships: in the second verse he pledges himself as a servant to his Master, and in the third he takes on the form of a loyal wife. The flavor or *rasa* of *bhakti* is strong in this hymn, as Haridas proclaims that he has no other desire than for Ram, and asks not for wealth, nor success, nor even liberation (*mokṣa*), but simply for the opportunity to be devoted to Ram. This is perhaps the most striking declaration of devotion that devotees can make: to pass up the opportunity to be liberated from the cycle of birth and death and worldly suffering in order to further serve the object of their love.

Particularly relevant to our analysis here is the second verse, which refers both directly and obliquely to yogic practice and to the metaphysics of sound. The term *āsaṅa acala* here carries a double meaning: it is both the ‘sturdy throne’ of the master, and the ‘unmoving posture’ through which one attains and channels the ‘pure knowledge and pure

sound' that is also mentioned in the verse. Haridas's audience would have recognized the association between yogic postures, knowledge and sound (*dhuni*): the Nath tradition of ascetics, which was strong in early modern Rajasthan, prescribed the practice of yogic postures in tandem with the recitation of auspicious sounds (mantras) as a means of transcending mundane levels of awareness and attaining knowledge of the higher levels of reality (e.g. *brahmajñāna*, knowledge of Brahma, and *tattvajñāna*, knowledge of things as they really are).³⁸² Such ideas are also found in the poetry of Kabir, who frequently speaks of 'the unstruck sound' and yogic anatomy and physiology in his *padis*.³⁸³ As noted above, Haridas saw both Gorakhnath (the archetypical Nath figure) and Kabir as his religious and poetic gurus.

What is this *dhuni*? A *tadbhava* form of Sanskrit *dhvani* (sound, echo, voice), in the vernacular poetry of Haridas and his contemporaries, this term could refer to the *anahad nād* (the unstruck sound that permeates the cosmos and the individual soul), the *śabd* or *sabad* (the semiotic word or non-semiotic sound conveyed by the guru, which brings enlightenment and liberation), the auspicious sounds (mantras) pronounced during yoga or mediation, or even more mundane sounds, like the sound of a song.³⁸⁴ Often, the term referred to more than one of these concepts simultaneously (and in this way was part of a distinctly vernacular, popular discourse of yoga as opposed to the more technically specific vocabulary of roughly contemporaneous Sanskrit works like the *Haṭhayogapradīpikā*,

³⁸² On Naths in Rajasthan, see Daniel Gold and Ann Grodzins Gold, "The Fate of the Householder Nath," *History of Religions* 24, no. 2 (1984): 113-32; on sound-related thought in the Nath tradition, see White, *Alchemical Body*, 290-94. Beck, *Sonic Liturgy*, 148-71.

³⁸³ See, for example, pad 325 in Das, *Kabīr Granthāvalī*, 214.

³⁸⁴ White, *Alchemical Body*, 281. Beck, 170.

Yogabīja, *Śivasamhitā*, and *Yogacintāmaṇi*).³⁸⁵ In the poetry of Kabir, Haridas, and similar vernacular saint poets, the term *dhvani* (*dhuni*) invokes a soteriology in which liberation from the mundane and illusory world of *saṃsāra* comes through listening quietly for the resonating sound of the Divine in one's self.³⁸⁶ One finds harmony with that sound by uttering auspicious sounds, both non-semiotic mantras but also powerful words, especially the name of Ram. In fact, these poets sometimes remark that the name of Ram is the most powerful utterance, delivering liberation and countering any ill effects (*rog*, *dveś*) of the phenomenal world.³⁸⁷ So it is no coincidence that the name of Ram is the first word of this *pad*. However, Ram is not the only appellation that Haridas uses for the Divine; the name 'Niranjani' is obviously found frequently in his poetry, along with 'Hari,' 'Govind,' and 'Nath.'

The next *pad* we will examine (taken from the 1687-96 manuscript) uses the term *nāth* ('lord') very effectively by Haridas to suggest both the Divine but also a husband or mortal lover. It also brings out the *rasa* or 'flavor' of the local quite vividly with its mix of features from Brajhasha and Marwari, and its deployment of motifs from regional folk traditions.

jaugīyyā tu āvu rai īṇaṃ desa
nījara paḍai kāmī nāmtha mhārau yyaī karu ādesa (ṭeka)
kara jauḍī pāīnaṃ paṇḍu re mīlīyyau jāṃṇaṃ ṇaṃ dau
tu hmārai ghara āvu āi dekhī darasa phala lau (1)
āyyau sāmvaṇaṃ māṃsa sajanī b(h?)aryā jala thala tāla
jaugīyyau kīṇaṃ bilamāṃī rākhyau birahani behāṃla (2)

³⁸⁵ Mallison, James. "Haṭha Yoga" and "Nātha-Sampradāya," in *The Brill Encyclopedia of Religions*, vol. 3; on relevant texts in Sanskrit, see Jason Birch, "The Meaning of *haṭha*," 527-29.

³⁸⁶ Haridas, *cāndrāyaṇ* 48, RORI JOD 11583, folio 145B. Kabir, *pad* 256, in Das (ed.), *Kabīr Granthāvalī*.

³⁸⁷ Haridas, *cāndrāyaṇ* 5, *pad* 27, RORI MS 11583. This belief is shared with Vaishnava Ram traditions as well; see Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text*.

bichuḍiyyāṃ ke bhava bhayyā re ai dīnaṃ dubhara jāī
aika berī kaūu dau naṃ pherī naṃgāra hamārai āī (3)
vā muratī maṃnaṃ mau basī re cīta tai dura naṃ jātha
kevula kai naṃhī aura kauī darasaṃaṃ dehaū nātha (4)

Yogi, come to this land,
May I get a small glimpse of my Lord!
This I request. (refrain)

Joining my hands, I fall at your feet,
Having found you, I will not let you go!
Come to my house –
Having seen you, I will receive the fruit of *darśan*.

Oh girlfriend, the month of *sāvan* has come,
And the ponds and high grounds have filled with water.
Who has waylaid my Yogi?
The *virahiṇī* is beside herself.

We've been separated for some time,
Oh! With great difficulty the days pass.
I won't let you wander even once,
Come to our town!

That figure has settled in my mind –
Oh it does not go from my thoughts
There is no other like the Incomparable One,
Give me *darśan*, Lord.

Haridas beautifully exploits the multivalence of the term *nāth*: in one sense, it is the Lord, i.e. God, to whom he is appealing for *darśan* (vision of the Divine) and union. In a second sense, it is the female speaker's husband who is away, and with whom she longs to be reunited. In yet another sense, it refers to a *yogī* proper, in the sense of an ascetic of the Nath tradition—a sense brought out by two references to the beloved as '*jaugiyyau*' (*yogī*) in the hymn. Not only the term *nāth*, but other words as well tell us that this *pad* is operating in multiple registers: *darśan*, for example, means both a glimpse of the speaker's

human beloved, and a super-sensory vision of the Divine. Similarly, the term *murti* suggests the speaker's mental image of her beloved, a literal image (sculpted or painted) of a deity, and an abstract mental conception of the unembodied Divinity.

The motif of the *virahiṇī* (Sanskrit *virattiṇī*), the woman afflicted by separation (*viraha*) from her lover/God, is ubiquitous in the poetry of both the *nirguṇ* saint poets and their Vaishnava counterparts (as well as more secular poetry), and connects Haridas to these traditions. At the same time, Haridas makes its expression even more evocative by adopting elements from the folk songs sung by women in Rajasthan.³⁸⁸ Songs lamenting separation from a beloved in the form of a *yogī* are of course found in other regions, but are particularly popular in Rajasthan, where an arid climate unfavorable to cultivation encourages migrant forms of labor, including long-distance trade.³⁸⁹ Husbands occupied in trade were often gone for most of the year, returning only during the rainy season of *sāvan* (mentioned in the poem) when roads became impassable; this trope would have been readily recognizable in the lived experience of Haridas's merchant lay followers, of which there were many (as we shall see in the next chapter). The use of particular terms and turns of phrase like *jaugiyyau*, *nījar*, and *baryā jala thala tāla* are remarkably similar to their use in Rajasthani women's folks songs, telling us that Haridas probably appropriated these terms from local traditions rather than the more general well of themes and vocabulary offered by

³⁸⁸ Compare with Mirabai's yogi-related songs as discussed by John S. Hawley, "Mirabai as Wife and Yogi," in Hawley, *Three Bhakti Voices*, 117-138.

³⁸⁹ On migrating artisanal and merchant groups in Rajasthan, see Nandita Prasad Sahai, *Politics of Patronage and Protest: The State, Society, and Artisans in Early Modern Rajasthan* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006) 124-177.

trans-regional *bhakti* poetic discourse (e.g. in the compositions of Kabir, Ravidas, Surdas, etc.).³⁹⁰

Haridas's language also evokes the local. The language of this *pad* approximates the 'standard' Brajbhasha of poetry enough to be understood outside of central Rajasthan, but it is thoroughly inflected by Marwari. This is observable at the level of phonology, in the frequent nasalization of vowels (e.g. *jāṇṇaṃ*, *sāṇṇvaṇaṃ*, *māṃs*, *bilamāṃṃī*, *behāṃṃl*, etc.), the use of the retroflex *ṇ* (e.g. *ṇaṃ* for Brajbhasha *na*) and the doubling of the semivowel *y* (e.g. *jaugīyyā*, *mīlīyyau*, *āyyau*, etc.). It is also observable at the level of morphology and lexicon, in such recognizably Marwari words as *mhārau*, *hmārai*, *kevul*, and the ubiquitous vocative particle *rai* or *re*.

Thus the very sound of Haridas's poetry was a sound of place, just as his language was a language of place (to borrow Pollock's terminology).³⁹¹ Similarly, though he shared most of his themes, motifs and images with his fellow saint poets (and a broader roster of Indic poets), Haridas often localized them in recognizable ways. If his poetry was so intricately and deeply tied up with sound, then what happened when Haridas's poems, songs and utterances moved from the realm of sound to the realm of the written page? Writing is said to allow utterance to traverse greater spatial and temporal distance; if that is the case, then what would happen to poetry like that of Haridas, which was so connected to the local and so oriented toward the temporal 'event' of performance?³⁹²

³⁹⁰ For an introduction to women's folk songs in Rajasthan and transcriptions of several songs, see Raheja, Gloria Goodwin (ed.). *Listen to the Heron's Words: Reimagining Gender and Kinship in North India*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.

³⁹¹ Pollock, *Language of the Gods*, 199, 381-82.

³⁹² On the social effects of writing on the distribution of ideas and knowledge, see Goody, *The Logic of Writing and the Organization of Society*; for a more theoretical discussion of how writing traverses time, space, and

***Guṭakās*: writing as notation and manuscript as memory**

The short answer, in the case of Haridas's poetry and the earliest manuscripts in which we find it, is that in this context writing was employed in the service of creating a unique performance event, and that event was determined as much by the particularities of its spatial and temporal context as it was by the written 'text.' In other words, the human subjects who were performing the poetry, and the social and ritual context in which they were performing it, contributed as much to the realization of the text as whatever was written on the page. The interaction of these different elements is reflected in the form of the manuscripts themselves and the various traces they carry from the act of writing, 'reading,' and performance, as well as traces from other aspects of their histories as useful and meaningful objects.³⁹³

As mentioned above, the earliest copies of Haridas's poetry are found in what are usually called '*guṭakās*' in Hindi, from the Sanskrit *guṭikā*, meaning small lump or ball. Though *guṭakā* can technically refer to any collection of folios, in Hindi it most often refers to small-format paper folios which can be loose but which are usually found stitched together with a cloth or cardboard binding (as seen in Fig. 3.2). Many (but not all) *guṭakās* were used as personal notebooks by *sādhus*, monks, and occasionally by householders

difference, see Jacques Derrida, "The End of the Book and the Beginning of Writing," and "The Violence of the Letter: From Lévi-Strauss to Rousseau," in *Of Grammatology*, 6-26, 101-140. A discussion of the power of writing to help 'broadcast' a message across space in the period and place under consideration here can be found in O'Hanlon, "Performance in a World of Paper."

³⁹³ And thus as 'things' in the sense used by Latour (*Reassembling the Social*, 70-82).

within saint communities.³⁹⁴ They contained mostly songs and sayings composed by the saints, but could also hold accounts, travelogues, genealogies, diagrams, lists of items to be procured, and all manner of notes—the *guṭakā* was like a *sādhu*'s suitcase. They often passed from one *sādhu* or monk to another and were expanded with additional folios being stitched in or the entire book being rebound.³⁹⁵ Thus the *guṭakās* we find today are often the work of multiple hands (as in the case of the *guṭakā* in Fig 3.3.).



Fig. 3.2. MS 12556, Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute, Jodhpur.

³⁹⁴ Details about the identity of the owner of a *guṭakā* can often be gleaned from colophons that follow a particular text or texts within the manuscript. This is how we know, for example, that some *guṭakās* were possessed or used by multiple individuals.

³⁹⁵ Horstmann, “Dādūpanthī Anthologies,” 164.

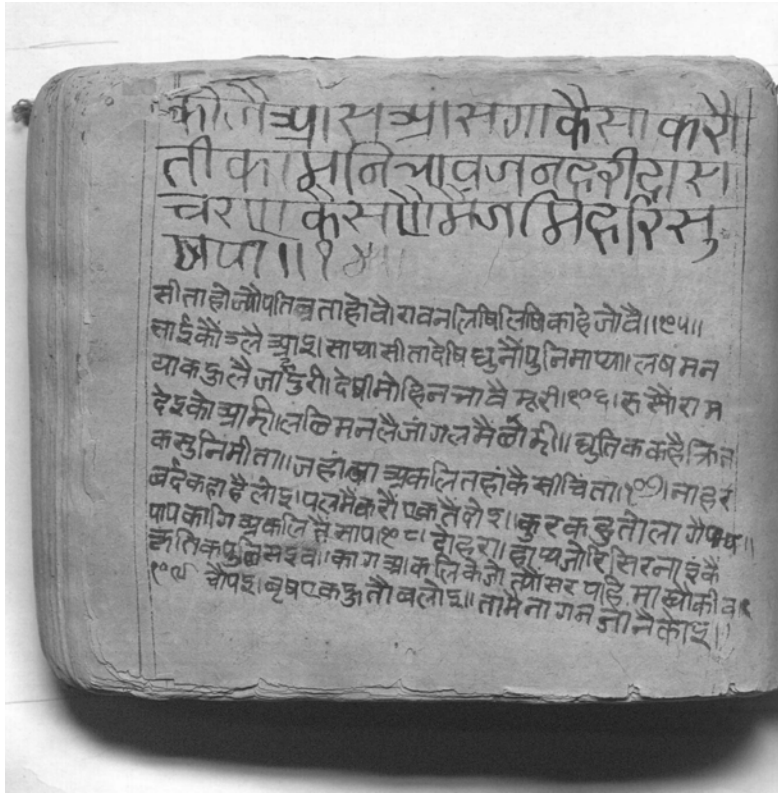


Fig. 3.3 MS 11583, Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute, Jodhpur.

Guṭakās, like most manuscripts from South Asia, are written in *scriptio continua*—there are no word breaks, and the individuals who copied them rarely signaled the breaks at the end of a poetic line or even at the end of a verse. The act of ‘reading’ such manuscripts has been likened to reading musical notation: the reciter generally knew the text already, and the written syllables functioned like cues.³⁹⁶ This draws our attention to the fact that the syllable-wise, metrical recitation of the text was more important than stressing word-breaks, which could actually hamper the rhythmic or musical reproduction of the text. The hand of

³⁹⁶ William Johnson, “Toward a Sociology of Reading in Classical Antiquity,” *The American Journal of Philology* 121, no. 4 (December 1, 2000): 597.

such manuscripts is typically rough, though one does find plenty of such manuscripts which have been carefully copied. Reference apparatuses—like verse numbers, folio numbers, and the use of different colored inks—are often, though not always, absent, and often irregular. All of this suggests that these manuscripts were intended for personal use, as an *aide mémoire*—not to be read as a book, but to help an individual call to mind forgotten details.

The first *pad* translated above (see Fig. 3.4), copied in 1672, is found in a *guṭakā* which contains twenty-seven *pads* and sixty-three *cāndrāyaṅs* by Haridas in addition to poems by saints like Kabir, Gorakhnath, and Sundardas of the Dadu Panth, as well as the hagiographies of Namdev (a fourteenth-century saint of Maharashtra) and Pipa (a fifteenth-century saint from Rajasthan claimed by the Niranjani but also by the Ramanandis). Haridas's *pads* are organized by raga, which would have facilitated use in musical performance, while the *cāndrāyaṅ* verses are organized by *aṅg* or theme, which would have facilitated use in the context of *pravacan* (sermonizing). Although the verses are numbered and the *ṭek* (or refrain) is noted for each *pad* (which again would be useful in the context of musical performance), the manuscript lacks any other consistent elements that would help one *find* anything in it, suggesting that it was copied for personal use. The use of punctuation to mark caesuras or the end of a poetic line is very inconsistent, and the copyist's system of orthography is idiosyncratic. Indeed, the aural 'text' as it was recited or heard appears to have been metrically sound, but the orthography obscures this fact, drawing our attention to an interesting aspect of this type of text and its manner of inscription: regardless of how the text 'looked' on paper it could still be recited correctly.

This reinforces the impression that whoever inscribed the text did so to aid their own memory, not replace it, and not to transmit the text to any other 'reader.'

This is even more apparent in the slightly later manuscript, datable to some time between 1687 and 1693, which contains the second *pad* analyzed above (Fig. 3.5). It contains no section headings or notation of raga, and no folio numbers. The use of punctuation is inconsistent, as is the numbering of the *pads* and individual verses within them. The orthography is similarly inconsistent. This clearly appears to be an individual singer's personal notes, and it is found in a rather remarkable *guṭakā* that includes, along with poetry by other saint poets, food recipes for acquiring yogic powers, numerous Bismillahs and spells written in Arabic and Devanagari scripts, as well magic squares and diagrams that are difficult to decipher because they are notes meant to index information in the memory of the *guṭakā*'s owner (Figs. 3.6, 3.7). Manuscripts like this one were *accessories* to knowledge, which itself was always located in human bodies, specifically the body of the guru in the tradition of the Niranjani and similar groups, and thus it was important to 'hear' the guru's teachings as he spoke them, even if he occasionally needed to jog his memory by looking at written notes.

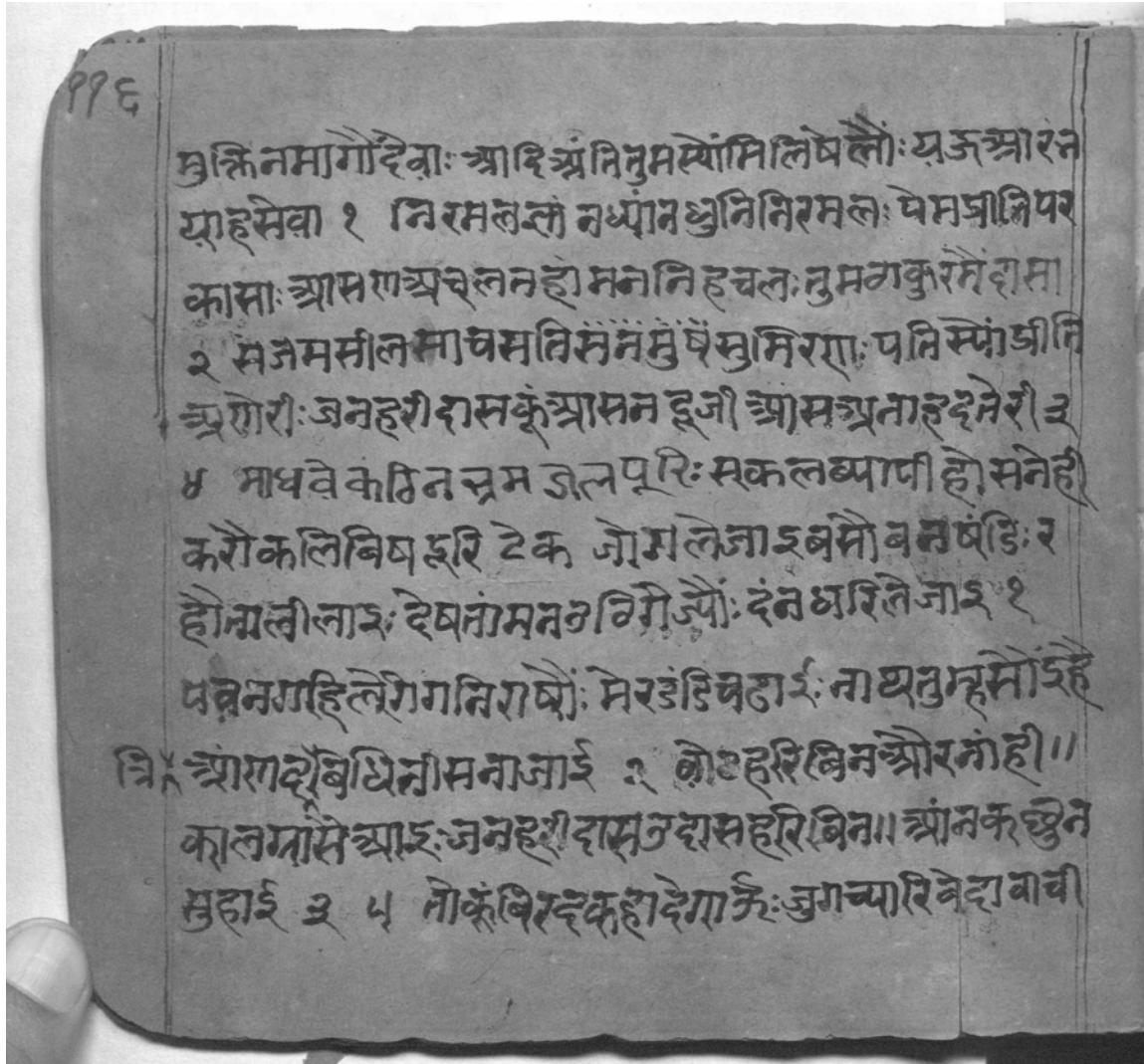


Fig. 3.4. MS 11583, Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute, Jodhpur.

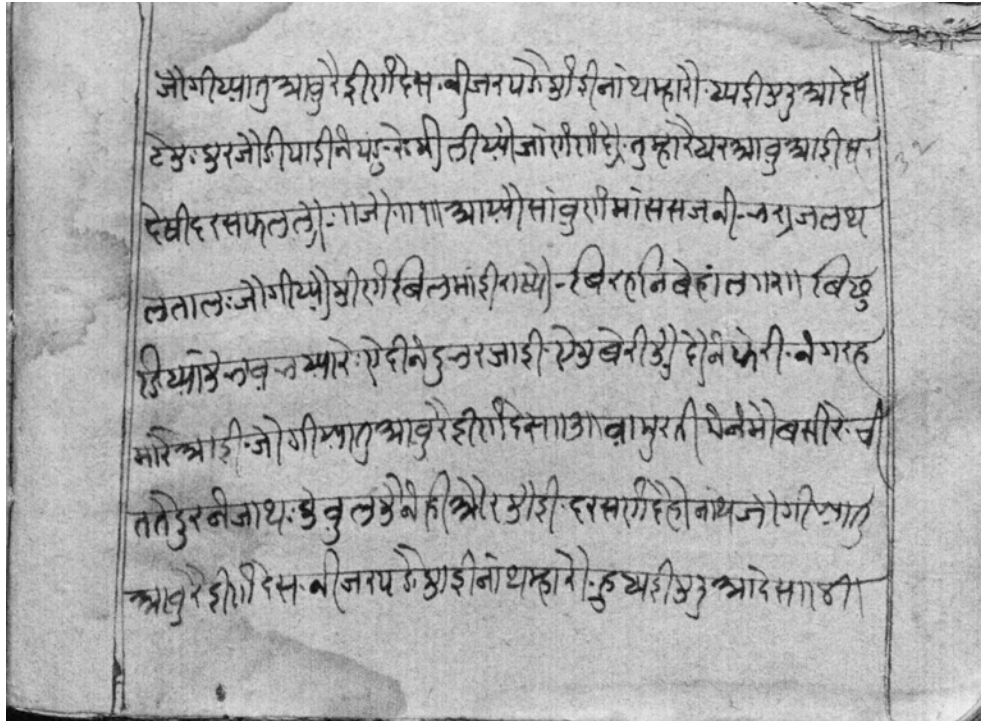


Fig. 3.5 MS 26334, Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute, Jodhpur.

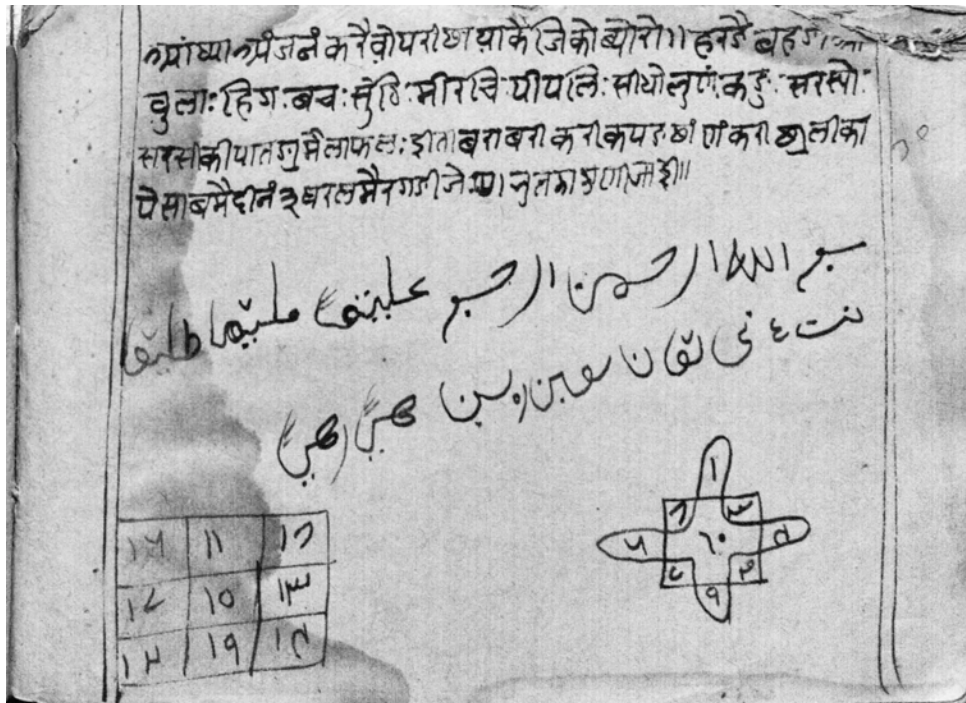


Fig. 3.6. MS 26334, Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute, Jodhpur.

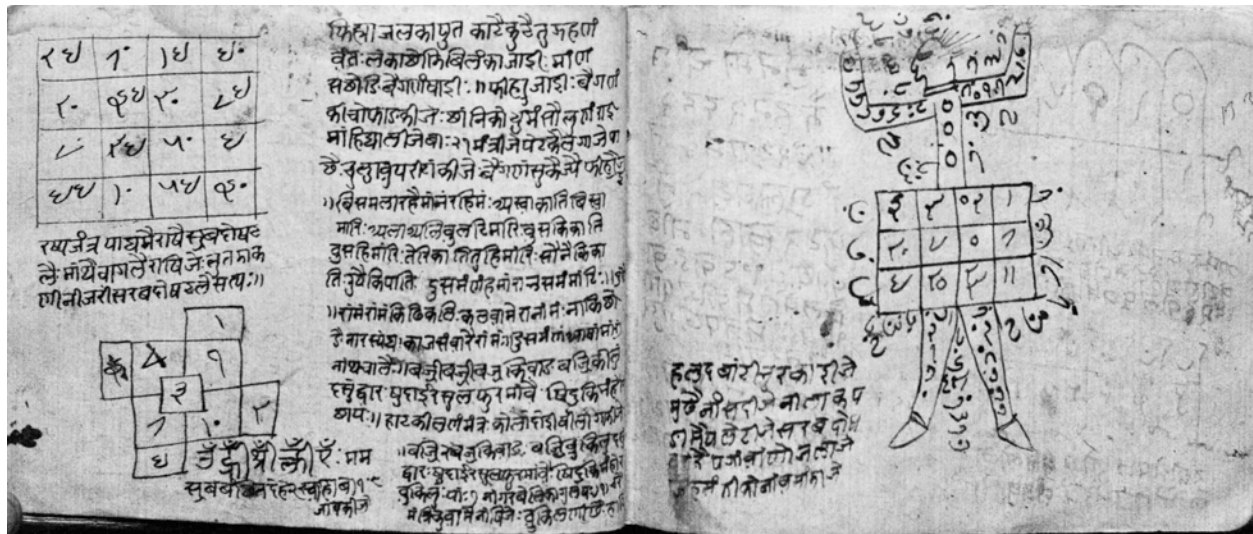


Fig. 3.7. MS 26334, Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute, Jodhpur.

That manuscripts were used in this fashion is not only suggested by these internal features, but also by hagiographical material that documents the ritual and social context in which this poetry was performed. Such hagiographical material, along with textual evidence from the poems themselves, also helps us to connect these texts and the manuscripts in which we find them to their ideological, social, and institutional context, namely the community of saints, monks, and their lay followers. It is to this context that we now turn.

Poetry, performance, and sonic soteriology

Haridas's poetry functioned in a tradition that privileged sound and the aural as the primary mode of knowing the world and also of transcending it. Such an epistemology informed and was informed by ritual and social practices that emphasized face-to-face communion with other members of the community of the faithful and direct transmission of

knowledge from guru to disciple. It was also an integral part of a system of media and communication in which texts were *most often* (though not exclusively) transmitted through oral performance.

The idea that sound, listening and speaking could effect change in the phenomenal world or allow one to transcend that world is certainly not unique to the Niranjani, nor to the *bhakti* tradition. The concept of utterance that brings about change in the world dates from the Vedic period, and questions of *śabda* (sound), *artha* (meaning), and their relationship had occupied Indian scholars of poetry and drama for the better part of a millennium by the time the traditions under consideration here arose.³⁹⁷ Rather than describing that long and complex history here, let us simply note the major features of the sonic soteriology that was at work in traditions like that of the Niranjani and their close *bhakti* cousins, a soteriology inherited largely from medieval Shaivite and *tantrik* traditions.³⁹⁸

As noted above in regard to the concept of *dhvani*, we find in the poetry of Haridas, Kabir, Dadu, and similar poets the notion of existence as vibration or sound, and the directive to ‘listen’ for the Divine resonating in one’s self in the form of *śabd* or *nād*.³⁹⁹ At the same time, the *śabd* can be the mantra, or esoteric knowledge, that the guru imparts to

³⁹⁷ For a comprehensive survey of thought on sound in the Sanskrit tradition, see Wilke and Moebus, *Sound and Communication*. For a more focused discussion of the intersections between poetic and religious thought on the nature of sound and meaning, see David Shulman, “How to bring a goddess into being through visible sound,” in *The Poetics of Grammar and the Metaphysics of Sound and Sign*, ed. Sergio La Porta and David Shulman (Boston: Brill, 2007), 305-41.

³⁹⁸ Hazariprasad Dwivedi, *Nāth Sampradāy* (Allahabad: Lok Bharati, 1966). ———, *Kabīr: Kabīr Ke Vyaktitva, Sāhitya Aur Dārśanik Vicārom Kī Ālocanā*, 9th ed. (New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 2002, originally 1964). Mariola Offredi, “Kabīr and the Nāthpanth,” in *Images of Kabīr*, ed. Monika Horstmann (Delhi: Manohar, 2002), 127-41.

³⁹⁹ E.g. Haridas, *cāndrāyaṇ* 4.1, MS RORI 11583, Folio 147B.

his disciple, thus unlocking the secrets of reality (*satya*) and conferring liberation.⁴⁰⁰ This notion locates spiritual power and authority within the guru, and the emphasis on ‘hearing’ reinforces the institution of the guru-disciple relationship, in which receiving knowledge directly from the guru was essential.⁴⁰¹ Not surprisingly, a large number of *sākhīs* and *pads* by Niranjani poets are devoted to emphasizing the importance and singing the praises of the guru (as we shall see in Chapter Five, Niranjani and Dadu Panth anthologies devote entire thematic ‘chapters’ to poetry about the guru). This insistence on direct aural reception of knowledge from the guru goes hand-in-hand with the critique of the intellectual hegemony of written texts and their interlocutors that we noted in the previous chapter. If Kabir, Ravidas and similar poets attempted to undermine the authority of literate religious elites (in both Hindu and Muslim traditions) by attacking the very idea knowledge could reside within a written text, then they also offered an alternative ontology and institution of spiritual authority by insisting that knowledge resides within human bodies, particularly the body of the guru.⁴⁰²

It makes sense, therefore, that the *guṭakās* described above appear more like musical ‘set lists,’ chord charts or lecture notes than ‘texts’ inscribed by one person so that another could ‘read’ them. Spiritual teachers, gurus, and monks in early modern Rajasthan were assessed by potential disciples on the basis of their knowledge and rhetorical abilities, which

⁴⁰⁰ Kabir, *sākhī* 7, *guru kau aṅg*, 59 in *Kabīr Granthāvalī*.

⁴⁰¹ Vaudeville, “*Sant Mat*,” 33-35.

⁴⁰² Kabir, *sākhī* 3, in *Kabīr Granthāvalī*. This extremely well-travelled *sākhī* characterizes the guru-disciple relationship as one in which the guru helps the disciple to ‘see’ the knowledge already residing within him. See also Bahkna, *sākhī* 1, in *Bakhanājī Kī Vāṇī*, edited by Swami Mangaldas (Jaipur: Sri Dadu Dayal Mahasabha). For comparison with the contemporary Persian tradition, see Nile Green, “The Uses of Books in a Late Mughal Takiyya: Persianate Knowledge between Person and Paper.” *Modern Asian Studies* 44, no. 2 (2010).

were often demonstrated in Socratic dialogues between guru and disciple: as the Dadu Panthi poet Bakhna says, just as one taps a pot in the bazaar to see if it is sound before buying it and taking it home, one must ‘tap’ a guru by asking him questions and seeing how he responds.⁴⁰³ In this context, a true guru was he who had the answers within himself, without recourse to ‘external’ knowledge held in books. (Apparently, however, he could take recourse to written notes in some situations; thus the *guṭakās* hint at a slight gap between ideal and practice.) In the hagiographical texts of the Niranjani Sampraday, Haridas appears to us as the ideal guru, teaching and answering questions wherever he wanders.⁴⁰⁴ Perhaps in this regard his alleged illiteracy (like the alleged illiteracy of Kabir, Ravidas, Dadu, etc.) is an asset, as it assures us that he never took recourse to anything written.

In the poetry of Haridas and other Niranjani poets significant emphasis is also placed on the soteriological and palliative effects of uttering and hearing the divine Name, and singing, reciting and listening to the praises of the Divine. This emphasis is shared with other *nirguṇ* as well as Vaishnava traditions. Haridas compares taking the name of Ram to taking a ‘vow’ (*vrāt*) through which one may ‘wash away the poison of the objects of the senses.’⁴⁰⁵ He also warns that singing Ram’s name is the only way to escape the clutches of *kāl* (time, death).⁴⁰⁶ Haridas and other Niranjani poets emphasize the benefits of practicing

⁴⁰³ Bakhna, *sākhī* 5. Thanks to Monika Horstmann for sharing and elucidating the meaning of this verse at the Early Hindi Retreat, Warsaw, 2013.

⁴⁰⁴ Raghunathdas, *Paracāī*, 13.6.

⁴⁰⁵ Haridas, *cāndrāyaṇ* 5, RORI MS 11583.

⁴⁰⁶ Haridas, *cāndrāyaṇ* 19-20, RORI MS 11583.

satsaṅg, or keeping the company of true/good people, an imperative which we also find in the compositions of Kabir, Ravidas, Dadu, Guru Nanak and the like.⁴⁰⁷

Keeping *satsaṅg* and singing the name of God and his praises (*guṇ-gān*, *yaś-kīrti*) appear to have often been practiced together, in the context of *samāj-gāyan* (communal singing). This is another practice that the Niranjani shared with not only the *nirguṇ* saints of Rajasthan, but also the Vaishnavas further east. Hagiographies of the various saints of the Niranjani Sampraday describe them as ‘singing’ the praises of Niranjan, and describe meetings in which saints and followers sang together.⁴⁰⁸ (Similar activity is documented in the case of the Dadu Panth in the *Dādū Janm-Līlā*.)⁴⁰⁹ Communal singing continues to be the primary ritual activity of the Niranjani Sampraday to this day.

Conclusion: Singing and reciting community

These practices brought into being a specific type of textual community. That community might extend far enough across space and time to incorporate figures like Gorakhnath and Kabir, and include the faithful residing in other regions and sectarian communities (as suggested by *Bhaktamāl* texts, including those of the Niranjani Sampraday and Dadu Panth). Yet that community was always experienced in an immediate spatial and temporal context, in other words through the face-to-face communion of the faithful in the context of *satsaṅg* and *samāj-gāyan*.⁴¹⁰ It was brought into being through the event which

⁴⁰⁷ Vaudeville, “*Sant Mat*,” 31-32.

⁴⁰⁸ Raghunathdas, *Paracāi*, 12, 15. Raghavdas, *Bhaktamāl*, vv 434-444.

⁴⁰⁹ Jangopal, *Dādū Janm Līlā*, v 3.12, 13.30, 14.25.

⁴¹⁰ Pauwels, adapting the ideas of Benedict Anderson, notes that communal singing in particular brought about community through ‘unisonality’: “...Anderson’s concept of unisonality would apply here with a different twist... The songs contribute to the collective ‘imagining’ of a community in the act of singing in a group and

was the performance of the text, because the text did not otherwise exist as an ‘object.’ The form of the manuscripts described above tells us that the text did not ‘live’ in them, though it was called into being through their aid. Community could be imagined in the broadest of fashions, but it could only be realized in the moment, and through the meeting of human bodies, when they ‘made the text speak.’ This kind of community was, in a certain sense, always local. So even though literacy and writing were present in the early Niranjani tradition, they were only put into the service of consolidating a textual community that was constituted by people more than ‘things.’ And in this context, the practice of writing was in the strict sense ‘literization’ and not ‘literarization,’ as inscription of hymns and sayings into *guṭakās* was in no sense an attempt to establish these texts as *kāvya* or literature.

This would start to change, however, in the middle of the seventeenth century as some Niranjani poets and monks began to engage in new forms of textual composition and new forms of inscription. Through the production of scholarly, literary works and their dissemination in the form of *pothīs*, the Niranjanis began to take part in trans-local and trans-regional intellectual discourses on matters as varied as theology, metaphysics, and poetics. In the process, they also moved toward establishing a new kind of textual community of their own.

remembering collectively the great saints with whom the community identifies, and also in the individual remembering of this communal commemoration when the refrain replays in the participants' heads afterward.” (Pauwels, *In Praise of Holy Men*, 34).

Chapter Four

Writing Scholarship and Literature in the Niranjani Sampraday

ātma lābha teṃ aura na koī, yaha bhākhata haiṃ muni saba soi
lābha artha kavi karaiṃ vakhāṇa, ātma koṃ īsvara kari jāṃṇ⁴¹¹

There is nothing [greater] than self-knowledge,
So all wise men say.
For the purpose of such knowledge the poet describes
[how] to know the God within.

—Manohardas Niranjani,
Vedānt Mahāvākya Bhāṣā.

Having seen one mode of oral-literate poetry in Chapter Three— hymns, sayings and their inscription in *guṭakās*—let us now explore a different mode, that of more literary and scholastic works by poets of the Niranjani Sampraday, and their participation in a growing discussion in the vernacular on religion, philosophy and literature in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. To a significant extent, this discussion between both religious and non-religious intellectuals took place on paper, in the form of *pothīs*, which were quite different in their form and use than the *guṭakās*. In order to understand how the Niranjani became involved this intellectual network and culture, we must begin by looking at the social composition of the Sampraday, particularly the involvement of local merchant communities. Fortunately, the hagiographical literature of the Sampraday, particularly the *Paracāī* of Raghunathdas, gives substantial attention to Haridas's early Bihani merchant followers. These merchants played an important role in the ideological and literary

⁴¹¹ Manohardas, *Vedānt Mahāvākya Bhāṣā*, v 2. MS 26579, Folio 1B. Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute, Jodhpur.

development of the Niranjani tradition, in a manner that has both similarities and differences with the role of merchants in groups like the Pushtimarg and Dadu Panth.⁴¹² Their presence and influence are reflected in the attention given to householder religion in Niranjani poetry and hagiography, and also in extent of literacy and the prolific production of manuscripts in the Niranjani Sampraday.

Throughout the chapter, emphasis will be placed upon the idea of religious *scholarship* as a mode of writing, in contrast to the hymns and sayings that concerned us in the previous chapter. By the seventeenth century, the process of vernacularization, which involved the gradual employment of the vernacular in all areas of literary, scholastic, and scientific debate, had opened a window of opportunity in regard to religious scholarship.⁴¹³ At the discursive level, there was an opportunity for innovation as poet-intellectuals worked out the dimensions and norms of scholarly writing in the vernacular—a process that involved adapting elements from the superposed language of Sanskrit, but in new ways that spoke to the social, political, and intellectual concerns of their own temporal context.⁴¹⁴ For example, I argue below that vernacular religious scholars (including, but certainly not limited to the Niranjanis) made their works more scholastic by making them more literary, i.e. by deploying certain literary elements in their works and by fashioning themselves as

⁴¹² On merchants and the Vallabha Sampraday, see Shandip Saha, “A Community of Grace: The Social and Theological World of the Puṣṭi Mārga Vārtā Literature.” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 69, no. 2 (January 1, 2006): 225–42. As noted in Chapter Three, the *Dādū Janm Līlā* of Jangopal makes frequent reference to the involvement of the merchants in the early days of the Dadu Panth; other references to merchant activity can be found in Swami Narayandas, *Śrī Dādū Panth Paricay: Dādū Panth Kā Itihās* (Jaipur: Shri Dadu Dayal Mahasabha, 1979).

⁴¹³ Sheldon Pollock, “The Languages of Science in Early Modern India,” in Sheldon Pollock (ed.) *Forms of Knowledge in Early Modern Asia: Explorations in the Intellectual History of India and Tibet, 1500-1800* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011) 19-48; ———, “New Intellectuals in Seventeenth-Century India.” *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 38, no. 1 (March 1, 2001): 3–31.

⁴¹⁴ See Busch, *Poetry of Kings*, 109-20.

poets. At the social level, vernacularization allowed a different set of players to participate in scholarly religious debates, and for new networks of religious intellectuals to form.⁴¹⁵ Subjects like Advaita Vedanta and literary aesthetics became arenas in which poets like those of the Niranjani Sampraday could interact with both religious and non-religious intellectuals across North India (and this exchange often took place through the medium of *pothīs*).⁴¹⁶

To demonstrate how the poets of this (in some ways very local) tradition interacted with the trans-regional community of *bhakti* and more secular scholars, we will survey the body of scholastic works composed by Niranjani monks, particularly those of Dhyandas (fl. 1650), Manohardas (fl. 1660), Tursidas (fl. 1680), Bhagvandas (fl. 1671-1704) and Hariramdas (fl. 1738-1779). These works participate in a variety of genres, including *namāvalī* (encyclopedic lists of the names of God), *kośa* (lexicons), *tattva-mimāṃsā* (tracts on metaphysics), *chanda-sāstra* (prosody) and translations from the Sanskrit *purāṇas* and *itihāsas* (epics). To illustrate the rhetorical and stylistic techniques employed by these poets to establish the scholarly (and sometimes literary) character of their works, we will look at some specific passages from the *Ekādaśī Kathā Māhātmya Bhāṣā* (“Vernacular Account of the Merits of the Stories of the Eleventh Night”; n.d.) of Dhyandas, the *Vedānta Mahāvākya Bhāṣā* (Commentary on the Great Sayings of Vedanta, 1660) of Manohardas, and the *Chandarātnāvalī* (String of the Jewels of Meter, 1738) of Hariramdas. Special attention will be given to the *Vairāgya Vṛnd* (1673 CE) of Bhagvandas, a work which straddles discursive

⁴¹⁵ Pollock, “New Intellectuals in Seventeenth-Century India.”

⁴¹⁶ On the discourse of Advaita Vedanta, see Christopher Minkowski, Minkowski, Christopher. “Advaita Vedānta in Early Modern History.” *South Asian History and Culture* 2, no. 2 (2011): 205–31. On discussions about literary aesthetics in Hindi during this period, see Chapter Two, “The Aesthetic World of *Rīti* Poetry,” in Busch, *Poetry of Kings*, 65-101.

distinctions between religious and literary scholarship and generic distinctions between commentary and treatise. The chapter ends with a description of the *pothīs* in which these texts were transmitted, the conditions of their oral performance, and the public which they helped bring into being, thus identifying another oral-literate mode of textual production and circulation.

