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The Many Identities of Sūrdās

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Sūrdās (or Sūr, for short) is one of the early Hindi poets who have drawn much attention from scholars of bhakti literature. A well-known story about Sūrdās states that he was of Brahman origin, however, due to his blindness, he faced cruel treatment. As a result, he sought refuge with Vallabhācārya, a founder of the Viṣṇu Kṛṣṇa faith in the city of Vrindavan. The primary source of this story is the *Caurāsī vaiṣṇavan kī vārtā*,¹ a biography of saints associated with the sect. In this work, Sūrdās is revered as one of the celebrated eight poets, known as *aṣṭachāp* or ‘eight seals’. This biography describes his early life, his encounter with Vallabhācārya, his realization of the divine play, and his performance of various miracles.

However, as more and more progress had been made in manuscript studies and other investigations², it has become challenging to ascertain the authenticity of the poems in the *Sūrsāgar* (Sūr’s Ocean), as is the case with other early Hindi poetry. It is entirely plausible that some of the poems attributed to Sūr were composed by others. On this note, the *Caurāsī vaiṣṇavan kī vārtā* mentions that the Mughal emperor Akbar searched for *pad*s (poems with a loose moraic metre) created by Sūrdās and purchased these poems against gold and silver coins.

- 1 There are two hagiographies associated with the Vallabha Sampradāy sect: the *Story of Eighty-Four Disciples* (*Caurāsī vaiṣṇavan kī vārtā*) and the *Two Hundred and Fifty-Two Disciples* (*Do sau bāvan vaiṣṇavan kī vārtā*). The former describes the disciples of Vallabha (Vallabhācārya), while the latter focuses on the disciples of Viṭṭhalnāth, Vallabha’s son. The compilation is attributed either to Gokulnāth, Viṭṭhalnāth’s son, or to Harirāy, who inserted his commentary into the original text.
- 2 The edition *Sur’s Ocean*, edited by Kenneth E. Bryant and translated by John Stratton Hawley, is one of them.

Tempted by the lure of these coins, Pandit Kaviśvar faked a *pad* of Sūrdās and brought it to Akbar. In an ordeal, when Akbar submerged the *pads* in water, the counterfeit *pad* became sodden, while the paper bearing Sūrdās' genuine *pad* remained dry (*Vārtā* 3–4).³ This story implies that some *pads* were indeed written by individuals other than Sūrdās. Taking into account the self-praise aspect of the sect's lineage, Akbar's ordeal of the *pads* can be interpreted as a sign that Vallabha Sampradāy tried to obscure the fact that poems by authors other than Sūr had been incorporated into the *Sūrsāgar*. Interpolations seem to have occurred in the period when this hagiography was composed in the seventeenth century.⁴

This chapter investigates the evolving attribution to the poet Sūrdās over time. Through an analysis of the shifting portrayals of Sūrdās in early Hindi hagiographies, the study points out that a lesser-known poet might have been merged with the more renowned figure of Sūrdās. This melding might reveal a strategy employed by religious sects to elevate the stature of their poets. There are two possible interpretations of this phenomenon: either the more recognized poet overshadowed and assimilated the lesser-known one, or the lesser-known poet purposefully associated his work with Sūrdās to ensure broader readership, capitalizing on the fame of the renowned poet. Ultimately, this chapter aims to analyse to what extent the hagiographical tradition may have played a role in shaping the evolution of the Sūr corpus, by teasing apart the poetry of at least two different Sūrdāses whose poems are mixed up in the critical editions.

Two Sūrdāses Described in the *Bhaktmāl*

Around the year 1600, Nābhādās composed the *Bhaktmāl* (The Garland of Devotees), one of the early hagiographies written in Braj Bhasha. In this work, he employed a six-line poem format, known as *chappay*, to depict not only his contemporaneous saints but also legendary saints and poets. Renowned figures like Tulsīdās, Kabīr, and Mīrābāī were featured in his hagiography, attesting to their widespread fame during his era. As Nābhādās is believed to have resided in Vrindavan around

3 Parīkh vs 2005: 443–8.

4 The earliest manuscript of the *Caurāsī vaiṣṇavan kī vārtā* dating to 1640 is mentioned by Hawley (2015: 365 n.105). This manuscript predates the supposed composition date of this hagiography suggested by Barz. According to Barz (1976: 102), Harirāy's ordering of the *Caurāsī vaiṣṇavan kī vārtā* is supposed to have been composed around 1696 CE.

the sixteenth century, his accounts of saints from that period are considered reliable. He referred to Sūr in *chappay* 73:

- 1 *Sūra kabita suni kauna kabi, jo nahim sira cālana karai.*
- 2 *ukti, coja anuprāsa, barana asthiti, ati bhārī.*
- 3 *bacana prīti nirbāha, artha adbhuta tuka dhārī.*
- 4 *pratibimbīta dibi diṣṭi hṛdaya hari līlā bhāsī.*
- 5 *janama karama guna rūpa sabai rasanā parakāsī.*
- 6 *bimala buddhi guna aura kī, jo yaha gunaśravanani dharai. 73*

- 1 Having heard the *kabit* of Sūr, which poet would not bow his head?
- 2 His speech, witty remarks, alliteration, and status of description, are incredibly profound.
- 3 He accomplished the words and love, and made wonderful meanings and rhymes.
- 4 Reflecting the divine sight in his heart, the play of Hari was made splendid [by him].
- 5 His speech showed all of Kṛṣṇa's birth, deeds, quality, and form.
- 6 Those who obtain the listening of this quality, their knowledge and quality will become pure.

In this poem, *pratibimbīta dibi diṣṭi hṛdaya* (divine sight was reflected in his heart) can be interpreted as an allusion to Sūr's blindness, emphasizing his inner vision. *Hari līlā* could refer to Kṛṣṇa līlā. The praise highlighting Sūr's renown among fellow poets for his poetical skill seems fitting for someone who holds the title of *aṣṭachāp* in the Vallabh sect. However, what's most intriguing is not just the content of this *chappay*, but the fact that Nābhādās composed another *chappay* dedicated to Sūr.

The following *chappay* no. 126 describes Sūrdās.

- 1 *gāna kāvya guna rāsi suhṛda sahacari avatārī.*
- 2 *rādhākṛṣṇa upāsa rahasi suhka kau ādhikārī.*
- 3 *navarasa mukhya śṛṅgāra vividha bhāntina kari gāyo.*
- 4 *vadana ucārata vera sahasa pāṇyani hvai dhāyo.*
- 5 *aṅgikārakī avadhi yaha, jo ākhyā bhrātājamaḷa.*
- 6 *śrīmadanamohana sūradāsakī, nāmaśṛṅghalā jurī aṭala. 126*

- 1 He is blessed with the talent of poetry and recitation, has a beautiful heart, and is an incarnation of the attendant [of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa].