Merchant communities, literacy and networks

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, oral modes of performance and circulation were integral to the social and ideological character of the Niranjani community. Yet from early on in their history the Niranjani also exhibited a particularly strong engagement with writing and manuscript culture. This engagement reflects broader trends in the religious and literary milieu of the time, including developments in the Dadu Panth, at Rajput courts, and among the Mughal elite.⁴¹⁷ We cannot understand the reasons for this high quantity and quality of literary productivity in the Niranjani Sampraday by looking only at the monk-poets themselves, since they appear to have been similar in many aspects to their counterparts in devotional orders with less literary output. We must therefore also look at the social composition and activities of the lay members of the Sampraday, who came from merchant as well as agricultural communities. These lay followers were not simply a passive audience for the teachings of the monastic order, but rather active participants in the

⁴¹⁷ On writing activity in the Dadu Panth, see Horstmann, "Dādūpanthī Anthologies"; on manuscript culture at Rajput courts see G.N. Bahura, "Introduction," in *Catalogue of Manuscripts in the Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum: Pothikhana Collection* and Chapter Five, "Rīti Literature in Greater Hindustan," in Busch, *Poetry of Kings*, 166-201; for a brief description of manuscript culture among Mughal elites and at urban centers, see Irfan Habib, "Writing and the Use of Books in the Age of Persian Manuscripts," *Tattvabodh* 1 (2006): 22.

development of the tradition's textual and ideological character.⁴¹⁸ Lay followers—those coming from merchant backgrounds in particular—also played a central role in circulation the works and ideas of the religious leadership.

The Bihani merchant community played an important role in the development of the Niranjani Sampraday from early on in its history. Tradition claims that Haridas's very first follower was the Bihani merchant Dwarkadas— usually referred to as 'Gadha Ji' because he was *gādhā* or firm in his faith— and though Gadha never became an initiated disciple (or 'sādhu'), he is as much the founder of the Niranjani *community* as Haridas is the founder of the monastic lineage.⁴¹⁹ In fact, the two are established in these roles by the hagiographical narratives of the Sampraday itself. The earliest hagiographical source to mention Gadha is the *Paracāi* of Raghunathdas, which we noted earlier as being composed in the late eighteenth century. Though composed around a century and a half after the events it describes, it can nevertheless be understood to record a tradition that preceded it, and gives important details about the identity of Gadha and the early relationship between his caste community and the Niranjani saint tradition.

The *Paracāi* constructs the figure of Dwarkadas Bihani, a local merchant, as the ideal devotee, while it also projects Haridas as an ideal spiritual guide for the well-healed but spiritually-imperiled traders of the region. After describing Gorakhnath's conversion of Haridas and Haridas's extended spiritual labors atop Tikhi Dungari, Raghunathdas relates

⁴¹⁸ The role of merchant figures in fashioning the image of an ideal devotee in the Niranjani tradition can be compared with the case of Haridas in the Gaudiya Sampraday (see Tony Stewart, "The Exemplary Devotion of the 'Servant of Hari'," in Donald Lopez (ed.), *Religions of India in Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995) 564-77) and also with the figures of Purnmal and the merchant brothers in the Pushtimarg's *vārtā* literature (Saha, "A Community of Grace," 225-42).

⁴¹⁹ Mishra, *Nirañjanī Sampradāy*, 80-83.

how Gadha was introduced to Haridas through the intercession of Padha Devi (*pārḥā devī*, also sometimes *pārḥā devī*). Padha Devi is one of several clan goddesses (*kul devī*) of the Maheshwari merchant caste of which the Bihanis are one *gotra*.⁴²⁰ In Raghunathdas's narrative, "... a goddess in the city [Didwana]/ whose name was known as *Pāḍhā*" comes to the Tikhi Dungari to pay homage to Haridas and to receive initiation from him. She laments that "I am drowning in the ocean of existence— please assist me." Seeing this pathos (*karuṇā*), Haridas is moved, and instructs her saying "All of Creation is the Master's doing— in it see only Hari."⁴²¹

Thus fulfilled, Padha Devi decides to go for a stroll through Didwana, eventually finding herself in front of the house of a "mahājan" called Dvāro (Dwarkadas). She calls to him, and when he responds, she tells him that, "Haridas is my Guru/ Serve him in thought and speech."⁴²² The next morning Dwarka climbs the mountain to obtain Haridas's *darśan*, and after giving Haridas an offering of food and water, begins to ask him about spiritual matters: "How do people swim through (successfully live) life? / How do householders make this birth fully-realized?" Haridas first tells him that "There isn't any path for a householder... You become attached to Maya / And diminish like iron and *lākh* (wax) in a fire."⁴²³ When, crestfallen, Dwarka bursts into tears, Haridas reassures him:

phira dayāla bole upagarī, serī eka gṛsata kuṃ bhārī
saṃtajanām kī saṃgati karai, mana maiṃ hari ko sumarana kareṃ
kathā kīratana hari jasa gāvai, prema prīti pravāha baḍhāvai

⁴²⁰ Sukhvīr Singh Gahlot and Banshi Dhar, *Castes and Tribes of Rajasthan* (Jodhpur: Jain Brothers, 1989) 90-91.

⁴²¹ Raghunathdas, *Paracāi*, v 3.2-5, in Mangaldas, *Śrī Mahārāj Haridās Jī Kī Vāṇī*, 220.

⁴²² *Ibid.*, v 3.8, 221.

⁴²³ *Ibid.*, v 3.15-16.

aisī bhāṃti hoi nistatāra, kahai dayāla tū suṇi ho dvārā⁴²⁴

Then Dayāl spoke a blessing –
“One path, [though] difficult, [exists for] the householder:
Keep company with good people,
Remember Hari in your heart.

Sing Hari's fame in stories and hymns,
Increase the flow of love and devotion.
In this manner emancipation occurs,
Thus says Dayāl, oh Dwārā, listen!”

Dwarka then begins to bring food and water daily to Haridas, traversing the distance of three *kos* from Didwana to Tikhi Dungari and back. One day while climbing the mountain, Dwarka trips and the *gāgarī* (earthen pot) of water slips from his hand and breaks. Dwarka is caught in a dilemma: if he returns to Didwana to collect more water, it will become too late to travel and Haridas will go hungry and thirsty; but he is also afraid that if he appears before the saint with food but no water, the holy man will be angry. Eventually he decides to continue climbing and to present the food, which he does with great humility and apologies. Haridas asks Dwarka why he looks so troubled, and Dwarka recounts the story of the broken water pot. Haridas then tells him that he is mistaken, and orders him to go back and collect the water pot. Upon doing so, Dwarka finds the pot unbroken and filled with water. Returning to Haridas with the water, he praises the saint's powers, to which Haridas responds that it is Hari's power that makes such things possible, for its breaking in the first place was nothing but an illusion caused by *maya*.

These episodes provide both an origin story that explains the Bihani Maheshwaris' engagement with the Niranjani Sampraday and an example of the ideal lay follower in the

⁴²⁴ Ibid., v 3.17-18.

figure of Dwarkadas. It is none other than the Maheshwaris' clan goddess herself who orders Dwarkadas, the figurative progenitor of the community of merchant lay followers in the Sampraday, to convert.⁴²⁵ As Raghunathdas relates, even Padha Devi is caught in the ocean of existence (*bhāv sāgar*), and must seek the intercession of Haridas (who holds knowledge of the all-pervasive Brahma) to help her escape it. Having made Haridas her own guru, she tells Dwarkadas to do the same, effectively ordering him to shift his faith and devotion from her to Haridas. (However, Haridas makes it clear in the episode of the water pot that it is not him but *nirguṇ* Ram who should be the object of devotion, since it is ultimately Ram who makes such miracles possible.)

Dwarkadas's dilemma is the central problem of a householder's spiritual life: how to obtain liberation while enmeshed in the worldly bonds of family, community, and trade? The possibility of an ascetic mode of spiritual practice is essentially foreclosed for a merchant like Dwarkadas, so how can he possibly make his life *sārthak* (realized or spiritually meaningful)?⁴²⁶ As a solution, Haridas suggests the only and 'difficult' path of keeping company with good (or faithful) people, singing the praises of God, remembering him at all times, and maintaining a constant flow of love and devotion toward God in one's heart—essentially, he prescribes the *bhakti* mode of religiosity. Dwarkadas then becomes the exemplary lay *bhakta*, believing fully in the knowledge and power of Haridas and devotedly serving him. His devotion is so great that when the water pot breaks, he is thrown into another dilemma, this time over whether to proceed with only half of his offering (and

⁴²⁵ The temple of Padha Devi, located at the edge of the salt lake in Didwana and datable to at least VS 1610 (1553/1554 CE) from an inscription on its gate, is still patronized by the broader Maheshwari community in Rajasthan, as well as by some members of the Niranjani Sampraday.

⁴²⁶ These dilemmas were also at the forefront of thinking on devotion in the Vallabha Sampraday; see Chapter Two "The Sampraday" in Barz, *The Bhakti Sect of Vallabhācārya*, 16-55.

risk the disappointment or even anger of his guru) or return home and abandon the undertaking entirely. That he persists with his task— and that Haridas ‘fills’ the lack of the water pot by revealing its breaking to be a misapprehension caused by *maya*— reaffirms the earlier message regarding householders: even though a householder’s ‘offering’ to God will necessarily be incomplete (because a householder can never fully renounce the trappings of worldly life) he should nevertheless continue in his devotion, since the perceived ‘lack’ is merely an illusion of *maya*, and his true devotion will ultimately be appreciated and rewarded by the Divine. At another level, the water pot is itself a symbol of the body— fragile, easily broken on the path of existence. However, when one meets a true guru, that guru will reveal that the body—and its destruction—is nothing but an illusion.⁴²⁷ The devotee then goes back and sees that the vessel is not ‘really’ broken at all, and is then able to continue his or her journey.⁴²⁸

The Bihani merchant Dwarkadas or Gadha is thus constructed as the ideal householder in juxtaposition to Haridas who, as we saw in the last chapter, is presented as the archetypical saint. A few oral traditions associated with Dwarkadas help us to further fill in the picture of the Bihanis’ relationship with the Niranjani Sampraday (though we should remain aware of the fact that the age of these traditions cannot presently be verified).⁴²⁹ According to tradition, Dwarkadas was without children and approaching old age when he first met Haridas. After serving Haridas for some time, Dwarka began to find

⁴²⁷ The symbolic use of a pot for the human body is well-attested in *bhakti* poetry in Hindi; see for example Kabir, *pad* 122, in Das, *Kabir Granthāvalī* (given in Callewaert, *Nirguṇ Bhakti Sāgar*, 323).

⁴²⁸ I thank Manpreet Kaur of St. Stephen’s College, Delhi, for calling my attention to this aspect of the text.

⁴²⁹ Though a few of the stories recounted here were told to me by members of the Sampraday during my visit to Didwana in March 2012, the versions I present for the purpose of analysis are those recorded by Swami Mangaldas in his *Śrī Mahārāj Haridāsji Kī Vāṇī*, since these would have been in circulation at least fifty years prior to my fieldwork.

the daily journey to Tikhi Dungari increasingly difficult. He then asked Haridas for two boons: first, that Haridas might take up residence in the city of Didwana so that Dwarka could more easily serve him, and second, that Haridas might somehow intercede on his behalf so that God would grant him a child. Haridas granted both boons, taking up residence in the Bihani quarter outside the walled city of Didwana, and blessing Dwarka and his wife so that they conceived a son.⁴³⁰ My study of inscriptions on stone markers in the area of Gadha Dham and of bronze plates kept at *loṭānājī kā bādā* (a Niranjani *samādhi*) confirm that this area, where Haridas was supposed to have dwelled at the edge of Didwana, was held by the Niranjani community by at least 1624/25 CE, and that this was indeed a Bihani neighborhood.⁴³¹ Though he does not mention Dwarkadas's request, Raghunathdas as well tells us that Haridas left Tikhi Dungari to take up residence outside the main city of Didwana, and it was there that the "*mahājan*" – merchants – came to hear him teach.⁴³² Finally, as mentioned above, the entire monastic and residential settlement of the Niranjani at Didwana is named Gadha Dham in honor of Dwarkadas's devotion—and oral tradition maintains that it was Haridas himself who named the burgeoning Niranjani settlement after his disciple.⁴³³ Certainly the naming of the Niranjani's center after a lay follower says much about the importance of both Dwarkadas and the community of merchants in the history of the Niranjani Sampraday.

⁴³⁰ Mangaldas, *Śrī Mahārāj Haridāsa Jī Kī Vāñī*, 69-70.

⁴³¹ Inscription on stone marker dated VS 1682 *mūti bhāḍav sudi 13*, outside Bhandari Temple at Gadha Dham; inscription on copper plate dated VS 1659.

⁴³² Raghunathdas, *Paracāi*, vs. 6.5-6, in Mangaldas, *Śrī Mahārāj Haridāsa Jī Kī Vāñī*, 224. Although the term *mahājan* is now usually associated with money-lenders, during this period the term could refer to persons involved in a number of trade or finance-related activities. That being said, it is also clear that at least some Bihani merchants were indeed engaged in money-lending, perhaps even to the state.

⁴³³ Mangaldas, *Śrī Mahārāj Haridās Jī Kī Vāñī*, 71. This tradition is also recorded in an inscription on the *kīrti stambh* next to Haridas's *samādhi* at Gadha Dham (date of inscription unknown).

The assistance that Haridas lent Dwarkadas in conceiving a child is also noteworthy. At least one (male) offspring is essential to the completion of a householder's life-rites, especially rituals associated with death that guarantee the soul's transmigration or liberation.⁴³⁴ A son is also essential to the smooth conduct of more worldly affairs such as the management of one's businesses interests. For a merchant like Dwarkadas, the prospect of growing old without a male heir was therefore frightening, and for merchants in the area of Didwana, the story of Haridas's role in granting Dwarkadas such an heir would have provided an incentive to join the Niranjani community or patronize its monks.⁴³⁵

One more episode from Raghunathdas's *Paracāi*—which is also part of popular oral tradition as well as the sacred geography of Didwana—is worth relating, as it provides further evidence of the Niranjani-merchant connection. After settling on the outskirts of Didwana, Haridas one day visited the city and found the 'mahajans' there alarmed at the growth of a pipal tree. Afraid that it would grow so large that its roots could tear through the foundations of nearby houses, the mahajans tell one of their members to cut it down, which he begins to do. Haridas intervenes, telling them not to cut fell the tree. When the mahajans respond that the tree's roots will eventually destroy their houses and ask him to offer a solution, he replies, "Know that the pipal tree will remain just like this / Sing the fame of Niranjan Dev, then you will obtain the fruit of what is desired in your heart."⁴³⁶

Haridas then places his feet on the pipal tree and, washing his hands, sprinkles the water onto the tree, effectively stopping its growth. (What is purported to be the same tree can

⁴³⁴ Jonathan Parry, *Death in Banaras* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

⁴³⁵ A similar, 'symbiotic' relationship between monks and merchants in the context of the Dadu Panth is described by Monika Horstman in *Symbiotic Antinomy: The Social Organization of a North Indian Sect* (Canberra: Australian National University, 1986).

⁴³⁶ Raghunathdas, *Paracāi*, vs. 6.11, in Mangaldas, *Śrī Mahārāj Haridāsji Kī Vāñī*, 224.

still be seen in the courtyard of the eponymous Pipali Mandir (Pipal tree temple) in Didwana, an important Niranjani site. See Figure 4.1.) In one version of the story available to us through the oral tradition, when the merchant householder who is cutting down the tree protests at Haridas's intervention, Haridas replies that "If you desire to cut [the tree] out of fear of its growth, then neither it nor your clan (*vamś*) will grow. It shall remain as it is; therefore, do not cut it."⁴³⁷ The episode appeals to another central householder concern, the continued growth of one's family or clan, through the familiar symbol of a tree. When a family (or tree, or family tree) grows too large, it threatens to break through the very foundations of one's house. However, as Haridas says, one should not destroy it altogether out of fear, but rather put their faith in God and allow the family/tree to remain as it is. This message would have spoken directly to the concerns of a successful Maheshwari family, in which commercial (and procreative) success could often be accompanied by familial discord. The narrative thus projects Haridas (and by extension his Sampraday) as a spiritual authority who can help the merchant householder navigate the precipitous peaks of success as well as the hollows of hardship.

Securing patronage from the Maheshwaris would have been advantageous to the early Niranjani Sampraday for a number of reasons. First, the Maheshwaris (who traced their origin to Khandela, approximately 94 kilometers from Didwana), maintained trade networks throughout the region of Rajasthan and even beyond it.⁴³⁸ This would have provided a ready-made broadcast network for Niranjani texts and ideas, and it is not a

⁴³⁷ Mangaldas, *Śrī Mahārāj Haridāsji Kī Vāñī*, 72.

⁴³⁸ Gehlot and Dhar, *Castes and Tribes*, 90; *Rajputana Gazetteer*, 194, 222. There are indications that the Maheshwari community extended as far as Gwalior by the 19th century (Luard, *Central India State Gazetteer*, 257), but I have yet to find evidence of how early the community was present there.

coincidence that numerous Niranjani manuscripts were copied in cities and towns where Bihani Maheshwaris had a significant presence, including Jodhpur, Jaipur, Nagaur, Bikaner, Pokaran, Ajmer, and even Delhi.⁴³⁹ The Maheshwaris would also have provided a ready source of cash, as many of them were money lenders (a common side-business for individuals engaged in other sorts of commerce, and an occupation alluded to by Raghunathdas in his references to the Bihanis as ‘*mahājan*’).⁴⁴⁰ These resources, as well as the Maheshwaris’ literacy, made them prime candidates for state service, and records indicate that Maheshwaris occupied many positions of authority in the Rathore and Kacchwaha kingdoms.⁴⁴¹

The Bihani Maheshwaris also constituted another kind of network that was more spiritual in nature: they were a strong link to the Dadu Panth. The Dadu Panth coalesced around the figure of Dadu Dayal (1544-1604 CE) in the late sixteenth century, and though spread across eastern and central Rajasthan, had its primary ritual and monastic centers at Naraina and Fatehpur (approximately ninety kilometers and seventy-five kilometers from Didwana respectively) and smaller centers at Didwana itself and at Sambhar, where a substantial population of Bihani Maheshwaris lived and where the Niranjani eventually set

⁴³⁹ For example, we find manuscripts copied at Jaipur (NPS 3448), Nagaur (RORI JOD 11551, 12062, 12476, 18173/2, 14359.10, 22463, MSPP 10, 1359), Pokaran (RORI 10845, 22452) Delhi (RORI JOD 14360), Bikaner (RORI JOD 26579, 26580), Jodhpur (RORI JOD 12226), Ajmer (RORI JOD 12356) and Delhi (RORI JOD 14360.2).

⁴⁴⁰ The geographical extent of the Maheshwaris’ activity, including as financiers, can be gauged from Banarasidas’s autobiographical *Ardhakathānak* (1641 CE), in which the Jain poet describes how a Maheshwari money lender from Agra accompanied him on his journey from Jaunpur to Agra (*Ardhakathānak*, v 499-555, in Lath, *Half a Tale*).

⁴⁴¹ Lawrence Babb, “Violence and Construction of Trading Caste Identity,” in Lawrence Babb, Varsha Joshi, and Michael W. Meister (eds.), *Multiple Histories: Culture and Society in the Study of Rajasthan* (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2002) 21.

up a presence as well.⁴⁴² The Dadu Panth and Niranjani Sampraday were greatly similar in terms of their ideologies, textual and religious aesthetics, social foundations and organizational structures, and as we shall see in this and the next chapter, the two were clearly involved in a productive exchange of ideas and practices during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁴⁴³

The Bihanis constituted a large part of the social foundation for this exchange. Garibdas, one of Dadu Dayal's early devotees and patrons, was a "*mahājan* dwelling in Didwana," according to the *Dādū Janm-Līlā* (1629 CE), and is said to have invited Dadu to visit there.⁴⁴⁴ Pragdas (also called Prayagdas), an important saint-poet of the Dadu Panth, was a Bihani from the town of Kirauli, and had relatives living in Didwana. In fact, at least one recension of Raghunathdas's *Bhaktamāl* gives Pragdas as Haridas Niranjani's guru: "*sara para kara prayāgadāsa ko / gorakhanatha ko mata layau*" ([Haridas] took Prayagdas upon his head / [And] embraced the doctrine of Gorakhnath).⁴⁴⁵ Whether or not this assertion is historically accurate, it reflects the closeness of the Dadu Panth and Niranjani Sampraday, a closeness brought about partly by members of the Bihani community.⁴⁴⁶

The Bihanis, with their relatively high levels of literacy, access to capital, extensive network throughout Rajasthan and into Madhya Pradesh, and links to the Dadu Panth (a

⁴⁴² Horstmann, *Crossing the Ocean of Existence*, 6-14.

⁴⁴³ Close contacts between the Dadu Panth and Niranjani Sampraday have also been noted by Monika Horstmann ("Caturdās's *Bhāṣā* Version of the Eleventh Book of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*," unpublished paper) and Ratan Lal Mishra (*Nirañjanī Sampraday*, 71-2, 83).

⁴⁴⁴ "Svāmmī kau sevaga maṃna bhāyau gopāladāsa laimna tahām āyau / jāti mahājana hari kau dāsūṃ basai gāṃva ḍiḍavāṃnaum bāsūṃ." In Callewaert (ed.), *Dādū Janm-Līlā*, 13.1.

⁴⁴⁵ Quoted in Mishra, *Nirañjanī Sampraday*, 96-7.

⁴⁴⁶ Whether one family or clan had members initiated into separate spiritual lineages, or whether members from one lineage crossed over to another, or whether initiation into two lineages was possible is not yet clear. That both the Niranjani and Dadu Panthis claim a few of the same historical personages as their own is suggestive of the latter two possibilities.

community whose leaders also stressed literary and theological rigor in their compositions, as we shall see later in this chapter), shaped the culture of the Niranjani Sampraday from its earliest days. This influence is reflected in two outstanding aspects of the Niranjani monastic order: the first is the apparently high level of literacy and scribal activity among Niranjani monks, which enabled the broadcasting of Niranjani texts across various publics while also facilitating the movement of texts from other traditions *into* the Niranjani community. The second is the prolific production of scholarly works on subjects of theology and religious practice by Niranjani composers. These texts, though written in verse, are distinct from the hymns and sayings discussed in the previous chapter in that they are expressly *literate* and *literary* in character. By 'literate' and 'literary,' I mean first that the content, structure and form of these works presuppose literacy in order to be conceived and properly understood, and second that the composers make a claim to literariness for their works. These are not hymns to be sung by supposedly illiterate peasants, but texts to be studied, reflected upon, elucidated and expounded upon, and speak to an audience that was translocal, literate, and educated, including householders, religious scholars, renunciates, and even courtly intellectuals.

Scribal activity

A literate and mobile class of Niranjani initiates proved to be extremely effective in broadcasting the Niranjani texts— and thus their ideas— across a broad geographical and social expanse, even while it also brought many texts and ideas into the Niranjani community. Who were these 'scribes'? Like the individuals who transcribed hymns and sayings into the *gutakās* under discussion in the previous chapter, these copyists as well

must be distinguished from those professional scribes – *munshīs*, *kātibs*, *bakhshīs*, *kāyasths*, and the like – that have recently become objects of scholarly inquiry.⁴⁴⁷ Educated in the context of Bihani merchant activity and Niranjani religious activity, they would have likely possessed multiple types of literacy and knowledge – bookkeeping and accounts in addition to religious knowledge. Manuscripts that I was able to view at Gadha Dham in Didwana evince a familiarity with accounting practices, lending some weight to this conjecture.⁴⁴⁸ Yet it is not clear whether these Niranjani were employed *as scribes* per se, in a capacity distinct from their other work as monks and traders. Additional research will be required to see how much of this copying activity was occupationally separate from other work; at present, however, it is clear that copying texts was a service that they performed for their gurus and patrons, in addition to their other activities.

Thanks to the Niranjani's diligence in inscribing colophons in their manuscripts, we often know who copied a text, when, where, and for whom; sometimes the colophon also carries other information, such as the copyist's lineage of gurus, or details about the Niranjani monastic structure. The picture that emerges from these colophons is of Niranjani initiates moving between cities and smaller towns, copying texts for the use of their guru or sometimes for a non-Niranjani patron. I have been able to identify fifty-six such scribes,

⁴⁴⁷ See for example: Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "The Making of Munshi," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 24, no. 2 (2004). Rosalind O'Hanlon, "The Social Worth of Scribes: Brahmins, Kayasthas and the Social Order in Early Modern India," *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 45 (2010).

⁴⁴⁸ During a purging exercise during the *melā* of 2012 in which the leaders of the Niranjani community discarded any incomplete or unidentified manuscripts at the Pipal Mandir and Gadha Dham, I was able to view numerous manuscript fragments; several of these included lists of foodstuffs and bulk items, along with various mathematical calculations. The nature of the transactions was not clear—it could have been related to business of the Sampraday itself, or to other business interests. The manuscripts did, however, evince a level or relative sophistication. Tables and calculations can also be found in other manuscripts, like the *guṭakās* surveyed in the last chapter. See for example RORI JOD 26334.

along with their dates and geographical locations. Certain cities, like Nagaur, Jodhpur, Bikaner, Ajmer, and Pokaran, were clearly productive Niranjani centers, with multiple Niranjani scribes copying texts over periods of a half century to two centuries.⁴⁴⁹ Other cities and towns, like Udaipur, Delhi, and Mundwa, appear to have been smaller centers of Niranjani activity. There are also numerous small towns and villages – places like Bisau, Koliya and Kathauti – where Niranjani initiates copied manuscripts. Although these places are dispersed over a large geographic territory, clusters clearly emerge in regions where the Niranjani were more active, and these are situated on major trade routes like the triangle formed by Nagaur, Ajmer and Jodhpur, and the route from Jodhpur to Jaisalmer. Not surprisingly, many of these locations had an attested Bihani presence.

These scribes copied every manner of composition by Niranjani saint-poets, including hymns and sayings (*sākhīs* and *pads*), but also the scholarly works that we will be discussing in this chapter. They also brought a wide variety of texts *into* the Sampraday, meaning that they copied works by non-Niranjani poets and other traditions, often for their gurus. Some of these works came from traditions both geographically and ideologically close to the Niranjani, like those of the Dadu Panth, including hymns by Dadu, Gopaldas, Wajid and Rajjab, in addition to more scholastic and literary works by Sundardas and Chaturdas. Other works came from traditions that were more distant theologically and ideologically-speaking, like the Ramanandi Sampraday; these include the *Rām Rakṣā* of Ramanand, poetry in praise of Ram by Agradas, and the hagiographical *Bhaktamāl* of

⁴⁴⁹ This is based on my study of fifty-two manuscripts copied by Niranjani scribes kept in the collections of the Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute at Jodhpur and Jaipur, and of the Nagari Pracharini Sabha in Banaras. Fortunately, for most of these manuscripts the scribe included both his own name and his location in the colophon. The earliest manuscript in this sample dates from VS 1693/1637 CE; the latest is dated VS 1928/1871 CE. Please see the bibliography for a comprehensive list of manuscripts consulted.

Nabhadas (together with the *Bhaktirasbodini* commentary by the Gaudiya poet Priyadas).⁴⁵⁰

Still others come from knowledge systems and traditions that are hardly ever associated with ‘*nirguṇ*’ *bhakti*, like the *Rāmcaritmānas* of Tulsidas, works by Shankaracharya, *bhramargūṭ* poetry from the Krishna tradition, works of astrology (*jyotiṣa*), and treatises on augury (*śakunāvalī*).⁴⁵¹

The Niranjanis’ paper trail thus reveals to us something important about how texts and ideas circulated in early modern north India, especially in and among those groups that are typically considered to be part of the *nirguṇ sant* tradition. This world of literate monks and paper manuscripts provides a counterpoint to the image of the illiterate, itinerant *sādhu* spreading poetry and ideas through song as he wandered the countryside.⁴⁵² That image certainly speaks to a historical reality, and evidence from hagiographic and documentary texts, as well as manuscripts themselves, suggests that the movement of holy men and other travelers did indeed play a major role in disseminating *bhakti* texts. Yet that is only part of the picture. Alongside and often overlapping with this network of oral circulation was a network of written circulation put in motion by the labor of educated monks like those of the Niranjani Sampraday.⁴⁵³ It is to the compositions of some of these monks that we will now turn.

⁴⁵⁰ RORI JOD 12226, 20680.

⁴⁵¹ RORI JOD 11033, 22452, 23342, 14907.

⁴⁵² Hess, *Bijak of Kabir*, 7.

⁴⁵³ Callewaert notes that monks of the similar Dadu Panth often spent the months of the rainy season copy manuscripts. (Personal communication, April 28, 2014); see also Horstmann, “Dādūpanthī Anthologies,” 163-63.



Fig.4.1 Pipal tree in the courtyard of the Pipali Mandir, Didwana.

Constructing a scholastic and literary tradition

Beginning with the first generation of Haridas's disciples in the mid-seventeenth century, the Niranjani Sampraday produced poets who were not just saints but also scholars. These poets continued to compose hymns and sayings of the type we discussed in the previous chapter, but they also penned literate, literary, and scholarly works on a number of different subjects that fell within, or intersected with, the discourse of religion, including *namāvalī* (encyclopedic lists of the names of God), *kośa* (lexicons), *tattva-mimāṃsā* (tracts on metaphysics), *chanda-sāstra* (prosody) and translations from the Sanskrit *purāṇas* and *itihāsas* (epics). In doing so, they greatly expanded the theological, philosophical, and

aesthetic scope of the community's thought, bringing it into conversation with religious groups as varied as the Dadu Panth, Ramanandi Sampraday, Pushti Marg and Gaudiya Sampraday, and with the thought of littérateurs and intellectuals as distant from their own tradition as Keshavdas of Orcha, and Kavindracharya of the Mughal court.⁴⁵⁴ Viewed in the broader context of vernacularization, the Niranjani's intellectual pursuits can be seen as a response to the demand for vernacular scholars and scholarship in early modern north India, as intellectual and creative dialogues in the vernacular gradually came to displace the same discourses in Sanskrit.

This tradition of scholarly writing begins with Haridas's disciple Dhyandas, who was active in the middle of the seventeenth century. Dhyandas composed several *jog granths* – (collections of *sākhīs* on various themes), *candrāyaṇ*, and *pads* in a style highly similar to that of Haridas. However, he also composed the *Ekādaśī Kathā Māhātmya Bhāṣā* (“Vernacular Account of the Merits of the Stories of the Eleventh Night”; n.d.), a vernacular rendering of stories from various *Puranas* related to the eleventh day of the light (*śukla*) and dark (*kṛṣṇa*) halves of each month of the Hindu calendar, stories which also provide explanations of, and instructions for, fasts and other acts of devotion to be carried out on those days. These stories undoubtedly circulated in the North Indian vernaculars before Dhyandas penned his work, but his treatment of them is self-consciously literary, written in

⁴⁵⁴ On religious scholarship in the Dadu Panth, see Monika Horstmann, “The Bhakti Theology of the Dādūpanthī Sundardās,” *Indologica Taurinensia* 12 (1984): 263-279. On the intermixing of religious and more secular scholastic thought in Keshavdas, see Busch, *Poetry of Kings*, 33-51. On Kavindracharya, see Busch, *Poetry of Kings*, 150-51, and also Raghavan, “The Kavīndrakalpalatikā of Kavīndrācārya Sarasvatī, in *Indica: The Indian Historical Research Institute Silver Jubilee Commemoration Volume*. Bombay: St. Xavier's College, 1953.

a Brajhasha largely free of influence from local dialects and prefaced with the following verses:

pūjūhaṃ surasati sura rāī, śubha ākṣari dai mo samujhāī
sahaṃsakṛta bhākhā kari, gāūṃ kathā sāstra ukṭi banāūṃ
haṃsavāhinī prabla hūjai, vimala vāṃnī mokūṃ dījai

I pray to Saraswati, the Queen of Speech,
Give me understanding and auspicious letters (speech).
I sing having made Sanskrit into the vernacular (*bhākhā*),
I compose utterances of *sāstra* and *kathā*.
May she whose mount is the swan be powerful!
Please give me immaculate speech.⁴⁵⁵

By beginning his work with an appeal to the Goddess of Speech (who is by extension the goddess of poetry and the patron of poets) Dhyandas immediately signals to his audience that he is taking part in the conventions of scholarly and literary writing. He explicitly acknowledges that the Sanskrit tradition is the source for his work, thus invoking its authority and prestige to give credibility to his own creation in the vernacular (*bhākhā*). He also states clearly that what he is composing is *sāstra* (a scientific or sacred treatise) and *kathā* (narrative), two genres taken directly from Sanskrit. This is a novel use of the term *sāstra*, and a bold claim on the part of Dhyandas: not only is he attempting to establish his own composition as a serious work of scholarship, but he is also trying to expand the very notion of what constitutes *sāstra*.

Shifts in the definition and content of scholarly disciplines were underway during this period, and so the experiments of Dhyandas and his fellow Niranjani do not appear as anomalies but rather as attempts to participate in this emerging intellectual culture. One

⁴⁵⁵ MS 12476, VS 1819 / 1762 CE, Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute, Jodhpur, Folio 1A.

discourse in which this shift was particularly prominent is that of Advaita Vedanta. As Christopher Minkowski has pointed out, it is possible to identify how the ‘unworldly’ philosophy of Advaita Vedanta in the early modern period was quite deeply embedded in the larger social system of which its proponents were a part; consequently, to fully understand the nature of the debates, it is necessary to look outside of them at the social and political context in which they were pursued.⁴⁵⁶ To the list of socio-political factors that Minkowski offers can be added the increasing influence of vernacular intellectuals, many of whom began to compose works of Advaita Vedanta in Brajbhasha. This included kings like Jaswant Singh of Marwar (r. 1638-78), *bhakti* saints like Sundardas of the Dadu Panth, and even prominent Sanskrit intellectuals like Kavindracharya Saraswati, a poet and teacher at the Mughal court.⁴⁵⁷ Two Niranjani poets, Manohardas and Bhagvandas, also took part in this emerging discourse of Advaita Vedanta in the vernacular; let us briefly review their works before discussing how they fit into the larger picture of popular Advaita.

Manohardas, who appears to have been part of the second generation of Haridas’s disciples, was a poet who composed in Brajbhasha but also had a solid command over Sanskrit and a familiarity with its scriptures.⁴⁵⁸ Believed to have lived at least part of his life in Sambhar (which was home to a substantial community of Maheshwaris belonging to both the Niranjani Sampraday and the Dadu Panth), Manohar Das’s floruit is the second half of the seventeenth century based on two internally-dated works, the *Gyān Mañjarī* (“Bouquet

⁴⁵⁶ Christopher Minkowski, “Advaita Vedānta in Early Modern History,” *South Asian History and Culture* 2, no. 2 (2011): 205–31.

⁴⁵⁷ On Jaswant Singh see Vishwanathprasad Mishra (ed.), *Jasavantasimha Granthāvalī*. Varanasi: Nagari Pracarini Sabha, 1972. For sources on Kavindracharya Saraswati, see Fn. 42 above.

⁴⁵⁸ Swami Mangaldas’s contention that Manohardas was a sixth-generation disciple of Haridas is contradicted by the dates of Manohardas’s compositions, that would place him, at latest, in the third generation of disciples. Mangaldas, *Śrī Mahārāj Haridāsji Kī Vāñī*, Part 2, 157.

of Wisdom”; 1659 CE) and the *Vedānt Mahāvākya Bhāṣā* or *Vedānt Paribhāṣā* (“Exegesis of the Great Sayings of Vedanta”; 1660 CE).⁴⁵⁹ Although he also composed singable *pads* and individual *sākhīs* of great quality, the majority of Manohardas’s known compositions are extended works of religious scholarship.⁴⁶⁰ For example, the *Gyānvacan Cūrṇikā* (“Digest of Sayings of Wisdom”; n.d.) is a vernacular digest of theories of logic; Manohardas presents principal concepts in verse in the *dohā* and *sorathā* meters, and provides an auto commentary in prose.⁴⁶¹ His *Śatpraśnottari* (“One Hundred Questions and Answers”) follows this same format, but appears to be a mix of ideas from the *Nyāya* school and the *Upaniṣads*, which he uses to construct a unified ontology. The *Śatpraśnottarī Bhāṣā* (“Exegesis on the Six Questions and Answers,” also called the *Śatpraśni Nirṇaya Bhāṣā*), on the other hand, is presented as a commentary on the *Śatpraśna Upaniṣad*, and was apparently informed by Sanskrit commentaries on the original text, including that of the thirteenth-century saint Madhva Acharya.⁴⁶² Manohardas indeed appears to have been concerned with rendering the Vedas and Upanishads (or at least what he saw as their essence) accessible through the vernacular: he composed the *Gyān Mañjharī* (1659 CE), a versified dialogue that seeks to establish renunciation as the primary injunction of the Vedas and Nirājan as the highest form of Brahma, and the *Vedānt Mahāvākya Bhāṣā* (1660 CE), a translation of, and commentary on, selected verses of the *Chandogya Upaniṣad*.⁴⁶³

Bhagvandas was a contemporary of Manohardas and was equally familiar with the

⁴⁵⁹ Mishra, *Nirājanī Sampradāy*, 154.

⁴⁶⁰ I have found one collection of his *pads* and *sākhīs*, contained in a Dadu Panthi manuscript copied in 1729 CE at Sanganer, that do not appear to be from any of the *prabandh granths* (unified texts) mentioned here.

⁴⁶¹ Manohardas, *Gyānvacan Cūrṇikā*, RORI JOD 26580; a brief selection can also be found in Mangaldas (ed.), *Śrī Mahārāj Haridās Jī Kī Vāṇī*, 158.

⁴⁶² *Śatpraśni Nirṇaya Bhāṣā*, AJ 243.1, MSPP 1300, RORI JOD 16526 (VS 1764).

⁴⁶³ *Gyān Mañjharī*, RORI JOD 26578, (VS 1794); *Vedānt Mahāvākya Bhāṣā*, RORI JOD 26579, (VS 1794).

Sanskrit tradition and skilled in composing verses in Brajbhasha. Writing from various cities near the Narmada River Valley in modern-day Madhya Pradesh, Bhagvandas was one of the most prolific and erudite composers of the Niranjani tradition.⁴⁶⁴ His *Amṛt Dhārā* (“Stream of Nectar,” 1671 CE) reads like a popular guide to Advaita Vedanta, describing in a schematic manner various levels of consciousness and spiritual practice, and citing the Vedas and Puranas as its primary sources.⁴⁶⁵ His next composition, the *Vairāgya Vṛnd* (“Collection of Verses on Non-attachment,” 1673 CE), is a remarkable text, styled as a vernacular commentary on the Sanskrit *Vairāgya Śataka* attributed to the seventh-century poet Bhartrihari; an extended discussion of this work can be found below. Bhagvandas also translated three important Sanskrit works (or rather parts of them), bringing into the Niranjani tradition not only Vaishnava elements but also material from the epics. In 1684 CE he composed a Brajbhasha translation of the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* (the same text that furnished much of the basis for Tulsidas’s *Rāmcaritmānas*) and, two years later, in 1686, completed a translation of the *Kārtik Māhātmya Bhāṣā*, a portion of the *Skandha Purāṇa*.⁴⁶⁶ He followed these with the *Jaimanī Aśvamedh* (*The Horse Sacrifice* [as told by] Jaimini) in 1698, which – though labeled by Bhagvandas as a commentary – is a vernacular rendering of episodes related to the horse sacrifice taken from the *Mahābhārata* epic.⁴⁶⁷ Toward the end of his life, Bhagvandas composed two more ‘commentaries’ (*ṭīkā*): the first, the *Bhāgavat Daśamskandh Bhāṣā* (1703 CE), is a Brajbhasha rendering of the tenth chapter of

⁴⁶⁴ The only location that Bhagvandas himself mentions in his writings is the Reva (Narmada) river valley; for other possible locations, see Mangaldas, *Śrī Mahārāj Haridās Jī Kī Vāṇī*, 147.

⁴⁶⁵ Bhagvandas, *Amṛtadhārā*, *dohā* 10, RORI JOD 12561, Folio 309.

⁴⁶⁶ *Kārtik Māhātmya Bhāṣā*, RORI JOD 11551 (VS 1891).

⁴⁶⁷ *Jaimanī Aśvamedh*, RORI JOD 16595 (VS 1881).

the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, which recounts the life of Krishna.⁴⁶⁸ The second, the *Bhāgavat Gītā Bhāṣā Tīkā* (1704 CE), is a Brajhasha translation of and commentary on the *Bhagavad Gītā*.⁴⁶⁹ Finally, Bhagvandas composed two undated original works, the *Bhakt Virudāvalī* and the *Pañcīkaraṇ Manorath Mañjharī*, which both construct a type of popular Advaita Vedānta by marrying concepts taken from the Upaniṣads with the idea of loving devotion to a *nirguṇ* Divine.⁴⁷⁰

The type of Advaita Vedānta articulated by Manohardas and Bhagvandas (and shared with other *bhakti* scholar-poets like Sundardas and of the Dadu Panth) is distinct from that which was being debated by their counterparts writing in Sanskrit, but their works do evince similarities as well with what was being written in Sanskrit. For example, like the Sanskrit Advaitins, Manohardas and Bhagvandas construct hierarchical doxographies that put Advaita at the top of the scale of the devotion, notably above *saguṇ* modes of worship.⁴⁷¹ As Minkowski writes, short digest-like prose works of Advaita Vedānta in Sanskrit proliferated during this period; the works of Manohardas and Bhagvandas appear to approximate these digests in form and style, although they are composed in verse.⁴⁷² However, unlike their Sanskrit contemporaries, the Niranjani poets make the target of their non-dualist thought a *nirguṇ* Brahma who is not only an object of knowledge (*jñān*), but an object of love (*prem*) and devotion (*bhakti*) as well.⁴⁷³ Manohardas and Bhagvandas also make frequent reference to the guru and the *sants* in these works, which together with their emphasis on love and

⁴⁶⁸ *Bhāgavat Daśamskandh Bhāṣā*, RORI JOD 10854 (VS 1918).

⁴⁶⁹ MSMSM *Bhagavad Gītā Bhāṣā Tīkā*, 3845(3).

⁴⁷⁰ *Bhakt Virudāvalī*, 12556 (VS 1856).

⁴⁷¹ Bhagvandas, *Amṛtadhārā*, RORI JOD 12561; Manohardas, *Vedānt Mahāvākya Bhāṣā*, RORI JOD 26579.

On doxographies in Sanskrit works, see Minkowski, “Advaita Vedānta in Early Modern History,” 210.

⁴⁷² Minkowski, “Advaita Vedānta in Early Modern History,” 210-11.

⁴⁷³ Bhagvandas, *Amṛtadhārā, sorathā* 31. RORI JOD 12561.

service makes their non-dualist thought curiously compatible with Vaishnava *bhakti*. There is evidence that local rulers (among others) took their thought on Advaita Vedanta seriously: a copy of Manohardas's *Ṣaṭpraśni Nirṇaya Bhāṣā* is found in the collection of the Rathore Rajputs of Jodhpur, and in 1778 the Niranjani monk Mangaldas copied a collection of works on Advaita Vedanta for the Rathore king Vijay Singh's sons Sher Singh and Guman Singh at Nagaur.⁴⁷⁴ Manohardas's *Vedānta Mahāvākya Bhāṣā* and *Gyān Mañjarī* and were copied for the Kacchwaha court in 1722 and 1748 respectively, and Bhagvandas's *Bhagavad Gīt Bhāṣā* is also to found in the Kacchwahas' collection, although details of how and when it came to be there are unknown.

In the case of one of the most well-known poets of the Niranjani Sampraday, it seems that intellectual sophistication was less important than accessibility and aesthetic pleasure establishing the popularity of his poetry and his image as a scholar-poet. Tursidas overlapped chronologically with Bhagvandas but wrote later into the eighteenth century; written hagiographies and oral tradition relate that he was sent to Banaras to study the *śāstras*, and when he returned, brought this knowledge into the Sampraday.⁴⁷⁵ However, his compositions are generally less complex in terms of both form and ideas than those of his Niranjani predecessors discussed above. His *Itihās Samuccay* (1688 CE?) is a translation of

⁴⁷⁴ MSPP 1300, 1215.

⁴⁷⁵ By travelling to Banaras for education, Tursidas would certainly have been exposed to the vibrant intellectual culture there in the seventeenth century, including the debates non Advaita mentioned earlier. On Banaras intellectual culture, see Rosalind O'Hanlon, "Speaking from Siva's Temple: Banaras Scholar Households and the Brahman 'ecumene' of Mughal India," *South Asian History and Culture* 2, no. 2 (2011): 253–77; Minkowski, "Advaita Vedānta in Early Modern History"; also Anank Venkatkrishnan, "Ritual, Reflection, and Religion: The Devas of Banaras," in "Scholar-Intellectuals in Early Modern India," special issue of *South Asian History and Culture*, forthcoming. In the Dadu Panth as well, it is frequently mentioned in hagiographical sources that seven of Dadu's disciples, including Sundardas, Rajjadbdas (one of the compilers of Dadu's *vāṇī*) and Jangopal (the composer of Dadu's hagiography) were sent to Banaras to be educated. See Narayandas, *Śrī Dādū Panth Paricay*.

selected episodes from the *Mahābhārata*, while his *Karanī Sār Jog Granth*, *Sādhu Sulacchin Granth*, and *Tattvagun Bhed Granth* (all undated) are easily accessible collections of *upadeśa* (injunctions) to yogic practice and non-attachment that combine popular notions of Advaita Vedanta with *prem-bhakti* (loving devotion to God). Tursidas's enduring image as the premier scholar-saint of the Niranjani tradition is perhaps due to this ability to render the esoteric knowledge of the Vedas and *śāstras* intelligible through familiar images and popular verse forms (as most of his compositions are in *dohā* and *rolā* meters).

The literary turn in the Niranjani's thought and style that had begun in the mid-seventeenth century came to a peak with Hariramdas, who composed his works in the first half of the eighteenth century while living in Didwana and the nearby town of Dhanop. Haridas displays an impressive breadth of learning in his compositions, which manage to integrate *nirguṇ* religious thought with literary styles and genres usually associated with Vaishnavism and more secular poetry. His first known work, the *Chandarātnāvalī* or "String of the Jewels of Meter" (1738 CE), is an extraordinary text that re-interprets the literary sciences of meter (*chanda-śāstra*) and poetic embellishment (*alaṃkāra-śāstra*) in terms of, and in the service of, *nirguṇ* theology.⁴⁷⁶ Though Hariramdas draws from several sources – including the *Kuvalayānanda* of Appayya Diksita, the *Vṛttaratnākara* of Kedara Bhatta, and the *Sāhityadarpaṇa* of Vishvanatha – his creation is more than the sum of its parts.⁴⁷⁷ Stylistically, it is a unique work in its use of multiple meters for *lakṣaṇas* (definitions) and for the content of its *udāharaṇas* (examples), which ranges from the sober

⁴⁷⁶ Of course, works of poetics and metrics by his more courtly predecessors were not devoid of devotional feeling either; see for example the discussion of Keshavdas's poetic manuals in Busch, *Poetry of Kings*, 23-51.

⁴⁷⁷ For an erudite introduction to the *Chandarātnāvalī* and its influences, see Neha Baid's introduction in Hariramdas, *Harirāmadās Kṛt Chandarātnāvalī*, edited by Neha Baid (Jodhpur: Rajasthani Granthagar, 2010).

admonitions of *nirguṇ sant-mat* to the titillating love intrigues of *rīti* poetry proper.

Hariram declares that his work is intended to initiate the young poet into the proper use of meters and rhetorical techniques because both are essential not only to the aesthetic success of poetry but also to the production of devotional feeling—*bhakti*. The *Chandarātnāvalī* thus makes a claim for the literarity of the poetry produced in the Niranjani tradition and similar sectarian traditions by providing it with a theoretical apparatus, a poetic theory that posits literarity as essential to a poetic work’s spiritual efficacy.

By the time that Hariramdas was writing, a curriculum or canon had developed for aspiring *bhāṣā* poets, including those of the more devotional persuasion; like the *Chandarātnāvalī*, Haridas’s other works appear to continue the work which of providing both theological and literary training for the religious poet.⁴⁷⁸ The *Nām Prakāś* (“Illumination of the Names,” 1768 CE) is a Brajbhasha lexicon based on the model of the Sanskrit *Amara Kośa* of Amara Simha, a literary thesaurus of use to both the composer and the *sahṛdaya* (connoisseur) of poetry.⁴⁷⁹ His next dated composition, the *Sahasranām Bhāṣya Bhāṣā* (“Vernacular Exegesis of the Thousand Names,” 1779 CE) is a Brajbhasha rendering of the Sanskrit *Sahasranāma Bhāṣya* of Shankaracharya, which itself is a commentary on the *Viṣṇusahasranāma*, a recounting of the names and attributes of Vishnu contained within the *Mahābhārata*.⁴⁸⁰ It is primarily composed in verse, but also includes an

⁴⁷⁸ On poetic education in Brajbhasha, see Françoise Mallison, “The Teaching of Braj, Gujarati, and Bardic Poetry at the Court of Kutch: The Bhuja Brajbhāṣā Paṭhśālā, 1749-1948,” in Pollock, *Forms of Knowledge in Early Modern Asia*, 171-182.

⁴⁷⁹ *Nām Prakāś*, AJ 817 (VS 1869).

⁴⁸⁰ *Sahasranām Bhāṣya Bhāṣā*, AJ 816 (n.d.). For the *Viṣṇu Sahasranāmam* and Shankaracharya’s commentary, see K. E. Parthasarathy (ed.) *Śrī Viṣṇu Sahasranāmam with the Commentaries of Śrī Śāṅkarācārya and Śrī Parāśara Bhattar* (Madras: Ganesh, 1966).

autocommentary in prose.⁴⁸¹ Hariramdas also composed two undated works: the first is the *Paramārth Satsaī*, an extensive treatise which schematizes the different levels of devotion and religious practice, and sets forth a system of epistemology and ontology that contains the guru and *bhakti* at its center.⁴⁸² The second is the *Dayāl Jī Kī Pañc Parcaī*, a hagiography of Haridas that is one of the earliest written sources for information about his life.

Even this very succinct survey of Niranjani scholars and their works reveals the depth and breadth of knowledge that was cultivated within the community and shared with other groups. These composers, who were simultaneously monks, saints, scholars and poets, were equally comfortable composing evocative hymns lamenting their separation from a Divine beloved and penning more contemplative *prabandha kāvya* that articulated complex metaphysical and literary concepts. Even these more esoteric works, however, appear to have been intended as much for householder devotees and men of letters as for the poets' renunciate brethren, as becomes clear from a closer scrutiny of the works themselves. We shall briefly examine one such work, the *Vairāgya Vṛnd* of Bhagvandas, and the manuscripts in which it circulated, before discussing more generally the development of an intellectual discourse in the vernacular in early modern Rajasthan, and the Niranjani's place within the corresponding network of scholars.

⁴⁸¹ I thank Neha Baid for bringing my attention to this text, which she discovered while completing her PhD research on Hariramdas Niranjani.

⁴⁸² *Paramārth Satsaī*, AJ 516 (n.d.).

The *Vairāgya Vṛnd* of Bhagvandas

The *Vairāgya Vṛnd* is noteworthy not only because it is an inventive and well-crafted work, but also because of what it tells us about the literary, religious and intellectual milieu in which it was conceived. Two hundred and ninety-three verses written in a chaste Brajbhasha free of influences from Marwari, it contrasts starkly with the relatively short and locally-colored hymns and sayings examined in the previous chapter.⁴⁸³ Although Bhagvandas styles his text as a *ṭīkā* or commentary on the Sanskrit *Vairāgya Śataka* of Bhartrihari, his ‘commentary’ does nothing less than re-imagine Bhartrihari’s anthology of independent epigrams as a unified religious treatise, yet in a manner that also allows it to be used as didactic material in less religious contexts, for example as a literary primer. The *Vairāgya Vṛnd* is thus a work of translation in two senses. First, it is what Charles Sanders Peirce terms an ‘iconic’ translation, in other words an attempt to re-create a source text in another language, more or less word-for-word; this is the meaning of translation with which we are most familiar in the present epoch.⁴⁸⁴ Second, to borrow terminology from Bruno Latour and Tony Stewart, the *Vairāgya Vṛnd* constitutes a node through which the ideological and aesthetic worlds of both Bhartrihari and Bhagvandas are translated into one

⁴⁸³ The most reliable copy of the *Vairāgya Vṛnd* that I have been able to find to date (RORI JOD 37973) contains two hundred and ninety-three original verses, which accompany one hundred and twenty Sanskrit verses attributed to Bhartrihari. Other copies contain a slightly greater or lesser number of verses, but this is due to the deletion or interpolation of framing verses that do not constitute any significant difference in readings.

⁴⁸⁴ Charles Sanders Peirce, “Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs,” in Justin Buchler (ed.) *Philosophical Writings of Peirce* (New York: Dover, 1955) 98-119. The first to put Peirce’s ideas in conversation with South Asian material was A.K. Ramanujan; see “Three Hundred *Rāmāyaṇas*: Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translation,” in Paula Richman (ed.) *Many Rāmāyaṇas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991) 44.

another.⁴⁸⁵ By positing his commentary, steeped as it was in Niranjani ideas, as the gateway through which Bhartrihari's text could be accessed, Bhagvandas invited his audience to not only read Bhartrihari's text in terms articulated by the Niranjani tradition, but also to read the Niranjani tradition as an extension of Bhartrihari's thought centuries earlier.

By making the celebrated text of the *Vairāgya Śataka* accessible in Brajhasha, Bhagvandas was rendering a valuable service to an emerging public that was more comfortable in the vernacular than in Sanskrit.⁴⁸⁶ This public included renunciates like Bhagvandas but also householder devotees and courtly intellectuals, groups that he could reach through the manuscript broadcast network outlined above. Thus translation in multiple senses—as 'iconic' translation, but also as the translation of ideological systems, aesthetic systems, and of notion of value—was an important (if not the primary) mode through which a body of intellectual and literary material was created in the vernacular during the early modern period.⁴⁸⁷ It has suffered general neglect in modern scholarship,

⁴⁸⁵ See Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, for a description of actor network theory and the role of translation in shaping flows in an intellectual and social network. Tony Stewart takes a very similar approach while analyzing the literary and intellectual products of Hindu-Muslim encounter in his article "In Search of Equivalence: Conceiving Muslim-Hindu Encounter through Translation Theory," though he derives his framework from sources other than Latour. In the context of South Asia, other studies that use the concept of translation to understand ideological and aesthetic exchange include Wagoner, "A Sultan among Hindu Kings," Flood, *Objects of Translation*; Aditya Behl, "Presence and Absence in *Bhakti*: An Afterword," *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 11, no. 3 (2007): 5. John Cort, "Making It Vernacular in Agra: The Practice of Translation by Seventeenth-Century Digambar Jains," in Francesca Orsini (ed.) *Tellings Not Texts* (?), forthcoming. Thomas de Bruijn, "Many Roads Lead to Lanka: The Intercultural Semantics of Rama's Quest," *Contemporary South Asia* 14, no. 1 (2005): 15. Deven Patel, "Source, Exegesis, and Translation: Sanskrit Commentary and Regional Language Translation in South Asia," *American Oriental Society* 131, no. 2 (April-June 2011): 22.

⁴⁸⁶ Sheldon Pollock, "India in the Vernacular Millennium: Literary Culture and Polity, 1000-1500," *Daedalus* 127, no. 3 (July 1, 1998): 41-74. —, "The Cosmopolitan Vernacular," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 57, no. 1 (February 1, 1998): 6-37.

⁴⁸⁷ Flood, *Objects of Translation*; also —, "Lost in Translation: Architecture, Taxonomy, and the Eastern 'Turks,'" *Muqarnas* 24 (January 1, 2007): 79-115. Stewart, "In Search of Equivalence"; Ramanujan, "Three Hundred *Rāmāyaṇas*"; Ernst, Carl W. "Muslim Studies of Hinduism? A Reconsideration of Arabic and Persian Translations from Indian Languages." *Iranian Studies* 36, no. 2 (June 1, 2003): 173-95. —. "The

being dismissed as ‘unoriginal’ or ‘derivative,’ but if we want to understand the intellectual and literary world of early modern India, we must look closely at these compositions to understand the way in which they made texts and knowledge systems formerly limited to Sanskrit available to new audiences, and that too in ways that were often quite inventive and sophisticated.⁴⁸⁸

The *Vairāgya Śataka* of Bhartrihari

The *Vairāgya Śataka* (One Hundred Verses on Non-attachment) and the figure of its putative author, the philosopher-king Bhartrihari (fl. 5-7th century), were prominent in both the devotional and courtly literary cultures of the early modern period, and by undertaking a commentary/translation of this work, the Niranjani poet Bhagvandas was taking part in a lively discussion on the religious, philosophical, and ethical import of the work among a variety of poets. The *Vairāgya Śataka* is one of three *śatakas* attributed to Bhartrihari, the other two being the *Nīti Śataka* (One hundred verses of worldly wisdom) and the *Śṛṅgār Śataka* (One Hundred Erotic Verses’).⁴⁸⁹ The attribution of all these verses to one historic

Islamization of Yoga in the ‘Amrtakunda’ Translations.” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Third Series, 13, no. 2 (July 1, 2003): 199–226. It is interesting to note the parallels, as well as contrasts, with the scene of Hindi in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During that pivotal time in the history of Hindi, intellectuals like Mahavirprasad Dwivedi and Raja Shivprasad emphasized the need for a body of knowledge on all manner of subjects in Hindi, and numerous prominent and lesser-known Hindi writers found both material and inspiration by translating or trans-creating works from Bengali, Sanskrit, and English.

⁴⁸⁸ The dismissal of this literature as derivative and unoriginal is connected to a more general characterization of the early modern period in India as a time of cultural and political degeneration in colonial historiography; this characterization in turn influenced historiographers of Hindi writing in both Hindi and English. See Busch, “The Fate of *Rīti* Literature in Colonial India,” in *Poetry of Kings*, 202-239. For representative statements by Hindi critics on this type of literature, see Shukla, *Hindī Sāhitya Kā Itihās*, 160; Nagendra, 274, 281-83. Both critics compare the Hindi intellectuals of the period rather unfavorably with the Sanskrit intellectuals who inspired them.

⁴⁸⁹ It is not clear whether Bhartrihari was indeed a king, or a court poet, or whether the figure of him popular by the early modern period was a conflation of two such individuals. See Barbara Stoler Miller, “Introduction,” in Bhartrihari, *Bhartrihari: Poems*, translated by Barbara Stoler Miller, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967) xvii.

individual is not without problems, and it is clear that the collation of the verses into these three collections probably took place over several centuries.⁴⁹⁰ Even the contents of the *Śatakatraya* (the collective name for the three *śatakas*) are not totally fixed, with only about two hundred verses being common to most recensions.⁴⁹¹ However, this diversity need not concern us too greatly here; what is important is that by the period in which Bhagvandas was writing, there existed an idea of the *Vairāgya Śataka* (and its two sister collections) as textually stable anthologies authored by a single enlightened poet.⁴⁹²

The figure of that enlightened poet is important as well: tradition relates that Bhartrihari was a king who, after enjoying the many sensual pleasures of the court, became disgusted with worldly life and renounced it completely, taking up an ascetic life in the forest.⁴⁹³ Though the historical veracity of this biography may be questioned, this is nevertheless how Bhartrihari is *remembered* by Bhagvandas and his contemporaries.⁴⁹⁴ For example, Raghavadas of the Dadupanth describes Bhartrihari in just this manner in his

⁴⁹⁰ Miller, *Bhartrihari*, xvi. Ludwik Sternbach, *Subhasita, Gnostic and Didactic Literature* (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1974) 4.

⁴⁹¹ Kosambi, "Introduction," in Bhartrihari, *Bhartrihari-Viracitaḥ Śatakatrayādi-Subhāṣitasan̄grahaḥ* (New Delhi: Munshirām Manoharlal, 2000) 56-78.

⁴⁹² They were clearly taken to be a defined tripartite text by Indrajit of Orcha, who composed a prose commentary on them in Brajhbhasha at the turn of the seventeenth century. R.S. McGregor, "Some Bhartrihari Commentaries in Early Braj Bhāṣā Prose," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 26, no. 2 (January 1, 1963): 314-28; ———, *The Language of Indrajit of Orchā: A Study of Early Braj Bhāṣā Prose* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1968).

⁴⁹³ Miller, "Introduction," in *Bhartrihari: Poems*, xvi-xvii. The most famous story about Bhartrihari relates how he was given a fruit of immortality by a brahmin; this he gave to his wife, who gave it to her lover, who gave it to another, and so on, until it reached the king again, at which point he became disillusioned with worldly love. This tradition is related, for example, in the *Vikramacarita*. See Judit Törzsök (trans.), *Friendly Advice by Nārāyaṇa & King Vikrama's Adventures* (The Clay Sanskrit Library, New York: New York University Press, 2007) 566-577.

⁴⁹⁴ *Vairāgya Vṛnd*, 1st prakāś, aril 16. The verse does not name Bhartrihari, but refers to an anonymous king in recounting the story. There is little ambiguity as to the king's identity, however, as the verse is part of the commentary on Bhartrihari's famous *śloka* lampooning worldly love and infidelity. For more on that verse, see below.

Bhaktamāl (1660 CE).⁴⁹⁵ In this encyclopedic hagiography, composed only thirteen years before Bhagvandas wrote the *Vairāgya Vṛnd*, Raghavdas also eulogizes several Niranjani saints, and it is highly likely that Bhagvandas was aware of this text and shared its reverence for Bhartrihari and his compositions.

The *Vairāgya Śataka* participates in the genre of *subhāṣita*, collections of unordered, independent epigrams that served a dual didactic purpose: to educate elites in proper conduct through their content, and to acculturate them into the appreciation of good literature through their form.⁴⁹⁶ The verses contained in the *Vairāgya Śataka* (the majority of which are composed in the meters of *śārdūlavikrīḍitā*, *śikhariṇī*, *vasantatilaka*, or *anuṣṭubh*) are all obviously related, to some degree, to the theme of non-attachment. In this particular *śataka*, Bhartrihari is particularly critical of the pursuit of worldly aims such as wealth and power, of sexual desire and worldly love (though these are of course his objects in the other *śatakas*), and of the practice of physical asceticism in the absence of mental discipline. In this regard, this collection was ideally suited for translation and consumption within the Niranjani monastic community: Bhagvandas and his fellow Niranjani poets advocated ‘being in the world but not of it,’ fiercely decrying worldly desires and pursuits and preaching mental detachment from them, but stopping short of advocating an ascetic life over that of a householder.

⁴⁹⁵ Raghavdas, *Bhaktamāl*, §283-4.

⁴⁹⁶ Sternbach, *Subhasita, gnomic and didactic literature*, 4.

The *Vairāgya Vṛnd* as commentary and as literature

Although ostensibly a commentary on the *Vairāgya Śataka*, the *Vairāgya Vṛnd* of Bhagvandas does much more than simply explicate or elaborate upon its source text—it transforms it into a different type of composition that can do the literary and intellectual work of both a *subhāṣita* and a religious treatise. The *Vairāgya Vṛnd* contains one hundred and twenty Sanskrit verses attributed to Bhartrihari, which Bhagvandas explicates and elaborates upon in two hundred and ninety-three Brajhasha verses composed in the form of *dohās*, *soraṭhās*, *kavitts*, *arills*, *chappays*, *caupaīs*, *kuṇḍaliyā*, *savaiyās*, and *samān savaiyās*.⁴⁹⁷ He calls his text a ‘*ṭikā*’, simultaneously referencing the prestigious commentarial tradition of Sanskrit and making an argument for the authority of his own text by claiming fidelity to Bhartrihari’s original. As he writes in the final section (*prakāś*) of the *Vairāgya Vṛnd*—

bhāṣā kṛta ṭikā yaha / sata tīnyūṃ parakāśa
dohā savaiyā caupāī / kuṇḍala kavita bigāsa
chappaya chanda aru soraṭhā / chanda rūp yaha jāṃna
*ati nirmala vairāgya tara / sāra sāra paramāna*⁴⁹⁸

This is a commentary (*ṭikā*) made in the vernacular
One hundred [verses] in three chapters,
Developed [in] *dohās*, *savaiyās*, *caupaīs*,
Kuṇḍaliyās, and *kavitts*,

Chappay, *chand* and *soraṭhā* -
Know these to be the forms of meter [used].

⁴⁹⁷ The *Vairāgya Vṛnd* has never been published, and I have yet to complete a critical edition of the text. For the purpose of this essay I have used Ms. 37973 of the Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute, Jodhpur, which, judging by evidence contained in other sections of the *gūṭakā*, dates from the mid eighteenth century CE. There is remarkable consistency in the available manuscripts, however, and so I cite this manuscript having compared it with other copies, and believe it to be sufficiently representative of the contents of the manuscript tradition. Any exceptions are noted below in the footnotes for quoted sections.

⁴⁹⁸ 5th prakāś, dohās 77 and 78. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

Exceedingly pure and overflowing with non-attachment,
The essence of its essence is made evident [here].

Bhagvandas also prefaces his commentary by stating that he has faithfully represented
Bhartrihari's original text, to the best of his intellectual ability:

*grantha nāma paramāna / vairāga vṛnda so jāniye
bhāsaum budhi unamāna / mūla bhṛtihari bhāsa taiṃ*⁴⁹⁹

The authoritative name of the *granth*—
Know it to be the *Vairāg Vṛnd*.
I speak according to my intellect
From the original utterances of Bhartrihari.

At the end of the text he again insists that he has neither added nor subtracted from the
original work, re-creating it “just as it was” (*jathā tathā*):

*jathā tathā yā graṇtha kū bhākhā sūṃ mana baṇdha*⁵⁰⁰

I have tied together this book (*granth*) in the vernacular
And according to my intellect, just as it was [in the original]

Claiming fidelity to the source text was clearly an attempt to tap into the authority and
prestige of Bhartrihari's original, and to establish Bhagvandas's commentary as an
authoritative rendering or interpretation. At the same time, as Busch has pointed out, among
prominent Brajbhasha poets like Keshavdas and Bhikharidas, the phrase *apni mati anusār*

⁴⁹⁹ 1st prakāś, sorathā 3.

⁵⁰⁰ 5th prakāś, v 68. For this particular verse, I take the reading from Ms. 2165; Ms. 37973 gives 'syaṃdh' for 'sindh', which maintains the rhyme but obscures the meaning of the verse.

“according to my understanding” is also meant to signal the poet’s original intervention and innovation.⁵⁰¹

However, this claim to a transparent rendering was not meant to diminish the importance or prestige of Bhagvandas’s own intellectual contribution to the work; indeed, composing a commentary was understood to be a great feat of scholarship. The preceding commentarial tradition within Sanskrit had involved far more than the straightforward explication of meaning, and Bhagvandas appropriated some of its techniques and prestige when he chose to write the *Vairāgya Vṛnd*. A vast array of texts on different subjects were composed in the commentarial style, making it the largest body of expository works in Sanskrit.⁵⁰² As commentaries, these works (including *ṭīkā* and *bhāṣya*) acknowledged a pre-existing discourse on their subject and positioned themselves in relation to it without being *bound* by it— indeed, many ‘commentaries’ are magisterial treatises in their own right, sometimes departing markedly from the texts upon which they purport to comment (usually referred to as *mūl*, literally ‘root’). Consequently, commentaries and their authors received as much prestige as the so-called *mūl* texts. By styling his work as a commentary, Bhagvandas presented himself as participating in this scholarly tradition, and partook of its prestige.

He was certainly not the first vernacular writer to do so: around seventy years earlier, at the turn of the seventeenth century, the Bundela Rajput prince Indrajit of Orchha had composed a prose commentary in Brajbhasha on all three of Bhartrihari’s *śatakas*.⁵⁰³

⁵⁰¹ Busch, “The Anxiety of Innovation,” 50-53; *Poetry of Kings*, 109-20.

⁵⁰² Tubb and Boose, *Scholastic Sanskrit*, 1.

⁵⁰³ McGregor, *The Language of Indrajit of Orchā*, 11.

(Unfortunately, there is no known manuscript available of his commentary on the *Vairāgya Śataka*; if one were to become available, a comparison with the *Vairāgya Vṛnd* might reveal whether Bhagvandas was familiar with Indrajit's work.) Indrajit, in turn, was building upon an existing commentarial literature on the *śatakas* in Sanskrit, and may have even drawn from commentaries in Rajasthani vernaculars.⁵⁰⁴ Meanwhile, at Indrajit's court, the poet Keshavdas had inaugurated the tradition of *śāstra*-like compositions in the vernacular on the science of poetry, and these in turn inspired their own commentarial tradition by the end of the seventeenth century, around the same time that Bhagvandas was writing.⁵⁰⁵ Just preceding Indrajit and Keshavdas, the poet Nandadas had composed the *Rāsapañcādhyayī*, which was both a translation of, and commentary on, the portions of the tenth book of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* that describe the *rās-līlā* dance of Krishna and the *gopīs* (cowherd girls).⁵⁰⁶ So Bhagvandas's *Vairāgya Śataka* should not be understood as an anomaly, but rather as a text that participated in the emerging tradition of vernacular commentaries on both Sanskrit and vernacular works.⁵⁰⁷

This tradition, though already several decades old, was still in the process of being consolidated when Bhagvandas composed the *Vairāgya Vṛnd*, and so his work reflects an awareness of the freedom to experiment and even a certain confidence, but also a lingering

⁵⁰⁴ McGregor, "The History of Hindi Part I," 928.

⁵⁰⁵ Busch, *Poetry of Kings*, 37. Mishra, "Tīkāṅṅ Aur Tīkāṅṅ," in Vijaypal Singh (ed.) *Keśavadāsa* (Delhi: Radhakrishna Prakashan, 1970.) 230-4. The earliest commentary Mishra mentions is a commentary (in Sanskrit!) on the *Rasikapriyā* dated VS 1755 / 1698-99 CE (Mishra, 230).

⁵⁰⁶ R.S. McGregor, *The Round Dance of Krishna, and Uddhav's Message* (London: Luzac, 1973); Nandadas, *Rāsapañcādhyayī*, in *Nandadāsa Granthāvalī*, edited by Babu Vrajaratnadas (Varanasi: Nagari Pracarini Sabha, 1958).

⁵⁰⁷ That tradition continued well into the colonial period, and Brajbhasha poets continued to compose commentaries on Bhartrihari's *Śatakas* long after Bhagvandas. We find, for example, a Brajbhasha commentary on the *Nīti Śataka* composed by one Nainsiha in 1729 at Ahmedabad, at the bequest of Anand Singh, prince and son of Anup Singh, the Rathore king of Bikaner. (MS 160.14, Abhay Jain Granthalaya, Bikaner.)

anxiety that attended vernacular composition in the shadow of the Sanskrit tradition.⁵⁰⁸

Therefore Bhagvandas's apologetics at the beginning and end of his work should be understood as attempts to establish the literary and intellectual merit of his enterprise. After the initial *maṅgalācaraṇ* or invocation to God, he makes the formulaic dismissal of his own poetic skill and the appeal to the learned to correct and to forgive his errors that begin many works of *kāvya* (poetry or literature):

*piṅgula amara lakhyau nahī nahi kavita kī rīti
grantha artha parakāśa kūṃ antari upajī prīti*

*chanda bhaṅga akṣara kaṭita aratha vipara jai hoi
dūkhana taiṃ bhuṣana karaiṃ kauvida kahiye soi*⁵⁰⁹

I have not seen the *Piṅgala Śāstra* or the *Amara Kośa*,
Nor the rules of poetry composition.
[Yet] a passion arose within
To illuminate the meaning of the *granth*.

If the meter be broken, or syllables omitted,
Or a contradictory meaning is produced
Those who change these flaws into adornments
Are called the learned.

Though he appears to be excusing himself as a literary neophyte, Bhagvandas's verses are meant to establish just the opposite: that the text he is about to present is a serious work of literature. Such apologetics are absent from contemporary hymns and works of strictly religious interest; it was only when literary merit was at stake that composers felt the need to address the topic, and so the works in which we find such apologetics include Tulsidas's *Rāmcaritmānas* and Manohardas's *Vedānt Mahāvākya Bhāṣā*, works that could make a

⁵⁰⁸ Busch, "The Anxiety of Innovation," 46-50. Pollock, *Language of the Gods*, 439.

⁵⁰⁹ Bhagvandas, *Vairāgya Vṛnd*, 1st *prakāś*, v 4-5.

plausible claim to the status of vernacular *kāvya* (even if the poets themselves were not ready to make such a claim expressly). It is also noteworthy that Bhagvandas attributes the power and success of his creation not to his own poetic skill, but to spiritual inspiration—the “passion” that “arose within” him. We first see this idea articulated in Tulsidas’s *Rāmcaritmānas*, and then repeatedly in works by *bhakti* poets in the seventeenth century: the assertion by a poet that his creation derives its affective power not from its formal literariness, but from its devotional *feeling*.⁵¹⁰ This logic is particularly noticeable in the compositions of Niranjani poets, who refer to themselves both as *kavi* (poets) and *bhakt* (devotees).

Just as he felt the need to establish his literary credentials, Bhagvandas was apparently aware that a case still needed to be made for the vernacular as a medium of intellectual discourse (including religious scholarship). In the final section of the *Vairāgya Vṛnd*, he makes an interesting assertion regarding the suitability of the vernacular to his intellectual purpose:

*śāstra aratha su kūṃpa jala bhāṣā silatā siṃdha
jathā tathā yā graṃtha kū bhāṣā sūṃ mana baṃdha*⁵¹¹

In regard to *artha* (the meaning/purpose of action), the *śāstras* are well water
And the vernacular a cool river
I have tied together this book (*granth*) in the vernacular,
And according to my intellect, just as it was [in the original].

mūla hāṃni kīnhi nahī karyau suvāka vilāsa

⁵¹⁰ Tulsidas introduces his vernacular adaptation of the Ram narrative by saying “*Kabita bibeka eka nahim moreṃ / satya kahaṃ likhi kāgada koreṃ. Bhaniti mori saba guna rahita bisva bidita guna eka / so bicāri sunihahim sumati jivha keṃ bimala bibeka.*” (*Rāmcaritmānas*, v 1.9).

⁵¹¹ Bhagvandas, *Vairāgya Vṛnd*, 5th prakāś, v 68. For this particular verse, I take the reading from Ms. 2165; Ms. 37973 gives ‘syamdh’ for ‘sindh’, which maintains the rhyme but obscures the meaning of the verse.

*bāla budhi bhākhā lakhain piṇḍata mūla prakāsa*⁵¹²

I haven't done harm to the original
I have created pleasurable, fine speech
In the vernacular speech of my child-like mind
Wise ones will perceive the light (meaning) of the original.

The verse recalls the famous *sākhī* attributed to Kabir— *saṃsakarit hai kup-jal, bhākhā bahatā nīr* (“Sanskrit is well water, the vernacular flowing water”)— so often quoted by modern scholars to demonstrate the iconoclastic *bhakti* poets’ attitude toward Sanskrit and its privileged knowledge systems. The *sākhī* characterizes Sanskrit as a ‘dead’ language, and celebrates the dynamism and ‘life’ of the vernacular, establishing it as the superior medium of religious and literary content. However, Bhagvandas’s critique is quite different as he juxtaposes the *śāstras*, not Sanskrit, with *bhākhā*. Sanskrit maintains a place of prestige in his text: he emphasizes his fidelity to the Sanskrit *mūl* text as the basis of authority of his work, and most available manuscripts of the *Vairāgya Vṛnd* include the original Sanskrit verses in addition to the commentary. Bhagvandas instead appears to be arguing that *śāstra* as a textual genre is a poor source for teaching or learning about the primary *artha* (purpose or goal) with which his text is concerned, i.e. non-attachment. For this purpose, the more poetic *Vairāgya Śataka* and even his own vernacular renderings of its epigrams are more effective. As we shall see in specific examples of his exegesis, Bhagvandas no doubt believed that it was his vernacular rendering that made clear the didactic import of Bhartrihari’s verses, which otherwise might have been lost in the swirl of multiple emotions conveyed in the original text.

⁵¹² Ibid., 5th prakāś, v 71. For this verse as well, I take the reading from Ms. 2165; in Ms. 37973, the scribe has written ‘vās’ for ‘bāl’, which does not render any satisfactory meanings.

How does Bhagvandas maintain the literary quality of the *mūl* text while also foregrounding Niranjani religious ideology in his interpretation of it? Bhagvandas adopted certain elements of the Sanskrit commentary like the dialectic style, paraphrasing, and references to texts and composers while abandoning others like word glosses and the analysis of compounds. It was through this selective application of commentarial elements that Bhagvandas was able to turn the *Vairāgya Śataka* from simply a work of *subhāṣita* into a work that could be used for both religious and more generally moral and even literary instruction (not to mention aesthetic pleasure).

Bhagvandas first frames the text by prefacing it with a brief discussion of the three types of *vairāgya*: *manda*, *tīvra*, and *taratīvra*, defining each and associating them with Shuka, Shukhadeva, and Bhartrihari respectively.⁵¹³ Interestingly, he associates *taratīvra*, the highest state of non-attachment, with Bhartrihari himself, placing him above the puranic figures of Shuka/Shukhadeva. Bhagvandas then turns to his explication of Bhartrihari's text.

Bhagvandas arranges the unordered verses of the original *Śataka* thematically into five *prakāś*, or chapters, titled “*nām-kām*” (desire for fame), “*dhan-mad*” (the intoxication of wealth), “*ṭṣṇā*” (thirst), “*sānti-sukh-nived*” (peace, happiness and indifference), and “*atitar vairāg*” (complete non-attachment). Although a number of Bhartrihari's verses do not lend themselves to this type of categorization and thus sit somewhat awkwardly in their various *prakāś*, the division itself reflects a certain logic, beginning with a diagnosis and

⁵¹³ Ibid., 1st prakāś, v 6-9. It is not clear if these two names, Shuka and Shukhadeva, refer to the same individual, i.e., the son of Vyasa, or to two separate individuals. In Bhagvandas's hierarchical scheme of levels of non-attachment, they are certainly treated as if they were two distinct individuals.

description of different states of attachment (*nām-kām*, *dhan-mad*, and *trṣṇā*), and ending with verses that describe the different levels of non-attachment (*śānti-sukh-nived* and “*atitar vairāg*). Bhagvandas further stitches several of the verses together by creating the structure of a dialogue (*goṣṭhī*), sometimes between guru and disciple, sometimes between mental states like ‘greed’ and ‘contentment’, sometimes between God and a generic devotee.⁵¹⁴ This results in a text that reads as a sort of treatise rather than as a collection of independent epigrams.

Bhagvandas is not completely consistent in the number of verses or in the types of meters that he uses to translate or to comment on each Sanskrit verse; nevertheless, a general pattern is easily discernible. He begins by giving the original Sanskrit verse, then an exegetical verse in Brajhasha that explains the meaning of the original in detail. For this purpose he most often employs *kavitts*, although he also uses *chappay*, *caupaī*, *arill*, *savaiyā*, and *samān savaiyā* in places. These longer meters provide plenty of space for exegesis, and rather than simply translating the content of the original, Bhagvandas typically adds details or comments to explicate metaphors and references and to emphasize the spiritual lesson to be learned. He then presents a *dohā* or *soraṭhā* that neatly encapsulates the meaning of the original verse. Within this shorter form, though he tries to re-create at least some of the literal content of the Sanskrit, Bhagvandas’s primary concern is clearly to compose an aesthetically powerful epigram that conveys the didactic message or emotional content of the original. Having thus established the theme or lesson, he then expands upon

⁵¹⁴ Some copies of the *Vairāgya Vr̥nd* contain additional clarifications or ‘rubric’ in prose that introduce and frame Bhartrihari’s verses in the manner of a commentary; for example, “Now Bhartrihari discusses the *bhāgavat*.” Ms. 2165, RORI Jaipur. Folio 832. Other examples can be found on Folios 829 and 831.

it, adding one or more verses in *dohā*, *soraṭhā*, *arill*, *chappay* or *caupaī* meters. The use of so many different meters in a single text, while rare for a devotional poet (especially of the *nirguṇ sant* tradition), was common among those poets associated with royal courts who composed *prabandha kāvya* (epic or long narrative poetry).⁵¹⁵ By employing so many different (and some relatively more complex) meters, Bhagvandas was taking the Niranjani tradition's poetry in a new direction, and into an area that overlapped with more 'literary' genres.⁵¹⁶

To see in detail how he did so, let us take an example that also reveals some choices regarding content. Though the *Vairāgya Śataka* itself is a collection of verses that reject worldly pursuits and extol the virtues of asceticism, it is clear that Bhagvandas was also quite deliberate in his selection of verses to translate, including not only verses from the *Vairāgya Śataka*, but also those that he found appropriate from the *Nīti* and *Śṛṅgāra śatakas*. As mentioned above, the contents of the individual *śatakas* were not consistent across manuscript traditions; nevertheless, the number of verses included in Bhagvandas's text that are elsewhere ascribed to the *Nīti* and *Śṛṅgār śatakas*, and the content of these verses, suggest that Bhagvandas was familiar with all three *śatakas*, and intentionally drew his content from all three (as opposed to the possibility that he was working from a single recension of the *Vairāgya Śataka* that included all one hundred and eighteen translated *ślokas*). Among the verses that appear to be imported from the 'other' *śatakas* is the following well-known *śloka*:

⁵¹⁵ Busch, *Poetry of Kings*; Dalpat Rajpurohit, "Language and Meters in the *Himmatbahādurvirudāvalī*," in Williams, Hawley and Malhotra, *Texts and Traditions*.

⁵¹⁶ The use of multiple meters in courtly poetry was often a performance of the poet's virtuosity; Keshavdas's *Rāmcaṅdrīkā* and Padmakar's *Himmatbahādurvirudāvalī* are prime examples of such metrical performance. See Fn. 102.

*yaṃ cintayāmi satataṃ mayi sā viraktā
sāpyanyamicchati janam sa janonyāsaktaḥ
asmatkṛte ca pariśuṣyati kācidanya
dhiktāṃ ca taṃ ca madanaṃ ca imāṃ ca māṃ ca*

She of whom I think ceaselessly is indifferent to me,
She yearns for another man, and he is attached to a third person
While some other woman pines away for me
Fie on that woman, on him, and on Kāmadeva,
as well as on this woman and on me.⁵¹⁷

The original verse is satirical, and while it lampoons worldly love, it does not reject it as inherently corrupt. In his exegesis, however, Bhagvandas employs the verse to make a critique of worldly love, desire, and sexual relations as obstacles to spiritual progress and the attainment of liberation:

*jāsūṃ merā mana lagyau sau tau mau virakta hvai kai
rata mānī aurahūṃ sūṃ sau tau anya rata hai
mai tau jānī merī triyā triyā hū na merī mo kūṃ
taji ma so puruṣa puruṣa āsa cita hai
tarunī triyā kūṃ tyāgi aisau mahā mandana rava
syau jai vesyā ghari andhitā ucita hai
dhṛga kaṃma dhṛga vāṃma dhṛga nara narī nāṃma
bhagavāna vināṃ gyāṃna mokūṃ dhṛga niti hai⁵¹⁸*

The one for whom my heart pines feels no attachment for me;
she desires another, and he's desirous of another.
The woman I understood to be mine is not mine and renounced me;
and is desirous of a man like me.
The blindness of quietly going to a house of prostitutes
is more appropriate than leaving an attractive young woman like this.
Fie on desire, fie on Kāmadeva, fie on man and woman;
to me, knowledge without the name of God is a contemptible way of living!

⁵¹⁷ Translation by M.R. Kale, *The Nīti and Vairāgya Śatakas of Bhartrhari*. Bombay: Motilal Banarsidass, 2013 (originally 1902), p 113. In Kale's edition, this verse is included under the *Nīti Śataka*.

⁵¹⁸ 1st prakāś, kavitt 15.

Most of Bhagvandas's *kavitt* follows Bhartrihari's originally closely, but the third and fourth lines introduce important new elements. In the third line, Bhagvandas critiques infidelity—i.e. desire run amok, desire for multiple objects—by comparing it unfavorably with the patronage of prostitutes. The only relationship that is implied to be beyond critique is the monogamous relationship of marriage, which is both the reality of the householder and the archetype of pure love in the *bhakti* poetry of traditions like the Niranjani's (recall the image of the *pativrata stri* or loyal wife in Haridas' *pad*s). Just as Haridas left a space for householder devotion and liberation in the episode of the *Paracaī* discussed earlier in the chapter, Bhagvandas leaves space for householder devotion and liberation in his exegesis. In spite of finding one's self bound in a web of worldly relations, one can transcend them through knowledge of and devotion to God. Bhagvandas establishes this through opposition when he states that any knowledge “without the name of God is a contemptible way of living.”

Bhagvandas then adds an additional verse in *arill* meter that expands upon the theme of the futility of sexual desire while also relating a popular narrative about the origins of Bhartrihari's own detachment from worldly life:

amṛta phala nṛpa pāi diyau jāi vāma kauṃ
vāṃma ratī pratihāra diyau jāi kāṃma kau
sau vesyāṃ rata bhayau diyau phala tāsa hai
parihāṃ vesyāṃ phala lai hāthi gaī nṛpa pāsi hai

The king obtained the fruit of immortality
and having gone to his wife gave it [to her]
[His] wife went and gave it to the door-guard out of lust
He became infatuated with a prostitute and gave the fruit to her
And yes! The prostitute took the fruit in her hand and brought it to the king.

In the case of several other verses as well, Bhagvandas uses what was originally a satirical verse or a maxim intended to instruct the listener in the ways of the world to reject worldly affairs in their entirety, or to characterize them as obstacles to spiritual progress and liberation. Several modern critics have commented on the range of emotion expressed by Bhartrihari in all three of his *śatakas*; even in his epigrams on non-attachment, Bhartrihari reveals a lingering ambivalence toward women and worldly pleasures, finding it difficult to completely give up such desires.⁵¹⁹ In Bhagvandas's commentary, however, none of this ambivalence is evident, and his renditions of Bhartrihari are withering critiques of desire, not just for women but for wealth and fame as well, and are unambiguous exhortations to adopt a state of non-attachment.

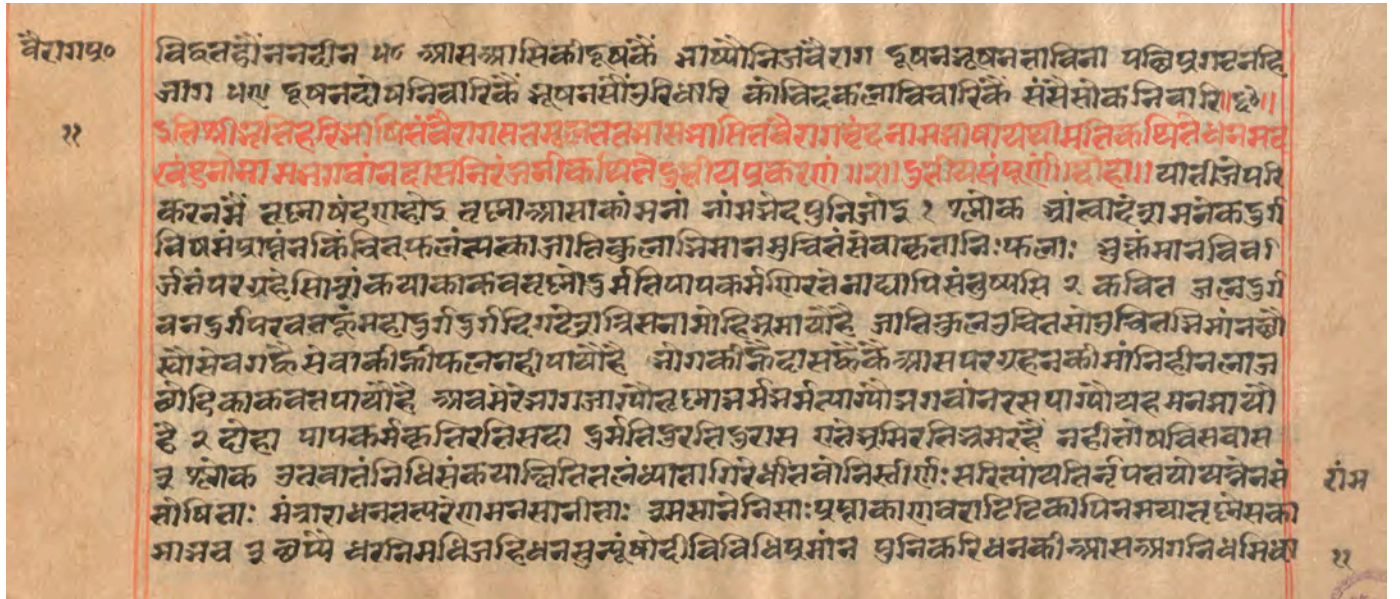


Fig 4.2 *Vairāgya Vṛnd*, including *ślokas* of Bhartrihari and Bhagvandas's commentary. Ms 37973, folio 11. Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute, Jodhpur.

⁵¹⁹ Kosambi, *Śatakatrayam*, 80-1. Miller, *Bhartrihari*, 17-24.

Inscribing, circulating and performing the *Vairāgya Vṛnd*

The *Vairāgya Vṛnd* is clearly intended to be a didactic text: its division into thematic chapters, its style (presenting an original Sanskrit verse followed by multiple verses that both explain the meaning of the original and expand upon its perceived message), and the addition of introductory and concluding sections explaining the aim and levels of non-attachment are ideally suited to teaching, probably in the context of *pravacan* (sermonizing) but also in the context of less religious and more literary education as well. With the *Vairāgya Vṛnd*, the guru or teacher would have had on hand not only the original Sanskrit verses – which carried a religious and social prestige – but also rhetorical tools with which to explain and elaborate upon their meaning.