- 2 Worshipping Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, he had the authority of secret happiness.
- 3 He composed many poems with nine emotions, in which *śṛṅgār ras* played a central role.
- 4 When he uttered poetry, it took thousands of feet and ran (it became famous immediately).
- 5 It is the highest honour that he was called the twin brother [of god].
- 6 The names Holy Madanmohan and Sūrdās are tightly linked.

This brief curtsy to Sūrdās describes that he was a master of the *śṛṅgār ras*, had already gained significant fame, and was revered as either an incarnation of one of Rādhā–Kṛṣṇa or as a twin brother of Kṛṣṇa. The last line emphasizes his deep association with Madanmohan (or *Madanamohana*), one of the names of Kṛṣṇa.⁵

It is intriguing to think that Nābhādās might have created two distinct *chappays* for the renowned poet Sūr. Yet, a more plausible explanation could be the existence of another Sūrdās, also a Kṛṣṇa devotee. However, due to the significant similarities between the two *chappays* (such as poetic prowess and devotion to Kṛṣṇa), it becomes difficult to distinguish them based solely on Nābhādās' descriptions. This is especially so when considering the difference in the name of the god to whom each of two Sūrdās was devoted: Hari in one case, and Rādhā–Kṛṣṇa and Madanmohan in the other.⁶

5 Hawley noted that the signature of Sūrdās Madanmohan apparently came to light for the first time at the end of the manuscript dated vs 1681 (Hindi MS no. 157, Anup Sanskrit Library, Bikaner). However, even in this instance, the poems attributed to Sūrdās Madanmohan are treated as a kind of appendix. See Hawley (1984: 23).

6 The challenges in differentiating between Hari and Kṛṣṇa, or indeed between other names like Govinda and Nandanandana, do not necessarily clarify the distinctions between the two Sūrdāses. However, an insightful reference from a reviewer introduces a nuance: the role of Rādhā. This reviewer references the work of Māns Broo, who highlights that in the early Gauḍīya texts, such as the *Haribhaktivilās* by Sanātan Gosvāmī, there is either no mention of Rādhā or she is not emphasized. Consequently, references to Rādhā–Kṛṣṇa might indicate the Gauḍīya affiliation of the second Sūr. Additionally, Madanmohan alludes to one of the three principal Kṛṣṇa images in the Gauḍīya tradition, as the fourth episode of Priyādās suggests.

Sūrdās Described in the *Bhaktirasbodhini*

Nearly a century later, Priyādās gave a concrete image to this ambiguous Sūr described by Nābhādās. In his commentary of the *Bhaktmāl*, titled *Bhaktirasbodhini* – which is printed alongside *Bhaktmāl* in contemporary editions – Priyādās gave details of *chappay* 126. This detailed account of Sūrdās-Madanmohan includes the following four stories:⁷

1 The Tax Collector Sūrdās and the Sugar

The first story refers to his original name, Sūr, his official position as *amīna* (tax collector) of Saṇḍilā, and his devotion to Madan-gopāl. He bought expensive sugar and sent it for preparing food offerings for Kṛṣṇa. Priyādās described the poet's eyes as resembling lotuses, implying that this Sūr was not blind.

2 Guardian of the Adherents' Shoes

The second story refers to him as the 'guardian of the adherent's shoes'.⁸ One devotee, having heard that the poet had mentioned this role in one of his *pads*, decided to test him. True to the claim, he indeed kept the shoes of one sadhu and refused to go inside the temple even when Gusāin called him twice. He explained: 'I was entrusted with the shoes, so I was focusing on people's feet.'

3 Mishandling of Akbar's Money

The third story narrates that Sūr spent all the collected revenue on feeding sadhus. When the emperor's man came to collect the money, he filled the box with stones and ran away to Vrindavan. A courtier, Todar Mal, urged Akbar to arrest him. When subjected to torture by the cruel official Daśatam, Sūr sent a *dohā* (a couplet) to emperor Akbar:

7 For a modern Hindi commentary, see Nābhājī (2011: 745–50).

8 Evidence of his composition, '*sūradāsa madanamohana janama janama gāuṁ. santana ki pānahīn kau racchaka kahāuṁ*' (Sūrdās Madanamohan will sing in every life, calling himself a guardian of the adherent's shoes), is cited. Nāgarīdās, in his *Pada-prasaṅga-mālā* 47, references the same line in the story of Sūrdās Madanamohan. This line is identical to the concluding line of verse number 2 in Mītal's edition. S. M. 2 bears resemblances to verse number 166 of the *Sūrsāgar*, though its final line is totally different as '*sūra kūra āṁdharau main dvāra paryau gāuṁ*' (Shall I, Sūr, who is cruelly blind, stand at the doorway and sing?). The phrase 'the guardian of the adherent's shoes' appears exclusively in the works attributed to Sūrdās Madanamohan.

*ika tama aṁdhiyāro karai, śūnya dai puni tāhi.
daśatamate rakṣā karo, dinamāṇi akabara śāhi.*

With one darkness [the world] will be darkened. [You] have
given emptiness on top of it.
O Akbar the Great, the Sun! Save [me] from [the cruel man]
Daśatam.

Moved by this couplet, Akbar was pleased and declared: ‘Go to
that place (Vrindavan). All the wealth I have consecrated to you.’
Akbar mercifully set him free.

4 The Grace of God

The fourth story highlights his devotional life in Vrindavan. He
was cherished by both Madanmohan and Mahāprabhu. When
he composed a poem, it reached up to one hundred *yojanas*
[away].

While Nābhādās simply referred to the fame of this poet as a master
of the *śṛṅgār ras*, who was revered as an incarnation of an attendant
of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, Priyādās’ commentary differs in many aspects from
Nābhādās’ description. The shared themes between Nābhādās’ and
Priyādās’ depictions are the immediate spread of the poet’s works and
his divine connection as a twin to a deity. According to Priyādās, this
Sūr was not a renowned poet of the Vallabha Sampradāy.

Now our question is: who was this ‘Sūrdās Madanmohan’? He
was a tax collector, a sincere devotee, and an embezzler of Mughal
emperor Akbar’s funds on behalf of the sadhus. The references to
Akbar and his minister Todar Mal provide clues about his era, likely
the late sixteenth century. This portrayal does not coincide with the
conventional image of Sūrdās that we are familiar with. The problem
here is that while detailing ‘Sūrdās Madanmohan’, Priyādās omitted
commentary on *chappay* 73, where Nābhādās referred to ‘Vallabha
Sūrdās’.

The reasons behind Priyādās’ focus on ‘Sūrdās Madanmohan’, who
is lesser-known, and his omission of the more renowned ‘Vallabha
Sūrdās’, remain ambiguous. A potential explanation could lie in the
purported association between Priyādās and Sūrdās Madanmohan with
Caitanya or Mahāprabhu. Given that the god espoused by Gauḍīya
(Caitanya) Sampradāy was Madanmohan, Sūrdās Madanmohan is
considered to have belonged to Gauḍīya Sampradāy. Furthermore,
Sūrdās Madanmohan is said have been a pupil of the theologian

Sanātan Gosvāmī (1488–1558), who himself was a disciple of Caitanya Mahāprabhu.⁹

Although there is no evidence or reference in the text, the link between the deity Madanmohan, whose temple was established by Sanātan Gosvāmī, and the pen name of this poet suggests that Sūrdās Madanmohan was a disciple of Sanātan Gosvāmī. According to Rāmcandra Śukla, the period of Sūrdās Madanmohan's composition was between vs 1590 and 1600. One of the reasons behind Priyādās' focus on 'Sūrdās Madanmohan' could be that Priyādās, driven by solidarity within the same sect, described this person in detail and provided insights into a follower of his sect.

Image of Sūrdās in Dādūpanthī Hagiography

There are other early sources to consider. Rāghavdās of the Dādūpanthī sect is said to have composed his *Bhaktmāl* dated 1660 (vs 1717). This text is chronologically placed between the *Bhaktmāl* of Nābhādās and the commentary of Priyādās. Rāghavdās referred to 'Sūrdās Madanmohan' along with 'Sūr, the author of *Sūrsāgar*', with descriptions seemingly derived from Nābhādās' *Bhaktmāl*.¹⁰ He explained that the names of Sūr and Madanmohan are linked and that Sūrdās Madanmohan's *śṛṅgār* ras was beautiful. Providing specific place names such as Dwarka, he emphasized the widespread influence of Sūrdās Madanmohan's poetry, echoing Nābhādās' narrative. Rāghavdās introduced a new angle,

9 R. S. McGregor (1984: 94–5), Śukla (1990: 102–3), and, notably, Aimbak (1979) have sought to analyse the influence of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava bhakti on Sūrdās Madanmohan. The reviewer of this paper graciously provided me with a Gauḍīya source on Sūrdās Madanmohan found in Haridās Dās' *Śrī Śrī Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇav Abhidhān*. In this text, Sūrdās Madanmohan, a disciple of Sanātan Gosvāmī, is distinctly recognized as a separate poet from the blind Sūrdās. The episodes closely align with Priyādās' commentary, including details such as Sūrdās, originally named Sūrdhvaja, being an official during Akbar's rule. He sent a cart-full of grain (or sugar) to Vrindavan for Lord Madanmohan and, after being motivated by a dream, organized a grand feast and donated generously from Akbar's coffers to sadhus. He moved to Vrindavan, served Ṭhākur, and composed the *Suḥṛdvāṇī*, a collection of 105 padas in Braj Bhasha, known for its lyrical brilliance (Haridās Dās 1957: 1403).

10 While Rāghavdās composed two stanzas (236–237) about Madanmohansūr (equivalent to Sūrdās Madanmohan) and Caturdās provided commentary on these (361–365), two other stanzas (263–264) by Rāghavdās dedicated to 'Sūrdās the author of the *Sūrsāgar*', did not receive commentary in the Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute edition.

revealing that while Sūrdās Madanmohan was primarily a devotee of Kṛṣṇa, he sang praise of Rāma.¹¹ The commentary on this text by Caturdās dated 1800 gave almost the same story about Sūrdās Madanmohan as that given by Priyādās, which is mentioned above.

Interestingly, after providing a brief note on ‘Sūr, the author of the *Sūrsāgar*’, this edition offers insights about the saint Bilvamaṅgal about whom Rāghavdās composed one stanza (265), on which Caturdās gave an extended commentary (403–413). In the commentary, Brahman Bilvamaṅgal becomes infatuated with a courtesan named Cintāmani, but is spiritually awakened to God by her words. After visiting her during heavy rain, using a snake as a rope to ascend to her house, Cintāmani rebukes him, emphasizing that her body is nothing but skin and bones.¹² This narrative bears a resemblance to Priyādās’ account of Tulsīdās.¹³ In Rāghavdās’ *Bhaktmāl*, while the name Sūrdās is not explicitly attached to Bilvamaṅgal, the critical edition labels him as ‘Bilvamaṅgal Sūrdās’. This is possibly due to Bilvamaṅgal’s blindness, a condition he inflicted upon himself by piercing his own eyes with a needle. Rāghavdās’ commentary on ‘Sūrdās, the author of the *Sūrsāgar*’ doesn’t state outright that he was blind but emphasizes Bilvamaṅgal’s blindness. Thus, Bilvamaṅgal emerges as the third Sūrdās. For example, the Sikh tradition melds three identities: ‘Sūrdās, the author of the *Sūrsāgar*’, ‘Sūrdās Madanmohan’, and ‘Bilvamaṅgal the blind (Sūrdās)’. Further details will be explored later, particularly in Punjabi sources regarding Sūr.

Description of Sūrdās in Persian Sources

The Persian sources that reference Sūrdās provide additional information. The *Ā’in-i-Akbarī* describes how Rāmdās, a resident of Gwalior, and his son Sūrdās were singers at the court of Akbar.¹⁴ The *Muntakhab-*

11 The parallels are evident when observing Tulsīdās, who, despite being a follower of Rāma, wrote verses about Kṛṣṇa.

12 The tale of Bilvamaṅgal in Bengal, which slightly differs from the narrative presented in the *Bhaktamāl* of Rāghavdās, see Chakrabarti 2024.

13 I.e., in Priyādās’ commentary, *Bhaktirasabochinī*. The repetition of the Bilvamaṅgal tale by Caturdās, where he is referred to not as Bilvamaṅgal but rather as Bilvamaṅgal Sūrdās, suggests two possibilities: either the title ‘Sūrdās’ was conferred upon him subsequently, leading to similarities in anecdotes with Tulsīdās, or the story predated the bestowal of the name ‘Sūrdās’.