At the same time, many of the shorter verses – the *dohās* and *soraṭhās* – provided pithy encapsulations of each lesson, and would have been ideally suited to memorization. In fact, though the *Vairāgya Vṛnd* is a highly literate text (in the terms described earlier in the chapter) and circulated widely in written form, some of its content was no doubt meant to be memorized, drawing our attention to another type of relationship between literacy and orality, a relationship in which the written text does not appear to have been merely a prompt for improvised performance. In the context of the hymns and *guṭakās* discussed in Chapter Three, the text inscribed in the manuscript was not recited verbatim, but acted as a prompt for improvised singing in social contexts where it was sometimes difficult to distinguish ‘audience’ and ‘performer’. In the context of scholastic texts like the *Vairāgya Vṛnd* and *pothīs*, performance seems most likely to have been word-for-word recitation, and that too from one performer (the teacher) to one or more members of the audience (students

or disciples).⁵²⁰ Improvisation was certainly possible in such a performance context—reciting a verse on a particular topic could remind the speaker of a similar verse, and so on, a phenomenon that seems to be the mark of a true guru or a good teacher.⁵²¹ Yet the *Vairāgya Vṛnd*, both at the level of its individual units (original verse plus commentary) and at the level of the work as a whole has a different logic from that of the singable *pad*. While the *pad* with its thematic consistency and individual verses allows its parts to be moved around and recombined, the *Vairāgya Vṛnd* directs its performer in how to use it through its structural and metadiscursive features: verses are often introduced with prose, such as “Here peace and happiness are described...” and certain verses are labeled as “questions” (*praśn*) or “answers” (*uttar*), making the dialectic style of exposition clear.

Individual manuscripts of the *Vairāgya Vṛnd* reflect this type of performance context while their histories reveal the variety of social and institutional contexts in which the *Vairāgya Vṛnd* was performed. Available manuscripts of the work are mostly in the *pothī* format, made of wide, unbound folios that were stored by being tied in a cloth (see Figure 4.2). As noted in Chapter 2, *pothīs*, though made of paper, replicated the size and format of the palm leaf manuscripts used for Sanskrit texts, down to the details of their embellishment like vertical margin lines and geometric motifs in the center of the manuscript where palm leaf manuscripts typically had a hole for binding. The *pothīs* of the *Vairāgya Vṛnd* (like almost all other *pothīs* copied by Niranjani monks) were copied on high-quality paper in a clean and attractive hand, with few errors or emendations. In many copies, red ink has been

⁵²⁰ C.f. Horstmann’s discussion of manuscripts and *pravacan* in the Dadu Panth in “Dādūpanthī Hagiographies,” 173-76.

⁵²¹ C.f. O’Hanlon, “Performance in a World of Paper,” 97.

used to highlight section headings, verse numbers, and the prose fragments mentioned above that would have helped the readers/performers to orient themselves within the text, to quickly find specific material, and to know how to ‘perform’ the different parts of the text (e.g. questions and answers are highlighted and thus distinguished from straightforward exposition, and Bhartrihari’s *mūl* verses are distinguished from the commentary). The existence of such navigational apparatus made the manuscript usable by multiple individuals, and their attractive appearance tells us that the manuscripts were intended to be seen, in addition to being ‘heard’ when their text was performed. They would thus have been suitable for use in a public context in which a guru lectured initiates or lay followers, or a ‘study group’ convened by wealthier members of the Niranjani community, or even in a royal court where examples of fine Sanskrit verse needed to be accompanied by explication.

Such performance contexts are not mere conjectures but rather are suggested by the details and histories of the manuscripts themselves. For example, some manuscripts of the *Vairāgya Vṛnd* were copied by Niranjani initiates for their gurus, suggesting their employment in religious teaching. Sometimes the *Vairāgya Vṛnd* was copied as a section of the *Vāṇī*, the holy book of the Niranjani discussed in Chapter 5. *Vāṇī* manuscripts were almost certainly used in liturgical settings, as their well-indexed contents made them convenient and accessible to the Niranjani leaders for whom they were copied and their impressive physical form (with multi-colored inks, embellishments, and codex bindings) made them a focal point for communal ritual.⁵²² That these *Vāṇī* manuscripts were and continue to be objects of inherited, familial wealth among influential clans within the

⁵²² See Figs. 5.3, 5.8, 5.13.

Niranjani community is also quite suggestive. Could they have been used in more ‘private’ study groups convened by influential members of the Sampraday, like the wealthy Bihani merchants discussed earlier? The Niranjanis certainly would have found an example for such types of gatherings and householder religious study among the many Jain Terapanth and Lokagacch adherents in the Nagaur region. More research remains to be done, however, before we can claim this with any certainty.

Other manuscripts of the *Vairāgya Vṛnd* were copied for non-Niranjani patrons, most notably for the Kacchwaha Rajput court of Jai Singh II at Jaipur in 1737.⁵²³ (Some of Bhagvandas’s other compositions, like the *Jaimanī Aśvamedh*, made it into the collections of the Rathore courts at Jodhpur and Nagaur.)⁵²⁴ This is where the potential of Bhagvandas’s text to be meaningful beyond a sectarian and even beyond a religious context becomes clear: more than just a treatise on renunciation, it was also a guidebook to a famous work of Sanskrit literature, and thus the key to an important piece of cultural capital.

As mentioned above, beginning in the 10th century CE, Sanskrit *subhāṣita* anthologies were compiled for the purpose of educating elites about literature, religion, politics and comportment—they were essentially compilations of epigrams, witticism, proverbs, maxims and examples of fine poetry. Through familiarizing oneself with the contents of such anthologies (often including memorization), an individual sought to cultivate connoisseurship and a worldly persona.⁵²⁵ The *Śatakas* of Bhartrihari—covering worldly ethics, erotic love and non-attachment from worldly concerns—were well-known

⁵²³ MS 2440.28, Maharaja Sawai Singh II Museum, Jaipur.

⁵²⁴ MSS 5.1 and 6.2, Maharaja Man Singh Pustak Prakash, Jodhpur.

⁵²⁵ Sternbach, *Subhāṣita, Didactic and Gnostic Literature*, 2-4.

collections of this type, praised not only for the wisdom of their verses but also for Bhartrihari's literary craft. By providing explanations of Bhartrihari's verses and, moreover, condensed equivalents in Brajhasha, Bhagvandas was rendering the valuable service of providing kings, princes, and courtiers more comfortable in the vernacular knowledge of the prestigious Sanskrit tradition. This too was a major driver of vernacularization, as the market for vernacular intellectuals continued to expand.⁵²⁶

Vernacularization and religious scholarship in early modern north India

There was a clearly discernible 'market' for such texts in seventeenth century North India, and this is why religious *scholarship* in the vernacular becomes important, and why the Niranjani's deliberately styled their texts as literary as well as religious. Hindu kings (or those aspiring to such status) in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries needed vernacular interpreters of the Sanskrit tradition in order to help them construct idioms of royal and courtly culture.⁵²⁷ General literacy in Sanskrit may have waned, but the cultural-political currency of its tradition had not, and so poets and scholars who could tap into that tradition and render it in the vernacular were in demand. Thus we see that a poet like Keshavdas (who came from a prestigious family of Sanskrit pandits), in addition to writing encomiums (*praśasti*) in praise of patrons, historical poetry (in the form of *mahākāvya*) recording their deeds, and poetic handbooks (called *rīti granth*), also composed works that

⁵²⁶ See Pollock, "Vernacular Poetries and Polities in South Asia" in *Language of the Gods*, 405-436.

⁵²⁷ Busch, *Poetry of Kings*; specific references are given in the discussion below. See also R.S. McGregor, "The History of Hindi Part I", 926-929, on the need to find a suitable royal idiom among Rajput kings in the Mughal Empire. Phillip Lutgendorf has also pointed out that the efforts of regional Hindu rulers to establish courtly cultures in the midst of waning Mughal power in the eighteenth century contributed to the popularization of Tulsidas's *Rāmcaritmānas* as a work of literature that articulated ideal Hindu kingship; see *The Life of a Text*, 135.

re-presented prominent Sanskrit works, or Sanskrit knowledge systems, in the vernacular. For example, his *Rāmacandrikā* (1601 CE, following right on the heels of Tulsidas's *Rāmcaritmānas*) is a very sophisticated, literary re-working of Valmiki's Ram epic.⁵²⁸ His *Vijñānagītā* (1610 CE), on the other hand, is a Brajbhasha adaptation of the *Prabodhacandrodaya* of Krishna Mishra, an allegorical drama that pits different aspects of the self against each other in struggle. Though it is primarily an exposition on Vedanta, it also incorporates thought from the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, Puranas and *Bhagavad Gītā*.⁵²⁹

Closer to the Niranjani, the Rajput courts of Rajasthan had been sponsoring poetry in the vernacular since the late sixteenth century (or much earlier, if we include the patronage of *cāran* poets who composed in Dingal), and were producing works of literary and religious scholarship in Brajbhasha when Bhagvandas and his Niranjani companions came onto the scene.⁵³⁰ Jaswant Singh (r. 1638-78), the Rathore king of Marwar (located at Jodhpur), composed several works of religious scholarship in Brajbhasha, all of them styled as dialogues: the *Ānandavilās* (1667), in which the metaphysical system (*tattvajñāna*) of Advaita Vedanta is presented in the form of a dialogue between the eighth-century Shankaracharya and an anonymous 'jīv' (being); the *Anubhav Prakāś* (n.d.), a similar work in which questions of metaphysics and ontology are explored in the form of a dialogue between guru and disciple; the *Aparokṣasiddhānt* (n.d.) begins with an extended praise of God (*guṇ-gān*), but transitions into a discussion of spiritual practice (*sādhana*) as a means to attaining liberation; the *Siddhāntabodh* (n.d.), on the other hand, though also a discussion of

⁵²⁸ Busch, *Poetry of Kings*, 44-6.

⁵²⁹ Cavaliere, "Religious Syncretism and Literary Innovation," in Williams, Hawley and Malhotra, *Texts and Traditions*.

⁵³⁰ Busch, "Busch, Allison. "Portrait of a Raja in a Badshah's World," 287-328.

Advaita puts notable emphasis on the importance of *anugraha* or the grace bestowed by God or the Guru onto the spiritual seeker; and the *Siddhāntasār*, a discussion of *tattvajñān* that gives extended attention to the futility of pursuing worldly desires. Jaswant Singh also composed ‘translations’ of Sanskrit texts, including the *Gītā Māhātmya* (n.d.), a translation and commentary on the *Bhāgava Gītā*, and—following in the footsteps of Keshavdas— a translation of the *Prabodhacandrodaya* (n.d.).⁵³¹ (In fact, the manuscript that Vishwanathprasad Mishra used for his edition of Jaswant Singh’s *Gītā Māhātmya* was copied by a Niranjani monk, Rughunathdas, in 1871.)⁵³² The breadth of Jaswant Singh’s oeuvre alone breaks down the supposed distinction between *bhakti* and *rīti*, demonstrating how one poet (and a royal poet, at that) could be simultaneously concerned with matters of both literary theory and religious thought. It also demonstrates how much of the intellectual ‘work’ of producing texts on such topics involved translation in some form or another. That a Rajput king was writing on some of the same topics treated by Niranjani authors and in a similar style (e.g. in the dialogic style, or as commentary), and that too in addition to composing a tremendously popular work of *alaṅkāra śāstra* in Brajbhasha, the *Bhāṣābhūṣan* (c. 1660), gives us an idea of how much the Niranjanis were engaging in a shared area of intellectual production.⁵³³

At the same time in the Kacchwaha court of Amber (Jaipur), a courtly manuscript culture was flourishing, having been inaugurated by Man Singh (1539-1614) with his establishment of the royal *pothīkhānā*, which was not only a library but also atelier for the

⁵³¹ For a survey of Jaswant Singh’s works, see Ravat, Chandramohan Singh. *Mahārāj Jasavantasimh Aur Unakā Sāhitya*. Delhi: Samuhik Prakashan, 2010. Edited editions of his major works can be found in Vishwanathprasad Mishra (ed.), *Jasavantasimha Granthāvalī*. Varanasi: Nagari Pracarini Sabha, 1972.

⁵³² Mishra (ed.), *Jasavantasimha Granthāvalī*, 377.

⁵³³ Busch, *Poetry of Kings*, 176-8.

production of fine, embellished manuscripts. Mirza Rai Jai Singh (r. 1621-67) greatly expanded the scope of this literary and manuscript activity, and employed no less a poet than the famous Biharilal, whose compositions incorporated both Krishna-related devotional themes and the literary motifs of the ascendant *rīti* tradition. Ram Singh (r. 1667-89) was not only the patron of the poet Kulpati Mishra, but his student, and a poet in Brajbhasha himself.⁵³⁴ Although he composed exclusively in Brajbhasha, Kulpati is known to have been well-versed in Sanskrit, and several of his works—both devotional and non-devotional—are translations or trans-creations of Sanskrit texts. These include the *Rasarahasya* (1670), a translation of Mammata’s poetic treatise the *Kāvya prakāśa*, the *Sangrām Sār* (1680), a Brajbhasha rendering of the *Droṇaparva* of the *Mahābhārata*, and the *Durgābhakti Candrikā* (1686), a translation of the *Durgāsaptasatī* of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*.⁵³⁵ Although Kulpati also composed original works of *praśasti* and a *satasai* (collection of approximately seven hundred independent verses), it is clear that much of his literary reputation (which grew to be quite great) was built upon re-creating Sanskrit texts and knowledge systems in Brajbhasha, a labor for which he was well-rewarded at the Kacchwaha court.

This intellectual culture, in which great importance was given to individuals who could mediate between Sanskrit and the vernacular, continued all the way up to the highest echelons of the Mughal imperial court, where Brahmin intellectuals like Keshavdas and Kavindracharya (scholar and perhaps teacher to Shah Jahan and Prince Dara Shikoh)

⁵³⁴ Allison Busch, personal communication, April 14, 2014.

⁵³⁵ Rakesh, Vishnudatt Sharma. *Ācārya Kulapati Miśra: Vyaktitva Aur Kṛtittva*. Dehradun: Sahityasadan, 1970. 88-111.

composed works for Mughal emperors and princes. Kavindracharya is particularly interesting in this respect, as he is the author of the *Kavīndrakalpalatā* (c. 1650), a Brajhasha text that incorporates a discussion of Indic systems of metaphysics or *tattvajñāna* with encomiums for the Emperor (in the form of *dhrupads*, again mixing oral performance and literary style), and the *Yogavāsiṣṭhasār* (n.d.), a vernacular rendering of the Sanskrit work of the same name attributed to Valmiki, which propounds the doctrine of Advaita Vedanta through a dialogue between the guru Vashishtha and King Rama.⁵³⁶ As Busch has pointed out, these men were not just poets but served as scholars, teachers, and sometimes even emissaries of their royal patrons.

Three points deserve special emphasis here. The first is that even while interpreting the Sanskritic tradition, these poets knew that they were doing something *new* in their vernacular creations, a consciousness that Busch has recognized in the ubiquitous phrase, “according to my own understanding.”⁵³⁷ Many Brajhasha poets introduce or close their works by stating that they are repeating what they have heard from authoritative works or traditions, but repeating it according to their own understanding, which not only locates their consciousness in a specific space and time (as opposed to the ‘timeless’ and universal discourse of Sanskrit), but also signals that they are making an intervention. The second is that, even when they were composing works of a devotional nature, these poets employed a discernibly scholastic and literary style. Thus Keshavadas’s *Rāmacandrikā* is not only a tale

⁵³⁶ Kavindracharya, Saraswati. *Kavīndrakalpalatā*. Jaipur: Rajasthan Puratattvanveshan Mandir, 1958. Busch, “Hidden in Plain View,” 289-92.

⁵³⁷ Busch, *Poetry of Kings*, 109-20.

of the divine king Ram, but also a metrical and rhetorical *tour-de-force*.⁵³⁸ Similarly, the discussion of *tattvajñāna* in Kavindracharya's *Kavīndrakalpalatā* is located within a larger work of *praśasti*- and *rīti*-influenced praise for the Mughal emperor and crown prince, which is .⁵³⁹ The third point of note is that most of this emerging discourse of religious and literary scholarship happened on paper. Beginning with Akbar in the late sixteenth century, the Mughal imperial court spent substantial resources on commissioning, collecting, and maintaining manuscripts, and such hand-made books were central to both the rituals of the court and to symbolic exchanges of power among the Mughal nobility, including Hindu *manṣabdārs* like the Rajput kings of Rajasthan.⁵⁴⁰ Consequently, their courts also began to devote substantial attention and resources to the production and collection of manuscripts as alluded to above.⁵⁴¹ The erudite Brajhasha texts discussed in this section all circulated in manuscript form, calling our attention to the importance of writing in the constitution of this literary and intellectual sphere. In contrast to the earlier textual culture of Rajput courts before the coming of the Mughals, in which pride of place was given to Dingal poetry (oral

⁵³⁸ Busch, *Poetry of Kings*, 44-45.

⁵³⁹ As Pollock has noted, there has been almost no research completed on non-literary 'scholarly' works in Brajhasha. ("The Languages of Science in India," in *Forms of Knowledge in Early Modern Asia: Explorations in the Intellectual History of India and Tibet, 1500-1800*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011. 26-9.)

⁵⁴⁰ John Seyller has discussed the ritualized viewing of manuscripts by Mughal emperors and the sophisticated system of evaluating a library's worth in "The Inspection and Valuation of Manuscripts in the Imperial Mughal Library." Several historians, including Irfan Habib, have noted the Mughal practice, inaugurated by Akbar, of distributing the books acquired when defeating an adversary among loyal *manṣabdārs* who took part in the campaign; such books were called *armas* or 'death of the enemy' (Habib, Irfan. "Writing and the Use of Books in the Age of Persian Manuscripts." Irfan Habib, "Writing and the Use of Books in the Age of Persian Manuscripts," *Tattvabodh* 1 (2006). 23) And as Cohn and others have noted, manuscripts and all written documents that passed before the eyes of, or where touched by, the Emperor carried some of his power as part of their substance, and thus the recipient of such objects shared in the power of the Emperor. Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge*, 18-19. This has been studied at length in the case of clothing or *khil'at* in Islamicate polities (see Stewart Gordon (ed.) *Robes of Honour: Khil'at in Pre-Colonial and Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003)), but substantial work remains to be done in regard to other objects like manuscripts.

⁵⁴¹ Bahura, *Literary Heritage of the Rulers of Amber and Jaipur*, 15-73.

epics performed by bards known as *cārans*), in Mughal-era Rajasthan literacy appears to have become a barrier to entry into the elite literary, intellectual and religious discourses of the court.⁵⁴²

Taking these three points into account, we should not be surprised by the textual strategies and scribal activity taken up by Bhagvandas and his fellow Niranjani poets. Like his more courtly counterparts, Bhagvandas appeals to the authority of the Sanskrit tradition but also signals that he is adding something new when he writes “I speak according to my intellect / From the original utterances of Bhartrihari.” The growing confidence among such vernacular intellectuals is reflected in the words with which his contemporary Manohardas Niranjani closes the *Vedānta Mahāvākya Bhāṣya* in 1660:

vākya aratha bhākhā karī, guru śiṣya so saṃvāda
vedānta bhākhā nāma yaha, samajhai pāvai svāda
adhikārī yā grantha kau, kahie sādhana siddha
sesa mujhe yā grantha kaum, lahai mokṣa so niddha⁵⁴³

I have rendered the essence of the Great Sayings in the vernacular,
In the dialogue of guru and disciple.
The name of this work is the *Vedānta Bhākhā*,
Understand it and thus obtain the flavour.
The one who is entitled to this work
Is called fully-realized (*sādhana siddha*).
Others, take this work of mine
And so obtain the treasure from liberation (*mokṣa*).

Manohardas confidently declares that his text holds the key to salvation and that only an enlightened individual who is fully-realized (*sādhana siddha*) can fully understand its

⁵⁴² Norman Ziegler, “The Seventeenth Century Chronicles of Mārvāra: A Study in the Evolution and Use of Oral Traditions in Western India.” *History in Africa* 3 (January 1, 1976): 127–53.

⁵⁴³ Manohardas, *Vedānt Mahāvākya Bhāṣā*, v 76-7. MS 26579, Folio 21B, Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute, Jodhpur.

meaning, showing little of the hesitation that would have accompanied a *bhākhā* poet a half century earlier, had he attempted to re-create the Upaniṣads in the vernacular.

Niranjani texts of this period also reflect an awareness of the stylistic requirements for participating in discourses of religious scholarship, and part of what appears to delineate this scholastic style is the adoption of certain literary elements. One of these elements is the use of more sophisticated meters: as noted above in the case of the *Vairāgya Vṛnd*, Niranjani scholar-poets employed long and relatively complex metrical forms like *kavitt*, *kuṇḍaliyā*, and *savaiyā* that were not generally used for hymns and are not found in the oeuvres of the their Niranjani predecessors (like Haridas, Khemdas and Sevadas) or of their more distant *nirguṇ sant* predecessors (like Kabir, Ravidas, and Namdev).

Another such element is simply the recognition of oneself as a poet (*kavi*), or the conception of one's work as poetry (*kāvya*). We see this self-consciousness among vernacular *bhakti* lyricists as early as the works of Nandadas (d. circa 1600). In the opening section of his *Rāsapañcādyāyī*, Nandadas refers to himself as “*kavi nanda*” (“Nanda the poet”), and the very first verse of the *Rūpamañjarī* suggests that he saw himself to be as much in the company of poets as of that of *bhaktas* when he composed his verses:

prathamahi pranaūṃ premamaya, parama joti jo āhi
rūpāu pāvana rūpanidhi, nitya kahata kavi tāhi⁵⁴⁴

First I give obeisance to The One Consisting of Love,
The greatest light there is.
The treasury of beauty, whose very form saves—
Poets speak of Him as eternal.

⁵⁴⁴ *Rūpamañjarī*, v 1. In Nandadas, *Nandadās Granthāvalī*, 103.

It is no coincidence that, as noted in Chapter Two, Nandadas also understood himself to be interpreting the Sanskrit tradition “for the benefit of those who cannot pronounce Sanskrit and are not proficient in its meaning.” The employment of a literary style appears integral to making a work scholastic, reflecting the influence of the superposed Sanskrit tradition and the prestige of the intellectual work that vernacular poets were performing for a discerning audience, their lack of ability to “pronounce Sanskrit” notwithstanding.⁵⁴⁵

By the mid-seventeenth century, the *nirguṇ*-oriented saint poets of Rajasthan had also become aware of this connection between works of religious erudition and literary style, and consequently begun to style themselves as poets and their activity as poetry. Let us take for example Manohardas’s *Vedānt Mahāvākya Bhāṣā*, a translation and commentary on the ‘great sayings’ of the *Chandogya Upaniṣad*, an unambiguously philosophical text concerned with the nature of God, the soul, consciousness, and reality. When introducing his text, Manohardas asserts that explicating such metaphysical knowledge is the job of the poet:

ātma lābha teṃ aura na koī, yaha bhākhata haiṃ muni saba soi
lābha artha kavi karaiṃ vakhāṇa, ātma koṃ īsvara kari jāṃṃ⁵⁴⁶

There is nothing [greater] than self-knowledge,
So all wise men say.
For the purpose of such knowledge the poet describes
[how] to know the God within.

⁵⁴⁵ Nandadas’s efforts must, of course, be viewed in parallel with the development of a scholastic discourse on bhakti in Sanskrit, in particular that of the Gaudiya Sampraday and the Vallabha Sampraday in Vrindavan. (Both topics are touched upon in Chapter Two.) Also, in Nandadas’s own lifetime, his ideas were adapted by the Ramanandi monk Agradas in the context of devotion to Ram and presented in the *Dhyānāmāñjarī* (1581 CE).

⁵⁴⁶ Manohardas, *Vedānt Mahāvākya Bhāṣā*, v 2. MS 26579, Folio 1B. Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute, Jodhpur.

This is a significant innovation in thinking about the role of the poet and the role of poetry. Recall that at the turn of the seventeenth century, Tulsidas insisted in the introduction to his *Rāmcāritmānas* that “I am devoid of any poetic knowledge / I simply write truth upon the blank page.” It was clear to Tulsidas—despite his obvious knowledge of poetic norms and his skill in reproducing them—that composing a work of devotion was one thing, and composing literature was another. By 1660, when Manohardas composed his *Vedānt Mahāvākya Bhāṣā*, things had changed. Devotional composers like those of the Niranjani Sampraday were bending the genre boundaries of literature and religious scholarship to bring the two closer together, and re-defining the meaning of terms like ‘*sāstra*’ and ‘*kāvya*’ in the process. The discourse of *bhakti* became the gravity well that caused the trajectories of literary thought and religious devotion to converge in a new kind of religious scholarship.

The extent to which the two had converged can be gauged by the fact that in the mid-seventeenth century the saint-poets of Rajasthan had begun to *prescribe* the observance of literary norms in the composition of devotional poetry and soon after began to compose their own instructional materials on the topic of *kāvya*. An important figure in this emerging field of devotional literary scholarship was Sundardas (1599–1689) of the Dadu Panth. Sundardas came from a Khandelwal merchant background but joined Dadu’s quickly-growing community as a child, and was later sent to Banaras to be educated in Sanskrit and the *sāstras*. When he returned to Rajasthan (taking up residence at a Dadu Panthi ashram at Fatehpur), he began to supply the Dadu Panth with its own corpus of

scholastic texts on philosophical and literary subjects.⁵⁴⁷ (His works were augmented by a large number of texts by Niranjani poets like Manohardas, Dhyandas and Bhagvandas that started coming into the Dadu Panth in the second half of the seventeenth century.)⁵⁴⁸ On the topic of literary expression in *bhakti* poetry, Sundardas states unequivocally:

bolīye to taba jaba bolave kī sudhi hoyā,
na to mukha mauna kara cupa hoyā rahiye.
jorḍīye to taba jaba joḍabā hū jāna paḍe,
tuka chanda aratha anūpa jāmeḥ lahiye.
gāīye hū taba jaba gāīve kā kaṇṭha hoyā,
sravaṇa ke sunata hī mana jāya gahiye.
tuka bhaṅga aratha mile na kachu,
sundara kahata aisī vāṇī nahi kahiye.⁵⁴⁹

Speak only when you have something intelligent to say,
Otherwise silence your mouth and remain quiet.
String together verse only when you know how,
And can bring together unparalleled rhyme, meter and meaning.
Sing only when you have the voice for it,
And the heart is seized as soon as one hears it.
That of which the rhymes and meters are broken, and no meaning can be
gleaned—
Sundardas says, do not speak such utterances (*vāṇī*).

This instruction, given in the chapter of Sundardas’s *Savaiyā Granth* dedicated to “*vacan vivek kau aṅg*” or ‘the topic of discerning speech,’ makes it clear that in order to compose devotional poetry it is not enough to simply have devotional feeling and ‘speak truth on empty pages’— one must also be able to articulate that feeling properly, using correct forms

⁵⁴⁷ Swami Narayandas, “Jīvan Caritra,” In *Sundar Granthāvalī* (ed. Swami Narayandas), 173.

⁵⁴⁸ RORI JAI 2165(13), NPS 1380. The Dadu Panth’s collection of manuscripts at its headquarters in Naraina and at the Dadu Mahavidyalaya in Jaipur also includes manuscripts of works by these authors. (Personal visits, June 2009.)

⁵⁴⁹ Sundardas, *Savaiyā Granth*, v 14.4. In *Sundar Granthāvalī* (ed. Swami Narayandas), 173.

of rhyme, meter and meaning-creation.⁵⁵⁰ It is noteworthy that Sundardas closes the verse by prohibiting the utterance of an ungraceful or unliterary ‘*vāṇī*.’ As we saw in Chapter 3, in traditions like those of the Dadu Panth and Niranjani Sampraday, the term *vāṇī* referred to the utterances of a saint, in the general sense of all his sayings, songs, and instruction, and also in the narrower sense of ‘oeuvre.’ Sundardas is thus referring quite directly to his own tradition, the tradition of saint poetry, and asserting that it is not simply the spontaneous utterances of men with spiritual knowledge, but the carefully-crafted product of men with literary knowledge as well.

It is therefore not surprising that by the early eighteenth century, a Niranjani poet like Hariramdas was composing treatises on literary matters such as meter, figures of speech (*alaṃkāra*) and literary lexicon (in addition to composing sophisticated works of metaphysics and more evocative hymns). Such texts were presented as guides for aspiring poets, but also showcased the literary expertise of their authors. As mentioned above, Hariramdas’s *Chandarātnāvalī* is a remarkable text that melds the theological and aesthetic sensibilities of *nirguṇ sant-mat* with the formal elements of a *rīti* literary treatise. Hariramdas introduces his work by saying that he composed it “for the benefit of others” (*parakām*), and that studying it will bring the uninitiated onto the path of poetic knowledge:

chandarātnāvalī nāma yo grantha hai
bālabuddhina kauṃ pādharo pantha hai
chanda kī mandatā yāhi cālyā haṭai
gyāna ke magga agyānatā jyaṃ ghaṭai

The name of this work is the *Chandarātnāvalī*,

⁵⁵⁰ In this context, meaning-creation (alluded to in the last line of the verse) would have meant the correct use of figures of speech (*alaṃkāra*) and proper syntax (*varṇ-vinyās*).

May those of undeveloped intellect set out on this path.
Unawareness of meter will go away,
And ignorance will disappear on the path of knowledge.

Although the examples (*udāharaṇ*) that Hariramdas provides to illustrate various meters and *alaṃkāras* reflect his deep religious engagement and *nirguṇ sant* sensibility, it is also clear that he understands himself to be addressing poets in general. For example, when he speaks of *alaṃkaras*, he notes:

jīhi artha kari kavita ko camatakāra mana hoī
alaṃkāra tihi nāma ko kavi dhāro mana joī⁵⁵¹

That which gives rise to meaning in poetry and wonder in the heart,
Has the name of *alaṃkāra*; poets, take this to heart.

It is this same, broad audience that he addresses in his *Nām Prakāś* (“Illumination of the Names”, 1768 CE) a literary thesaurus of sorts that would have provided the professional or aspiring poet with synonyms for all manner of literary and devotional figures and motifs.

This again draws our attention to the multiple audiences that Niranjani poets addressed simultaneously in their works. To put it another way, they imagined a public constituted by individuals and traditions that spanned multiple social and institutional contexts, but which were united by their participation in a shared scholastic debate on topics of literature and devotion in the vernacular. In this public sphere, distinctions were made between different types of knowledge and different textual genres, but the public itself was

⁵⁵¹ Hariramdas, *Chandarātṇāvalī*, v. 108.

not divided along such lines.⁵⁵² On the contrary, this emerging vernacular public sphere was a lively and productive space for ideas precisely because multiple discourses came into conversation with one another within it. Conversely, the production of any one type of knowledge became diffused over multiple social and institutional sites. Thus we find, on the one hand, individuals like Sukhdev Mishra (fl. 1663-1703), a Brahmin from Daulatpur in modern-day Uttar Pradesh who enjoyed the patronage of kings and petty nobles, and who in addition to composing works on metrics (the *Vṛttavicār*, 1670) and praise poems for his patrons, also penned a substantial work of Advaita Vedanta (the *Adhyātma Prakāś*, 1698).⁵⁵³ On the other hand, we find individuals like Hariramdas Niranjani, who while living the life of a renunciate monk at monasteries in Didwana and Dhanop composed theological treatises and hagiographical narratives, but also wrote on metrics and poetics.⁵⁵⁴ That poets with such different social locations—one courtly, one monastic—were writing about the same topics at almost the same time suggests the existence of a public sphere or at least an intellectual community that did not differentiate on the basis of *bhakti/rīti* or monastery/court.

Seen in this context, the emphasis placed by the Niranjani and Dadu Panthis on knowledge of literary and scholastic norms signals their participation in this intellectual public sphere. It also helps explain the role of a broad education in the training of a monk in these traditions. Dadu Panthi sources proudly note that Sundardas was sent to Banaras to be

⁵⁵² Arvind Rajgopal, “The public sphere in India: Structure and Transformation,” and Christopher Bayly, “The Indian Ecumene: an Indigenous Public Sphere,” in Arvind Rajagopal, and C. A. Bayly (eds.) *The Indian Public Sphere: Readings in Media History* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁵⁵³ Shukla, *Hindī Sāhitya Kā Itihās*, 177-79. Rashami Malhotra, *Rītikālīn Kavītā Evaṁ Kāvyaścārya Sukhadeva Miśra* (Ghaziabad: Anubhav Prakashan, 2005).

⁵⁵⁴ See above, “Constructing a scholastic and literary tradition”; also Baid, “Introduction,” in Hariramdas, *Chandarātnāvalī*, 9-53.

educated, and when he returned constructed a strong ideological foundation for the Panth with texts like the *Jñān Samudra* and *Savaiyā Granth*.⁵⁵⁵ In the case of the Niranjani Sampraday, it was Tursidas who was sent to Banaras to study, and who returned to compose some of the most popular works of Advaita Vedanta in the tradition.⁵⁵⁶ Given the ideological and aesthetic orientation of the Dadu Panth and the Niranjani Sampraday—their rejection of the authority of Sanskrit scriptures, their hostility toward the caste system, their preference for a *nirguṇ* Absolute over *saguṇ* Vaishnava deities—it might initially seem strange that these groups would send their members to Banaras, a center of ‘traditional’ learning.⁵⁵⁷ However, once we recognize that a familiarity with and proficiency in literary and scholastic norms were prerequisites for participation in intellectual debates, it becomes clear that such an education was essential to the making of a scholar-poet, regardless of their particular sectarian or ideological moorings.

Scholarship in manuscript: *pothīs*, literacy, and intellectual networks

The other prerequisite to participation in this public sphere, as mentioned above, was literacy. Yet this was a different type of literacy from that discussed in the previous chapter. In the case of the hymns and sayings of the Niranjani saint poets and their inscription in *guṭakā* notebooks, we saw a mode of writing as notation, the use of manuscripts as accessories to oral performance, and a type of literacy of which the primary function was the reconstruction of an oral text whose relationship to the written signs on the page was

⁵⁵⁵ Narayandas, “Jīvan Caritra,” in Sundardas, *Sundar Granthāvalī*, edited by Swami Narayandas (Jaipur: Shri Dadu Dayalu Mahasabha, 1989) 2.

⁵⁵⁶ Pitambardatt Barthwal, “Kuch Nirañjanī Santom̄ Kī Bāñiyām̄,” in Govind Catak (ed.) *Pitambardatt Barthwāl Ke Śreṣṭh Nibandh* (New Delhi: Takṣila Prakāśan, 1978) 54; Mishra, *Nirañjanī Sampradāy*, 115.

⁵⁵⁷ On the contemporary scene of education in Banaras, see O’Hanlon, “Speaking from Shiva’s temple.”

relatively ‘loose.’ We also observed that this mode of writing and literacy had an intimate connection with ideologies of language and salvation at work in traditions like that of the Niranjani Sampraday.

The texts discussed in this chapter—like the *Vairāgya Vṛnd*, *Vedānt Mahāvākya Bhāṣā*, and *Chandarātnāvalī*—draw our attention to another type of literacy which is characterized by certain types of *discursive* knowledge (as opposed to just the *technical* knowledge of how to read and write) and by the importance of textual artifacts—manuscripts—as objects of exchange. The composers considered here appear to have not only known how to read and write (in the case of Tursidas, we may even have a manuscript copied by the poet himself), but were also conversant with norms of literary and scholastic writing like meter, rhetoric, motifs, and formal conventions.⁵⁵⁸ They drew many of these elements from the Sanskrit tradition, suggesting that at this historical moment, even if poets composed in the vernacular, their ‘literacy’ was partly constituted by their knowledge of this other, culturally privileged language.⁵⁵⁹

Manuscripts of these texts also functioned in a manner quite different from the notebooks discussed earlier. Whereas the *guṭakās* were largely for personal use (even when shared between two or more individuals), and employed almost exclusively as accessories to oral performance, the *pothīs* that contained the texts discussed in this chapter were created

⁵⁵⁸ Pitambardatt Barthwal describes a copy of Tursidas’s *Itihās Samuccay* in the Nagari Pracharini Sabha in Banaras ends with a colophon dating it to VS 1745/1688-89 CE, signed by one Tursidas Niranjani. *Yog Pravah*, 38-39, quoted in Mishra, *Niranjanī Sampradāy*, 119. This Tursidas could well be the author of the text, given that the date of the manuscript falls within his lifetime, and the guru-disciple lineage that the scribe gives for himself roughly approximates the one that tradition ascribes to Tursidas. However, on a visit to the Nagari Pracharini Sabha in May 2012, I found that the aforementioned manuscript was not available.

⁵⁵⁹ On the hierarchy of Sanskrit and Hindi in terms of a poet’s intellectual credentials, see Busch, “Anxiety of Innovation,” 46-49.

to be objects of social, ritual, and political *exchange*. They were indeed used in oral performance: as noted above in the case of the *Vairāgya Vṛnd*, the organization of the text and various features of its manuscripts (like section headings, verse numbers, etc) were clearly geared toward teaching and sermonizing, suggesting that the manuscript was ‘read from.’ Yet those and other physical attributes of the manuscripts—their clarity, large format, navigational apparatuses, and indeed their beauty—also tell us that they were meant to be seen, and seen by more than one pair of eyes. The very fact that an overwhelming number of these *pothīs* contain single texts, instead of multiple texts like the *guṭakās*, tells us much. If the *guṭakā* tended to be an individual’s *aide mémoire*, a repository of notes on not only poetic texts but all manner of information, a *pothī* was usually a single text that could be used by multiple individuals. Since each *pothī* contained just one text, the accumulation of texts by an individual or institution involved the accumulation of physical manuscripts (in contrast to the filling or burgeoning of a single manuscript), the creation of a collection, and sometimes the physical establishment of a library (*pothīkhānās* in the case of the Kacchwaha court, community *granth bhaṇḍārs* in the case of Jains in cities like Jodhpur, Nagaur, Bikaner, and Jaisalmer, and special storage rooms in the case of the Niranjani).⁵⁶⁰

This is no small detail. Vernacular knowledge now had a discrete physical unit, a countable currency that could be exchanged between individuals and institutions. Within a monastic institution like that of the Niranjani or the Dadu Panth, that exchange might take place between a disciple and his guru, in the form of service (i.e. copying a manuscript for

⁵⁶⁰ John Cort, "The Jain Knowledge Warehouses: Traditional Libraries in India," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 115, no. 1 (Jan-Mar 1995): 10; Bahura, *Literary Heritage of the Rulers of Amber and Jaipur*, 15-20.

one's teacher). It could also take place between a monk and a private householder (raising the question of whether a monetary exchange occurred as well, or an accounting of *punya* or spiritual merit, as in the case of the Jain community).⁵⁶¹ The exchange could even take place *between* monastic orders, as was clearly the case between the Niranjani Sampraday and Dadu Panth: both communities possess numerous copies of works composed by saints of the other order.⁵⁶²

Beyond the monastic order, *pothīs* became a form of intellectual (and perhaps literal) wealth among householders as well. As we will see in the next chapter, as householder members of the Niranjani Sampraday came to take custodianship of Niranjani temples and *samādhis*, manuscripts became part of the inherited wealth of the superintending family. This mirrors in some ways contemporary practices in the Jain sects of the Adhyātma Panth and Tera Panth, where reading groups convened by householder poet-intellectuals constituted a primary locus of community formation during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁵⁶³ In this regard, it is worth recalling that the Niranjani community was characterized by the substantial presence of Bihani merchants and prolific copying activity from early on in its history, and was also in close contact with Jain communities at Didwana, Nagaur, Bikaner and Ajmer.⁵⁶⁴

Manuscripts also became an object of intellectual and material exchange between the monastic community and royal courts. No less than eight *pothīs* containing works by Niranjani authors made it into the collection of the royal *pothīkhānā* at Jaipur, including

⁵⁶¹ Cort, "The Jain Knowledge Warehouses," 10-15.

⁵⁶² See the discussion of poetic anthologies in Chapter Five.

⁵⁶³ Cort, "Making It Vernacular in Agra"; Kailash Chand Jain, *Jain Dharma Kā Itihās*, vol. 3, (New Delhi: D.K. Printworld, 2005) 869-898.

⁵⁶⁴ Jain, *Jain Dharm Kā Itihās*, 819-831.

Tursidas's verses, Bhagvandas's commentary on the Bhagavad Gītā and his *Vairāgya Vṛnd*, Manohardas's *Vedānta Mahāvākya Bhāṣā*, and Hariramdas's *Chandarātnāvalī*.⁵⁶⁵ Further west in Marwar, an unknown but very talented scribe (judging by the quality of his handwriting) copied verses by Haridas, Dadu, Kabir, and Raidas for the Rathore king Bakhat Singh at Nagaur in 1740; in the process of anthologizing these verses and creating this attractive *pothī*, the scribe transformed the hymns contained within it into a new kind of textual object, a phenomenon we will discuss in detail in the next chapter. In 1773, a Dadu Panthi monk named Jivandas copied Sundardas's *Gyān Samudra* for the Rathore court at Jodhpur; only five years later the Niranjani monk Mangaldas copied a manuscript of various verses on the topic of Advaita Vedanta for the Rathore princes Sher Singh and Guman Singh. A copyist named 'Trivadi Harakaran' copied Bhagvandas's *Jaiminī Aśvamedh* for the court in 1786, and sometime early in the next century the court acquired a copy of Manohardas's *Ṣaṭpraśni Nirṇaya Bhāṣā*.⁵⁶⁶

In the growing manuscript culture of the Mughal-period nobility (which included the Rajput *manṣabdārs* of Rajasthan) in the seventeenth century, such manuscripts were treated as intellectual currency, and sometimes in a way analogous to literal currency. In lands directly under Mughal control, the value of an individual's manuscript library was estimated when calculating an individual's net worth; though I have not found any evidence that this practice was followed in Rajput kingdoms, the diligent manner in which details about manuscripts—their acquisition, creation, transfer, exchange, etc.—are noted in the *bahīs* or

⁵⁶⁵ MSS 1989(9 and 25), 3845(1, 2, and 3) 2440(25), 804(9), 1802, 5983, 3809(6), 4842. Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum, Jaipur. At least two of these manuscripts are datable to the first half of the eighteenth century.

⁵⁶⁶ MSS 5(1), 6(2), 938, 1215, 1234, 1300, 1359.

records of Rajput courts suggest that they were considered valuable objects and that their exchange carried symbolic significance.⁵⁶⁷ Manuscripts were thus more than just ‘texts,’ and by participating in this manuscript culture the Niranjani entered into certain relationships of exchange with other devotional communities and royal courts.

These types of exchanges draw out attention to a very different social system of knowledge from that described in the previous chapter. In the context of the Niranjani poets’ hymns and sayings we saw that knowledge was understood to reside within human bodies and its transfer was an ‘event’, i.e. oral performance. When the Niranjani engaged in this other mode of writing—inscribing complete and discrete texts on individual manuscripts that could move between individuals and social contexts—the Niranjani were participating in a different system, one in which knowledge could reside within objects, and those objects could travel across great geographical distance and multiple social contexts (not to mention across time). The ‘transfer’ of knowledge took place as much through the exchange of a material object as through an ‘event.’ We do not want to take this point too far—human agents were still very much part of the equation, as most evidence suggests that manuscripts were ‘made to speak’ by a knowledgeable individual (guru, monk, court poet or tutor) who would recite from and expound upon them. Still, these manuscripts make a different type of knowledge economy possible. In the case of the *gutakās*, no knowledge resided within the manuscript, because it simply helped the human agent reconstruct the text. But in the case of the *pothīs*, the complete text resided in the manuscript itself—it simply required a human interpreter or interlocutor to activate it.

⁵⁶⁷ See Seyller, *Inspection and Valuation of Manuscripts in the Imperial Mughal Library*”; Habib, “The Use of Books,” 23.

To a certain extent, this system freed texts from human bodies, and this is why literacy proved to be so important for the Niranjani, a community with a relatively low number of members. Technical literacy (the ability to understand and produce written language) and discursive literacy (the ability to understand and reproduce the language of a particular discourse, such as philosophy or aesthetics) gave the Niranjani a substantial leverage point that helped them become influential despite their small size. It has been said that in pre-print societies, writing as a medium empowers minorities; in the case of the Niranjani, that formulation appears to be true.⁵⁶⁸ It also complicates our understanding of vernacularization as a process that equalized the cultural and ideological playing field. The growth of vernacular writing and manuscript culture did not lead to a situation in which all social groups could participate equally in intellectual exchange. Instead, it created a situation that favored groups like the Niranjani who invested in and mastered the technology of writing and the discourses that were linked with written textual culture.

⁵⁶⁸ David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery, "Introduction," *The Book History Reader*, New York: Routledge, 2004, 4.