14 Sūrdās is mentioned in *The Ā’in i Akbarī* by Abul Fazl Āllāmī, translated in Blochmann (1873): 612, Ā’in 30, as the nineteenth of thirty-six musicians: ‘Sūr Dās, son of Bābū Rām Dās, a singer’.

al-Tavārīkh identifies his father Rāmdās as a resident of Lucknow.¹⁵ The *Inshaa-i Abu'l Fazl* (The letters of Abu'l Fazl) explains that Sūrdās was invited to meet Akbar in a letter from Abu'l Fazl.¹⁶ While it is possible that these records might be discussing a third or fourth distinct Sūrdās, I am inclined to believe that they refer to Sūrdās Madanmohan. The Sūrdās depicted in these Persian documents shares similarities, particularly regarding his role at Akbar's court, with the Sūrdās Madanmohan as described by Priyādās. Based on these accounts, we could suppose that the singer Sūrdās Madanmohan and his father Rāmdās lived in Lucknow. Subsequently, Sūrdās Madanmohan might have taken on the role of a *divān* (government official) of Saṇḍilā, a location not distant from Lucknow.¹⁷

Description of Sūrdās in Punjabi Sources

In regarding to Punjabi sources, Jeevan Deol pointed out that there is a single line (*chāḍi mana hari bimukhana ko sangā*) attributed to Sūrdās in the Sāranga *rāga* section of the *Ādi granth*, which is found as an entire *pad* in some manuscript traditions.¹⁸ The hymn by Sūrdās in

15 *The Muntakhab al-Tawārīkh of 'Abd al-Qādir bin-i-Malik Shāh al-Badāonī, Badā'uni*, ed. W. N. Lees, Kabīr al-Dīn Aḥmad, and Aḥmad 'Alī 1865–1869: vol. 2, p. 42. For English translation, see Lowe 1973: 37. I am grateful to Dr. Kazuyo Sakaki for the Persian source.

16 Mital (1958: 5) presents a narrative regarding an invitation from Akbar, but does not cite any sources. The authenticity of this claim remains unverified.

17 Hawley (2009: 21–4) gives the details of the Persian sources.

18 As for the hymn of Sūrdās, Deol (2000: 184–90) gives the critical text of the *pada* based on the Patna recension. He says that the printed *Ādi granth* text might be a variant of this recension.

chhāḍi mana hari bimukhana ko sangā.

kahā bhae pīpāi piāe bikhū na tājai bhuīanga. 1. rahāu

kāgā kahā kapūra chugāe suāna navāiai ganga.

khara kaii kahā agara ko lepanu marakaṭa bhūkhana anga. 1.

pāhana patita bāna nahī bedhe rīte hohi nikhangā.

sūradāsa oi kārī kamarī charāta na dūje rangā. 2.

Mind, leave the company of those who have turned away from Hari;

Does a snake ever lose its venom from being given milk? (1) *rahāu*

Why feed crows camphor? Why bathe a dog in the Ganges?

What use is a paste of perfume on a jackass or jewels on a monkey's arm? (1)

A spent arrow can't piece a stone even if quivers are emptied.

Sūradās, a black blanket can never have a different hue. (2)

Translated by Jeevan Deol.

the *Ādi granth* resembles a *pad* attributed to the poet ‘Vallabha Sūr’ in the *Sūrsāgar*. While there exists a connection between the *Ādi granth* and *Sūrdās* of the Vallabha Sampradāy, it is interesting to note that post-eighteenth-century Sikh hagiography created an image of *Sūrdās* by mixing not just the blind *Sūrdās* and *Sūrdās Madanmohan*, who was a *dīvān* at the imperial court, but also *Bilvamaṅgal*. For example, the *Pothī Harijasa* by Darbārī Dās in vs 1860 provides an account of *Sūrdās* in the following manner: Kṛṣṇa cursed a cowherd named Guālī for having looked at a *gopī* with lustful eyes. Consequently, Guālī was reborn as *Sūrdās*, the blind son of a Kāyastha serving as a *dīvān* at the imperial court. Sūr was given a *jāgīr* and administered it. He was asked to praise the emperor, but he refused. In this story, the blind *Sūrdās* and the court official *Sūrdās Madanmohan* became one. Furthermore, due to the misinterpretation of *Bilvamaṅgal* in *Caturdās’* commentary on Rāghavdās’ *Bhaktmāl*, the curse for having looked at a woman with lustful eyes was incorporated into the story of a single *Sūrdās*.¹⁹

Eighteenth-century Sources

In contrast, two eighteenth-century hagiographies explicitly describe *Sūrdās Madanmohan*. The first, by Nāgarīdās of Kishangarh, introduces four stories, which bear similarities to the account provided by

This resembles the following *pada* attributed to *Sūradās* (probably of Vallabha Sampradāy) in the *Sūrsāgar* (332) of Nāgarī Pracārīṇī Sabhā.

tajau mana, hari-bimukhani kau saṅga.

jinakairiṁ saṅga kumati upajati hai, parata bhajana mairiṁ bhaṅga.

kaḥā hota paya-pāna karāeṁ, biṣa nahiriṁ tajata bhujaṅga.

kāgahiriṁ kaḥā kapūra cugāeṁ, svāna nhavāeṁ gaṅga.

khara kauriṁ kaḥā aragajā-lepana, marakaṭa bhūṣaṇa-aṅga.

gaja kauriṁ kaḥā sarita anhabāeṁ, bahuri dharai vaha ḍhaṅga.

pāhana patita bāna nahiriṁ bedhata, rītau karata niṣaṅga.

sūradāsa kārī kāmari pai, caḍhata na ḍūjau raṅga.

Mind, leave the company of those who have turned away from Hari,
Meeting, whom bad intentions are produced and worship is interrupted

Why feed milk to a snake who never abandons poison?

Why feed crows camphor? Why bathe a dog in the Gangā?

Why use a paste of perfume on a jackass or jewels on a monkey’s arm?

Why bathe an elephant in a river? Just go back to own way (of getting covered in dust).

A spent arrow can’t piece a stone even if quivers are emptied.

Sūradās says, a black blanket can never have another hue.