CHAPTER 5

From Sacred Sound to Sacred Book: Scripturalization in Northwest India

sāta samaṃḍa kī masi karaum lekhanī saba banarāi
dharatī saba kāgada karaum taū hari guṇa likhyā na jāi

If I were to make the seven oceans into ink,
And make all the forests into a pen,
And make the who earth into paper,
Still the greatness of Hari could not be written!

Kabir, *sākhī* 2,
*saṃmrathāi kau ang*⁵⁶⁹

Whereas the previous two chapters 'zoomed in' on the Niranjani Sampraday in order to analyze the relationships between oral performance and written manuscripts up close, this chapter zooms out again in order to take a wide view of manuscript culture in North India across several different religious communities. The mode of orality-literacy to be surveyed here is related neither to song and notebook-like *guṭakās*, nor to scholarly texts and *pothīs*, but rather to the production of scripture and a type of manuscript that would most accurately be termed a 'holy book.' The chapter looks at the period from the late sixteenth to the early eighteenth century during which several devotional groups (including the Niranjani) not only refined and consolidated their textual canons, but did so through the creation of carefully organized anthologies.⁵⁷⁰ These anthologies are an example of literization and *scripturalization* (as opposed to literarization), the process through which a text is

⁵⁶⁹ In Callewaert, *Nirguṇ Bhaktī Sāgar*, 286. The verse is one of several known vernacular adaptations from verse 32 of the *Śivamahimnaḥ Stotra*.

⁵⁷⁰ It should be noted that the coincidence with the turn of the century in the Gregorian calendar is strictly coincidental; the specific historical phenomena with which this trend had a dialectical relationship are discussed below.

established to be central to the thought and belief of a community, and through which that text comes to be understood as being not simply expressive of something else that is revered, but rather as constituting an object of reverence in its own right.⁵⁷¹ Literization and scripturalization went hand in hand, as the material instantiation of the saints' utterance was integral to their establishment as a type of 'scripture.' Accordingly, these manuscripts became an important part of the ritual and social life of the traditions that created them, traditions that increasingly used the idiom of the royal court to define themselves. A type of textual community thus arose that was different from those discussed in previous chapters; this new type of textual community, with the physical manuscript at its center and as its highest authority, can truly be said to be an *ahl-i kitāb* or 'people of the book.' (However, the arrival of this new type of manuscript tradition and community did not displace earlier manuscript practices.)⁵⁷²

The chapter begins by defining both scripture and scripturalization, and explaining their relationship to literization and writing. It then turns to a discussion of the factors that encouraged devotional groups to establish their own written scriptures in the seventeenth century, arguing that the proliferation of scriptures in this period reflects a newly emergent form of religiosity and its corresponding relationship with the political. To demonstrate this point, the chapter briefly surveys the written scriptures of the Sikhs, the Dadu Panth, and the Niranjani Sampraday, examining how each group adopted a slightly different scriptural

⁵⁷¹ As Catherine Bell notes, in scripture “the lines between medium and message” collapse, melding the text that evokes the Divine with the Divine itself. Catherine Bell, “Scriptures: Text and Then Some,” in Vincent Wimbush (ed.) *Theorizing Scriptures: New Critical Orientations to a Cultural Phenomenon* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2008) 24. The definition of scripture is discussed in greater detail below.

⁵⁷² It should also be noted that the material traces of different types of manuscripts—*gutākās*, *pothīs*, and holy books/*granth*s—do not always conform to chronological development that appears to have taken place in these communities, with *gutākās* and *pothīs* presumably preceding the formation of canonical *granth*s.

strategy in response to this cultural and political context, yet all created scriptures that were essentially anthologies of poetry by multiple saints. Finally, after looking closely at the organizational structure of these anthologies and their material form as manuscripts, the chapter closes with a description of how these ‘holy books’ became the focal point of a ritual culture that was increasingly characterized by a courtly idiom. The idiom of the divine court allowed these communities to position their scriptures as constitution-like authorities that superseded the power of human agents, and to project themselves as polities distinct from the Mughal or Rajput state.

Literization and Scripturalization

Just as literization was integral to the literarization of a language and its texts, it was also integral to scripturalization in early modern North India; in other words, writing was an essential part of transforming songs, sayings, and other works composed in the vernacular into the culturally privileged category of scripture. Even though no equivalent to the English term ‘scripture’ exists in South Asian languages, the concept can still be of use to us here. Numerous scholars writing on South Asian and other religious traditions have produced a substantial body of thought on the nature of scriptures, their creation and their use.⁵⁷³ My intent here is not to propose yet another definition of scripture, nor to challenge

⁵⁷³ On scripture as a general category, see Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *What Is Scripture? A Comparative Approach* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993). A comparative approach to scripture has been outlined and demonstrated in the two influential collections of essays: William Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987). Miriam Levering, *Rethinking Scripture: Essays from a Comparative Perspective* (Albany: State University Press of New York, 1989). For a discussion of ‘scripture’ in the South Asian context, see Thomas Coburn’s essay, “‘Scripture’ in India,” in the aforementioned volume. Select studies of the concept of scripture in the context of late medieval and early modern India include: Mackenzie Brown, “Purāṇa as Scripture: From Sound to

existing definitions and methodologies. Instead, I wish to highlight one mode of creating or defining scriptures in a particular place and time, emphasizing the role of writing in this process. A working definition of ‘scripture’ and ‘scripturalization’ is therefore required.

Since no one writer’s thought adequately captures the richness and particularities of the phenomenon in early modern India, let us piece together a definition that does the necessary analytical work. ‘Scripture’ for our purposes here is a text that has attained a special status in which it is understood to be not just descriptive or evocative of something else sacred, but is a sacred ‘thing’ in and of itself (again using ‘thing’ in the sense of Latour, as a non-human actor that has a life of its own, and is understood to make meaning as much as accrue it).⁵⁷⁴ As Catherine Bell suggests, scriptures are “texts that are held sacred in comparison to other objects or other texts... It is the written word elevated into a service that eliminates the lines between medium and message, only to reimpose these lines in less sacred contexts.”⁵⁷⁵ We are fortunate in the case of groups like the Niranjani Sampraday, the Dadu Panth, and the Sikhs to have a record of this historical telescoping of medium and message, for as Wilfred Cantwell Smith writes, “To observe [a text’s role in human life as scripture] at all accurately is to recognize its fundamental historical character: its quality of

Image of the Holy Word in the Hindu Tradition,” *History of Religions* 26, no. 1 (August 1, 1986): 68–86. Gurinder Singh Mann, “Scriptures and the nature of authority: the case of the Guru Granth in Sikh tradition” in Vincent Wimbush, *Theorizing Scriptures: New Critical Orientations to a Cultural Phenomenon* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2008) 41-54. ———, *The Making of Sikh Scripture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). Tony Stewart, *The Final Word: The Caitanya Caritāmṛta and the Grammar of Religious Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁵⁷⁴ Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 70-82.

⁵⁷⁵ Catherine Bell, “Scriptures: Text and Then Some,” in Wimbush (ed.), *Theorizing Scriptures*, 24.

changing over time – and place; of being ever enmeshed in the particular contexts of those in whose lives and societies the role has been played.”⁵⁷⁶

That historical process of particular poems’ elevation from expression of the sacred to sacred object in themselves, and the blurring of the distinction between medium and message, is reflected first in the literization of these hymns and sayings (which transforms them into a material object), and second in their scripturalization through anthologization. By ‘anthologization,’ I mean their organization and framing through certain rubrics into a unified textual object, and their employment in certain ritual contexts. The aforementioned rubrics, framing, and ritual practices require a written text with which to work. This is not to suggest that literization and scripturalization were necessarily concurrent or mutually imbricated in the context of other scriptures, and in other places and times, but rather the opposite: to emphasize that in early modern North India these two processes occurred together for historical reasons. These reasons included inter-sectarian competition and the growing importance of written manuscripts in the circulation of knowledge (a phenomenon that was touched upon in the previous chapter). Therefore if we follow Vincent Wimbush's suggestion that the study of scripture should be an investigation of what various peoples at various times “have made scripture do” for them, then it would appear that the type of scriptures considered here fulfilled the function of distinguishing a community of belief from others, as well as aligning that community with a system of knowledge production and circulation constituted by the creation and exchange of written texts.⁵⁷⁷

⁵⁷⁶ Smith, *What is Scripture*, 4.

⁵⁷⁷ Vincent Wimbush, “Introduction: TEXTureS, Gestures, Power: Orientation to Radical Excavation,” in Wimbush (ed.) *Theorizing Scriptures*, 1.

The scriptural turn of the long seventeenth century

Among devotional groups in North India whose members composed hymns, sayings, treatises, and other works in the vernacular, a discernible trend toward refining and consolidating textual canons begins around the turn of the seventeenth century CE and continues for roughly the next century.⁵⁷⁸ This trend was no doubt overdetermined in nature, since internal changes within individual religious communities, political shifts within the Mughal Empire, and changes in the relationship between political elites and religious communities were all taking place at this time.⁵⁷⁹ Nevertheless, a few major factors that contributed to it and which are of particular relevance to this study can be identified. The first is heightened competition between sectarian groups, the result of saturation in the market of devotion in the Gangetic Plain. As Richard Burghart writes,

In order to maintain themselves over time, the ascetics of the various Hindu sects required access to three important resources: devotees and disciples, pilgrimage routes and pilgrimage centers, and political patronage. The availability of these resources was limited. Although some ascetic sects were founded in the outlying regions of the sub-continent, nearly all of them, like the Ramanandi sect, eventually spread over the Ganges basin where, given the number of sects operating on that territory, the competition for these resources was very intense.⁵⁸⁰

⁵⁷⁸ In the case of the Gaudiya Sampraday, the scripturalization of vernacular works is anticipated by the scripturalization of Sanskrit texts; see Stewart, *The Final Word*.

⁵⁷⁹ For an overview of this period, see Chapter 6, "Expanding Political and Economic Spheres," in Asher and Talbot, *India before Europe*, 152-185. For changes taking place within religious groups, see Barz, *The Bhakti Sect of Vallabhācārya*; Entwistle, *Braj, Centre of Krishna Pilgrimage*; Shandip Saha, "The Movement of Bhakti Along a North-West Axis: Tracing the History of the Puṣṭimarg between the Sixteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 11, no. 3 (Dec 2007 2007): 19; Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "The Crystallization of Religious Communities in Mughal India," in *On Understanding Islam: Selected Studies* (New York: Mouton, 1981), 177-196.

⁵⁸⁰ Richard Burghart, "The Founding of the Ramanandi Sect," in David Lorenzen (ed.) *Religious Movements in South Asia, 600-1800* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 233.

In the context of sectarian competition for a limited pool of devotees and disciples, it became imperative to differentiate one's own ideological and aesthetic tradition from those of other groups. Several communities drew this distinction and consolidated their sectarian identity by asserting some poets and texts to be 'theirs' while ejecting other poets and works from their canons.⁵⁸¹ A survey of available anthological manuscripts produced within several different religious orders reveals that most manuscripts copied around 1600 CE (regardless of sectarian affiliation) include a rather ecumenical assortment of saint poets and poems, suggesting that songs by Kabir, Ravidas, Tulsidas, Sur and the like were often performed together, or at least by the same group of devotees/performers.⁵⁸² However, by the middle of the seventeenth century, things had changed: manuscript anthologies from this period reflect clear ideological and sectarian boundaries, with groupings of particular saint poets taking shape. For example, manuscripts from the Pushtimarg increasingly featured only members of the *aṣṭachāp* or 'eight seals' (Surdas, Paramanandadas, Nandadas, Krishnadas, Govindswami, Kumbhandas, Chitaswami, and Chaturbhujdas), a development that paralleled the formation of the *vārtā* hagiographical literature establishing these poets' position within the Vallabhite tradition.⁵⁸³ In fact, the refinement of textual canon, the establishment of those texts as scripture (as opposed to merely song), and the development

⁵⁸¹ For a sophisticated analysis of the relationship between canon formation and community consolidation, Heidi Pauwels, "Hagiography and Community Formation: The Case of a Lost Community of Sixteenth-Century Vrindāvan," *The Journal of Hindu Studies* (March 9, 2010): 38.

⁵⁸² Williams, "Bhakti Kāvya Mem Nirguṇ Saḡuṇ Vibhājan," 53-61.

⁵⁸³ Williams, "Bhakti Kāvya Mem Nirguṇ Saḡuṇ Vibhājan," 53-61. On the development of the Pushtimarg's hagiographical tradition in the *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan Kī Vārtā* and *Do Sau Bhāvan Vaiṣṇavan Kī Vārtā*, see Barz, Richard. *The Bhakti Sect of Vallabhācārya* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1992); Hariharnath Tandan, *Vārtā Sāhitya* (Aligarh: Bharat Prakashan, 1960). For a description of how the Pushtimarg's *vārtās* appropriated the figures of prominent saints, see John S. Hawley, "The Sectarian Logic of the *Sūrdas Kī Vārtā*," in Monika Horstmann (ed.) *Bhakti in Current Research, 1979-1982* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1983) 191-211.

of a hagiographical tradition that both emphasizes the centrality of scriptures while establishing the spiritual credentials of the authorial personalities associated with them were roughly coeval in the case of most devotional communities in North India. To return to example of the Pushtimarg, as Vasudha Dalmia has noted, the imperative of asserting sectarian difference led to an emphasis on scripture in the *vārtā* literature, and the “scripture in the case of the Pushtimarg is the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and the canon that the *sampradāya* itself is creating, much of it in Brajbhāṣā and some of it orally transmitted.”⁵⁸⁴ Thus scriptural canon and hagiography reflect and authorize each other in the Pushtimarg. In the Gaudiya Sampraday, it was a vernacular hagiography, the *Premavilās*, which both chronicled the historical events that established the works of the Goswamis as scripture (i.e. the bringing of those works from Braj to Bengal) while simultaneously establishing the authority of those scriptures through its depiction of miraculous events.⁵⁸⁵ Thus competition encourages the refinement of canon through both scripture and hagiography, with the latter helping to establish the former.

This appears to be the case for the Sikhs and the Dadu Panth as well. In the Sikh context, the collection which came to be known as the *Ādi Granth (Original Book, 1604)*, an anthology of hymns and sayings by the Sikh gurus and several non-Sikh saints, was compiled shortly before Bhai Gurdas (d. 1637) composed his *Vāraṇ Bhāi Gurdās (Account of Bhai Gurdas)* which extols the first six Sikh gurus and provides a narrative context for the

⁵⁸⁴ Vasudha Dalmia, “The ‘Other’ in the World of the Faithful,” in Monika Horstmann (ed.), *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* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2006) 138.

⁵⁸⁵ Stewart, *The Final Word*, Chapter 1.

development of Sikh scripture.⁵⁸⁶ In the Dadu Panth, the collation of the tradition's primary texts in the form of the *Dādūvāṇī* (*Words of Dadu*, c. 1604), *Pañcavāṇī* (*Words of the Five*, c. 1604), and two *Sarvāṅgīs* (*Complete Collection*, c. 1620's) was paralleled by the composition of hagiographies of Dadu, his disciples, and the *nirguṇ* saint community at large in the *Dādū Janm Līlā* (1620), *Sant Guṇ Sāgar* (1604?), and *Bhaktamāl* (1660) respectively.

The history of scripture and hagiography in the Niranjani Sampraday seems to have followed a slightly different trajectory. The creation of the *Vāṇī* (c. 1690) precedes the composition of the first written hagiographical text, the *Dayāl Jī Kī Pañc Paracāī* (c. 1730?) of Hariramdas, by at least forty years, if not more.⁵⁸⁷ Unlike the hagiographies of the Sikhs and Dadu Panthis, neither the *Dayāl Jī Kī Pañc Paracāī* nor the Niranjani hagiographies that followed it (the *Paracāī* of Raghunathdas and the *Bhaktamāl* of Pyareram) accord much importance to written scriptures or give many details of their origin. Nevertheless, the status of the *Vāṇī* as scripture is clear from its form and ritual use, both of which mirror texts and practices in the Sikh community and Dadu Panth.

Before turning to a detailed discussion of scripture in each of these three sects, let us note the second major factor contributing to the scriptural turn in vernacular devotional traditions: the importance of writing and manuscript culture among political elites. As

⁵⁸⁶ For the purposes of this research I have used Winand Callewaert (ed.) *Sari Guru Granth Sahib: With Complete Word Index* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1996) and Bhai Gurdas, *Vāraṇ Bhāī Guradās: Text, Transliteration, and Translation* (Patiala: Vision & Venture, 1998). The name “*Ādi Granth*” is of late eighteenth-century coinage; I use it in the chapter, however, to refer to the manuscript tradition for the Sikh canonical text that is eventually came to be called the *Ādi Granth*.

⁵⁸⁷ The date of the *Dayāl Jī Kī Pañc Paracāī* is unknown, but its author, Hariramdas, was active from the 1730's through the 1770's, making it unlikely that he composed the hagiography of Haridas much earlier than the 1730's.

discussed in the previous chapter, intellectual exchange among the Mughal nobility, including Rajput elites, was largely pursued on paper, with texts moving between courts, monasteries, and other communities of intellectuals. This made literacy and the composition of written texts prerequisites to participation in this intellectual world. By giving their poetry the form of unified ‘*granth*s’ and the material form of *pothīs*, religious scholars like those of the Niranjani Sampraday were able to enter a scholarly discourse that included aspects of what we now term ‘religious’ thought, including theology, metaphysics, and the epics.⁵⁸⁸ The line dividing scholarship and scripture was thus blurry to begin with. Yet what about the hymns and sayings of such devotional groups, which were qualitatively different from more scholastic and literary compositions? Just as the increasingly paper-based intellectual exchange between elites encouraged devotional groups to literize and literarize their poetry in order to re-present it as scholarship, it also encouraged such groups to re-present their hymns and sayings as scripture through the processes of literization and scripturalization. In order to have visibility among Mughal and Rajput political elites, a devotional community needed to have some type of written scripture.

Discussion of religious matters at the Imperial court and the vast knowledge-gathering project initiated by the Mughals centered largely (though not totally) on texts, and that too on expressly written texts.⁵⁸⁹ The breadth of the Mughals' interests can be discerned from the contents of the Imperial library, about which Abul Fazl writes:

⁵⁸⁸ The epics were considered *itihāsa*, roughly analogous to history or chronicle, but also appreciated and studied for their literary value; indeed, the first or original poet (*ādikavi*) was no other than Valmiki, the composer of the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

⁵⁸⁹ The performance of Brajbhasha verse, often in musical form and touching upon devotional themes, was widely patronized by the Mughal aristocracy, including by the Emperor himself, from at least the time of Akbar. Yet the Mughal appreciation of this poetry appears to have been primarily aesthetic as opposed to

nāzam va sher va hindī va fārsī va yūnānī va kashmīrī va ‘arabī tartībḥā yāfat budān... zabān-dānān kitāb-i hindī va yūnānī va ‘arabī va fārsī ba-dīgar zabānḥā guzārish.⁵⁹⁰ 82

Prose and poetry, Hindi (Sanskrit), Persian, Greek, Kashmiri are all kept separately... Scholars of language (*zabān-dānān*) are constantly engaged in translating Hindi, Greek, Arabic, and Persian books (*kitāb*) into other languages.

The Imperial library was as much a symbol of power as it was a repository of information, and a symbol of the Emperor’s universal knowledge. The library was in part the material product of the massive translation project initiated by Akbar in which Indic texts on everything from poetry to mathematics to flora and fauna were translated into Persian or, sometimes, the vernacular of Brajhasha.⁵⁹¹ This translation project, through which the Mughals sought to ‘know’ the territories and people over which they had dominion, was focused on written texts—in Abul Fazl’s words, “books” (*kitāb*). His use of this term (instead of *nāmāh*, *waz*, etc which may refer to a text, but not necessarily to a written one) is noteworthy: he refers to the *Mahābhārat*, *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Vedas* and *Harivaṃśa* all as *kitāb*,

devotional or scholastic. See Busch, “Hidden in Plain View,” 272-76. Akbar is also famous for enjoying oral religious disputation between experts from different religious traditions. Darryl Maclean, “Real Men and False Men at the Court of Akbar,” in David Gilmartin and Bruce Lawrence (eds.), *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2000). Yet this type of ‘performance’ as well seems qualitatively different than the teaching, performance, and explication of texts at the Mughal court.

⁵⁹⁰ Abu al-Fazl ibn Mubarak, *Ā’in-i Akbarī* (Aligarh: Sir Syed Academy (Aligarh Muslim University), 2005) 96. Although I have taken assistance from Henry Blochman’s English translation, I have also translated some terms differently and avoided interpolating certain words (a practice of Blochman’s) since Abul Fazl’s language will be of importance to the analysis that follows. Abū al-Faḍl ibn Mubārak, *The Ā’in-i Akbarī*, translated by H. Blochmann, edited by D. Phillott (Delhi: Low Price Publications, 1989).

⁵⁹¹ Here I include within the notion of ‘translation’ texts like the Brajhasha *Kavīndrakalpalatā* (c. 1650?) of Kavindracharya Saraswati, which contain digests or explanations of Sanskrit knowledge systems. On this and similar expository writing at the Mughal court, see Busch, “Hidden in Plain View,” and *Poetry of Kings*. For a discussion of the Mughal translation project, see Audrey Truschke, *Cosmopolitan Encounters: Sanskrit and Persian at the Mughal Court* (Dissertation, New York: Columbia University, 2012); also John Seyller, *Workshop and Patron in Mughal India: The Freer Rāmāyaṇa and Other Illustrated Manuscripts of ‘abd Al-Raḥīm* (Washington D.C.: Artibus Asiae, 1999).

suggesting that in the Mughal imaginary, these texts were understood to be somehow analogous to the Islamicate notion of the book (itself ultimately drawn from the archetype of the Qur'an).⁵⁹² Similarly revealing is the manner in which Abul Fazl introduces the 'nine schools' of Indian thought ("nyāya, vaiśeṣika, mīmāṃsa, vedānta, sāṅkhya, patāñjala, jaina, bauddha, and nāstika") by describing their method of writing:

In this country there are eight sects who professedly teach the doctrines of the beginning of the world and of the next world... Formerly they wrote with an iron stylus on the leaves of the palm and the *tūz*, but now on paper, and from left to right. The leaves are kept separate and it is not the practice to stitch them together. Their mystic idealism enlightens the understanding and invigorates the soul.⁵⁹³

In Abul Fazl's thought, writing is at the center of what constitutes a tradition or doctrine.

The actual practice of translation at the Mughal court also appears to have centered on written texts, with teams of Jain, Brahmin and Muslim intellectuals working on and from manuscripts (although as Audrey Truschke points out, the oral process through which these multiple translators negotiated the meaning and recreation of the text in another language allowed material from non-written sources to be incorporated).⁵⁹⁴ Moreover, the socio-religious groups who prospered under the patronage of the Mughal court were those who

⁵⁹² On the Qur'an as the archetypal *kitāb* Islamicate cultures, see George Atiyeh, "Introduction," in George Atiyeh (ed.) *The Book in the Islamic World: The Written Word and Communication in the Middle East* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995) 13-18.

⁵⁹³ I have used Blochman's translation, but made minor revisions. Phillot (ed.), *The A'in-i Akbarī*, 127.

⁵⁹⁴ Audrey Truschke, *Cosmopolitan Encounters*. For details of the persons and process involved in translation of works from Sanskrit to Persian, see especially "Translation Infrastructure and Social Collaboration," 186-90.

possessed both the cultural capital of written scriptures and the technical and discursive literacy to explicate them, like certain Jain and Brahmin communities.⁵⁹⁵

As noted in the previous chapter, there was a similar if not greater demand for religious intellectuals at Rajput royal courts, where the explication of Sanskrit scriptures in the vernacular was integral to the ongoing construction of notions of kingship.⁵⁹⁶ From among the many sects that had emerged in the efflorescence of *bhakti* devotionism in the sixteenth century, those that maintained the closest ties to state power and the greatest presence at court in Rajasthan in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were those that possessed a clearly-defined scriptural canon of their own. This can be no mere coincidence. This trend is visible among the Gaudiyas, Ramanandis and Vallabhites at the Kacchwaha court in Amer/Jaipur, and the Pushtimarg at Bikaner, Kota, and Nagaur.⁵⁹⁷ As Monika Horstmann has pointed out, the turn toward Brahminical *smārta* religion at the court of the Kacchwahas in particular made for an environment in which a sect's legitimacy was largely weighed in terms of its textual canon.⁵⁹⁸

⁵⁹⁵ Trusccke, *ibid.* See also Jha, Shalin. "Interaction of the 'Lords': The Jain Community and the Mughal Royalty under Akbar." *Social Scientist* 40, no. 3/4 (April 2012): 33–57.

⁵⁹⁶ Bahura, *Literary Heritage of the Rulers of Amber and Jaipur*, 23–47. For the continuing importance of such vernacular intellectuals in the eighteenth century, see Monika Horstmann, "Visions of Kingship in the Twilight of Mughal Rule" (Amsterdam: Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2006).

⁵⁹⁷ On canon and identity in the Ramanandi Sampraday (and its relations with the Kacchwaha court), see William Pinch, "Reinventing Ramanand: Caste and History in Gangetic India," *Modern Asian Studies* 30, no. 3 (July 1, 1996): 549–71; ———, "History, Devotion, and the Search for Nabhadās of Galta," in Daud Ali (ed.), *Invoking the Past: The Uses of History in South Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). On the Gaudiyas, see Horstmann, "Visions of Kingship," 20–2. On the Pushtimarg and Rajput courts in Rajasthan, see Norbert Peabody, *Hindu Kingship and Polity in Precolonial India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁵⁹⁸ Horstmann, "Visions of Kingship," 20–2. This emphasis on scriptural credentials ultimately favored groups like the Gaudiyas, though it could also present potential problems: "Orthodox credentials of the Gauṛīyas could be culled from the scholastic works of the Gauṛīya Gosvāmīs, but there was a vibrant and strong tradition among the Gauṛīyas which was both tantric, non-orthodox and accordingly critical of ritual, the very corner-stone of the Smārta system. (Horstmann, "Visions of Kingship," 21–2.)

This is not to suggest that the importance of written scriptures encouraged all devotional groups to establish such scriptures in order to secure political patronage (though clearly it did have that effect on some groups). As we will see shortly, the Dadu Panth and the Niranjani Sampraday do not appear to have courted political patronage very actively, while the Sikh gurus posited themselves as a competing source of power vis-à-vis royal and imperial courts. What it does suggest is that in the changed media and ideological environment of the late seventeenth century, written scripture had become a standard marker of identity and legitimacy, or better, a currency of exchange in transactions of religious and political power. Whether that exchange was one of patronage (e.g. a religious sect invoking the *smārta* authority of its scriptures in order to secure its place at a royal court) or one of competition (e.g. a religious sect employing its independent scriptures as part of a bid for political autonomy), the need for the capital constituted by a written holy book (or books) was a common denominator of such symbolic transactions in this place and time.⁵⁹⁹ The holy book is therefore an important element of the emerging notion of ‘religion’ in the early modern period and its corresponding relationship with political power

⁵⁹⁹ The use of a monetary metaphor here is not incidental. In Western India at least (if not in a greater portion of North India), the ideologies and activities of *bhakti* sects, including groups like the Dadu Panth and Niranjani but also the Pushtimarg, Gaudiya Sampraday and later the Swami Narayan Sampraday, became increasingly aligned with the interests of the merchant groups that made up a large part of their lay following. (This was paralleled in the neighboring Jain communities of the Tapa Gacch, Adhyatma Panth and Tera Panth.) At the same time, the religious policies and ideologies of Rajput courts became increasingly determined by the needs of commerce; for example, the religious policies enacted by Jai Singh at Jaipur in the 1730’s were partly intended to wrest control of trade routes away from monastic orders. See Horstmann, “Visions of Kingship.” Peabody, *Hindu Kingship and Polity in Precolonial India*; William Pinch, “History, Devotion, and the Search for Nabhadras of Galta,” in Daud Ali (ed.) *Invoking the Past: The Uses of History in South Asia* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999) 36.

that has been noted by William Pinch and Patton Burchett.⁶⁰⁰ This new religiosity, distinct from earlier yogic ideologies of metaphysical power and closely related to *bhakti* (though not identical to it), was “a religion of temples, monasteries, and physical symbols,” and one of those physical symbols was the holy book.⁶⁰¹

The *Ādi Granth* in the Sikh community

Therefore it is no coincidence that the earliest and most assertive attempt to establish a written scripture is found among the Sikhs, a tradition that from its beginnings understood itself to be a distinct *dīn* (religion, faith).⁶⁰² Sikhism, begun by Guru Nanak (1469-1539) at the end of the fifteenth century, has much in common with both *sant*- and Vaishnava-style *bhakti*, and even includes poetry by saints from both traditions in the *Bhagat Bāṇī* (*Words of the Devotees*) section of its primary scripture, the *Ādi Granth*. Yet it seems to have always been articulated as a distinct faith and its followers appear to have been aware of their identity as a separate community from the early days of the tradition.⁶⁰³ On the one hand, the Sikh gurus, beginning with Guru Nanak, stressed the inclusiveness of their community with its equal embracing of members of all castes and both genders, and its corresponding universality as a spiritual and social law equally applicable to all (in distinction to groups

⁶⁰⁰ William Pinch, *Warrior Ascetics and Indian Empires* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 17-20, 211-225. Patton Burchett, “Bhakti Religion and Tantric Magic in Mughal India: Kacchvahas, Ramanandis, and Naths, circa 1500-1750” (Dissertation, Columbia University, 2012).

⁶⁰¹ Pinch, *Warrior Ascetics*, 20.

⁶⁰² Gurinder Singh Mann, *The Making of Sikh Scripture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) 6-10. The term *dīn* appears multiple times in the *Ādi Granth*, and perhaps revealingly, a *sākhī* in the *Ādi Granth* attributed to Kabir, *sūra soī pahacānie laḍai dīna kai heta*, “he who fights in the name of religion (*dīna*) is recognized to be a warrior,” is found in other sources with a reading of *dhanīm* instead of *dīn*. Callewaert, *Nirguṇ Bhakti Sāgar*, 289.

⁶⁰³ Mann, *Making of Sikh Scripture*, 7-8.

like the Pushtimarg that insisted on the importance of God's grace—*anugrah*—as a prerequisite to liberation and on the maintenance of caste distinctions and therefore differential *dharma*). On the other hand, the tradition maintained a relatively high degree of internal consistency, partly through its emphasis on its own lineage of gurus and its exclusion of most other saints from the canon.⁶⁰⁴

This combination of universalist ideology, internal consistency and a *bhakti*-style theology that Pinch characterizes as positing “a distant yet ever-present Lord, God as a thing apart, God with an upper-case ‘G,’” made for a communal identity of such scope that it could not be characterized as ‘sectarian’ (in the manner of a *sampradāy* or *panth*), but rather it could only be imagined in terms of *dīn* or *mazhab* (creed, law, religious order).⁶⁰⁵ In this regard, the idiom of the Sikh faith resembled that of Islam, a tradition whose unity was partly articulated and brought about through the symbol of the Qur’an. Gurinder Singh Mann suggests that Guru Nanak’s understanding of the social and institutional importance of the Qur’an encouraged him to create his own scripture:

[Guru Nanak] knew the Qur’an and he could not possibly have missed the emphasis it places on the *ahl-i-kitab* (the possessors of the revealed book)...

In the setting of an Indian *khanqah*... the Qur’an played a significant role, placed out in the open to allow lower-class converts full access to the scripture of their new religion—a kind of access denied to them in their

⁶⁰⁴ This is not to efface the history of internal divisions and distinctions with the Sikh tradition, a history that continues to this day. To a certain extent, the internal cohesion which gave rise to and maintained the *Guru Granth Sāhib* as the primary scripture of the community was achieved through constant and strict excision of any potentially heterodox elements. See Jeevan Singh Deol, “Text and Lineage in Early Sikh History: Issues in the Study of the Ādi Granth,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 64, no. 1 (January 1, 2001): 34–58. Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994. Ronki Ram, “Social Exclusion, Resistance and Deras: Exploring the Myth of Casteless Sikh Society in Punjab,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 42, no. 40 (October 6, 2007): 4066–74.

⁶⁰⁵ Within the *Guru Granth Sāhib*, the term *dīn* in the sense of religion or faith occurs 9 times. Callewaert (ed.) *Śrī Guru Granth Sāhib: With Complete Index*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1996.

earlier belief system. Whether or not the new converts were literate and able to read [the] Qur'an, they were permitted physical access to it...

His perception of himself as the recipient of divine revelation and his hymns as manifesting the divine truth, in combination with his recognition of the significance of the institution of scripture and its importance in the political definition of the community under the law of the times, would have led him to compile a text of his own hymns. Leaving unpreserved what he thought to be the divine message—the compilation of which would carry the political weight of the *ahl-i kitab* classification for his community, bringing both prestige and economic benefit of acquittal from paying the *jizyah*—would contradict his organizational concerns, which led to the creation of liturgical prayer, the *laṅgar*, and a careful choice of successor to lead the community.⁶⁰⁶

Certainly the institutional and social cohesion symbolized by the Qur'an would have provided Guru Nanak and his successors an incentive and model for establishing a similar scripture in their own tradition, and the suggestion that the Gurus perceived benefits to establishing their community as an *ahl-i kitab* highlights the political aspect of scripture, an aspect that I would like to emphasize here.⁶⁰⁷ However, we can perhaps make an even stronger argument about the importance of scripture in this context that transcends functionalist explanations of what it was perceived to do for the community. The very mode of religiosity that characterized Sikhism and distinguished it from other forms of religiosity in early modern North India seems to presuppose a scripture that is distinct, singular, and unitary, just like the community that it governs.⁶⁰⁸ A brief chronological review of the compilation of the *Ādi Granth* will help reveal why assigning any one functionalist

⁶⁰⁶ Mann, *Making of Sikh Scripture*, 12.

⁶⁰⁷ This was not to the exclusion of Indic models of scripture: as Gurinder Singh Mann has pointed out, the Goindval *pothīs* mostly likely consisted of four volumes, which suggests emulation of the four *Vedas*. Mann, *The Goindval Pothīs*, 25-9; ———, *The Making of Sikh Scripture*, 10-11.

⁶⁰⁸ On law and writing, see Vismann, "Law's Writing Lessons," in *Files*, 1-38. There is of course a large body of scholarship on the relationship between religion and law; for a survey of traditions and scholarship see the essays in Richard O'Dair and Andrew Lewis, *Law and Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). Vismann's analysis is particularly insightful, however, because it emphasizes the importance of writing in authorizing law as a social transaction of power, rather than focusing on writing's documentary function.

explanation for the formation of Sikh scripture falls short, and why that formation reflects a much more profound re-thinking of what a religious community was in the socio-political context of the time.

The Sikh hagiographical tradition, beginning with Bhai Gurdas (d. 1637), maintains that Guru Nanak carried a manuscript (referred to as a *kitāb*) of his poetry with him, and that he gave this manuscript to his successor Guru Angad as a symbol of the transfer of spiritual authority.⁶⁰⁹ Tradition also recounts that later gurus added their own compositions to the manuscript, and that they passed it on to their successor in a ritualized ceremony.⁶¹⁰

Although it is difficult to ascertain with complete certainty whether such a manuscript existed, the fact that hagiographers make mention of it—and that they do so at the turn of the seventeenth century, around the time that Guru Arjan compiled the first version of the *Ādi Granth* (known as the Kartarpur *pothī*) and had it installed in the temple at Ramdaspur—suggests that the idea of such a book was central to Sikh communal identity by that time. Some scholars speculate that the Guru Harsahai *pothī*, so called because it was kept by the family of Guru Harsahai in the village of the same name, is in fact the manuscript inscribed by Guru Nanak and expanded by his successors.⁶¹¹ Whether or not this is the case, the *pothī* almost certainly dates from at least the time of the fourth Sikh guru, Guru Ramdas (1534-1581).⁶¹² Two other important manuscripts date to this period: the

⁶⁰⁹ Gurdas, *Vāran Bhāi Guradās: Text, Transliteration, and Translation* (Patiala: Vision & Venture, 1998) v 1.32. (p 62). Mann, *Making of Sikh Scripture*, 12.

⁶¹⁰ Mann, *Making of Sikh Scripture*, 35.

⁶¹¹ Mann, *Making of Sikh Scripture*, 34. Pashaura Singh, *The Guru Granth Sahib: Canon, Meaning and Authority* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000) 32.

⁶¹² This manuscript was unfortunately stolen in 1970, making further study impossible; details of the manuscript, its dating, and significance can be found in Mann, *Making of Sikh Scripture*, 33-40, and Singh, *Guru Granth Sahib*, 32-34.

Goindval *pothīs* (so named for their traditional home at Goindval, Punjab), which can be safely dated to 1570-72.⁶¹³ These would have been copied during the period of the third guru, Guru Amardas, and at the town founded by him (Goindval). All three of these manuscripts figure in the history of internal disputation among Sikhs in the late sixteenth century that concluded with the fifth guru, Guru Arjan (1563-1606), emerging as the possessor of greatest authority in the tradition, and the compilation of the *Ādi Granth* and its installation at the new Sikh capital of Ramdaspur in 1604.

Without going into great detail, we can identify at this moment the birth of scripture in the Sikh tradition. Its establishment can be understood as the outcome of both internal and external factors. Internally, the late sixteenth century saw the Sikh community divided into multiple groups competing for authority, with the sons of Guru Amardas, Guru Ramdas, and later Guru Ramdas's sons all representing different factions.⁶¹⁴ The possession of an authoritative compilation of the sayings and hymns of the Gurus (which comprised the core of Sikh thought and the performance of which constituted the center of Sikh ritual life) would have no doubt been a major piece of symbolic capital. In this context, Guru Arjan's undertaking of having the Goindval *pothīs* brought to his seat (*gaddi*) at Ramdaspur, copied, and then installing this new copy as a sacred object in the recently-completed Harmandir Sahib can be read as a move to consolidate his authority within the Sikh community.⁶¹⁵

However, this cannot account fully for the establishment of the *Ādi Granth* in this manner and at this moment, since it assumes that the idea of a singular scripture was already

⁶¹³ Gurinder Singh Mann, *The Goindval Pothis: The Earliest Extant Source of the Sikh Canon* (Cambridge: Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies, Harvard University, 1996) 15-23.

⁶¹⁴ Mann, *Making of Sikh Scripture*, 33-51.

⁶¹⁵ Mann, *Making of Sikh Scripture*, 33.

important in the Sikh community. Furthermore, Guru Arjan's compiling of the material of the four Goindval *pothīs* into a *single* text (along with the addition of his own compositions), taken together with his construction of the Harmandir Sahib, extension of the Sikh settlement at Ramdaspur, and establishment of a revenue-gathering in the community suggests an outward-looking vision as much as it does a response to internal competition.⁶¹⁶

That vision saw the Sikhs as a semi-autonomous community in a region under direct Mughal rule, the Lahore *ṣūbah*. (Bhai Gurdas, who was also one of the scribes of the *Ādi Granth* in addition to being a hagiographer and court poet to multiple Gurus, states in no uncertain terms that the Guru is the only temporal as well as spiritual authority.)⁶¹⁷ The political and specifically courtly idiom of Sikh religious ritual will be discussed in detail below, as will the importance of the *Ādi Granth* as a material object; let it be noted here that Guru Arjan's compilation of the *Ādi Granth* marks an assertion of a certain type of religiosity and religious community, one which is tightly bound up with written scripture. That Sikh poets of the seventeenth century found it important to commemorate the transport of the Goindval *pothīs* to Ramdaspur, their copying and the installation of the *Ādi Granth*, tells us that they saw these events as a beginning as much as they understood them to be the continuation of an earlier tradition.⁶¹⁸ Beginnings (whether real or imagined) are extremely important; the Sikh tradition's emphasis on this moment, and on the act of collation and

⁶¹⁶ On revenue-gathering, see Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India, 1556-1707* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999) 397-8.

⁶¹⁷ Gurdas, *Vāran Bhāi Guradās*, vv 4.31, 5.21, 39.3.

⁶¹⁸ Mann, *Making of Sikh Scripture*, 131. The enshrinement of two palanquins believed to have been used to transport the Goindval *pothīs* is another commemoration of this event. (Mann, *Making of Sikh Scripture*, 42.)

inscription as a type of beginning, reflects an awareness of itself as being defined by the scriptural book.⁶¹⁹

The *Dādūvānī*, *Pañcavānī*, and *Sarvāṅgīs* of the Dadu Panth

The Dadu Panth was most likely influenced by these developments in the Sikh community, though the compilation and ritual deployment of its scriptural anthologies was different in some critical respects. The Dadu Panth coalesced about a hundred years later than the Sikh community, coming together in the last three decades of the sixteenth century, during the second half of Dadu's lifetime.⁶²⁰ Yet it began compiling the poetry of its saints in anthologies very similar to the *Ādi Granth* at almost the same time, i.e. the early years of the seventeenth century.⁶²¹ Members of the Dadu Panth, including some of its more prominent saint poets, had contact with the Sikh community, particularly in the city of Fatehpur, and this exchange appears to have brought a number of texts from the Sikh tradition into the Dadu Panth.⁶²² The exchanges between the Dadu Panth, Sikh sects, and later the Niranjani Sampraday at Fatehpur have yet to be studied, even though inscriptional and other textual evidence exists.⁶²³ Yet the lack of exact dates for the Dadu Panth's texts in

⁶¹⁹ On the importance of beginnings for literary traditions, see Pollock, *Language of the Gods*, 283-287; Busch, "Hindi Literary Beginnings." On the relationship between beginnings, tradition and scripture in the Christian context, see Evans, C. F. "Tradition and Scripture." *Religious Studies* 3, no. 1 (January 1, 1967): 323-37. On scriptural beginnings in the South Asian context, see Thomas Coburn, "'Scripture' in India," in Miriam Levering (ed.), *Rethinking Scripture: Essays from a Comparative Perspective* (Albany: State University Press of New York, 1989).

⁶²⁰ The primary source for the early history of the Dadu Panth is the *Dādū Janm Līlā* of Jangopal (edited by Callewaert as *The Hindi Biography of Dādū Dayāl*). Additional information about the early period can be found in Naryandas, *Śrī Dādū Panth Paricay*, vol. 1.

⁶²¹ Horstmann, "Dādūpanthī Anthologies," 164-67.

⁶²² Horstmann, "Dādūpanthī Anthologies," 171.

⁶²³ For inscriptions related to these communities at Fatehpur, see Ratanlal Mishra, *Epigraphical Studies of Rajasthan Inscriptions* (Delhi: B.R. Publishing, 1990); on one example of textual exchange between these

this early period make it difficult to ascertain the nature of influence with much certainty: did the Sikh *Ādi Granth* inspire the compilation of the *Dādūvāṇī*, *Pañcavāṇī*, and *Sarvāṅgīs*? Did the *Dādūvāṇī* and *Pañcavāṇī* inspire the compilation of the *Ādi Granth*? Was there competition to establish such a *granth*, or was the nature of the exchange more collaborative? More research will be necessary to answer these questions, but given the close contact of the Sikhs and Dadu Panth, a direct relationship between their almost simultaneous establishment of written, anthological scriptures seems difficult to discount.

Monika Horstmann suggests that the earliest Dadu Panthi scripture was most likely the *Dādūvāṇī*, a collection of Dadu's hymns and diptyches compiled either during his lifetime or soon after.⁶²⁴ Given Dadu's status as the founder of the Panth, his charisma as a saintly figure and the quality of his poetry, this is not unlikely. What we do know with relative certainty about the *Dādūvāṇī* is that it occupied a central place in the Dadu Panth's canon throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and indeed into the present day, being prolifically copied and installed as a focal point of worship in Dadu Panthi temples.⁶²⁵ As mentioned in the third chapter, both the *Dādū Janm Līlā* of Jangopal and *Bhaktamāl* of Raghavdas attest that Dadu's disciple Mohandas Daftari dutifully recorded the poetic compositions of his guru as he recited them. Whether or not such notes were actually taken and whether they formed the basis for the compilation of the *Dādūvāṇī* (questions to which we do not presently have answers) is actually less important than the fact that Jangopal and

communities, see *Pāras-Bhāg*: Bhāi Aḍḍaṇ's Translation of Al-Ghazālī's *Kīmīyā-yi Sa'ādat*," in Heidi Pauwels (ed.), *Patronage and Popularisation, Pilgrimage and Procession: Channels of Transcultural Translation and Transmission in Early Modern South Asia; Papers in Honour of Monika Horstmann* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009) 9-22.

⁶²⁴ Horstmann, "Dādūpanthi Anthologies," 164-66.

⁶²⁵ Horstmann, "Dādūpanthi Anthologies," 171. The *Dādūvāṇī* continues to be the focal point of worship in the main temple at Naraina, the headquarters of the Dadu Panth since 1604.

Raghavdas provide a textual history for these anthologies soon after their establishment (if not at the exact same time). Similarly, though the historical accuracy of the events recounted in the hagiographical *Sant Guṇ Sāgar* (*Ocean of the Merits of the Saints*) of the Dadu Panthi poet Madhavdas is difficult to confirm because the text itself has been substantially revised over time (although the poet gives the date of completion as 1604, it was most likely composed after the works of Jangopal discussed earlier), the narrative it recounts is nevertheless important because it provides an originary moment for the *Dādūvānī* and a precedent for its veneration:

dohā

āṣāḍha śukla aṣṭamī guruvāṇī tharapāya
mandira meṁ jaya bola kari bhoga prasāda lagāya (1)

dohā

On the eight day of the bright half of Āṣāḍh (24 June 1604),
the *Guruvāṇī* was installed.
'Jai!' was shouted in the temple,
and *prasād* (food offerings) was served.

indava chanda

mandira meṁ guruvāṇī virājata, dāsa gupāla ju chāpa pujārī
gādi khaḍāu su pustaka vastrahi, ṭopi ju kesaru saumja saṁvārī
saumja banāya dharī takhatā pari, ūpara āmcala dharahim bhārī
prātaka dhūpa niśā kari dīpaka, yom kari pūjana sām̐jha saṁvārī (2)

Indava chand

The *Guruvāṇī* sat in splendor (*virājata*) in the temple,
and Gopaldas was designated of *pujārī*.
The *gādī*, sandals, clothed book (*pustaka vastrahi*),
and saffron-colored cap were arranged as items of veneration.
These items were placed on a throne,
and above this a heavy curtain was hung.
By incense in the morning, and by lamp at night—
this is how the twilight worship was orchestrated. (2)

bāmcata santakathā guru grantha ju, dāsa gopāla ucāra karāi

saṁta samāja sabai maṁḍalī mila, svamiju saṁta sabhā madha āi
hota kathā nita doya muhūrata, saṁta kathā kari śabdahu gāi
dhyāna dhareṁ aru bhojana pāvata, saṁta ju āsana jāya rahāi (3)

Gopaldas spoke [a sermon],
reciting from the *Gurugranth*.
All the local congregations of the holy society
gathered in Swami's hall of congregation (*saṁta sabhā*).
For two *muhūrts* there was always a homily,
then the *sants* sang devotional songs.
After meditation they were given food,
then retired to their places (*āsana*). (3)

pāchali yāma su saṁta ru sādhu ju, nhāvata dhovana śauca karāi
prāta su sām̐jha kareṁ mili gāvata, ḍholaka jhām̐jhu maṁjīra bajāi
ārati sām̐jha kareṁ mili gāvata, baiṭhata hī pada maṁgala gāi
āsana pe phira jāya virājata, yor̐ niśi vāsara saṁta rahāi (4)

In the last watch of the night,
the *sants* and *sādhus* were made to purify themselves and bathe.
In the morning at twilight, they sang together,
and played drums and cymbals.
The twilight *ārati* they performed together and sang,
and in a sitting posture sang auspicious songs.
Then they went and resided (*virājata*) again to their places;
this is how the *sants* were made to pass day and night. (4)

pālaki chāpa dharī guru mandira, satya banāya subhāṁti sajjāi
jo apano gurupaṁtha upāsaka, pāsa rakhe guruvāṇī pujāi
dāsa garība daī sab ko sudha, saṁta sudhānahim̐ vāṇī dharāi
deśa diśā nija sādhuṁ ko paṭi, mādhava vāṇiju kīrati gāi (5)

The Guru's temple received the name (*chāp*) of 'palanquin,'
and was nicely arranged and decorated.
Those practitioners who adopted the Guru's panth
kept a *Guruvāṇī* at hand which they worshipped.
Garibdas admonished and reminded every *sant*
that he should keep a scripture (*vāṇī*).
Everywhere he sent his *sādhus*.
Madhav, the glory of the *vāṇī* was sung. (5)

dādu guru nija āyasu pāvata, rajjaba mohana śrī jagannātha
sākhi hu śodha anukrama rākhata, tāla ru rāga garībahim̐ sātha
aṁga saim̐tisa sākhi likhī saba, rāga satāisa śabdahim̐ gāthā

yoṁ kari saṁta likhī guru vāñiju, sthāna ru sthāna bhāi vikhyātā (6)⁶²⁶

Receiving orders from the guru Dadu himself,
Rajjab, Mohan and Shri Jagannath
Revised the *sākhīs* and put them in order,
and [did the same] for the *tālas* and *rāgas* together with Garibdas.
All the *sākhīs* were written down in thirty-seven chapters,
and the devotional songs in twenty-seven ragas.
In this way the *sant* inscribed the *Guruvāñī*
and it became famous everywhere.

Even if these particular verses of the *Sant Guṇ Sāgar* were added after 1604 and their historical accuracy is unknown, the scene that they paint of the *Dādūvāñī* vividly demonstrates its importance to the later Dadu Panthi tradition, and the relationship between the scripture and the community. Madhavdas repeatedly uses words that resonate with courtly (as well as Vaishnava associations): the *Dādūvāñī* is not simply kept in the temple, it is *virājata*—sitting in splendor, in the manner of a ruler (or the image of a deity).⁶²⁷ It is described as being a *pustaka vastrahi*, a ‘clothed book,’ which literally refers to it being wrapped in cloth (a typical manner of storing a valued manuscript), but this detail might also have been intended to draw comparison with clothed images of God (*mūrti*) in Vaishnava ritual culture. The throne (*takhatā*) and canopy (*aṁcala*) in which the *Dādūvāñī* is installed are markers of royalty. The holy scripture is directly identified with the community by the leader of the Panth: Garibdas (the son and successor of Dadu) gives the directive that every member should carry a copy. All of this goes hand-in-hand, of course, with the continuing

⁶²⁶ Madhavdas, *Sant Guṇ Sāgar*, edited by Bakshiram Shastri (Bhairan: Mahant Ramvallabhdas Swami, 2000). vv 25.1-6. Quoted in Horstmann, “Dādūpanthī Anthologies,” 167-68. I have made use of Horstmann’s translation, but have also revised several lines to more accurately reflect the register in which Madhavdas speaks of the *Dādūvāñī* and associated rituals.

⁶²⁷ The participle *virājat* is derived from Sanskrit *virāj-*, which itself comes from *rāj-*, to rule. Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, s.v. ‘*virāj*’. It is most typically used in Brajhasha poetry to refer to human actors who are enthroned or residing in great splendor.

practice of oral performance modes, specifically communal singing and sermonizing (*sant-kathā*). The scene mirrors the book-centered ritual and communal life of the Sikhs of Ramdaspur after 1604, and the reference to the *Dādūvāṇī* as the *Guruvāṇī* (*Words of the Guru*) and *Gurugranth* (*Book of the Guru*) seem to anticipate what the *Ādi Granth* of the Sikhs would eventually come to be called—the *Guru Granth Sāhib*.⁶²⁸

These verses also provide a textual history for the *Dādūvāṇī* that establishes its authority as a representative of the Guru: we are told that “receiving an order from the guru Dadu himself, Rajjab, Mohan and Shri Jagannath revised (*śodha*) the *sākhīs* and put them in order (*anukram*), and did the same for the *tālas* and *rāgas*...” This line makes a claim not only for the purity of transmission, but also for the authority of those who compiled Dadu’s words to do so in the manner that they did.⁶²⁹ As we will see shortly, establishing such editorial authority was no small matter, since the structure and organization of such anthologies were a large part of what made them scripture.

Whereas the *Dādūvāṇī* establishes Dadu’s songs and sayings as the central scripture of the Dadu Panth, the *Pañcavāṇī* locates him (and by extension the Dadu Panth as a whole) in a broader tradition of revelation and devotion by including his poetry with that of Namdev, Kabir, Raidas and Hardas. The *Pañcavāṇī* was compiled soon after the *Dādūvāṇī*, if not at the same time.⁶³⁰ It is difficult to speak of the *Pañcavāṇī* as a single text, since the

⁶²⁸ The tenth and last Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, gave the collection the title *Guru Granth Sāhib*, following his extension of the collection and his investment of the book as the Guru in 1708, thus closing the line of human gurus. See Mann, *Making of Sikh Scripture*, 130, and Singh, *Guru Granth Sahib*, 239.

⁶²⁹ Two of the individuals mentioned here, Mohandas Daftari and Rajjabdas, accordingly receive substantial attention in Dadu Panthi hagiographies, which put emphasis on their direct contact with Dadu. See Raghavdas, *Bhaktamāl*, vv 382-87, as well as Narayandas, *Dādū Panth Kā Itihās*, 680-87.

⁶³⁰ Horstmann and Callewaert both estimate the compilation of the *Pañcavāṇī* to have occurred around 1600; see Horstmann, “Dādūpanthī Anthologies,” 166-67; Callewaert, *Nirguṇ Bhakti Sāgar*, 9-11.

earliest manuscripts contain works by the same five saints, and in the same order (Dadu, Namdev, Kabir, Raidas then Hardas), but the actual poems included for each saint can vary significantly.⁶³¹ (The compilers of the various *Pañcavānīs* are unknown.) We are confronted with a scriptural tradition that appears to be defined by an authorial canon, but not a textual canon.

The *Sarvāṅgīs* of Rajjab and Gopaldas locate Dadu and his disciples within an even broader community of saints, anthologizing the *sākhīs* and *pads* of Dadu and Dadu Panthi poets with those of a large number of poets from *nirguṇ sant*, Vaishnava, Sufi, and (importantly) Sikh backgrounds—eighty-eight poets in total in the *Sarvāṅgī* of Rajjab, and one hundred and thirty-eight in the *Sarvāṅgī* of Gopaldas.⁶³² The very title of these two collections—*Sarvāṅgī*, “that which is comprised of all themes (*aṅg*)”—suggests an attempt to compile a comprehensive collection of saint poetry that touched upon every possible aspect of devotional discourse (an impression confirmed by the theme-based structure of much of the *Sarvāṅgīs*, which is discussed below). Rajjab and Gopaldas, both being direct disciples of Dadu, were contemporaries, raising the question of what caused them to independently collate their own anthologies.⁶³³ Gopaldas gives the date of completion of his anthology as 1627; Rajjab provides no date and scholars have thus far been unable to

⁶³¹ Callewaert, *Nirguṇ Bhakti Sāgar*, 11.

⁶³² Winand Callewaert, *The Sarvāṅgī of the Dādūpanthī Rajab* (Leuven: Departement Orientalistiek, 1978). ———, *The Sarvāṅgī of Gopāldās: a 17th Century Anthology of Bhakti Literature* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1993).

⁶³³ Scholars have found little evidence to explain this duplication of effort; however, an alleged disagreement between Garibdas, Dadu’s son and spritual successor, and Rajjab may provide a clue. According to the Dadu Panth hagiographical tradition, Garibdas objected to Rajjab’s clothing: a groom’s attire, as Dadu had converted Rajjab while the latter was in his marriage procession on his way to be wed (Rajjab is said to have never changed his garb from that day forward). This disagreement led to a period of estrangement between Garibdas and Rajjab, during which Rajjab lived in Banaras. (Madhavdas, *Sant Guṇ Sāgar*, quoted in Callewaert, *Sarvāṅgī of the Dādūpanthī Rajab*, 60.) Although he eventually returned to Rajasthan and the Dadu Panth, this distance between him and the highest spiritual authority of the sect could explain his independent collation of a scripture.

determine it with any certainty.⁶³⁴ However, the presence of poems by Tursidas Niranjani suggests that it could not have been given its final form earlier than the 1620's. Differences not only in the number of poets included but also in the particular compositions taken from each poet and the organization of the respective *Sarvāṅgīs* as a whole suggest that Rajjab and Gopaldas were working from similar but separate sets of source material, and discounts the possibility that Gopaldas's longer anthology is an expansion of Rajjab's text.

This 'source material' was most likely a mix of written manuscripts and the memory of informants, in other words singers and *sādhus*. Callewaert maintains that Gopaldas and Rajjabdas probably produced these enormous compendiums from memory.⁶³⁵ While this may have been humanly possible, it seems doubtful given the ubiquitous presence of writing and transcription activity in the sect beginning in the time of Dadu himself.⁶³⁶ Dadu Panthi hagiographical texts like the *Dādū Janm Līlā*, *Sant Guṇ Sāgar* and *Bhaktamāl* put so much emphasis upon writing as a means of establishing the authority of their anthologies that it seems unlikely that written manuscripts were totally unutilized by Rajjab and Gopaldas when they collated their works.⁶³⁷ At the same time, this does not preclude the involvement of other persons and the substantial use of memory in reconstructing the texts contained in the *Sarvāṅgīs*. As Callewaert notes, the importance of raga as a rubric in the organization of both anthologies highlights the involvement of singers in grouping the material into

⁶³⁴ Callewaert, *Sarvāṅgi of Gopāldās*, 520. For an overview of arguments on the date of Rajjab's *Sarvāṅgī*, see Callewaert, *Sarvāṅgī of the Dādūpanthī Rajab*, 73-75.

⁶³⁵ Callewaert, *Sarvāṅgi of Gopāldās*, 5-6.

⁶³⁶ This point has also been made by Horstmann ("Dādūpanthi Anthologies," 176-77).

⁶³⁷ For example, the verses of the *Sant Guṇ Sāgar* quoted above specifically mention Rajjab as one of the redactors of the *Dādūvāṇī*, casting doubt on the idea that he worked totally from memory when compiling his own collection.

clusters.⁶³⁸ Furthermore, the repeated appearance of certain key words in poems that have been grouped together suggests the use of human memory in organizing the material, similar to the technique used by poets like Kalidasa and Ashvagoshā (or those who transmitted their works) to reconstruct long narrative poems.⁶³⁹

The fact that manuscripts of the *Sarvāṅgīs*, *Pañcavāṇī*, and *Dādūvāṇī* from the first half of the seventeenth century survive but Dadu Panthi manuscripts of other types, like *guṭakās*, generally do not, should not suggest that these scriptural anthologies were simply transcribed from memory. Instead, they point to an important distinction that the members of the Dadu Panth made between different types of writing and manuscripts. The manuscripts that have survived are the ones that were carefully preserved, stored in turmeric-dusted cloths to keep away bugs and mold, kept upon *gaddīs* (thrones) in the Dadu Panth's temples or safeguarded in wooden boxes, and protected from the touch of too many hands. They were understood to be objects of veneration as well as objects of utility, and were treated accordingly. In contrast, *guṭakās* like the type we saw in Chapter Three were not considered to be sacred objects in this way, and even the examples which we still have today generally show significant 'wear and tear.' Thus the fact that we have such early copies of the *Dādūvāṇī*, *Pañcavāṇī*, and *Sarvāṅgīs* at all suggests that they were treated differently from more quotidian forms of writing.

The timing and manner in which the Dadu Panth established its first scriptural text suggest a strong Sikh influence, and the type of canon constructed in the *Sarvāṅgīs* and

⁶³⁸ Callewaert, *Sarvāṅgi of Gopāldās*, 9.

⁶³⁹ Callewaert, *Sarvāṅgi of Gopāldās*, 8. On this feature in narrative and didactic poetry from the classical period, see E.H. Johnston's introduction in Ashvagoshā, *Aśvaghoṣa's Buddhacarita, Or, Acts of the Buddha* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1992.)

Pañcavāṇī—ecumenical, but with pride of place given to the tradition’s founder—is also somewhat similar to that of the *Ādi Granth*. However, there are also significant differences in the scriptural cultures of these two groups: in contrast to the single scripture of the *Ādi Granth* (which did expand and show variants in manuscripts until 1704, but maintained a striking consistency overall), the Dadu Panth produced a primary or central scriptural text from the works of its founder, but also other collections that ‘surround’ it, and which are secondary in importance and degree of veneration. All of these, however, are anthologies in a manner similar to the *Ādi Granth*, and like it create a canon of saints and texts. In the case of the *Dādūvāṇī*, its installation in the sect’s temples and its worship in the idiom of the court also parallels the ritual use of the Sikh holy book. Finally, we see a strong similarity in the way that the establishment of scriptural texts is remembered and authorized in the hagiographical texts of both the Sikhs and the Dadu Panth. In both traditions, the composition of major hagiographical works accompanies or closely follows the establishment of a scriptural text: in the Sikh case, the composition of the *Ādi Granth* was soon followed by Bhai Gurdas’s *Varan*, which tells the *Ādi Granth*’s history through the story of its authors and through references to earlier inscriptions of Guru Nanak’s compositions.⁶⁴⁰ In the case of the Dadu Panth, over the roughly twenty-five year period during which the *Dādūvāṇī*, *Pañcavāṇī*, and *Sarvāṅgīs* were compiled, two major hagiographies (the *Dādū Janm Līlā* and *Sant Guṇ Sāgar*) were also completed, both of which make reference to the processes through which the works of Dadu were transcribed

⁶⁴⁰ Guradāsa. *Vāraṅ Bhāi Guradās*, vv 1.31-32, 39.1-2.

and compiled.⁶⁴¹ Their brief descriptions are elaborated by Raghavdas in his *Bhaktamāl* approximately thirty years later.⁶⁴² Both traditions mark the inscription and installation of their canonical scriptures as a beginning, even while they link the thought of their founders to that of earlier saints through the inclusion of those saints in the scriptures themselves.

The *Vāṇī* of the Niranjani Sampraday

The history of scripture in the Niranjani Sampraday is clearly influenced by the models that preceded it in the Sikh tradition and the Dadu Panth; however, the concept of a scripture as a category and the holy book of the *Vāṇī* in particular never appear to have become as central to Niranjani thought and practice as was the case for these other sects. “*Vāṇī*” (‘words’ or ‘voice’) is the name used to describe a relatively standardized collection of sayings, songs, hagiographical poems and even a few treatise-like works by Niranjani and some non-Niranjani saints. So far I have not found any copies that date prior to the 1690’s, though it is possible that the tradition began earlier.⁶⁴³ Identifying a beginning for the *Vāṇī* is made more difficult by the fact that no hagiographical texts make reference to it, or suggest any precedent for it in history of the Niranjanis. This makes for another contrast with the Sikh and Dadu Panthi examples: whereas these groups used hagiography to mark the inauguration of their scriptures and establish the authority of those scriptures’

⁶⁴¹ Jangopal, *Dādū Janm Līlā*, 13.25.

⁶⁴² Raghavdas, *Bhaktamāl*, vv 382-87.

⁶⁴³ The Rajasthan Oriental Research holds a few copies of the *Vāṇī*: JOD 22452, 12561; JAI 2165; the majority of copies I have seen are in the possession of the Niranjani community, particularly in those families that are custodians of Niranjani *samādhis* and temples. The relative prominence of these families in the Niranjani community and the connection of copies of the *Vāṇī* to the *samādhi* or temple in which they are found (they are part of the inherited wealth of the superintending families) suggests an important role for the *Vāṇī* in the community’s structure. More research is necessary, however, to determine the exact nature of that role.

transmission, no such effort is observed in the case of the Niranjani Sampraday. The first written hagiography of which we have any knowledge (Hariramdas's *Dayāl Jī Kī Pañc Paracāi*, probably not earlier than 1730) not only trails the compilation of the *Vāñī* by at least forty years, but says nothing about Haridas's compositions, let alone their recording.⁶⁴⁴ The second major hagiography, Raghunathdas's *Paracāi* (late eighteenth century), similarly makes no mention of writing or scripture, even though it describes many other aspects of Haridas's life and the early Niranjani community in detail.⁶⁴⁵ The other major source of information on Niranjani poets, the *Bhaktamāl* of Raghavdas of the Dadu Panth, makes no mention of writing either in regard to Niranjani saints.⁶⁴⁶

Nevertheless, the Niranjani *Vāñī* resembles the Sikh and Dadu Panthi scriptures in aspects of its organization, material form and ritual use, suggesting that it did have an elevated status and role as a holy book in the Niranjani community starting in the late seventeenth century.⁶⁴⁷ Like the *Pañcavāñī*, the *Vāñī* is a scriptural tradition defined by a core authorial canon, but slight differences in the selection of texts and their order can be found among manuscript copies. The core of the *Vāñī* is made up of Kabir, Gorakhnath, Haridas, Dadu, Sevadas Niranjani, Tursidas Niranjani, and Namdev—these poets will be found in every copy, and the selection of texts included for each is largely (though not one hundred percent) the same. Yet every copy of the *Vāñī* I have viewed thus far also contains material from other Niranjani and non-Niranjani poets, the mix of which varies from copy

⁶⁴⁴ Hariramdas, *Dayāl Jī Kī Pañc Paracāi*, RORI JOD 24778.

⁶⁴⁵ Raghunathdas, *Paracāi*, in Mangaldas, *Śrī Mahārāj Haridāsji Kī Vāñī*, 217-242.

⁶⁴⁶ Raghavdas, *Bhaktamāl*, vv 429-44.

⁶⁴⁷ The *Vāñī* has ceased to be used in congregational worship, but has remained an object of worship during the performance of *āratī* (see below). Members of the community now use printed editions of hymns during *samāj-gāyan*.

to copy. Most often they include works by the Niranjani poets Dhyandas, Santdas, Khemdas, Manohardas, Bhagvandas, Jagjivandas and Pipadas, but can also include Hindi poetry attributed to Ramanand and Bhartrihari, works by Sundardas of the Dadu Panth, and hagiographies by Anantadas, not to mention poems by lesser-known saints of Rajasthan whose sectarian affiliation (if any) is unknown. In this respect, the *Vāṇīs* resemble the *Sarvāṅgīs* in the breadth of saints and traditions that they incorporate; although the *Sarvāṅgīs* include far more poets in terms of sheer numbers, between the *Sarvāṅgīs* and the *Vāṇī* we find a similar representation of traditions, and they share many of the same poets—not just the usual suspects like Kabir, Ravidas, Namdev and the like, but also Gorakhnath, Ramanand, Tursidas, Pipadas and Bhartrihari.⁶⁴⁸ Copies of the *Vāṇī* also bear a striking resemblance to another type of manuscript found in the Dadu Panth, a bound codex produced in the Dadu Panth at least as early as the 1630's, and which Horstmann describes as “either of the whole or parts of the *Dādūvāṇī* or the whole or parts of the *pañcvāṇī* plus additional material from the regionally and religiously related traditions.”⁶⁴⁹ We find several more poets and texts shared between the *Vāṇī* and these codexes, including Haridas, Khemdas, the hagiographies of Anantadas and the parable of *Mohamard Rājā Kī Kathā*. The Niranjani *Vāṇī* also shares with these manuscripts (and with the manuscripts of the *Sarvāṅgīs*) a somewhat unique form: all are bound vertically as codexes, and are approximately 25 cm in height by 15 cm in width, with between five and six hundred folios

⁶⁴⁸ In the case of Bhartrihari, this includes poems in Brajbhasha that bear the *chāp* ‘Bharatharaharī’ or ‘Rājā Bharatharaharī’, but for which the historical author is unknown. The *Sarvāṅgī* of Gopaldas also includes poems by Swamidās, a relatively less important saint poet of the Niranjani Sampraday (v 37.12, in Callewaert, *Sarvāṅgī of Gopāldās*, 243). Its inclusion is curious, since the only other Niranjani poet included by Gopaldas in his collection is Tursidas, who was quite well known in the region and whose poetry was heavily circulated in the Dadu Panth.

⁶⁴⁹ Horstmann, “Dādūpanthī Anthologies,” 169.

(Fig. 5.1 and 5.2). So although there is not a one-to-one correspondence between the contents of the *Vāṇī* and these early Dadu Panthi manuscripts, plenty of their content, as well as their format and appearance, are shared.

Yet whereas these ‘enlarged’ *Dādūvāṇī* and *Pañcavāṇī* manuscripts do not appear to have been understood to be unified scriptural texts and their manuscripts were not worshipped in the manner of, say, the *Dādūvāṇī*, the Niranjani *Vāṇī* was treated as a unified ‘*granth*’ and as a sacred object. Copies of the *Vāṇī* are to be found in almost every Niranjani *samādhi* (a monument built to commemorate a Niranjani saint who had died) and temple, installed as objects of veneration along with the personal effects of the saint or—in the case of the temples—along with Shiva lingams.⁶⁵⁰ They are an important part of the ‘wealth’ connected to the *samādhi* or temple and are worshipped during the performance of *ārātī* (evening prayer), much in the manner that an image of the deity is worshipped in Vaishnava traditions, with the *pujārī* (ritual specialist) waving a lamp in front of the book and other articles to purify them, and lighting incense. Their colophons reveal that they were most often copied by Niranjani initiates for their gurus, and as we will see below, they were almost certainly used in congregational worship. In this regard, the *Vāṇī* follows the model of the *Ādi Granth*, which is both the Word of the Guru when recited from, but also the person of the Guru when worshipped.

⁶⁵⁰ The term ‘temple’ here requires clarification: there are several temple-like structures at Ghadha Dham where communal singing and sermons took place; their courtyards sometime contain Shiva *lingams*, recalling the Niranjanis’ links to the Shaivite Nath Sampraday. It is difficult to date the installation of these *lingams*; however, the lack of architectural features or orientation around these images, and their rather marginal placement within the temples (at the edges of a space, and not on any lines of symmetry or axis) suggest that they were not originally part of the structures.

The Niranjani *Vāṇī* then compels us to consider the importance of the material book, or rather manuscript, in constituting a text or assemblage of texts as a scripture. Each copy of the *Vāṇī* had at its core a fixed canon of saints and their poetry—Kabir, Gorakhnath, Haridas, Dadu, Sevasdas, Tursidas, and Namdev. In addition to this core, the manuscript could hold any number of texts and authors from a broad but nevertheless defined canon that included Niranjani and Dadu Panthi poets, and a few select poets from other traditions, like Ramanand and Anantadas of the Ramanandi Sampraday.⁶⁵¹ Their inclusion in the manuscript appears to have ‘made’ these texts into scripture as well, insofar as it made them part of a venerated textual artifact that was ‘more sacred’ than other inscribed objects (recall that poetry by some of these saints was also found in contemporary *guṭakās* that were definitely not sacred objects in this way). This case of ‘scripture by association’ invites comparison with the apocrypha or deuterocanon in post-Reformation Christianity, a class of texts that are distinguished from the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments but which were nevertheless included in recensions of the Bible because of the edifying nature of their content.⁶⁵²

The *Vāṇī* does not appear to have ever become as central to Niranjani identity as the *Ādi Granth* became for the Sikhs, nor did the Niranjani ever produced a definitive recension like the Dadu Panth did for the *Dādūvāṇī*. Nevertheless, the *Vāṇī* did come to occupy an important place in the ritual life of the Niranjani, particularly in the Niranjani

⁶⁵¹ For the sectarian lineage between Ramanand and Anantadas (as well as an introduction to Anantadas’s hagiographical texts), see David Lorenzen, *Kabir Legends and Ananta-Das’s Kabir Parachai* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991) 9-10. See also: Anantadas, *The Hagiographies of Anantadās: The Bhakti Poets of North India*, edited by Winand Callewaert (Richmond: Curzon, 2000).

⁶⁵² A discussion of the status of the apocrypha in the Christian Bible can be found in Xeravits, Geza, and Jozsef Zsengeller (eds), *Deuterocanonical Additions of the Old Testament Books: Selected Studies* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010).

settlement at Gadha Dham near Didwana, where it was probably used in *pravacan*, *samāj-gāyan*, and where copies of it were worshipped in *samādhis*. In this small religious polity on a hill, copies of the *Vāṇī* became tokens of religious authority among the leaders of the community and a proxy for the Gurus whose words were contained within it. This polity and the *Vāṇī*'s role in consolidating it are discussed below in the context of the divine court.

Anthologization and *granthikaraṇ* in the making of scriptures

As we saw in the case of the notebook-like *guṭakās* in Chapter Three, simply inscribing a hymn onto paper did not establish that song to be *kāvya*, nor did it establish it to be scripture. Something else was required in order to transform *bhakti gīt* (devotional song) into a text proper, into a *granth* (a literary or intellectual work) that could aspire to the status of, and perform the ideological and institutional work of, a text like the *śāstras*, the *purāṇas*, or the Qur'an. Those who compiled the songs and sayings of the saints in the Sikh, Dadu Panth, and Niranjani communities fashioned their collections as scripture by utilizing certain techniques of organization and textual framing that emphasized the theological and doctrinal unity of their contents, and which presented the anthology itself as a unified whole that was more than the sum of its parts. We do not have a convenient term in English with which to refer to this process, but the Sanskrit verb *granth-* comes close, as it means “to tie or string together... to string words together, compose,” the product of which is a *granth*, a “composition, treatise, literary production, book in prose or verse.”⁶⁵³ In this case, anthologizers like Guru Arjan, Bhai Gurdas, Mohandas, Gopaldas, Rajjab, and the

⁶⁵³ Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 370-71.

anonymous compilers of the Niranjani *Vāṇī* strung together the verses of various saints to produce their own *granth*s—the nature of this endeavor and its product is reflected in the names given to the anthologies thus produced: *Ādi Granth* (Original *granth*), *Guru Granth* (The *granth* of the Guru), *Sarvāṅgī* (comprehensive [collection]), etc. They accomplished this through the presentation of an overall frame for the text, through musical or thematic organization of the material, and through certain metadiscursive devices (rubrics in the most literal sense, i.e. explanatory notes, usually in red ink) that tell the reader how to approach and perform the texts contained within the anthology in the context of congregational worship.

Frameworks and opening and closing formulae

Most of the compilers discussed above frame their anthology as a unified whole, a *granth*, either through introductory verses, concluding verses, or both. These often include invocations (*vandan*), benedictions (*maṅgalācāraṇ*), and a statement of the benefits to be gained by listening to or reciting from the contents of the anthology (*phalaśruti*). The *Ādi Granth* begins with the *mūl mantra* (root mantra), attributed to Guru Nanak, that functions as an article of faith similar to the *kalimah tayyibah* (*lā ilāha illā-llāh, muḥammadun rasūlu-llāh*, there is no god but Allah, Mohammad is the messenger of Allah) in Islam: *ika omkāra sati nāmu kartā purakhu nirbha-u niravairu akāla mūrati ajūnī saimaṁ gura prasādi*, “One Omkār, the Name is Truth, the Creator personified, without fear, without hatred, the image of the Undying, beyond birth, self-existent, by the grace of the Guru.”⁶⁵⁴ Each individual

⁶⁵⁴ On the origins and development of the *Mūl Mantra*, see Singh, *Guru Granth Sahib*, 84-90.

section of the *Ādi Granth* similarly begins with the mantra *ika omkāra satgura prasādi*, “One Omkār, by the grace of the Guru.” Gurinder Singh Mann has compared the usage of this second, shorter mantra in the *Ādi Granth* to the Bismillah (*Bismillah-arrahmān-arrahīm*, “In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate”) that begins each *sūrah* (chapter) of the Qur’an.⁶⁵⁵ He also makes the interesting suggestion that the appearance of this formula at the beginning of each section gestures back to the act of writing: by invoking the Guru’s grace, “a claim is made that the inscription begins by his grace, as mediated to the scribe through the human guru. At every juncture of his labor, thus, the scribe remembers God and seeks his help through the guru.”⁶⁵⁶

The compilers of the *Ādi Granth* also frame the work as a whole by locating the *Japjī* (*Chant*) and *So Dar Rahiras* (*Supplicatory Prayer at the Door*) at the beginning of the *Granth* and the *Rāg-mālā* (*Garland of Rāgas*) at the end, with the hymns and sayings of the Gurus and devotees (the largest part of the *Granth*) in the middle. The *Japjī* and *So Dar Rahiras* are prayers to be recited daily, the former in the morning and the latter in the evening.⁶⁵⁷ Locating them at the beginning of the *Ādi Granth* clearly identified it as a liturgical text. The *Rāg-mālā*, on the other hand, is a somewhat technical text that succinctly outlines the derivations of the various *rāgas* and *rāginīs* (musical modes and their subdivisions). Scholars have yet to ascertain the exact nature of the relationship between this text, the actual performance practices of the early Sikh community, and the selection

⁶⁵⁵ Mann, *Making of Sikh Scripture*, 101.

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁷ For the importance and performance of these hymns in the early Sikh community, see Singh, *Guru Granth Sahib*, 98.

and categorization of *rāgas* in the body of the *Ādi Granth*.⁶⁵⁸ However, it is clear that the inclusion of the *Rāg-mālā* reflects the centrality of communal singing in Sikh ritual life at the time of the *Ādi Granth*'s compilation (including the creation of the specific office of ritual singer, the *rāgī*), and its placement at the end of the *Granth* (in the manner of an appendix?) suggests its ancillary character vis-à-vis the earlier two portions of the work. The *Japjī* and *Rāg-mālā* thus appear like book-ends or covers between which the central part of the *Ādi Granth*, the hymns of the Gurus, are kept.⁶⁵⁹

As for the Dadu Panth, each of the four scriptural anthologies frames its material a bit differently, but three out of the four—the *Dādūvāṇī* and the two *Sarvāṅgīs*—show marked similarities, especially in their opening formulae. The guru (both human and Divine) is a central figure in the Dadu Panth, and all Dadu Panthi scriptural anthologies begin with the *guru kau aṅg* or 'chapter on the guru,' which contains *sākhīs* extolling the guru and stressing his importance to the disciple's search for Truth. In fact, the anthologies as a whole are understood to be the words or voice (*vāṇī*) of the Guru (in the case of the *Dādūvāṇī*) or gurus (in the case of the *Pañcavāṇī* and *Sarvāṅgīs*). It therefore makes sense that we find a *maṅgalācāraṅ* invoking God and the Guru together at the beginning of the

⁶⁵⁸ See Surinder Singh Kohli, *A Critical Study of Ādi Granth, Being a Comprehensive and Scientific Study of Guru Granth Sahib, the Scripture of the Sikhs* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1976). Singh, *Guru Granth Sahib*, 125-50. Winand Callewaert and Mukund Lath suggest that the *rāg-mālā* portion of the of *Ādi Granth* "has no relevance in the *Granth*, except as a kind of tribute to the importance of music for it." Callewaert and Lath, *Hindī Padāvalī of Nāmdev*, 97. While the *rāg-mālā* is no doubt a tribute to the importance of music in the tradition, it seems unlikely that Guru Arjan would have included such a technical text in the compilation of the Kartarpur *pothī* without a more specific and sophisticated ideological and aesthetic program. This topic continues to await sustained inquiry.

⁶⁵⁹ Separating the central body of hymns and the *Rāg-mālā* is the 'seal' (*mundāvanī*) of Guru Arjan, a hymn generally understood to 'close' the main section of the *Granth* by declaring *thāla vica tinna vastū paṭo sata santokha vīcāro*, "Upon this plate, three things have been placed—truth, contentment and contemplation," with the 'plate' taken to mean the *granth* (*Ādi Granth*, 31.M5). The *mundāvanī* indeed appears at the end of the section of hymns in the Kartarpur *pothī*, but other early manuscripts do not consistently place it there. See Singh, *Guru Granth Sahib*, 53-80.

Dādūvāṇī and both *Sarvāṅgīs*. The *Dādūvāṇī* opens with the following two verses, composed in a hybrid or pseudo-Sanskrit:

sākhī

dādū namo namo niraṃjanam namaskāra gurudevataḥ
vandanam sarva sādhanā praṇāmanam paraṃgataḥ (1)
parabrahma parāparam so mama deva niraṃjanam
nirākāram nirmalam tasya dādū vandanam (2)⁶⁶⁰

sākhī

I bow to Dadu, I bow to Niranjana
I salute the Divine Guru.
I praise all of the holy ones (*sādhanā*)
[And] pay obeisance to those who have crossed over (*pāraṃgataḥ*) (1)
Highest Brahma-
He is my Lord, Niranjana.
Without form, totally pure,
I praise Him and Dadu. (2)

There is some ambiguity in the last line, *tasya dādū vandanam*: it could mean both “I praise Him and Dadu,” and “Dadu praises Him,” a multivalence conveniently allowed for by the peculiar mix of Sanskrit and Brajhasha. Such language mixing in itself, however, was not peculiar to the Dadu Panth, nor even to ‘subaltern’ devotional communities; we find similar examples of mixed Sanskrit-vernacular language in courtly poetry as well, for example in the opening *virudāvalī* (string of titles) of the *Mānacārit*, a eulogistic poem written by Amrit Rai for the Kacchwaha king Man Singh in 1585.⁶⁶¹ Thus if the compilers of the *Dādūvāṇī*

⁶⁶⁰ Dayal, Dadu, *Śrī Dādūvāṇī*, edited by Ramprasaddas Swami (Jaipur: Shri Dadu Dayalu Mahasabha, 2007). After comparison with the same verses in the *Sarvāṅgī* of Gopaldas (see below), it appears that the modern editor may have hypercorrected parts of the text in order to render them more like Sanskrit, for example changing *anuswaras* at the end of a line to ‘m’ and changing final ‘ha’ to ‘ḥ.’ Consultation of the early manuscripts of the *Dādūvāṇī* will be necessary for determining whether this reading, or the reading in Gopaldas, is correct.

⁶⁶¹ *Mānacāritāvalī: Amber Ke Suprasiddh Rājā Mānasingh Ke Carit Se Sambandhit Pāñc Rājasthānī Racanāṃ Kā Saṅkalana* (Jaipur: Maharaja Savai Manasingh II Museum, 1990) 2. I thank Professor Allison Busch for sharing this verse at the Praise Poetry Workshop, Columbia University, February 22nd, 2013. Examples of

were attempting to add to the prestige of the volume by using this Sanskrit-like language in its opening verses, then they were tapping into an aesthetic that was not only religious but political as well.

Gopaldas begins his *Sarvāṅgī* with the same two verses (albeit with slight variations, see Fn. 70) and adds two more in a similar style of faux-Sanskrit:

sākhī

dādū namo namo niraṃjanaṃ namasakara guradevataha
baṃdanaṃ sarba sādḥavā praṇāmmaṃ pāraṃgataha (1)
parabrahma parāparaṃ so maṃma deva niraṃjanaṃ
nirākāra nirmalaṃ tasya dādū baṃdanaṃ (2)
niravairī nirvikārī paramodhate paramārathaḥ
tāsa piṃḍa bhava mukatā tā saṃgati ho pārathaḥ (3)
tatavetā tapośreṣṭha nibhramīm niralobhitā
subhāṣyataṃ sāstramārthaka kartavyaṃ gura pārthaḥ (4)⁶⁶²

sākhī

I bow to Dadu, I bow to Niranjan
I salute the Divine Guru.
I praise all of the holy ones (*sādḥavā*)
[And] pay obeisance to those have crossed over (*pāraṃgataḥ*). (1)
Highest Brahma-
He is my Lord, Niranjan.
Without form, totally pure,
I praise Him and Dadu. (2)
Without hatred, changeless,
The highest knowledge which gives delight,
From which liberation is achieved from the body,
[My] entreaty is with him. (3)
Philosopher (*tattvavetta*), greatest of ascetics,
Free of confusion, without desire,
The well-spoken pursuer/knower of the *sāstras*,
The Guru is to be entreated. (4)

similar language can be found elsewhere in the *Sarvāṅgī* of Gopaldas and in the rubrics of Niranjani *Vāṅīs*, as described below.

⁶⁶² Gopaldas, *Sarvāṅgī*, vv 1-4.

The content of this *maṅgalācāraṇ* fits perfectly with the Dadu Panth's guru-centered ideology and aesthetic, but the language is definitely not that of the poetic content of the *Sarvāṅgī*, which signals to us that this is part of the framework in which the 'main text' is situated. Entire poems in this language appear in several sections of the anthology, but always at the end of a section (again marking an end or transition).⁶⁶³ Gopaldas also provides a prose colophon for his compilation that states the name of the work and includes a *phalaśruti*:

iti śrī sarbaṅgī pothī nāṁma śrī cyaṁtāmaṇi | saraha karata joḍa gopāladāsajī
saṁtadāsajī kau siṣya | śrī svāṁmīm dādūdayālaḥjī kau potā siṣya | kasabā
subhasthāne sām̐bhari | mirjājulakarayājī rāje | samatra 1684 | solā mair̐
caurāsya barṣe phāguṇa sudi | pūṇavāsī kai dina saṁpūrṇa bhavet | gopāla
saiṁtīsa barasa ke jaba bhae ... yahu gura gobinda data dīnhā yā pustaka kūr̐
bāṁcamtā | hoi ajāṁna sujāṁna bhārma karma dubidhyā miṭau | ulajhyā
sulajhai prāṁna saba sadhaur̐ kā gyāṁna mata | kīyā eka ṭhā āṁṇi koī cetani
saṁmajhai guramukhī | sati pūrikhāṁ kī bāṁṇi |

Thus [is written] the great jewel of thought, the *pothī* called the *Sarvāṅgī*. I join my [hands] and [bow] my head, Gopaldas, disciple of Santadas and grand-disciple of Śrī Swami Dadu Dayal. In the auspicious location that is the *qasbah* of Sambhar, in the kingdom of Mirza Zulakaraya,⁶⁶⁴ *samvat* 1684 (1628 CE), in the month of Phalgun, on the day of the full moon it was completed. Gopaldas was thirty-seven years old when it was completed... Guru-Govind gave the gift/order to recite this book (*pustak*). The ignorant will become knowing, error and doubt will be removed. The soul that is entangled (in Maya) will be liberated and know all doctrines and practices (of salvation). I put all of this in one place, whatever I understood from the mouth of the Guru, the words of Truth of those who have come before.⁶⁶⁵

Gopaldas makes it clear that this is just not another *gūṭakā* by giving his anthology a name, providing details of its completion and his own spiritual pedigree, and making a claim for

⁶⁶³ Callewaert estimates that this poetry in hybrid Sanskrit accounts for 1300 lines of poetry or almost 5% of the entire anthology. (Callewaert, *Sarvāṅgī of Gopāldās*, 8) Some of these poems are touched upon below in the discussion of organizational schemes.

⁶⁶⁴ A Mughal *ṣubahdār*?

⁶⁶⁵ In Callewaert, *Sarvāṅgī of Gopāldās*, 520.

the soteriological efficacy of the contents. At the same time, the oral source of the ‘*pothī*’ is invoked when Gopaldas writes that the contents are whatever he has understood “from the mouth of the Guru.”

In his own *Sarvāṅgī*, Rajjab (who were are told is one of the three compilers of the *Dādūvāṇī*, along with Mohandas Daftari and the *kayasth* Jagannath) is more succinct in his introductory and concluding material, but nevertheless frames his anthology in a similar way. He opens the *Sarvāṅgī* with an ‘*astuti*’ (Sanskrit *stuti*, a eulogy or praise poem) for the Guru:

sākhī
gura akhira dhara sādha kabi sabani karūm astūti
rajaba kī caka cūka pari khimā karau hvai sūti

The imperishable Guru, the Upholder (Vishnu), the holy ones and poets,
I sing the praises of them all.
May they be merciful and understanding (*sūti*)
With my many sins (*cūk*).

Rajjab’s inclusion of poets (*kabi*) among those whom he salutes at the beginning of his work anticipates the emphasis on poets and proper poetic technique in the works of Sundardas, Rajjab’s younger *gurubhāī* (co-disciple) and close friend.⁶⁶⁶ Rajjab closes his anthology (which includes many of his own *sākhīs* and *pad*s in addition to those of other saints) with an ‘*āratī*’ (liturgical hymn) praising God and the Guru. Its placement recalls the arrangement of the *Ādi Granth*, in which the daily prayers are placed before the main content; although the *Ādi Granth* includes these prayers at the beginning and the *Sarvāṅgī* at

⁶⁶⁶ On the friendship of Rajjab and Sundardas, see Narayandas, “Bhūmikā” (introduction) in *Sundar Granthāvalī*, edited by Swami Narayandas (Jaipur, 1936) 2, 21-24. The two are said to have been sent to Banaras together to study.

the end, both anthologies make a distinction between prayers for recitation and the other material, and either ‘open’ or ‘close’ the work with such prayers.

Neither the *Pañcavāṇī* of the Dadu Panth nor the *Vāṇī* of the Niranjani Sampraday has an opening or closing formula for the entire work. However, as both anthologies are organized into sections by poet, they use *maṅgalācāraṇ*, mantras, and other introductory and closing devices to mark the beginning and end of each poet’s section (or, in the case of a poet for whom only one work is given, the beginning and end of the work). These devices may include praise for the poet, a short description of the work, or even the inscription of a sacred sound like *ra-ra-ra-ra-ra-ra-ra-ra-ra-ra-ra-ra-ra-ra-ra-ra...* (Fig. 5.3). In at least a few manuscripts of the *Pañcavāṇī* and *Vāṇī*, the inscription of *raṁ-raṁ-raṁ-raṁ-raṁ-raṁ-raṁ-raṁ-raṁ-raṁ-* before the very first text in the manuscript, or after the colophon, perhaps serving the purpose of an opening or closing ‘seal.’⁶⁶⁷

Organization of material

To a large extent, the transformation of a large and sometimes quite varied body of poetic material into a scriptural text was accomplished through techniques of painstaking organization. Even if, as Callewaert suggests, it was humanly possible for a single compiler to reproduce from memory all of the content we find in such anthologies, the use of organizational rubrics that are also found in *guṭakās* and *pothīs* (like *rāga* and *aṅg*) suggest that compilers were working from pre-existing written material, or in cooperation with others who used such manuscripts. Still, although these rubrics may have been inherited

⁶⁶⁷ MS 2165, Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute, Jaipur. This is also found at the end of the manuscript from which Callewaert has made his edited edition of the *Sarvāṅgī* of Gopaldas, 520.

from earlier scribes and manuscripts, these compilers used them innovatively to produce anthologies that read as if they came from a single theological and aesthetic tradition.