19 Deol 2000: 175–6, f.15.

Priyādās. Embezzlement, guardian of the shoes for the devotees, and the popularity of his poems echo the narrative by Priyādās. Along with it, a new story emerges about a jewelry theft in the Keśavrāy temple in Mathura. Sūrdās Madanmohan composed a poem describing how the *ṭhākur* (Kṛṣṇa) went to the house of his in-laws and his wife's female relatives took his jewelry according to the local custom.²⁰

The second is the Marathi hagiography, the *Bhaktavijaya*, composed by Mahipati. His portrayal of Sūrdās Madanmohan is both longer and more important than his description of 'Sūrdās the blind' as the avatar of Akrūr. His reference to Sūrdās Madanmohan closely mirrors the account by Priyādās. However, he puts great emphasis on the fact that each character has a completely sincere duty of his own. Sūrdās Madanmohan believed he was born to feed the sadhus and consumed Akbar's money, knowing that he might be executed. Yet, Akbar also has a religious mind in that he was delighted by this action and did not mete out any punishment.²¹

In this regard, how many Sūrdās there were depends on whether we consider the Sūrdās in Persian sources to be a different person. The Sūrdās at Akbar's court is commonly identified with Sūrdās Madanmohan, as previously discussed. Thus, these details highlight that alongside the Sūrdās of the Vallabha Sampradāy, who stands as the central figure in hagiography, the identity of Sūrdās Madanmohan also received notable recognition in the eighteenth century. This underscores the presence of multiple Sūrdās figures within early hagiographies across different traditions and sects. Does the prominence of the Sūrdās of the Vallabha Sampradāy suggest that his recognition overshadowed that of another Sūrdās figure depicted at a similar level in early hagiography? In other words, did the Vallabha Sampradāy Sūrdās prevail to such an extent that it erased the recognition of other Sūrdās figures, despite their acknowledgment across sects up to the present day? Or, instead of outright erasure, could it be a case of assimilation of multiple Sūrdāses into the Sūr corpus? At least, the nineteenth-century Punjabi hagiography suggests that over time, confusion may have led to the amalgamation of multiple character identities into the contemporary portrayal of Sūrdās.

20 Pauwels 2017: 135–7.

21 The depiction of Sūrdās Madanmohan and Vallabha Sūrdās in Mahipati's *Bhaktavijaya* is based on the translation by Abbott and Godbole (1982: 41–51).

Assimilation of Verses

A more complicated aspect is the assimilation of verses, particularly the authorship of the *Sūrdās* poems. Several researchers have pointed out the fact that poems by saints other than ‘Vallabha *Sūrdās*’ are included in the collection, especially concerning *Sūrdās Madanmohan*. A prominent Hindi scholar, Rāmcandra Śukla, noted that even though there is no well-known book by *Sūrdās Madanmohan*, his verses are full of *ras* (essence or taste). As a result, many of them have been incorporated into the *Sūrsāgar*. He quoted the following two *pads* of *Sūrdās Madanmohan* in his book *Hindī Sāhitya kā itishās*, but the second *pad* is almost the same as *pad* 1306 in the *Sūrsāgar* of the Nāgarī Pracārīṇī Sabhā edition.

- 1) *madhu ke matavāre syāma! kholauṁ pyāre palakaim.*
sīsa mukuṭa laṭā chuṭī aura chuṭī alakaim
sura nara muni dvāra ṭhāḍhe, darasa hetu kalakaim.
nāsikā ke motī sohai bīca lāla lalakaim.
kaṭi pītāmbra muralī kara śravana kuṇḍala jhalakaim.
sūradāsa madanamohana darasa daihauṁ bhala kai.
 Oh Syām, who is intoxicated in honey, open your pretty eyelids.
 On your crowned head, hair is scattered, and a lock of hair is unraveled.
 Oh god, oh man, oh saint, I hope you will stand at the door and reveal yourself to me.
 The pearl of your nose is beautiful, and I regret to see a beloved one on the way.
 Yellow cloth on your waist, a flute in your hands, and earrings on your ears shine.
Sūrdās Madanmohan says, please give a glimpse.
- 2) *navala kisora navala nāgariyā.*
apanī bhuja syāma bhuja ūpara, syāma bhuja apane ura dhariyā.
karata vinoda tarani-tanayā taṭa, syāmā syāma umagi rasa bhariyā.
yauṁ lapaṭāi rahe ura antara marakata mani kañcana jyaum jariyā.
upamā ko ghana dāminī nāhīm, kaṁḍarapa koṭi vārane kariyā.
sūra madanamohana bali jorī nandanandana vṛṣabhānu dulariyā.
 A young man (Kṛṣṇa) and a young girl (Rādhā).
 Put her arm in his arm, and she pulled his arm on her chest.

On the shore of the Yamuna River, Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā overflowed
lusciously, having amusement, they embraced each other like
an emerald embedded in gold.

The cloud and lightning defy all metaphor; even millions of
Kāmas may sacrifice themselves in vain.

Sūr Madanmohan offers himself to the couple – the son of
Nanda and the beloved daughter of Vṛṣabhānu.

Since both Sūrdāses composed hymns dedicated to Kṛṣṇa in the same dialect of Hindi, Braj Bhasha, the verses bear a striking resemblance. How, then, can we confirm that the *pads* in the *Sūrsāgar* were composed by Sūrdās Madanmohan? Śukla says that more of Sūrdās Madanmohan's poetry is known to people, but in this confusing situation, only a handful scholars have endeavoured to compile or edit the *pads* of Sūrdās Madanmohan. The following attempts are worth noting:

- 1) Nāgarīdās referred to Sūrdās Madanmohan and quoted four of his *pads* in his *Pad prasaṅg mālā* (1748/vs 1805).
- 2) Vīyogī Hari gave fourteen *pads* in his *Brajmādhurīsār* (1923/vs 1980).²²
- 3) Sarayūprasād Agravāl gave twelve *pads* in his *Akbarī darbār ke hindī-kavī* (1950/vs 2007).²³
- 4) Bābā Kṛṣṇadās of Gauḍīya Sampradāy collected 105 *pads* of Sūrdās Madanmohan (1943/vs 2000).²⁴
- 5) The Sarasvatī Bhaṇḍār in Kankroli, Rajasthan, collected 126 *pads* into one booklet.²⁵
- 6) According to Haridās Dās' *Gauḍīya vaiṣṇav abhidhān* in 1957, Sūrdās Madanmohan composed a *padāvalī* titled the *Suḥṛdvānī*, which contains 105 *pads*.²⁶
- 7) Prabhudayāl Mītal published the *Sūrdās Madanmohan: jīvanī aur padāvalī* in 1958/vs 2015, in which 185 *pads* are included. Mītal edited them based on the four books (Vīyogī Hari, Sarayūprasād Agravāl, Bābā Kṛṣṇadās and the Sarasvatī Bhaṇḍār) mentioned above.

22 Hari (1933 [1923]): 100–7). Another book by Vīyogī Hari (1930) contains five verses of Sūrdās Madanmohan which are the same verses as in the 1933 edition.

23 Agravāl 1950: 447–50.

24 This book is no longer available (Mītal 1958: १).

25 According to Mītal (1958: १-३), his edition is mainly based on this collection.

26 There are no further details available beyond the title and the number of *pads* (Haridās Dās 1957: 1403).

Quotations from Sūrdās Madanmohan's verses given in this chapter are based on Mītal's edition in which 185 *pad*s are included.

Regarding literary themes, Sūrdās Madanmohan's verses do not exhibit any distinct stylistic characteristics. His preferred subjects include the meeting of lovers, the pain of separation (*viraha*), and the description of Kṛṣṇa's beauty, in which young Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa are portrayed. In addition, several poems focus on the play of young Kṛṣṇa (*bāl-līlā*), and there is one *pad* on the butter tax (*dān-līlā*). These subjects are typical of the poetry of devotion to Kṛṣṇa. However, as Nābhādās described that Sūrdās Madanmohan was a master of *śṛṅgār ras*, his poems are indeed full of amorous passion of the *gopīs* towards Kṛṣṇa. In one of his verses, a heroine ardently expresses her hope that Kṛṣṇa will come to her, saying:

*hirade kau thāra karūṁ naina-prāna tāmairi dharūṁ, tana-mana
nyauchāvari karūṁ, hoya jyaum āvana. (Sūrdās Madanmohan
padāvalī of the Mītal edition (S. M.) 94)*

I will make my heart a tray on which I will put my eyes and life.
If he comes, I will sacrifice my body and soul.

In his PhD dissertation (1979), Aimbak attempted to trace the influence of the Gauḍīya Sampradāy in some phrases of Sūrdās Madanmohan's poems. However, Sūrdās Madanmohan did not explicitly describe the sectarian theory of the Gauḍīya Sampradāy. It is reasonable to state that the religious thought of his poems was not remarkably different from that of other poems of Kṛṣṇa devotion.²⁷

The Verses Common to the Mītal Edition of 'Sūrdās Madanmohan' and the *Sūrsāgar* Attributed to 'Vallabha Sūrdās' (Nāgarī Pracāriṇī Sabhā Edition)

Regarding verses found in both editions, Mītal pointed out that 24 out of the 185 *pad*s attributed to Sūrdās Madanmohan can also be found in the *Sūrsāgar*. By compiling and comparing electronic versions of the *Sūrsāgar* from Nāgarī Pracāriṇī Sabhā and the Sūrdās Madanmohan from the Mītal edition, I identified an additional four *pad*s beyond those noted by Mītal, as well as several shared phrases. In total, at

27 Aimbak 1979: 167.

least twenty-eight *pads* proved indeterminate regarding their original authorship.

These shared *pads* can be categorized based on the extent of their similarities. Notably, no *pad* perfectly matches in both editions. Among the types of partial match, I discounted *pads* that only shared a few words between editions, reasoning that they did not meet the criteria for consideration. For instance, there are *pads* that start with three common words (*Jasodā, jhulāvai, halarāvai*), a type of partial alignment I generally opted to ignore. Nevertheless, I would like to introduce them here to highlight the unique characteristics of each poet. While both poets touched upon the theme of mother Yaśodā's affection for baby Kṛṣṇa, they expressed it in a distinct manner.

*Jasodā hari pālanaim jhulāvai.
halarāvai, dularāi malhāvai, joi-soi kachu gāvai.
mere lāla kauṁ āu nindariyā, kāhaim na āni suvāvai.
tū kāhaim nahim begihim āvai, tokauṁ kānha bulāvai.
kabahuṁ palaka hari mūdi leta haim kabahuṁ adhara
pharakāvai.
sovata jāni mauna hvai kai rahi, kari-kari saina batāvai.
ihī antara akulāi uṭhe hari, jasumati madhuraiṁ gāvai.
jo sukha sūra amara-muni duralabha, so nanda-bhāmini pāvai.
(Sūrsāgar 661)*

Mother Yaśodā rocks a cradle for Hari (Kṛṣṇa).

Rocking, shaking, making a kissing sound, she sings something or another.

Come to my baby, sleepyhead! Why don't you come to let him sleep?

Why won't you come soon? Kānha (Kṛṣṇa) calls you.

Sometimes he closes his eyelids, and sometimes his lips quiver.

When she knows he has fallen asleep, she stays still and silent, then tells [the others] that he has fallen asleep.

[But] during this time, Hari (Kṛṣṇa) restlessly wakes up, and Yaśodā sings softly.

Sūrdās says, the happiness of Nanda's wife is difficult to obtain even for divine beings and sages.

In depicting the same scene of rocking a child, Yaśodā in the *Sūrsāgar* softly sings (*jasumati madhuraiṁ gāvai*) to lull Kṛṣṇa to sleep. In contrast, Sūrdās Madanmohan employs numerous onomatopoeia and ya-

maka. While a distinguishing characteristic of the *Sūrsāgar* is its sense of stillness, that of *Sūrdās Madanmohan* is its euphony.

Jasodā maiyā lāla kauṁ jhulāvai.
āche bāre kānha kauṁ hularāvai.
kaniyāñ- kaniyāñ aīyāñ - aīyāñ yauṁ kahi lāḍa laḍāvai.
hulululu hulululu hām- hām- hām kahi goda lieñ khilāvai.
dou kara pakari jasodā rāñī, ṭhumakī pām̐ya dharāvai.
ghananana ghananana ghuñgharū bājaiñ, jhām̐jhariyā
jhamakāvai.
Sūradāsa madanamohana kauṁ, yāhī bhām̐ti rijhāvai.
mañ mañ mañ mañ pap pap pap pap pap pap cac cac cac tat
tātheī,
yā bidhi lāḍa laḍāvai. (S. M. 5)

Mother Yaśodā swings her baby (Kṛṣṇa),
 Rocking the good child kānha (Kṛṣṇa).
 Having said, ‘Come Kaniyāñ’, she caresses,
 Having said ‘hulululu hululu hām- hām- hām’, she hugs [her
 son] to her breast and feeds him.
 Grabbing him by the hand, Mother Yaśodā makes him toddle.
 ghuñgharū make sound ghananana- ghananana and its tin-
 kling shines.
 Sūrdās Madanmohan says she delighted Madanamohan (Kṛṣṇa).
 By ‘mañ mañ mañ mañ pap pap pap pap pap cac cac cac tat’, she caresses in this way.

This *pad* exemplifies Sūrdās Madanmohan’s onomatopoeia and *yama-ka* (*kaniyāñ- kaniyāñ aīyāñ – aīyāñ*) as characteristics of his composition. In relation to this, McGregor (1984: 95) observed that his *pads* are musical and rhythmical.