The organization of the *Ādi Granth* reflected (and no doubt helped to consolidate) the ideological and social structure of the Sikh community. The placement of the *mul mantar* and daily prayers at the beginning of the *granth* established it as a liturgical text, and appears to have given primacy to these prayers and mantra as essential articles of faith. The *Rāg-mālā*, as stated earlier, provided a closing or appendix for the *Ādi Granth*, though its exact relationship with the rest of the text is still not fully understood. The bulk of the *Ādi Granth*, however, is made of hymns and shorter poems (*śabad*, *salok* = *dohā*) by the Sikh Gurus and non-Sikh *bhagats* (devotees) including Kabir, Ravidas, Shaikh Farid, Namdev, and Surdas. Their hierarchical arrangement in the canon is clearly articulated in the organization of the hymns.

The hymns are organized into thirty-one sections by *rāga*, and in each of these sections the hymns of the Sikh Gurus come first, with those of Guru Nanak appearing at the very beginning. The assignment and ordering of the *rāgas* occurred over years, with substantial revisions being made between the Guru Harsahai, Goindval, and Kartarpur *pothīs*. The exact logic behind the final ordering that dates from the time of the Kartarpur *pothī* (1604) has not yet been deciphered, but as Gurinder Singh Mann has pointed out, the arrangement of *rāgas* in the *pothīs* that preceded it involved a complex balancing of considerations of *rāga/rāginī* gender, the season of the year, and the time of day when it was

most appropriate to perform a given *rāga*.⁶⁶⁸ This suggests that similar considerations were at work in the organization of the Kartarpur *pothī*, the first canonical recension of the *Ādi Granth*. Within each *rāga* section, the hymns of the Sikh Gurus are carefully organized by meter and genre (with shorter compositions toward the beginning, and longer ones toward the end), while the compositions of the non-Sikh *bhagats* are put together at the end of the *rāga* section without any distinction of meter or genre, in a section simply titled *bāṇī bhagatan kī*, ‘voice of the devotees.’⁶⁶⁹ The use of a special coding system for the compositions of the Gurus in which each is designated by the term *mahal* (Arabic, ‘palace’) and a number (Guru Nanak is *Mahal 1*, Guru Angad is *Mahal 2*, and so on) further distinguishes the *Ādi Granth* as a uniquely Sikh scripture.

The structure and organization of the *Ādi Granth* reflects its use as a living text in Sikh devotional life in the early seventeenth century: the *vars* of Bhai Gurdas, as well as internal evidence in the Sikh Guru’s hymns, suggest that communal singing was the primary, though not exclusive, form of congregational ritual.⁶⁷⁰ Such singing also took place in the ‘court’ of the Sikh Guru, and so the early manuscripts of the *Ādi Granth* were probably used in singing, just as printed copies of the *Ādi Granth* are used today in singing at *gurdwaras* (lit. ‘door of the guru,’ a Sikh temple). The inclusion of the *Japī* and *So Dar Rahrās* also make sense given the *Ādi Granth*’s use as a liturgical text. Yet this structure was meant to do more than simply facilitate oral performance—it also ‘made’ the poems of

⁶⁶⁸ Mann, *Making of Sikh Scripture*, 87-94. *Rāgas* are treated as masculine while *rāginīs* (sub-divisions of a *rāga*) are treated as female. Mann points out that in the Goindval *pothīs*, female *rāginīs* consistently come before, and in equal proportion to, male *rāgas*.

⁶⁶⁹ This format and subheading are found as early as the Kartarpur *pothī*. Mann, *Making of Sikh Scripture*, 94-95.

⁶⁷⁰ Guradas, Bhai. *Varnan Bhāi Guradās*. In *Bhai Gurdas: The Great Sikh Theologian: His Life and Work*. Edited by Gurnek Singh. Patiala: Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, 2007.

the Gurus and devotees into a single body of revelation, embodied in the physical book of the *Ādi Granth*.

The organizational schemes found in the scriptures of the Dadu Panth and Niranjani Sampraday similarly show an orientation toward oral performance combined with a totalizing vision of canon. In the case of the *Dādūvāṇī*, the overall organization is simple: after the initial invocation to God and the guru, Dadu's *sākhīs* are presented, and then his *pads*, neatly dividing his poetry into that which could be recited and that which could be sung (or recited). There is another level of organization, however. The *sākhīs* are divided into *aṅgs* or sections characterized by theme, e.g. *guru kau aṅg* (section on the guru), *viraha kau aṅg* (section on love in separation), *niṣkāṁī pativrata kau aṅg* (section on the desireless, loyal wife), etc. This appears to have been a major innovation in the vernacular manuscript culture of North India. On the one hand, the theme-based organization of *sākhī* made the work of *pravacan* (sermonizing) easier by providing the speaker with numerous distiches on a variety of themes, all easily located.⁶⁷¹ On the other, they constructed an apparent theological and doctrinal unity out of a large and diverse body of individual verses. In the case of the *sākhīs* of Dadu (or those of Kabir, Ravidas, Haridas, or any *nirguṇ* saint-poet of this period) there are many *sākhīs* that could be grouped under multiple themes: *maya kau aṅg*, 73 for example, could easily have been grouped under the themes of *kāl* (death, time), *cetāvanī* (warning), or even *kāmī nar* (lascivious man), but we find it grouped in the *māyā kau aṅg* (section on *māyā*). This is not to suggest that the thematic ordering of *sākhīs* was arbitrary, but rather the opposite: that such ordering took tremendous time and

⁶⁷¹ Horstmann, "Dādūpanthī Anthologies," 175-76.

thought, and was a concerted effort to trace the theological and doctrinal contours that, to the compilers and their devotional community, appeared to lie just under the surface of a vast and variegated body of poetry.⁶⁷² Such an organizational impetus and approach were not universal—in the ideologically and socially similar Kabir Panth, for example, no such need was felt when compiling the *sākhīs* of Kabir into the sect’s primary scripture, the *Bījak*, in the mid to late seventeenth century.⁶⁷³ There was thus something more going on in the scriptural thinking of the Dadu Panth.

This approach can also be found in the Dadu Panth’s *Pañcavāṇī* and the Niranjani Sampraday’s *Vāṇī*. In both cases, the *granth* as a whole is organized according to poet: in the *Pañcavāṇī*, the poems of Dadu are followed by those of Namdev, Kabir, Ravidas and Hardas; in the *Vāṇī*, it is usually the works of Sevadas Niranjani that come first, followed by the poetry of Haridas, Kabir, Gorakhnath, Tursidas, Dadu and Namdev, then others.⁶⁷⁴ For each poet, the *sākhīs* are given first, then the *pads*, and then—if they exist—the poet’s *candrāyaṇ*, *ramainī*, and *kuṇḍaliyā*. The *sākhīs* are arranged thematically by *aṅg*, and here an interesting uniformity appears: the same set of *aṅgs* is used in organizing the *sākhīs* of each poet, thus in every poet’s repertoire you will find *guru kau aṅg*, *māyā kau aṅg*, *cetāvaṇī kau aṅg*, etc. This speaks to the common thematic concerns of the poets, but also reveals an attempt by compilers to impose a uniform structure onto the material. Again the *aṅg*-based organization of the *sākhīs* and the *rāga*-based organization of the *pads* would have facilitated the use of the texts in *pravacan* and *samāj-gāyan* (communal singing)

⁶⁷² See Karine Schomer, “The *Dohā* and Sant Teaching,” in Schomer and McLeod (eds.) *The Sants*, 73-85.

⁶⁷³ Linda Hess, “Three Kabir Collections,” in Schomer and McLeod (eds.), *The Sants*, 112-13.

⁶⁷⁴ There are some exceptions to this order; e.g. MS 2165 in the Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute, Jaipur, which begins with the poetry of Santdas Niranjani instead of Sevadas.

respectively, two activities which we know to be central to communal ritual in the Dadu Panth and Niranjani Sampraday during the early seventeenth century.⁶⁷⁵

The compilers of the *Sarvāṅgīs* took thematic organization even further by organizing *all* of their material by *aṅg*. Rajjab divides his collection into one hundred and forty-four *aṅgs*; within each *aṅg* we find *pads*, *sākhīs*, and occasionally *kavitts* by various poets in what appears to be no particular order.⁶⁷⁶ Gopaldas organizes his material into one hundred and twenty-six *aṅgs* in which we find *pads*, *sākhīs*, *arils*, *savaiyās*, *kavitts* and occasionally entire works (like the *Nām-Mālā Granth* attributed to Guru Nanak, and an anonymously authored *saṁvād* or dialogue between Krishna and Arjun composed in hybrid Sanskrit) by different poets, again in no consistent order. As Callewaert points out, there is a pattern inasmuch as Gopaldas includes in each *aṅg* a selection of *pads* interspersed with *sākhīs*, but even this pattern is broken in several places, making it seem unlikely that any rubric other than theme was at work in his editorial process.⁶⁷⁷ Rajjab and Gopaldas thus structure their collections in such a way that finding both musical and non-musical poetry on a particular topic is extremely easy. However, finding *pads* in a specific *rāga* is exceedingly difficult, making the utility of the anthology for singers negligible; not only are the *pads* of any given *rāga* spread out across multiple *aṅgs*, but even within an individual *aṅg*, *pads* with the same *rāga* designation are not grouped together. Furthermore, the lack of hierarchical distinction between poets—within each *aṅg*, the poetry of Dadu and his disciples appears after that of other poets as much as it does before them—distinguishes these anthologies from the *Ādi*

⁶⁷⁵ Jangopal, *Dādū Janm Līlā*, v 15.6. Rangunathdas, *Paracāī*, v 14.21. See discussion of these activities in Chapter Three. See also Horstmann, “Dādūpanthī Anthologies,” 173-75.

⁶⁷⁶ For example, in the *aṅg* dedicated to *Dayā Nirbhairatā*, we find *pads*, then *sākhīs*, then *pads*, then *kavitts*, etc.

⁶⁷⁷ Callewaert, *Sarvāṅgi of Gopāldās*, 8.

Granth, *Pañcavāṇī* and *Vāṇī*, all of which give careful attention to putting the works of their own poets first.

As a whole, however, the *Sarvāṅgīs*, along with the *Pañcavāṇī*, *Dādūvāṇī*, *Vāṇī*, and *Ādi Granth* represent a certain class of text that presents its material as a unified body of revelation. Their opening and closing sections make it clear that the anthology is ultimately one text, though its words came from many voices. The meticulous application of organizational schemes based on theme, *rāga*, meter, and the relative status of the various poets in the canon, accentuated and established the theological, doctrinal, and aesthetic unity of the tradition. Therefore canonization was not just about distinguishing one's own canon from those of other sects, but also about arranging that canon internally so that it formed, as much as possible, an organic whole. Of equal importance was the practical utility of such anthologies in the ritual life of the sect, and so the organizational criteria of *aṅg* in the case of *sākhīs* and *rāga* in the case of *pads* reflects the two primary forms of congregational activity, teaching and communal singing.

Holy books: scripture in manuscript

What seals these anthologies' identity as scripture is their physical form—without studying the manuscripts in which we find the *Ādi Granth*, *Dādūvāṇī*, *Pañcavāṇī*, *Sarvāṅgīs* and *Vāṇī*, their character as symbolic and ritual foci cannot be fully understood. Substantial time and thought (not to mention financial resources) were put into the inscription of these texts, producing large and quite beautiful manuscripts. The utilization of particular scripts, the meticulous attention to ruling and binding, the inclusion of navigational and explanatory

rubrics, and the embellishment of a manuscript with figures and illustrations not only contributed to the practical utility of the manuscript in the context of oral performance but also transformed it into an object of veneration. These anthologies were meant to *look* like books (*kitāb*), bound together physically by scribes just like their contents had been bound together theologically and doctrinally by the compilers.

In early modern North India, the use of a particular script was not ‘natural’ or inevitable; as Francesca Orsini has argued, the uncritical assumption that certain scripts have a relationship with certain languages (or with certain literary traditions, often defined in terms of religion and projected backward) obscures the much more complex relationship between text and script, and between text and language that existed in this period.⁶⁷⁸ By paying attention to the scripts that compilers and scribes used to inscribe their scriptural anthologies, we can gain insight into how they understood their own sectarian identity and represented that identity to broader devotional and political publics.

Once again, the most assertive gesture in this regard is made by the Sikh community, which imagined and projected itself as a distinct and independent faith (*dīn*). By the time that the Guru Harsahai *pothī* was copied (possibly in the 1530’s), the Sikh leadership had already begun to develop a distinct script which they evocatively named *Gurmukhī* (lit. ‘from the mouth of the Guru’).⁶⁷⁹ Gurmukhi was adapted from the *laṇḍe* and *takarī* scripts, both of which were used by merchant and scribal communities like the *mahājans*, *kāyasths*, and *khattris*, the community from which Nanak and his family members—many of them

⁶⁷⁸ Francesca Orsini, "How to Do Multilingual Literary History? Lessons from Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century North India." *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 49, no. 2 (2012): 21.

⁶⁷⁹ Mann, *Making of Sikh Scripture*, 39. Pashaura Singh dates the development of the Gurmukhi script to the lifetime of Guru Nanak on the basis of a marginal inscription in the Goindval *pothīs* crediting Guru Angad with developing it under Guru Nanak’s supervision. Singh, *Guru Granth Sahib*, 17.

involved in building the early Sikh community—hailed.⁶⁸⁰ The development of a visually distinct script and rules of orthography, instead of the adoption of Devanagari or similar Nagari-derived script (or, for that matter, the Perso-Arabic script) was a statement of not only religious difference, but also of political autonomy.⁶⁸¹ The Devanagari and Perso-Arabic scripts were not only used for religious texts, but also for the everyday purposes of state administration and the business of the Mughal and Rajput courts. As we will discuss in detail below, the establishment of the *Ādi Granth* as the Sikh’s primary scripture during the tenure of Guru Arjan coincided with the first major assertion of Sikh political autonomy, which located the Guru and the *Ādi Granth* at the center of a courtly ritual culture. Gurmukhi came to be used not only for scriptural purposes, but for the documentation and management of the Sikh proto-state as well. The early copies of the *Ādi Granth* display clean handwriting, and regular orthography.⁶⁸² This may seem natural for a copy of a scriptural text, but such uniformity and care are what *distinguishes* a scriptural text from, say, a *gūṭakā*, or even some *pothīs*. This cleanliness of script is also a distinguishing characteristic of the Dadu Panth and Niranjani Sampraday’s scriptures.

⁶⁸⁰ Singh, *Guru Granth Sahib*, 16-17. See also: Christopher Shackle, *An Introduction to the Sacred Language of the Sikhs* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1983). On *lanḍe* and *takarī*, see Deambi Kaul, *Śāradā and Ṭakarī Alphabets: Origin and Development* (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 2008). Jeffrey Diamond, “A 'vernacular' for a 'new generation'? Historical perspectives about Urdu and Punjabi, and the formation of language policy in colonial Northwest India” Schiffman, Harold (ed.). *Language Policy and Language Conflict in Afghanistan and Its Neighbors: The Changing Politics of Language Choice* (Boston: Brill, 2012) 288.

⁶⁸¹ Mann (*Making of Sikh Scripture*, 5) and Singh (*Guru Granth Sahib*, 17) both interpret the development of Gurumukhi as an attempt to create a unique Sikh script that would parallel the use of the Devanagari script by Hindus for their holy texts and the Perso-Arabic script by Muslims. They do not, however, ascribe to it a political aspect. There are potential problems with ascribing a one-to-one relationship between script and religious community in this period (see Orsini, “How to do Multilingual History”), which is why I suggest here that the development of Gurmukhi be looked at as a political move as well as a religious one.

⁶⁸² Mann, *Making of Sikh Scripture*, 45. Singh, *Guru Granth Sahib*, 236 (Plate 1), 262 (Plate 2).

Both the Dadu Panth and Niranjani Sampraday appear to have inscribed their anthologies in Devanagari from the beginning of their traditions. Again, this was not inevitable: as we noted in Chapter Four, both communities drew substantial membership and financial support from merchant communities like the Maheshwaris. In the Niranjani Sampraday, at least some initiates into the monastic wing of the Niranjani appear to have been familiar with the disciplines of accounting and other forms of merchant literacy. In the Dadu Panth, it was a book-keeper, Mohandas Daftari, who is said to have first transcribed the sayings and songs of Dadu, he was assisted by Jagannath, a *kayasth*, when he redacted Dadu's poetry into the *Dādūvāṇī*.⁶⁸³ Such groups and individuals would have been familiar with *mahājanī* (*laṇḍe*) and *kaithī* scripts in addition to Devanagari.⁶⁸⁴ However, if the Fatehpur manuscript of 1582 and the early seventeenth-century manuscripts of Vaishnava sects in Rajasthan can be taken as representative, then Devanagari was the script used at court for poetic texts and by upwardly-mobile *bhakti* communities for their vernacular and Sanskrit works. In this context, the use of Devanagari by the Dadu Panth and Niranjani Sampraday would have been an attempt to participate in this broader manuscript culture by adopting its norms. As noted in the previous chapter, the Niranjani Sampraday was able to tap into intellectual debates between courtly and religious scholars by copying and distributing the works of its poets in the form of easily-transferable *pothīs* (all of which were copied in Devanagari). The use of Devanagari for scriptural text can therefore be understood as another instance of its participation in a broader manuscript culture that

⁶⁸³ Madhavdas, *Sant Guṇ Sāgar*, quoted in Horstmann, "Dādūpanthī Anthologies," 169.

⁶⁸⁴ On *kaithī* and its use, see George Abraham Grierson, *A Handbook to the Kaithi Character* (Calcutta: Thacker, 1899). On *laṇḍe/mahājanī*, see Fn. 88 above.

was increasingly employing Devanagari for its poetic, scholarly, and religious texts. In existing manuscript copies of the Dadu Panth's *Pañcavānī* and *Sarvāṅgīs*, and the Niranjani Sampraday's *Vāṇī*, the quality of handwriting and lack of scribal errors distinguish these texts clearly from the *guṭakās* and even from the *pothīs* produced by members of these sects. As the photos of a *Sarvāṅgī* manuscript from 1715 (Fig. 5.4) and a *Vāṇī* manuscript from 1716 (Fig. 5.5) demonstrate, such careful copying produced a manuscript that was not only easy to read and navigate, but was also an object of beauty.⁶⁸⁵

In fact, calligraphy could provide an opportunity for beautiful embellishment. This opportunity was greatly exploited by Sikh scribes, who used the canvas of the folio to its full advantage, making large fluid strokes that recall the Persian calligraphy in the Nastaliq hand so valued at Mughal and provincial courts (see Figs. 5.6 and 5.7).⁶⁸⁶ The Devanagari script did not provide the same opportunities for calligraphic embellishment offered by Persian or even Gurmukhi, yet the Niranjani managed to transform it into a thing of beauty through the creative use of different colored inks (Fig. 5.8). The investment of such time and resources makes sense in the context of volumes used in congregational worship, and which were not only 'useful things' but also objects of veneration.

This calligraphy rested upon the foundation created by ruling and margins. Page-ruling, the inscription of margins and the painting of bounding boxes were no small matter in the manuscript culture of early modern North India. In the manuscript ateliers of the Mughals at Agra and Delhi, and of the Kacchwahas in Amber/Jaipur, paper preparation and

⁶⁸⁵ Callewaert, *Sarvāṅgī of the Dādūpanthī Rajab*, 89, 93.

⁶⁸⁶ On the importance of calligraphy at the Mughal court, see Fazl, *Ain-i Akbarī*, 92-98. At regional courts, see Seyller, *Workshop and Patron in Mughal India*.

ruling constituted a separate skill with specific personnel assigned to these tasks.⁶⁸⁷ In the context of the Sikh, Dadu Panthi, and Niranjani communities, page-ruling, margins and boxes were another element that distinguished their ‘public’ *granth*s from the more ‘private’ notebooks that were the *gutākās*. The early copies of the *Ādi Granth* closely resemble Islamicate *kitāb* with their square bounding boxes and wide margins that were sometimes filled with floral embellishments (Figs. 5.7, 5.9). Gurinder Singh Mann has suggested that this is additional evidence that the Qur’an provided the prototype of a holy scripture for the compilers and scribes of the *Ādi Granth*.⁶⁸⁸ While this is quite likely, it seems equally possible that the more general Islamicate manuscript culture of the political elite in sixteenth and seventeenth century Punjab had an equal influence on the aesthetic of the *Ādi Granth*. As Mann and others point out, Guru Nanak and the early Sikh leadership were likely literate in Persian given their participation in state service and trade.⁶⁸⁹ The language of political power in Punjab was Persian and the manuscript culture of the courts there was Islamicate.⁶⁹⁰ This privileging of Persian as the language of political power would continue within the Sikh court itself as late as the reign of Guru Gobind Singh (who himself composed in Persian).⁶⁹¹ In this context, the Sikh appropriation of Islamicate manuscript culture seems to be just that—appropriation of an entire aesthetic of writing and books that

⁶⁸⁷ Seyller, *Workshop and Patron in Mughal India*, 50-54. Bahura, *Literary Heritage of the Rulers of Amber and Jaipur*, 15-20.

⁶⁸⁸ Mann, *Making of Sikh Scripture*, 100.

⁶⁸⁹ Gurinder Singh Mann, *Sikhism* (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2004) 18.

⁶⁹⁰ Muzaffar Alam, “The Pursuit of Persian: Language in Mughal Politics,” *Modern Asian Studies* 32, no. 2 (May 1, 1998): 318.

⁶⁹¹ Louis E. Fenech, *The Darbar of the Sikh Gurus: The Court of God in the World of Men* (New Delhi : Oxford University Press, 2008). —, *The Sikh Zafar-Nāmāh of Guru Gobind Singh : A Discursive Blade in the Heart of the Mughal Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

was culturally and politically privileged, rather than emulation of just one book, albeit the archetype of all other *kitāb*.

The archetype for the holy books of the Dadu Panth and the Niranjani Sampraday, at least in terms of ruling and margins, appears to be the *pothī*. Manuscripts of the *Pañcavāṇī*, *Sarvāṅgīs* and *Vāṇī* usually include one or two margins in red ink on each side, a practice inherited from palm-leaf manuscripts and continued with paper *pothīs* (Figs. 5.1-2). However, some copies of the *Vāṇī* also include vertical margin lines, and even square bounding boxes like Islamicate manuscripts (Figs. 5.3, 5.5, 5.8).

The format and binding of scriptural texts in these three traditions are perhaps the elements that distinguishes them most from other manuscripts of the period. The earliest available manuscripts of the Sikh tradition, the Goindval *pothīs* and Kartarpur *pothī* of the sixteenth century (as well as most of the copies of the *Ādi Granth* that followed them in the seventeenth century) are in ‘long’ or ‘portrait’ format, with their height greater than their width (Fig. 5.10). They are also all bound along their long edge, like Islamicate *kitāb*, and with leather covers that are folded over each other with a flap.⁶⁹² Furthermore, they are quite large in format, resembling in size the Mughal albums used as ‘scrapbooks’ for keeping miniature paintings and specimens of calligraphy.⁶⁹³ The seventeenth and eighteenth-century manuscripts of the *Pañcavāṇī*, *Sarvāṅgīs* and *Vāṇī* are all smaller in format than manuscripts of the *Ādi Granth*, but are even ‘longer’ in orientation: they are

⁶⁹² In the case of the Goindval *pothīs*, however, it seems that they were bound after their inscription, though how long after is not known. Mann, *Making of Sikh Scripture*, 58-59.

⁶⁹³ On Mughal albums, see Stuart Welch, “Introduction.” In *The Emperors’ Album: Images of Mughal India* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1987) 11-30. Seyller, *Workshop and Patron in Mughal India*; Susan Stronge, *Painting for the Mughal Emperor: The Art of the Book 1560-1660* (London: V&A, 2002). Elaine Julia Wright, *Muraqqa’ Imperial Mughal Albums from the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin* (Alexandria: Art Services International, 2008).

most often 25 cm in height by 15 cm in width, making them almost twice as long as they are wide (Figs. 5.1-2). They are also, like the *Ādi Granth*, all bound length-wise, but with covers made of paper and cloth (Fig. 5.11).

What is the significance of this format and binding? It is tempting to speculate that the Qur'an was the model for these holy books, as Mann does in the case of the *Ādi Granth*.⁶⁹⁴ In the case of the *Ādi Granth* with its large folios, flowing calligraphic style, bounding boxes, and floral embellishments, this seems particularly possible. Yet as mentioned above, this was also the format for most Islamicate manuscripts. Moreover, in the case of the holy books of the Dadu Panth and Niranjani Sampraday, this long format was combined with ruling and margins that were clearly adapted from palm-leaf *pothīs*. In fact, where we find reference to these scriptures in the hagiographical and other documentary writings of these communities (including in some of the colophons of the manuscripts themselves), they are always referred to as *pothī* or *pustak*, never as *kitāb*.⁶⁹⁵ The hypothesis that the Qur'an in particular, or the *kitāb* in general, was the model for the holy books of these communities is also complicated by the fact that we find long format manuscripts (although of smaller dimensions, unbound, and usually illustrated) being produced for the Rajput courts of the Rathores and Kacchwahas from the mid-seventeenth century, and beginning in the eighteenth century, we find long-format, vertically-bound manuscripts at the Kacchwaha court at Jaipur, being referred to as *guṭakās*.⁶⁹⁶ At the present moment, it is

⁶⁹⁴ Mann, *Making of Sikh Scripture*, 11-12.

⁶⁹⁵ See, for example, the *Sant Guṇ Sāgar*, vv 25.1-6. The early manuscripts of the *Ādi Granth* are all referred to as *pothī*, although it is not clear when this term was first used for them.

⁶⁹⁶ See for example the *rāg-mālā* manuscripts produced for the court of Marwar in Vicky Ducrot, *Quattro Secoli Di Pittura Rajput: Mewar, Marwar E Dhundhar: Miniature Indiane Nella Collezione Di Isabella E Vicky Ducrot* (Milano: Skira, 2009) 29, 64, 88. See also the manuscripts of the *Rasikapriyā* and *Rasamañjarī* in

perhaps safest to suggest that these scriptural manuscripts resemble more the Islamicate *kitāb* than the Indic *pothī*, though they combine elements of both.

The similarity of the Dadu Panthi and Niranjani manuscripts, on the other hand, cannot be coincidence. Their size and format are nearly identical, as are their ruling, margins, and as we will see next, their rubrics and navigational apparatuses. Horstmann has suggested in the case of the Dadu Panthi manuscripts that their format and binding served the practical purpose of making them ready for travel; she writes that they were like *vademecums* for the *sadhūs* of the Dadu Panth who wandered for much of the year.⁶⁹⁷ This is definitely true for some manuscripts, but many manuscripts of the *Pañcavāṇī* (especially those which hold additional texts as well) and the Niranjani *Vāṇī* are still too large to be comfortably transported; additionally, the histories of some manuscripts suggest that they became associated with a particular temple or *samādhi*, meaning that they didn't travel much at all.⁶⁹⁸

Though seemingly quotidian from our post-print vantage point, the inclusion of clarificatory rubrics and navigational apparatuses like page numbers and tables of contents was a significant innovation for these traditions, and again distinguished them from other types of manuscripts like *gutakās* and *pothīs*. Even the pre-*Ādi Granth* manuscripts of the Sikh canon (the Goindval *pothīs*) include folio numbers and a table of contents, and evince

Daniel J. Ehnbohm, *Indian Miniatures: The Ehrenfeld Collection* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1985) 102-3, 108-111. Losty, *Art of the Book in India*, item 129.

⁶⁹⁷ Horstmann, "Dādūpanthī Anthologies," 164.

⁶⁹⁸ Personal communication with Niranjani *pujārīs* at Sanga Kua and Amardas's *samādhi*, Gadha Dham, March 2012. The colophons of several Niranjani *Vāṇīs* also suggest that, although they may have initially travelled with their owners, when their owners passed away they were enshrined with the rest of the saint's paraphernalia at his *samādhi*. This phenomenon is discussed below in regard to textual community and religious polity.

an attempt to make sure that particular *rāga* sections began and ended on particular pages.⁶⁹⁹ The *Pañcavāṇī* manuscripts from the seventeenth century and the Niranjani *Vāṇī* manuscripts from the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries include folio numbers and comprehensive tables of contents—the compilation of such a table of contents, often several pages long itself, with page numbers and a numerical tally of verses for each section, must have been a meticulous and time-consuming task (Fig. 5.12). We find similar tallies at the end of each section; for example, at the end of a section of *sākhīs* by, say, Kabir, we find the total number of *sākhīs* included with the statement *iti kabīr kī sākhī saṃpūrṇ*, “thus is complete the *sākhīs* of Kabir.” These types of rubrics abound in the scriptural anthologies of the Dadu Panth and Niranjani Sampraday, and while they are also found in the *pothīs* of these and other devotional communities, their extensive use in these scriptural anthologies is remarkable. Although it is derived from Latin, ‘rubric’ (from Old French *rubriche*, ‘of ochre,’ via Middle English) is the perfect term for the notations we find between verses and sections in these manuscripts. In early Christian manuscripts, it refers to sections written in red ink (so that they would stand out) containing instructions to the liturgist for conducting worship. In the Dadu Panthi and Niranjani manuscripts, they serve a similar function. In addition to marking the beginning and end of a poet’s section in the *Pañcavāṇī* or *Vāṇī*, they contain mantras and *maṅgalācāraṇ* to be recited before beginning a text, mark the beginning and end of thematic sections (*aṅgs*), denote the *rāga* for each *pad*, note the number of each verse (and the *ṭek* or refrain of each *pad*), mark change of speaker in dialogical texts (*saṁvād* and *goṣṭhī*) with notes like *guru uvāc*, *śiṣya uvāc* (the guru says, the disciple says)

⁶⁹⁹ Mann, *Making of Sikh Scripture*, 45-46.

and provide other clarifications (e.g. *ath bhartiharī...*,) that would assist the reader/reciter in explaining the material that he was reciting. Colophons tell us that that most of these manuscripts of the *Pañcavāṇī* and *Vāṇī* were copied by disciples for their gurus; these rubrics and navigational apparatuses would therefore have allowed the guru to find the material he needed quickly and easily, and to ‘move around’ between different sections of the manuscript. These codexes are therefore radically different than the *gūṭakās*, in which navigation required prior knowledge of the contents. They were also quite different from the *pothīs*, in that whereas a *pothī* usually held one text or genre of text (e.g. *pads*, or a hagiography, or a scholarly text), these *granthas* held multiple texts in multiple genres, and all of them ‘searchable’ thanks to diligent notation.

Many of these rubrics and notation were of course commonplace in Sanskrit manuscripts of the period and in manuscripts of *rīti granth* and courtly *prabandh kāvya* (narrative poetry) in Hindi.⁷⁰⁰ What makes them remarkable in this context is their deployment in organizing and explicating vernacular devotional poetry, and in framing that poetry as part of liturgical practice. For example, in one Niranjani *Vāṇī*, after a verse by Bhagvandas we find a note in red ink that cites the *Dattatreya Ākhyāṇa* of the *Bhāgavat Purāṇa* as the source of textual authority for Bhagvandas’s claims (*aihi prastāv bhāgavat mainḥ data ākhyāṇn kari kahyau haim*).⁷⁰¹ In some copies of the *Vāṇī* (as well as in some copies of the ‘extended’ *Pañcavāṇī* manuscripts described by Callewaert and Horstmann) we find short sections called *ādhyātmik arth* (meaning regarding the relationship of the soul

⁷⁰⁰ See for example the folio from a copy of the *Rasikapriyā* (c.1610-24) of Keshavdas given in Busch, *Poetry of Kings*, 38. A particularly apropos example is found in a folio of the *Bhāgavat Purāṇa* copied at Mewar between 1660 and 1680 that includes, along with the Sanskrit text, a short paraphrase in Brajhasha, incised in red ink. Ducrot, *Quattro Secoli Di Pittura Rajput*, 28.

⁷⁰¹ MS 2165 Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute, Jaipur. Folio unnumbered.

and God) following poems by Kabir, Namdev, Dadu, etc.; these notes attempt to succinctly explain the ‘meaning’ of the poet’s verse in terms of the popular discourse of Vedanta (as described in Chapter Four).⁷⁰² In this manner, rubric and notation could apparently transform a hymn into an object of exegetical discourse.

The final distinguishing element of these scriptural anthologies is their visual embellishment. We have already noted the use of floral embellishments in the margins of *Ādi Granth* manuscripts. Geometric and floral patterns can also be found in the margins of manuscripts of the *Pañcavāṇī*, *Sarvāṅgīs*, and the *Vāṇī* (Fig. 5.13). One of the most striking modes of embellishment, however, is the alternating use of red and black ink in one *Nīranjani Vāṇī* (Fig. 5.8).

These physical aspects of the manuscripts in which we find the scriptural anthologies of the Sikhs, Dadu Panth and Nīranjani Sampraday mark their nature as useful objects—they were meant to be used for recitation, singing, and sermonizing; they were designed to be consulted, to be easily usable by more than one person. Yet many of these same aspects also helped to constitute these manuscripts of veneration: they are truly beautiful, and their size and workmanship inspire awe. Upon seeing them one immediately gets the impression that these *granth*s were meant to be seen publicly, in congregational worship. Their size and beauty also make them appropriate as objects of veneration and as symbols of power—which they all were, in different ways and to different degrees, in the context of their respective religious publics.

⁷⁰² Horstman, “Dādūpanthī Anthologies,” 173.

The divine court, religious polity and political autonomy

These holy books—in the most literal, physical sense—draw our attention to the formation of a new kind of textual community in these traditions. A textual community certainly does not require a ‘physical’ book; the Niranjani community itself coalesced around the ‘texts’ of Haridas and his disciples long before they had any physical book that represented that canon.⁷⁰³ Yet the collation of saints’ poetry into a single collection and the transformation of that collection into a physical book—the saints’ words manifest—had a discernible effect on how these communities imagined themselves. The creation of a canon was accompanied by the creation of a community or public that corresponded to that canon. With the creation of physical holy books we see the concretization of that community or public as a polity—that polity could be simply symbolic or, as in the case of the Sikhs, it could become a site for the assertion of political autonomy. However, across the Sikh, Dadu Panthi, and Niranjani traditions, this idea of religious polity, and the position of holy scripture within it, were articulated in the idiom of the royal court.

The historical moment in which the Sikhs and Dadu Panth inaugurated their scriptures (to be followed later by the Niranjani) was characterized by the refinement of canons among *bhakti* devotional groups and the corresponding refinement of communal boundaries. Yet at the same time, canonization also led to the imagining of a *bhakti* ‘public’ that could transcend sectarian divisions. As Christian Novetzke suggests, what *bhakti* ‘is’ at its core is a technology of creating publics:

⁷⁰³ On textual communities and literacy, see Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), especially Part II, “Textual Communities,” 88-240. For a selection of essays on textual communities in India, see Vasudha Dalmia, Angelika Malinar, and Martin Christof (eds), *Charisma and Canon: Essays on the Religious History of the Indian Subcontinent* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

Unifying the myriad forms that *bhakti* has historically taken and continues to take is the idea of a public, which I think of as a social unit created through shared cultural phenomena and reinforced by demonstrations in public of these shared cultural phenomena. Publics are not exclusive—indeed they can hardly be regulated at all.⁷⁰⁴

Therefore what *bhakti* ‘does’ is create communities through the possibility of communion with others across space and time (in a manner similar to that which Benedict Anderson posits for proto-national communities).⁷⁰⁵ What makes these communities ‘public’ is the demonstration or enactment of community in spaces or contexts that look outward toward the larger social sphere. As alluded to above, the holy books of the Sikhs, Dadu Panth and Niranjani Sampraday were intended to be deployed in *public* settings, in both the sense of being used in congregational worship and in the sense of being deployed as a symbol of community in a broader conversation on devotion being pursued among religious sects but also royal and imperial courts. These groups were not necessarily the first to do so; in fact, they may have been responding in part to the magisterial gesture toward creating a *bhakti* public made by the Ramanandi poet Nabhadās with his *Bhaktamāl* circa 1600.⁷⁰⁶ In this voluminous and sweeping encomium of devotees real and mythical, Nabhadās (who is said to have composed his work at Galta near Jaipur, not far from the neighborhood of the Dadu Panth and Niranjani, though evidence of his location is lacking) ties together saints from

⁷⁰⁴ Christian Novetzke, "Bhakti and Its Public." *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 11, no. 3 (Dec 2007): 259.

⁷⁰⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities : Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006) 5-7.

⁷⁰⁶ For a comprehensive introduction to the *Bhaktamāl*, see James Hare, "Garland of Devotees: Nabhadās' 'Bhaktamal' and Modern Hinduism" (Dissertation, Columbia University, 2011). For an analysis of the role of Nabhadās and the *Bhaktamāl* in the history of the Ramanandi Sampraday and the formation of a *bhakti* public, see Pinch, "History, Devotion, and the Search for Nabhadās of Galta."

various times and traditions into one body, and by extension imagines their devotees
(including his audience) as part of this body:

bhakta bhakti bhagavanta guru catura nāma vapu eka
inake pada baṁdana karata nāsai vighana aneka

The devotee and devotion, God and Guru—
Four names for but one body.
Worshipping their feet
Destroys many an obstacle.⁷⁰⁷

Nabhadas also invokes the *catuḥ sampradāy* or Four Sampradays—the sects inaugurated by Ramanuja, Madhava, Nimbarka and Vishnuswami—as being a central part of this *bhakti* community.⁷⁰⁸ The Sikh Gurus and Dadu, on the other hand, are conspicuously absent, despite the fact that Nabhadas almost certainly knew of them.⁷⁰⁹ Nabhadas’s vision of the *bhakti* public is explicitly all-encompassing in scope, which makes his neglect of the Sikh and Dadu traditions all the more striking—and the significance of this could not have been lost on the Sikhs and Dadu Panthis.

Nabhadas’s *Bhaktamāl* enjoyed enormous popularity across north India and among numerous different sects, spawning commentaries and similar sectarian *Bhaktamāls*.⁷¹⁰ The public that Nabhadas had imagined was apparently manifesting itself quite quickly. In this context, the Sikh, Dadu Panthi and later Niranjani attempts to establish their own scriptures and canons, creating constellations of saints similar to but distinct from that of Nabhadas,

⁷⁰⁷ Nabhadas, *Bhaktamāl*, in Narendra Jha (ed.), *Bhaktamāl: Paṭhānuśilan Evam Vivecan* (Patna: Anupam Prakashan, 1978) 1.

⁷⁰⁸ On the idea of the *catuḥ sampradāya* in the *Bhaktamāl* and elsewhere, see John S. Hawley, “The Four *Sampradāy*—and Other Foursomes,” in Imre Bangha (ed.), *Bhakti Beyond the Forest* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2013).

⁷⁰⁹ Hare, “Garland of Devotees,” 250. See also Burchett, “Bhakti Religion and Tantric Magic,” 239-248.

⁷¹⁰ For a survey of the *bhaktamāl* genre, see Agarchand Natha’s introduction to Raghavdas’s *Bhaktamāl. ga-ta*.

can be read as attempts to create their own publics. As noted earlier, the inauguration of scriptural anthologies in the Sikh community and Dadu Panth were accompanied by the production of hagiographies that told the story of the saintly canon and established the authority of the textual canon by documenting its transmission from the mouth of the guru to its inscription in the anthology. For the Sikhs, this canon consisted of the Gurus and a select group of lesser *bhagats*. In the case of the Dadu Panth, the sect eventually produced its own *Bhaktamāl* which posited an alternative *catuḥ sampradāy* consisting of the Sikh *panth*, Dadu Panth, Kabir Panth and Niranjani Sampraday.⁷¹¹ As for the Niranjanis, although they circulated both the *Bhaktamāl* of Nabhadās and the *Bhaktamāl* of Raghavdas, they eventually produced a *bhaktamāl* of their own, with Pyareram Niranjani completing his *Bhaktamāl* in 1827.⁷¹² In this manner, the Sikhs, Dadu Panth and Niranjani Sampraday answered the sweeping gesture of Nabhadās's *Bhaktamāl* with the one-two counter punch of both scripture and hagiography.

The publics that these groups posited were like religious polities, at the center of which was the Divine Court. Presiding over that court was the holy book which, as the Word of the Guru manifest, constituted a physical symbol of religious authority. This emerging notion of the textual community, inflected as it was by the idiom of royal courts, was articulated in rituals centered on the book, in symbols of authority among the leaders of these communities, and in the architecture and communal spaces of the sects. The motifs of the Divine Court in which God is the ruler, and of 'Begumpur' (city without sorrow) as the perfect polity in which distinctions of caste and creed do not exist, are found throughout

⁷¹¹ Raghavdas, *Bhaktamāl*, v. 341-44. For a translation and discussion of these verses, see Chapter Three.

⁷¹² Mangaldas, *Śrī Haridas Jī Mahārāj Kī Vāñī*, 243.

saint and Sufi poetry in the early modern period, and certainly pre-date the formation of the Sikh, Dadu Panth and Niranjani communities.⁷¹³ However, the manner in which these groups translated these tropes into ritual and social practice was definitely novel. The idea of the divine court in Sikhism has received some scholarly attention already; its parallels in the Dadu Panth and Niranjani Sampraday, however, have yet to be studied.⁷¹⁴

In the Sikh tradition, the establishment of scripture was accompanied by the creation of a religious court and the declaration—even if primarily symbolic at that time—of political autonomy. The idea of the Divine Court in the Sikh tradition begins with Guru Nanak himself, who refers to the *dargāh* (court) of the Lord in his poetry.⁷¹⁵ He also began the first Sikh experiment of creating a separate settlement for the fledgling community at Kartarpur at the turn of the sixteenth century.⁷¹⁶ It was Guru Arjan, however, who at the turn of the seventeenth century established the Sikh community as a semi-autonomous polity at Ramdaspur, expanding the *masnad* system of representation and revenue collection begun by Guru Amardas and creating a ‘court’ in the form of the Harmandir Sahib in 1595.⁷¹⁷ It was in this temple-court that he installed the Kartarpur *pothī* as a sacred scripture in 1604. Guru Arjan’s court poet, Bhai Gurdas, makes frequent reference in his *vars* (heroic

⁷¹³ They are found, for example, in a *pad* of Ravidas included in the *Ādi Granth*, *rāg gauḍī* 2. 354. Compare with Kabir “*niraṃjana dhan tumharo darabār...*”

⁷¹⁴ Louis E. Fenech, *The Darbar of the Sikh Gurus: The Court of God in the World of Men* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008). Sukhvindar Bath, *Pañjāb Kā Darabārī Hindī Kāvya* (Delhi: Sanjay Prakashan, 2006). Jagjiwan Mohan Walia, *Parties and Politics at the Sikh Court, 1799-1849* (New Delhi: Master Publishers, 1982). See also Mann, *Making of Sikh Scripture*.

⁷¹⁵ E.g. *nānaka dara pardhāna so dargahi paidhā jāe*, “O Nanak, they are respected at the Lord's Gate; they are robed in honor in the Court of the Lord.” AG 4.14.

⁷¹⁶ Mann, *Making of Sikh Scripture*, 6-9.

⁷¹⁷ On revenue-collection, see Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India*, 397-8. Also Mann, *Making of Sikh Scripture*, 12.

poetry) to the temporal as well as spiritual authority of the Guru.⁷¹⁸ The Guru to which he refers, however, is not merely the human Guru (three of which he served as court poet and intellectual), but ultimately “the Word of the Satguru” which “amended the Vedas, *Kitāb* (Qur’an), four castes and *āśramas*” and which never dies but rather “blooms in the congregation.”⁷¹⁹ One of the scribes of the Kartarpur *pothī*, Bura Sandhu, wrote that the *pothī* manifested the very body of Guru Nanak, and to appear before it was to have an audience with the Guru.⁷²⁰ The *pothī* as the Word and body of the Guru then became the center of a courtly ritual in which the human Guru and courtiers not only recited from the *pothī*, but also paid obeisance to it by bowing in front of it. And in 1708, when faced with the possible destruction of the Sikh state by the Mughal military, the tenth and last Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, formally invested the *Ādi Granth* as the perpetual Guru of the community.⁷²¹ Threatened by the possible destruction of human agents of authority (including the Guru himself), the Book was made the sovereign authority. Since by that point the Guru represented temporal as well as spiritual authority (ruling over a nascent Sikh state), the investment of the *Ādi Granth* made it the textual authority for the state, in a manner not totally unlike a constitution or a written canon of law.⁷²²

Since the turn of the eighteenth century, ritual performance around the *Ādi Granth* has followed an elaborate and very courtly pattern: the Guru Granth Sahib is first awoken,

⁷¹⁸ Gurdas. *Vāran Bhāī Guradās: Text, Transliteration, and Translation*. Patiala: Vision & Venture, 1998. vv 4.31, 5.21, 39.3

⁷¹⁹ Gurdas. *Vāran Bhāī Guradās*, vv 39.12, 40.6.