Here is an example of a *pad* that shares numerous common phrases:

mayā kariai kṛpāla, pratipāla, saṁsāra udadhi jañjāla
paraṁ pāra.
kāhū ke brahmā, kāhū ke mahesa, prabhu mere tau tumahīñ
adhāra.
dīna ke dayāla hari, kṛpā mokauri kari, kahi-kahi loṭata
bāra-bāra.
sūrasayāma antarajāmī svāmī jagata ke kahā kahaṁ karau
niravāra. (Sūrsāgar 870)

Oh passionate one and protector, please feel compassion, by
 which I can cross over the snares of the world's ocean.
 Someone's shelter is Brahmā, someone's Śiva. You are the shel-
 ter for me.
 'Oh Hari, who is merciful to the poor, please show grace to me.'
 I roll saying it many times.
 'Oh Syām of Sūr, you know from within and are a master of the
 world. What else can I say? Please disentangle me.'

*mayā kariyai kṛpāla, pratipāla, saṁsāra-udadhi-jañjāla taim
 pāraṁpāra.
 kāhū kaim caṇḍikā, kāhū kaim mahesa, kāhū kaim naresa,
 desa eka kaim, prabhu! mere tau tuma hī ho ādhāra.
 dīna dayāla dayā kariyai jiya, vaha aparādha agādha, jāsai
 mere saba dukkha dūra hohim bikāra.
 'Sūradāsa madanamohana' piya tuma antarajāmī, jagata ke
 svāmī saurī kahā kahaim bāraṁbāra. (S. M. 1)*

Oh passionate one and protector, please feel compassion, by
 which I can cross over the snares of the world ocean.
 Someone's shelter is Durgā, someone's Śiva, and someone's king
 in the same country. You are the shelter for me.
 'Oh one who is merciful to the poor, please feel compassion for
 the life of an infinitely guilty person, by which all my pains
 and agitation will go away.'
 Sūrdās Madanmohan says, the beloved you know from within,
 and are a master of the world.
 What else may I say many times?

By the fact that the poems are almost identical, with only a slight variation
 in the third line, the two can be considered the same composition. While
 each line of the *Sūrsāgar* is composed of roughly thirty-six moras with an
 internal pause, the Sūrdās Madanmohan's *pad* does not adhere to a strict
 metrical rhythm. The *Sūrsāgar* verse appears more refined than Sūrdās
 Madanmohan's in terms of prosody. In other words, it might be more apt
 to suggest that the editors of the *Sūrsāgar* had superior editorial skills.

The following example clearly shows that the verse of the *Sūrsāgar*
 was revised based on that by Sūrdās Madanmohan.

*māi rī, jhūlata haim raṅga hiṇḍoraim, sobhā tana syāma-goraim,
 nīla-pīta paṭa ghana-dāminī ke bhauraim.
 gopijana cahum auraim jhulāvati thoraim-thoraim,*

pabana gamana āvai saurṁdhe kī jhakoraiṁ.
sobhā-sindhu mana boraiṁ, nainana saurṁ nainā joraiṁ,
rījhi- rījhi prana bārata, chabi para tṛṇa toraiṁ.
 ‘Sūradāsa madanamohana’ cita coryau murali kī ghora,
dhuni suni sura-badhū sīsa dhoraiṁ. (S. M. 181)

Just look at the joyful swing and the beauty of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā.
 The yellow cloth on his dark body is like lightning in the cloud
 in the dawn.

Wives of cowherds rock the swing a little from all sides
 When the wind blows, the fragrance sways.
 The ocean of beauty drowned the mind, looking eye to eye.
 They are delighted to sacrifice their lives – Ward off evil eyes on
 this beauty.
 Sūrdās Madanmohan says, the sound of the flute stole the
 heart.
 Hearing the sound, the celestial nymph shakes her head.

lalanā jhūlaiṁ hiḍoraiṁ sobhā tanu goraiṁ.
nīla pīta paṭa ghana dāminī kauṁ bhoraiṁ.
sobhā-sindhu mana boraiṁ gopī cahumṁ oraiṁ
nainani naina joraiṁ jhūlaiṁ thoraiṁ thoraiṁ
pavana gavana āvai saurṁdhe kī jhakoraiṁ.
tana mana bārāiṁ yā chabi para tṛṇa toraiṁ
 ‘sūra’ prabhu cita coryaiṁ naiku aṁga moraiṁ.
sunī murali ghoraiṁ surabadhu sīsa dhoraiṁ. (Sūrsāgar 3457)

An attractive woman swings the swing. Her fair body shines.
 The yellow cloth on his dark body is like lightning in the cloud
 at the dawn.
 The ocean of beauty drowned the mind of wives of cowherds
 on all sides.
 Looking eye to eye, they swing the swing a little.
 When the wind blows, the fragrance sways.
 On this beauty, sacrifice the body and soul and ward off evil
 eyes.
 Master of Sūr stole the heart and body just for a moment.
 Hearing the resounding of the flute, the celestial nymph shakes
 her head.

This *pad* can be categorized as a ‘corrected type’. The words and phrases in both are nearly identical. A rough-hewn *pad* by Sūrdās Madanmohan has been rearranged into a more refined version with better-rhyming word order in the *Sūrsāgar*. The longer *pad*, which had over forty moras in each line, has been rearranged into the shorter one with around twenty moras per line. The *Sūrsāgar* version features the end rhyme *-oraiṁ* (*goraiṁ*, *bhoraiṁ*, *oraiṁ*, *thoraiṁ*, *jhakoraiṁ*, *toraiṁ*, *moraiṁ*, *ḍhoraiṁ*) in all the lines. As the principle of ‘lectio difficilior potior’ implies, it is difficult to conceive that the elegantly written poem in the *Sūrsāgar* would be deliberately reworded in a native fashion by Sūrdās Madanmohan.

The Problems of Mora

Concerning the issue of mora, while the *Sūrsāgar* consistently adheres to metrical rules, Sūrdās Madanmohan does not. In fact, the poet’s name is difficult to handle in terms of the metre, due to its extensive syllabic count. The poet’s name, Sū-ra-dā-sa - ˘ - ˘ Ma-da-na-mo-ha-na ˘ ˘ ˘ - ˘ ˘, consists of ten syllables and thirteen moras. Occasionally, the poet employs this penname to fit twelve moras, counting ‘o’ as a single mora:

madanamohana *kī yā chabi ūpara, sūradāsa balihārī.* (S. M.166)

˘ ˘ ˘ ˘ ˘ ˘

To this beauty of Madanmohan, I Sūrdās Madanamohan offer myself as a sacrifice.

This is evidenced by the following corresponding phrase in the *Sūrsāgar*, in which *nanda-suvana*, corresponding to *madanamohana*, has six moras’ value.

Nanda-suvana *ko yā chabi ūpara, sūradāsa balihārī.* (*Sūrsāgar* 707)

- ˘ ˘ ˘ ˘

Upon this beauty of Nanda’s son, I Sūrdās offer myself as a sacrifice.

Nanda-suvana has six moras, so ‘mo’ of *madanamohana* should be scanned as a light syllable having one mora. The problem of the hypermetric line is eliminated by changing the word *madanamohana*

(seven moras) into *manamohana* (six moras), which is another epithet of Kṛṣṇa in the *Sūrsāgar*.

Sūradāsa ura basahu nirantara madanamohana abhirāma rī.

(S. M. 61)

Sūrdās Madanmohan says, oh beautiful Madanamohan, dwell in my heart.

Sūradāsa ura basahu nirantara manamohana abhirāma.

(Sūrsāgar 1822)

Sūrdās says, oh beautiful Manamohan, dwell in my heart.

The modification from *madanamohana* to *manamohana* not only reduces the number of moras by one, but also complicates the identification of a piece as Sūrdās Madanmohan's work. It is natural for Sūrdās to worship Manamohan (Kṛṣṇa). Furthermore, the distance between the positions of *Sūradāsa* and *Madanamohana* (*Manamohana*) raises an ambiguity: is 'Madanamohan' an integral part of the poet's name, or is 'Sūrdās the blind' venerating Manamohan Kṛṣṇa? Although the comparison of both works suggests the presence of distinct poets, the overwhelming similarities caution us. Relying solely on the verses from Mītal's edition for arguments is precarious, as the poems therein cannot always be definitively attributed to Sūrdās Madanmohan.

Conclusion

The hagiographies and *pad*s ascribed to Sūrdās Madanmohan give us a clear indication that there was one Sūr, who was a government official, as well as a poet whose penname was Sūrdās Madanmohan, a master of *śṛṅgār ras*. His work, which was not bound by traditional metrical rules, appears to be intermingled with the *Sūrsāgar*, attributed to 'Sūrdās the blind' – a saint of the Vallabha Sampradāy. Many poems, with phrases common to both the *Sūrsāgar* and the edition of Sūrdās Madanmohan, seem to either be the work of Sūrdās Madanmohan or Sūrdās Madanmohan's adaptations of the poems of 'Vallabha Sūrdās', the latter suggested by the *Caurāsī vaiṣṇavan kī vārtā*. However, it is essential to emphasize that these amalgamations were not solely the work of the poet himself but rather interventions by later editors. The insistence of the *Caurāsī vaiṣṇavan kī vārtā* on the authenticity of the *Sūrsāgar* while discrediting other poets who claim

the name Sūr creates an impression of favouritism toward the Vallabha Sūr over Sūrdās Madanmohan, implying an inferior status for the latter. However, early hagiographies like the *Bhaktmāl* hold Sūrdās Madanmohan in reverence, contradicting this notion. This suggests the possibility that editors associated with this sect were responsible for refining and incorporating the works of other poets, including Sūrdās Madanmohan, into the *Sūrsāgar*, thereby masking their true origins. If you read between the lines, the narratives presented in the *Caurāsī vaiṣṇavan kī vārtā* may have been intended to obscure this aspect of editorial intervention, consequently raising doubts about the purity of the *Sūrsāgar*. In an era where authorship recognition was low, editors commonly incorporated elements from the works of poets from different sects, especially when they shared the same language and worshipped the same deity. This practice was not unique to Sūrdās but rather a common occurrence, where editors would utilize the favourable aspects of such poems.²⁸

Finally, I want to return to the fact that Priyādās ignored ‘Sūrdās the blind’, one of the *aṣṭachāp* poets of the Vallabha Sampradāy. While Priyādās provided extensive details about the tax collector Sūrdās Madanmohan, why did he remain silent on Vallabha’s Sūrdās? Hawley²⁹ and Pauwels³⁰ suggest that the well-known stories of Sūrdās in the Vallabhan hagiography may be a late development. Thus, Priyādās’ silence might indicate his ignorance of the celebrated poet Sūrdās. However, given that he detailed other contemporary poets including Tulsīdās, Mīrābāī, it’s curious that Priyādās didn’t mention ‘Vallabha Sūr’, especially when the Dādūpanthī Rāghavdās had done so just a few years before. Why could Priyādās not do the same? Priyādās’ portrayal of Vallabha saints was somewhat restrained. For instance, when Nābhādās characterized Vallabha as a Viṣṇusvāmī Sampradāy member in the *Bhaktmāl*,³¹ Priyādās’ commentary was unremarkable.³²

28 De Bruijn’s concept (2014: 139–59) helps in understanding this phenomenon: ‘the generalization of literary material can be seen as a mechanism that is built into the genre and is not dependent on the individual authorship of a historical poet.’ I would like to express my gratitude to the anonymous reviewer for their valuable insight into the idea presented in this annotation.

29 Hawley 1984: 3–22.


30 Pauwels 2017: 134.

31 Hare (2011: 61 fn. 166) highlighted the potential interpolation of the *chappay* dedicated to Vallabha in the *Bhaktmāl*. Nābhādās mentioned the establishment of four *sampradāys* by Rāmānuja, Nimbārka, Madhva, and Viṣṇusvāmī. About the relationship between Viṣṇusvāmī and Vallabha, see Hawley (2011: 28–51).

32 In *chappay* 48 composed by Nābhādās, Vallabha is mentioned with Jñāndev, Nāmdev, Trilocaṇ for the Viṣṇusvāmī Sampradāy.

Similarly, while Nābhādās referred to Giridhara and Gokulanāth, sons of Viṭṭhalnāth and grandsons of Vallabha as belonging to the lineage of Vallabha (*chappay* 130–3), Priyādās’ commentary remained simple. In contrast, Priyādās’ depiction of Sūrdās Madanmohan is elaborate and detailed. This could hint at a possible sectarian bias or rivalry, with Priyādās favouring the Gauḍīyas over the Vallabhites. Perhaps, foreseeing Sūrdās Madanmohan’s impending assimilation into Vallabha Sūrdās, Priyādās subtly championed the lesser-known poet. Future manuscripts might shed more light on this speculation, especially if they reveal Priyādās’ commentary on Sūr (*chappay* 73) in Nābhādās’ *Bhaktmāl*.

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Abbreviation

S. M. *Sūrdās Madanmohan padāvalī* of the Mītal edition

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