⁷²⁰ Mann, *Making of Sikh Scripture*, 131.

⁷²¹ Mann, *Making of Sikh Scripture*, 118.

⁷²² On the connections between writing, law, and the state, see Messick, Brinkley. *The Calligraphic State: Textual Domination and History in a Muslim Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996. Especially Part I, “Authority.”

then brought in ceremonial procession to the center of the *gurdwara*, the equivalent of a ruler's Hall of Audience.⁷²³ It is placed on a *takht* (throne), underneath a canopy (another regal symbol) where the reciter, or *granthī*, waves a flywhisk above the *Granth* as he reads from it, thus performing an act of *sevā* or service identical to that performed for the image of a deity in Vaishnava practice. Throughout the service members of the community not only listen to the text of the *Granth* being recited, but physically enact reverence or obeisance to it, the living Guru, by bowing their heads, joining their hands, and prostrating themselves before it. It is a physical performance of the recognition of authority strikingly similar to that performed before the image of the deity in Vaishnava traditions. It is also recognizable as a type of *darśan*, or visual communion with the *Granth*, as this physical regimen is practiced in sight of the manuscript.

In the Dadu Panth, the *Dādūvāṇī*, as the Word of the Guru manifest, became the center of a courtly ritual in much the same way, although the Dadu Panth never made claims to political authority on a scale comparable to the Sikh example. If Madhavdas's account in the *Sant Guṇ Sāgar* is taken as reliable, then Garibdas, Dadu's son and successor, established the *Dādūvāṇī* as the textual authority for the community in 1605, just a year after Guru Arjan's installation of the *Ādi Granth* at Ramdaspur. Let us briefly review a few of Madhavdas's more relevant observations on the installation and ritual:

Dohā

On the eight day of the bright half of Āṣāḍh (24 June 1604),
the *Guruvāṇī* was installed.
'Jai!' was shouted in the temple,
and *prasād* (food offerings) was served.

⁷²³ Mann, *Making of Sikh Scripture*, 131-34.

Indava chand

The *Guruvāṇī* was residing in the temple,
and Gopaldas received the designation of *pujārī*.
The *gādī*, sandals, book wrapped in cloth,
and saffron-colored cap were arranged as items of veneration.
These items were placed on a throne,
and above this a heavy curtain was hung...

Gopaldas gave a sermon,
reciting from the *Gurugranth*.
All the local congregations of the holy society
gathered in Swami's hall of congregation.
For two *muhūrts* there was always a homily,
then the *sants* sang devotional songs.
After meditation they were fed,
upon which they retired to their places...

The Guru's temple received the name of 'palanquin,'
and was nicely arranged and decorated.
Those who were lay followers of the Guru's panth
kept a *Guruvāṇī* which they worshipped.⁷²⁴

A manuscript of the *Dādūvāṇī* continues to be the focus of ritual in the main temple at the Dadu Panth's central monastery at Naraina to this day. The monastic complex, dating from the late sixteenth and enlarged during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, shares elements with palace architecture in the region, and the main temple with its elevated, stage-like *sanctum sanctorum* resemble the Halls of Audience common in the fort-palaces of petty princes and nobles in the area (Figs. 5.14-15).⁷²⁵ In the *sanctum sanctorum*, the *Dādūvāṇī* is kept on a small but ornate *takht* and underneath a richly embroidered canopy, much like an image would be in a Vaishnava (Fig. 5.16). During *ārātī* and even informal gatherings of

⁷²⁴ Madhavdas, *Sant Guṇ Sāgar*. Edited by Bakshiram Shastri. Bhairan: Mahant Ramvallabhdas Swami, 2000. vv 25.1-6. Quoted in Horstmann, "Dādūpanthī Anthologies," 167-68. I have made use of Horstmann's translation, but have revised it in places.

⁷²⁵ For the history of various buildings in the complex, see Narayandas, *Śrī Dādū Panth Paricay: Dādū Panth Kā Itihāsa* (Jaipur: Shri Dadu Dayalu Mahasabha, 1979).

members of the community, monks and lay followers of high standing in the community recite from the text, and all members are invited to participate in antiphonal singing of its hymns. When no ritual or gathering is taking place, followers join their hands, bow, and prostrate themselves in front of, and in sight of, the enshrined copy of the *Dādūvāṇī*. Once a year, during the *Dādūmelā* (a fair commemorating Dadu's death), the miniature city of the monastic complex—with its own lanes, squares (*cauk*), and ceremonial gates—becomes filled with members of the Dadu Panth. This temporary polity, united by faith and allegiance to the Word of the Guru, finds its center at his court, the main temple where *bhajan* and *kirtan* are sung in the presence of the Guru, i.e. in the presence of the *Dādūvāṇī*. While we must be careful not to project practices for which we only have documentary evidence beginning in the colonial period back onto pre-colonial times, these practices together with the evidence provided by the *Sant Guṇ Sāgar* suggest that the *Dādūvāṇī* as a symbol of religious authority was part of a broader notion of the Dadu Panth as a religious polity, one that found its expression in the miniature city of Naraina and found its realization, if only temporarily, once a year.⁷²⁶

In the Niranjani Sampraday we find similar veneration of the physical manuscript of the *Vāṇī* as the body of the Guru, though the rituals around it and the articulation of the religious polity are less heavily inflected with royal symbolism. The unfortunate lack of documentary evidence regarding the creation of the *Vāṇī* and the rituals surrounding it make it difficult to date practices very exactly; however, the colophons in some copies of the *Vāṇī*

⁷²⁶ For the early history of the Dadu Panth, see Narayandas, *Śrī Dādū Panth Paricay*, and also James Hastings, “Poets, Sants, and Warriors: The Dadu Panth, Religious Change and Identity Formation in Jaipur State circa 1562--1860 CE” (Dissertation, The University of Wisconsin - Madison, 2002). Descriptions of the monastery at Naraina in the nineteenth century can be found in *The Rajputana Gazetteer*, vol. 2. (Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, 1879) 161.

and oral testimony from members of the community provide some clues. *Vāṇīs* were usually copied by disciples for their gurus; the guru passed them onto his disciples or, in the case of the death of a prominent saint, his *Vāṇī* was installed along with his *gudaḍī* (patchwork blanket) and other personal effects in his *samādhi*, a small monumental structure (Figs. 5.17, 5.18) Most copies of the *Vāṇī* at Gadha Dham near Didwana are now held by prominent families of the Niranjani community, most notably the *pūjārīs* (ritual authorities) who superintend the *samādhis* and other temples of the Sampraday (the post of *pūjārī* for a particular *samādhi* or temple is inherited). The *Vāṇīs* that are found in *samādhis* are, like the rest of the saint's paraphernalia, worshipped during *āratī*; at other times, members of the community pay obeisance by joining their hands and bowing before the scripture and other items.

The Niranjani settlement at Gadha Dham, though now absorbed into the sprawling urban fabric of Didwana, was once outside the city; it grew up in the Maheshwari merchant neighborhood on the hill that overlooked the walled city. According to members of the Niranjani community there, until the twentieth century Gadha Dham functioned as a semi-independent settlement, with both the monastic community and lay followers inhabiting the fifty-two acres that had been granted to the Sampraday by a local ruler. (While the actual size of the land grant is unknown—fifty-two being a formulaic number with spiritual significance, making its accuracy somewhat suspect—stone inscriptions at the border of the settlement and next to the *Bhaṇḍārī Mandir*, as well as a copper plate inscription kept at the *samādhi* known as *Loṭānjī Kā Baḍā* do record land grants dating to the first quarter of the

seventeenth century.)⁷²⁷ At the center of the settlement were the *samādhi* of Haridas and the *Bhaṇḍārī Mandir* (Treasurer's Temple), so named because the funds for it are said to have been supplied by the family of Dwarkadas, the wealthy merchant who became Haridas's first disciple.⁷²⁸ The *Bhaṇḍārī Mandir* is a beautiful building which incorporates elements of domestic and palace architecture, with a long courtyard, numerous large rooms, a large kitchen (one assumes for the purpose of providing food at ritual functions), ornate *chattrīs* (domes pavilions) and extensive wall paintings of floral designs and animals (Fig. 5.19). The main monastic complex and Haridas's *samādhi* are surrounded by buildings in a similar style; unfortunately the dates of these buildings are not yet known. Altogether, however, they form a miniature city similar to that found at Naraina, complete with its own streets, gates, wells and pasture land. More research will be necessary in order to know how this settlement grew over time, but initial observations suggest that indeed functioned as older members of the Niranjani Sampradāy describe it: as a community of monks and lay followers who would gather daily at the *samādhi* of Haridas for congregational worship, including *bhajan* and *kirtan*.⁷²⁹

The sound of the Guru's voice; the sight of the Guru's body

The examples of the three traditions surveyed here suggest that scriptural anthologies—both as performed 'texts' and as physical objects—were experienced in multiple and multi-sensory ways. The manuscripts, sacred objects by virtue of what is

⁷²⁷ Interview with Niranjani custodians of *Loṭānjī Kā Bādā*, March 2012. See also Mishra, *Nirañjanī Sampradāy*, 80.

⁷²⁸ Personal communication with Niranjani informants at Gadha Dham, March 2012.

⁷²⁹ Interview with Niranjani informants, March 2012.

written in them, contain the substance of the Word of the Guru, which imparts both knowledge and liberation. Ritual specialists—the *granthī* in the Sikh example, the Guru or monk in the Dadupanthi and Niranjani examples—make the Guru speak through recitation of what is contained in the manuscript. Thus in the case of the *Ādi Granth*, the Guru simultaneously speaks and imparts grace through sound (*śabd*) as the text is recited or sung, and through sight as the faithful approach close to the *Granth* to receive *darśan*. In the case of the *Dādūvāṇī* and the *Vāṇī*, the Guru speaks when the texts within the manuscript are performed, and conveys grace through *darśan* when it is silent. At the same time, individuals are constituted as subjects, as members of the community through the physical regimen of listening, seeing, and performing obeisance. Just as the hypothetical French Catholic in Althusser’s analysis embodies ideology by kneeling before the altar, the believer here embodies the ideology that equates the manuscript with the body of the Guru as he bows in front of it.⁷³⁰

It is the physicality of these scriptural anthologies as manuscripts, as material *granth*s, that effects much of their ideological work. In terms of canon, by choosing the poetry of particular star saints from among the vast galaxy of devotees and putting them together as a constellation in a physical book, compilers gave that constellation a physical reality. Or to put it another way, if the holy book was the Guru’s Word or body, then by stitching the words of multiple saints together into a *granth*, compilers created a physical symbol of the community of saints that they invoked in their songs and stories. In terms of community, these books stood as symbols of an authority that superseded the authority of

⁷³⁰ Louis Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (New York: Verso, 2014) 280.

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any one individual (a law), and therefore also acted as symbols of the community that they tied together through that law. The inauguration of these scriptures, commemorated in hagiographical poetry and celebrated in the style of a coronation, mark the moment in which these traditions become conscious of themselves as a different type of a textual community, and as a public.

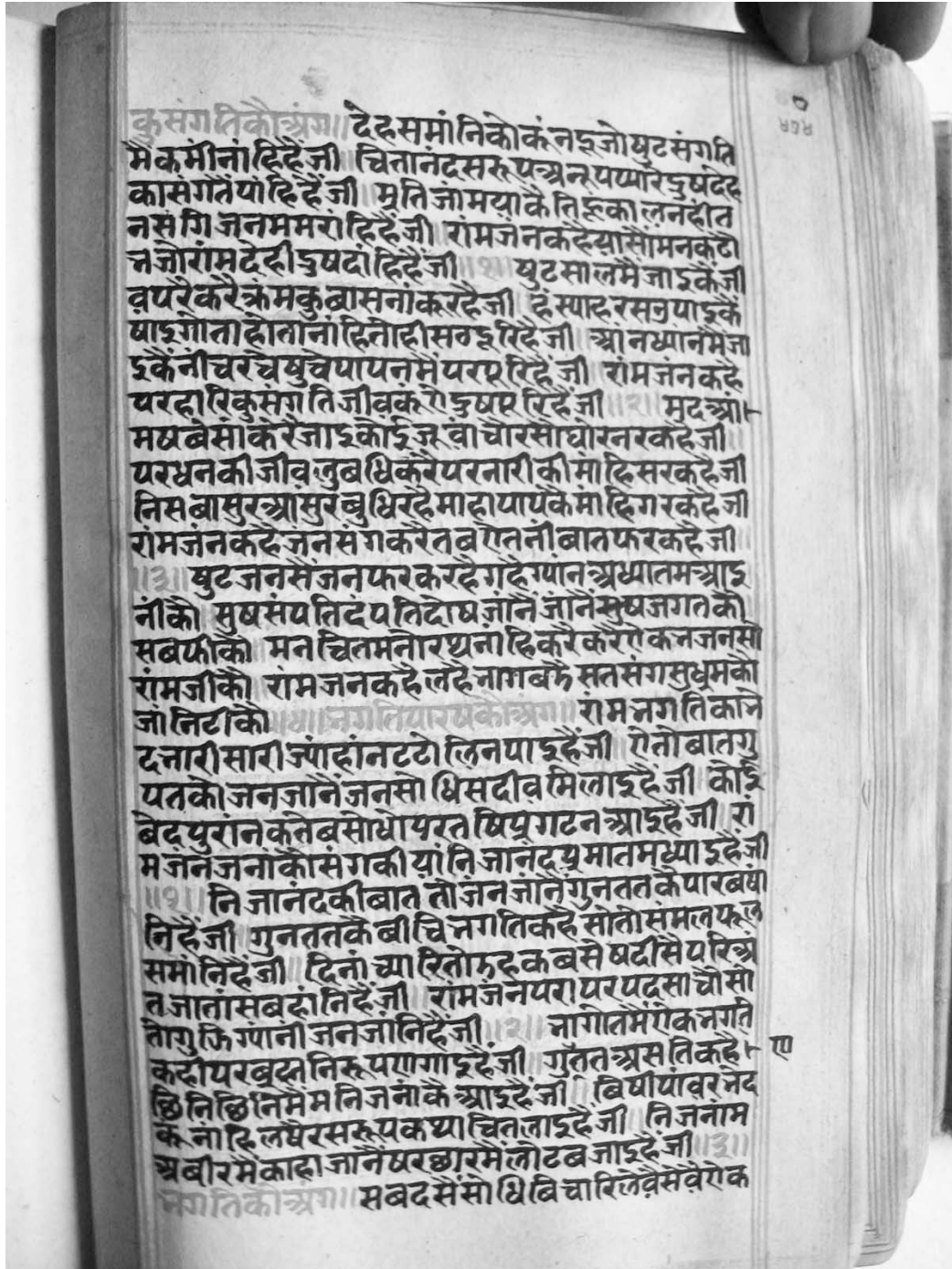


Fig. 5.1 A copy of the Niranjani Vāṇī. Pre-1850. RORI JAI 2165. Folio 474.



Fig. 5.2 A copy of the *Sarvāṅgī* of Gopaldas. Eighteenth century. Courtesy Winand Callewaert.



Fig. 5.3 The first folio of the *vāṇī* of Santdas Niranjani in a manuscript of the *Vāṇī*. The *vāṇī* begins with the syllable *ra-ra-ra-ra-ra-ra-ra...* followed by the name of Ram sixteen times. RORI JAI 2165.

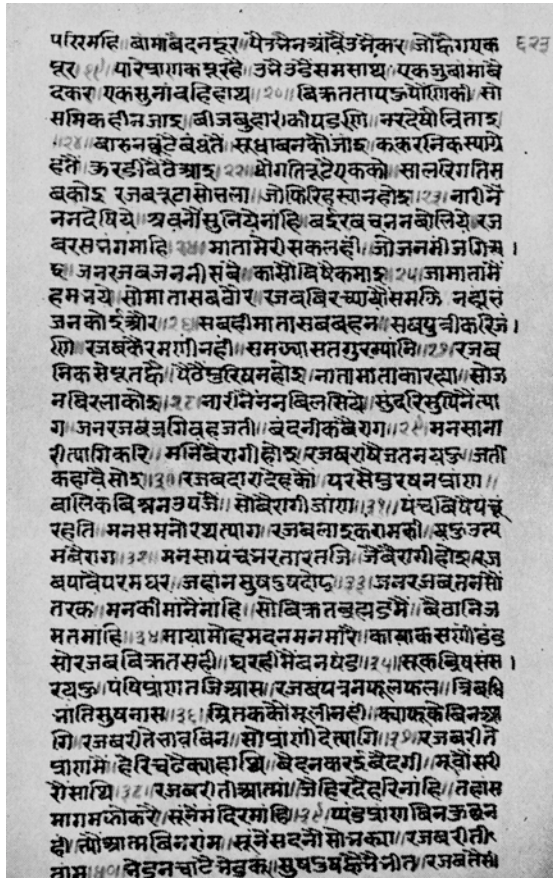


Fig. 5.4 Sarvāngī manuscript. 1715 CE. Courtesy Winand Callewaert.



Fig. 5.5 Vānī manuscript. RORI JAI 2165.

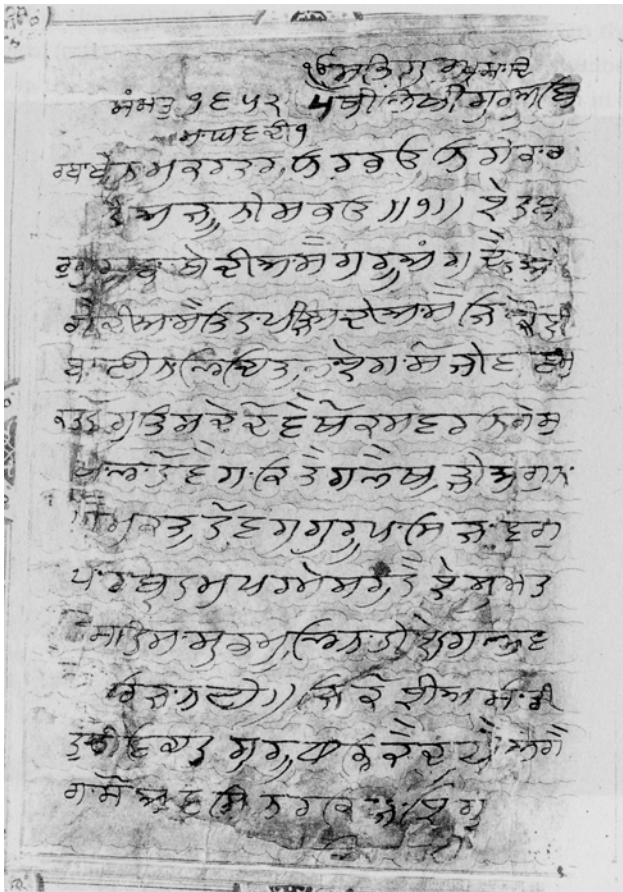


Fig. 5.6 Folio from the Goindval *pothi*. 1570-72 CE. Courtesy Gurinder Mann Singh.



Fig. 5.7 Folio from the Goindval *pothi*. Courtesy Gurinder Singh Mann.

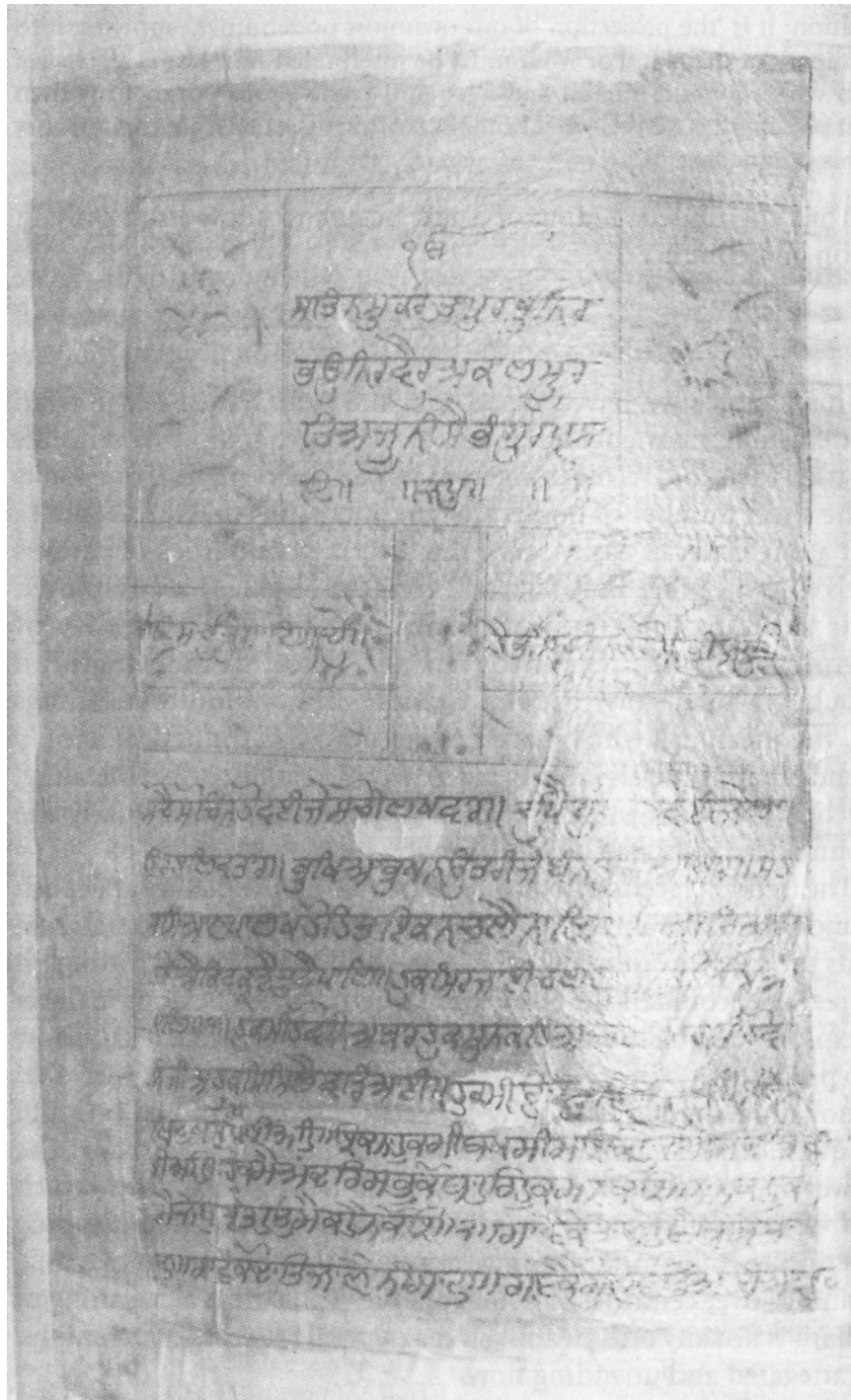


Fig. 5.9 Folio of the Kartarpur *pothi*. 1604 CE. Courtesy Pashaura Singh.



Fig. 5.10 The Goindval *pothī*. Courtesy Gurinder Singh Mann.



Fig. 11 The copy of the *Vāṇī* at the *samādhī* of Amardas at Gadha Dham, Didwana.

रागद्विगोष्ठी ॥॥॥	पं० १४२	४	चोणिककोश्रग ॥	पं० १७५	४३
रागयदती ॥॥॥	पं० १४२	१	कोमीनरकोश्रग	पं० १७६	६७
रागबिलासल ॥॥॥	पं० १४३	४४	अथसहजकोश्रग	पं० १७७	६
अथरागवोडी ॥॥॥	पं० १४७	४	अथसाधकोश्रग	पं० १७७	२७
रागआसावरी ॥	पं० १४८	४	नरमबिहसकोश्रग	पं० १७८	३४
रागगोडलियते ॥	पं० १४८	३३	अथनेषकोश्रग ॥	पं० १७८	२७
अथरागसारग ॥	पं० १५१	११	कसंगानिकोश्रग	पं० १७९	१७
अथरागश्रेराक ॥	पं० १५२	१	अथसंगतिकोश्रग	पं० १७९	२२
अथरागकाया ॥	पं० १५२	१७	अथसाधकोश्रग	पं० १८०	१२
अथरागबिचोती ॥	पं० १५४	१८	अथसाधकोश्रग	पं० १८०	१५
रागकल्योण ॥॥॥	पं० १५६	१७	देशादेशकोश्रग ॥	पं० १८०	८
अथरागधनाप्री ॥	पं० १५७	१९	साधसाधीनृतको	पं० १८०	१९
अस्तुनिकापद ॥	पं० १५९	१९	साधमहात्मकोश्रग	पं० १८१	२४
ध्यानदसजीकी	पं० १६०	२	अथमधिकोश्रग	पं० १८१	१४
श्रीकवीरजीकी	पं० १६०	क	अथबिचारकोश्रग	पं० १८२	११
श्रीगुरदिवकोश्रग	पं० १६२	४५	सारगाहीकोश्रग	पं० १८२	५
गुरयाशिषकीश्रग	पं० १६४	१४	पौत्रपिछोणिकोश्रग	पं० १८२	५
सुभिराकोश्रग	पं० १६४	३४	बिसबासकोश्रग ॥	पं० १८२	४३
अथअकलिकोश्रग	पं० १६५	२	अथधीरजकोश्रग	पं० १८३	६
अथउपदेसकोश्रग	पं० १६५	१८	धिरकमाईकोश्रग	पं० १८३	१४
अथद्विरहकोश्रग	पं० १६५	५३	समथाईकोश्रग ॥	पं० १८४	२९
ग्यानसंज्ञागविरह	पं० १६७	२४	कसबदकोश्रग	पं० १८४	६
अथपरमाकोश्रग	पं० १६७	६८	अथसबदकोश्रग	पं० १८४	१२
अथरसकोश्रग ॥	पं० १६९	२७	अथकरमकोश्रग	पं० १८५	६
अथलोधीकोश्रग	पं० १६९	२	अथकासकोश्रग	पं० १८५	६९
हेरोनकोश्रग ॥	पं० १६९	३	सजीवनिकोश्रग ॥	पं० १८६	१६
अथहेरतकोश्रग	पं० १६९	२	ब्रह्मसाधीनृतको	पं० १८७	४
अथजराकोश्रग	पं० १६९	८	चितकपटीकोश्रग	पं० १८७	७
अथल्योकोश्रग	पं० १७०	६	गुरसिधदेरकोश्रग	पं० १८७	१६
यतिवरसाकोश्रग	पं० १७०	३३	हेतवीतिकोश्रग ॥	पं० १८७	११

Fig. 5.12 Table of contents, Niranjani Vāṇī at Amardas's samādhi, Gadha Dham.

श्रीश्रीतिरंजनाय नमः ॥ श्रीगणहिपत्यय
 नमः श्रीसकलसंतमहापुरुषाय नमः ॥ अ
 थगुमाईजीश्रीश्रीउरसीरामजीकोकृतलि
 ष्यते ॥ अथश्रीब्रह्मनामस्तुतिलिष्यते ॥
 ॥ ॐ प्रमजोतिप्रकासमिष्वह्यपरपरं परानं
 दपरमादिपुरुषपरमात्मापरमेश्वरं परमत
 त्वपरमतेजंपरमसांतिस्वरूपकं परमपदस
 मानसर्वसिद्धिं अजरोअमरअनूपकं परम
 निरगुणनिराकारं निरहरोनिराशयं निरि
 वकारनिराधारं निरबिगृहोनिरामयं परम
 अरचितअदलआकुलअमलअगदअ
 गोचरं परमअजअविअनंतअवरनअचिं
 तचितचिंताचरं अघनोअस्थिरो
 अमूरतिअ वलअमित
 अंतदपरं अटटोअ
 हिगोअम रतिमौलो
 अधरअलि मतअविह
 अतीतो अजीतोअन
 हो अवीहोआ रंजनं असंगीअ
 नगीअरंगी उदीतोआगंजनं जोमिवायुन
 द्यातेजं आकासयोनइंडीय माजानअ
 दहकरणं चतुरविंशरहतिउचयअस्थल
 वालदृधोनतरुनोवा आदिअंतिमधिरे
 ससं अनुभूतअच्छेदअनिच्छित अलषरू
 अनेषसं सिरोमणिमरबंगप्रवातिसुधा
 सिंधुसंपूरणं अजोनीआवैनजाइ जनमदुः
 निरमूलनं कालदंशनकरमघननमही
 ननमनमलहरं विस्वरविस्वरप्रणप्रचु
 तगामनसागोचरं परमपावनपापहरता पर

Fig. 5.13 Niranjani Vāṇī at Sanga Kua Mandir, Gadha Dham. 1790 CE.



Fig. 14 Dadu Mandir, Naraina.



Fig. 15 Interior of Dadu Mandir, Naraina.



Fig. 16 The *Dādūvānī* enshrined on the *takht* in the Dadu Mandir, Naraina. The manuscript is kept under the parasol toward the rear; the printed copy in the foreground is used in liturgy and communal singing. When not in use, a one rupee coin is placed on top of it.



Fig. 5.17 The *samādhi* at *Loṭānjī Kā Bādā*, Gadha Dham.

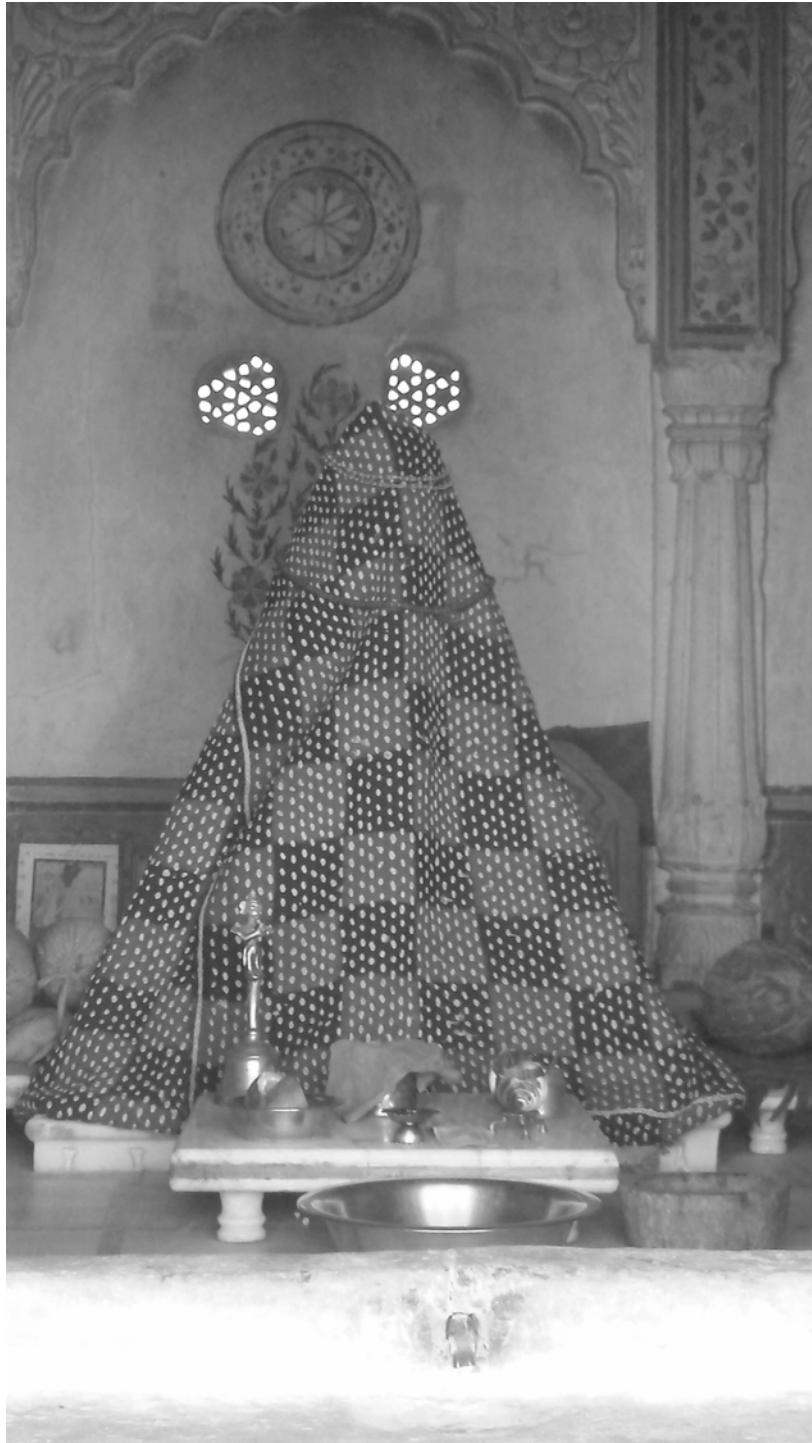


Fig. 5.18 The *gudaḍī* and other effects of Amardas in his *samādhi* at Gadha Dham.



Fig. 5.19 Second-floor interior of the *Bhaṇḍārī Mandir*, Gadha Dham.



Fig. 5.20 The central monastic complex at Gadha Dham; the *saādhi* of Haridas is the domed building on the upper right.

Conclusion

Mapping the literary and manuscript archive of Hindi

suṇi pāḍe kiā likhahu jaṃjālā
likhu rāma nāma guramukhi gopālā

Listen pandit! Why do you write entanglement?
Living mindfully of Guru-Gopal, write the name of Ram.

Guru Nanak
*Ramkali M. 1 Dakhaṇī Oamkāru*⁷³¹
Ādi Granth

How shall I tie together the pages of this dissertation into a *granth*? The discussion has at times ‘zoomed out’ in order to provide a picture of manuscript culture(s) as a whole in early modern North India, and at other times ‘zoomed in’ on the case of a particular community in order to provide a close up of the nitty-gritty details of inscripational activity in the vernacular. This has hopefully revealed the multiplicity of social and institutional contexts in which the vernacular of Hindi came to be written down and fashioned into a language of literature, scholarship, and scripture. Moreover, I hope that it has revealed some of the ways in which writing connected those various contexts by creating networks of individuals and institutions. The idea for this research originated in a chance observation: while perusing the catalogues of the Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute, I was intrigued by the number of manuscripts copied by members of a community that I had never heard of, the Niranjani Sampraday. The more of their manuscripts that I viewed, and the more I learned about them, the more I realized that this now almost forgotten religious community

⁷³¹ In *Śrī Guru Granth Sāhib* (ed. Callewaert), 930.

in a now largely unknown town (Didwana) was connected to all sorts of other communities, discussions, and publics of its time. In other words, the manuscript record revealed a literary and intellectual map in which the Niranjani and Didwana were not at all at the periphery—not at the center either, but certainly not off the map. This made me wonder what sort of map of early modern Hindi literature we might be able to sketch if we followed the paper trails left by the poets, scribes, singers and gurus of pre-colonial North India.

The methodological import of this research is that we should pay attention to what the physical archive can tell us about the thinking of the peoples who composed, circulated and performed devotional and literary works in pre-colonial South Asia: how did they make distinctions between different genres and disciplines? Which authors or works did they see as forming a canon or tradition? What kind of textual communities did they imagine as they collected, collated, and organized texts? And how did they use those texts in performance to bring those communities into being?

In order to see the archive in the first place, one has to cast a somewhat wide net. When I began this project, I did not start with a single text or poet, nor did I start with a single tradition. Even while focusing on the Niranjani as a community, I did not focus on them as a ‘tradition’ in that I did not look only at the texts that they themselves composed, but also at those of other groups and traditions that the Niranjani copied, circulated and performed. As a result, I obtained a view of the Niranjani as a textual community that may otherwise have been impossible. Accomplished scholars like Pitambardatt Barthwal, Parashuram Chatturvedi and Swami Mangaldas had created one picture of the Niranjani Sampraday based on the writings of its own poets, and this picture—with its emphasis on

the influence of Naths, yogic practice, renunciation, etc.—is certainly accurate.⁷³² Yet it is not the whole picture. By looking closely at the manuscripts left by the Niranjani, I was slowly able to see an incredibly rich and varied assortment of texts, ideas and practices like hymns, epigrams, scholarly treatises, and scriptures; theology, metaphysics, and aesthetics; communal singing, sermons, and study. Moreover, the further I looked into the Niranjani archive, the more points of connection I found with other communities, traditions, and systems of thought.

In such an approach, every text or tradition becomes an entry point into a wider system of circulation and discussion. Ann Laura Stoler has argued that we should attempt to “read with the grain” of an archive in order to understand its logic and the watermark of power relations impressed upon it.⁷³³ The archive of early modern Hindi has its own contours, and if we follow them, we find a web of connections between authors, works and traditions that have otherwise been set apart in much of modern scholarship. On the other hand, we also find distinctions being made between certain types of texts and genres that have been lumped together in modern literary historiography. For example, following the manuscript record for the *Vairāgya Vṛnd* of Bhagvandas, the *Vedānt Mahāvākya Bhāṣā* of Manohardas and the *Chandarātnāvalī* of Hariramdas Niranjani (all discussed in Chapter Four) reveals that they were circulated and performed in a variety of social and institutional contexts, including the monasteries of the Dadu Panth and Niranjani Sampraday, Sikh communities in Punjab and the royal courts of the Kacchwahas and Rathores. This in turn

⁷³² Pitambardatt Barthwal, “Kuch Nirāñjaniyom Kī Bāñiyām”; Chatturvedi, *Uttarī Bhārat Kī Sant Paramparā*, 337-348; Mangaldas, *Śrī Mahārāj Haridās Jī Kī Vāñī*.

⁷³³ Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

draws our attention to the existence of genres and discourses like *subhāṣita*, *śāstra*, Advaita Vedānta, and *alamkāra śāstra* that connected poets, intellectuals and audiences across different social locations—and in effect bringing certain types of publics into being. However, the *guṭakās* and *pothīs* of the Niranjani Sampradaya and other communities draw our attention to a distinction between hymns and epigrams on the one hand, and more scholastic texts on the other. Hymns and sayings connected to certain performance practices (*satsaṅg*, *samāj-gāyan*, *pravacan*) were inscribed in a particular manner (like notation) in a particular type of object (the *guṭakā*) by individuals for (usually) their own use. Longer compositions on subjects like metaphysics or devotional poetics were generally inscribed in *pothīs*, and these *pothīs* appear to have circulated (and been used in performance) in a manner quite different from that of the *guṭakās*. This in turn draws our attention to a distinction that was made by communities of poets and their audiences between the genres of song, sayings, and scholasticism.

The connections and distinctions that the manuscript archive reveals thus correspond very little to categories like *rīti* and *bhakti* that assume a distinction between literary and devotional thought. The important distinction in the materials studied here seems not to be between literature and religion, but between song and scholasticism, or between lyric and literature. This was a distinction that devotional groups like the Niranjani themselves appear to have been aware of, as both the style of their works and the manuscripts in which those works circulated bear markers of difference. The poems of Haridas, for example, are tremendously evocative, and continue to be sung to this day; yet it does not appear that anyone, including the Niranjani, ever considered his lyrics to be *kāvya*, or to be religious

scholarship. In order to be a work of religious scholarship, a text first had to be *literary*, something that the Niranjani poets were very aware of—this is why we find them self-consciously referring to themselves as *kavi*, invoking Saraswati (the patron goddess of *kāvya*), and employing meters, rhetorical devices and motifs that would demonstrate the literary credentials of their works. By doing so they were able to participate in discussions that were occurring between intellectuals of various stripes—poets, *littérateurs*, Advaitins—at courts and monasteries spread across the region in which Brajbhasha had become a language of intellectual exchange.

In all of this, writing and literacy appear as important markers of difference—they differentiate literature from song (as Pollock has already demonstrated), but also scripture from song.⁷³⁴ Not only were literacy and writing essential to the creation of the massive and intricately organized scriptural anthologies of the Sikhs, the Dadu Panth, and the Niranjani Sampraday, but the physical books thus produced became important symbols that both tied their respective communities together, and differentiated them from other communities. Scripture does many things, including constructing and authorizing a canon by tying some texts together and excluding others. For the communities considered here, writing was essential to this process of canonization because it allowed them to tie hymns, sayings and other types of works together in specific configurations: using thematic rubrics like *aṅg*, formal rubrics like *rāga* and meter, and authorial hierarchies (i.e. the ordering of multiple poets' works in a particular fashion), they transformed large and variegated collections of songs and sayings into unified bodies of revelation and law. Furthermore, the physicality of

⁷³⁴ Pollock, *Language of the Gods*, 288, 300.

the *granth*s had its own ontological significance: it gave a physical reality to the idea that the *vāṇīs* or words of the saints spoke as one voice. By investing the physical book with the authority of the Guru (quite explicitly in the case of the Sikhs, less explicitly but nevertheless very clearly in the case of the Dadu Panth and Niranjani Sampraday) these groups transformed themselves into a different type of textual community. This type of textual community did not just sing songs—it possessed a *scripture*, a *granth*.

This type of textual community also had a special relationship with the socio-political context of early modern North India. As a technology of demarcating and authorizing a canon, a scriptural *granth* helped to define the contours and identity of a community. Yet its physicality allowed it to do more than this: as a physical symbol of authority and focal point for the courtly rituals of groups like the Sikhs, the Dadu Panth and the Niranjanis, it became a locus for the enactment of self-regulating mini-polities—in other words, it became a thing around which religious publics could arrange themselves, and through which authority could be mediated. In all three communities, the physical *granth* was the object from which the *granthī* (in the case of the Sikhs) or guru (in the case of the Dadu Panth and Niranjani Sampraday) performed, and the object that received physical demonstrations of subjection from the faithful when it was not being ‘made to speak.’ It is no coincidence that these three religious groups of northwestern India established scriptures at roughly the same time, and in the midst of changes in the relationship between political and religious power: as we saw in Chapter Five, it was these types of religious publics, defined by scripture, that were ‘recognized’ by the Mughal and Rajput political elite. Therefore the establishment of scripture does not appear to be a means to an end (e.g.

exemption from *jizyā*), but an end in itself—the transformation of the community into a new form.

The importance of literacy and writing in the definition of literature and scripture did not, however, diminish the importance of the oral aspect of literary and devotional culture in any way. As I hope the previous chapters have demonstrated, no genre, tradition, or type of text from the world of early modern Hindi can be understood exclusively in terms of the oral or the literate (themselves both abstractions). All textual production, circulation and performance took place in a social and ideological context in which literacy and orality were intricately bound up with one another. Thus hymns, sayings and other types of poetry that were orally performed—even when composed by supposedly illiterate poets—contain elements of literate literary culture, and scholastic, literary, and other works that are highly literate—and were obviously written from the time of their inception—reproduce aspects of oral discourse. The artist Miloš Ranković, attempting to illustrate the temporal movement of texts like the epics from oral to literate contexts, draws a vine-like line that begins at the oral pole of the oral-literate spectrum, and as it moves toward the literate pole, begins to sprout branches that curl back on themselves *ad infinitum*—the result is a beautiful and intricate filigree of mutual influence that cannot ever be completely untangled.⁷³⁵ At the level of ideology, the traditions surveyed here most certainly made a distinction between orality and literacy, between speaking and writing. These ideologies were very powerful, influencing the social structure of the communities in the form of institutions like the guru-disciple relationship (which was imagined as exclusively oral in *nirguṇ sant* communities),

⁷³⁵ Printed in Ranković (ed.), *Along the Oral-Written Continuum*, 39.

and the institution of scripture (which was imagined as literate). At the level of practice, however, these communities' textual traditions were a mix of multiple oral-literate modes of production, circulation, and performance.

The distinction to be made then is not between speaking and writing, orality and literacy, but between the way that orality and literacy are imagined at different times and for different purposes. In the epigram that begins this conclusion, Guru Nanak implores his listener—a pandit, the symbol of book learning without wisdom—to give up “writing entanglement” (*likhahu jaṃjālā*). It is a beautiful phrase, one that brings to mind the image of a pandit furiously scribbling detailed polemics against this or that religious or intellectual adversary. The more he writes, the more he becomes entangled in the looping vines of the letters and the confused details of the argument. Guru Nanak's counsel is to abandon such a doomed enterprise, as such writing only entangles one further in the illusory world of *samsāra*. Instead, he suggests, write the simple and elegant name of Ram, and become “oriented toward” the Guru (*guramukhi*). To draw (what I hope is not too strained) an analogy, perhaps our task when approaching pre-colonial Hindi literature is not to attempt to bluntly separate the oral from the literate, an act that will only entangle us further, but rather to follow the elegant contours of this literature as it moves back and forth between the oral and the literate, the sung, the recited, and the written. It is then, when we follow the strokes of not only the discourse itself but also of its physical traces in the manuscript archive that we may see the connections and distinctions that the poets, saints, scholars and audiences of the early modern period imagined and brought into being.

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