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On the Nāth and Sant Traditions: Transmission, Yoga and Translationality

In historical perspective, the papers in Part III cover a span of several centuries and must be read against their specific backgrounds. We have brought them together here, however, since they reflect on traditions related either to the Nāths or the Sants, or to their mutual relations. The authors have written their contributions independently, but the editors and the readers may read them in the light of their shared issues and themes. Source texts, periods, and methods differ—but the collated topics on Nāths and Sants facilitate comparison. From this perspective, I will highlight some systematic points that deserve special attention. However, I will not sum up the contents of the six papers included in this part of the book—this has already been done by the authors in their abstracts. I have chosen to start with some reflections on socio-religious questions related to the two traditions, and then to approach the question of yoga in this period and its relation to bhakti. On a more interpretative level, I shall discuss the importance of translation as a challenge to comparison and interpretation for researchers in the field. The separation between these domains has more of a heuristic value—no doubt they are deeply interconnected.

Transmission, authority

> 'I am a Hindu by birth, a Yogī
> through endurance, a Muslim pīr
> through understanding.
> Recognize the path, oh mullāhs and
> qāzīs, that was accepted by Brahmā,
> Viṣṇu, and Śiva.'
>
> *Gorakhabāṇī*, *sabadī* 14

All the papers relate, albeit under different angles, to modes of transmission, to the mechanics of access to authority, to processes of legitimation and transfer of knowledge in a context demanding the confirmation of socio-religious identities.[1] The social background of adherents, doctrinal discourses, critical exegeses, and gendered voices are among the topics discussed by the authors in this section to confirm sectarian identity and assure transmission. What is transmitted and how are different doctrines shared and canonized? What kind of polemics are necessary to establish one's own identity? What place does the so-called religion occupy in the wider economic, political, and literary fields?[2]

Speaking of Nāths and Sants in early modern North India opens up a large range of questions which have to do foremost with various religious attitudes and competing doctrinal interpretations, as well as sociographic dimensions. The term Sant cuts through different doctrinal ideologies that overlap regarding sectarian and religious adherences, as well as more literary ones, and it demands us to ask the question, 'Who, finally, is a Sant?' To answer this question, the circulation of cultures at the heart of the early modern world makes it meaningful and necessary to develop perspectives which discuss topics related to broad historical processes (sociological, political, and so forth) rather than to one or the other tradition, or to closed religious boundaries.[3] Similarly, controversies nourish the field of interaction of these various traditions during the period.

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1 The selected elements are in no way representative of the full scope of research the papers provide.

2 I am aware of the difficulties of applying the term of 'religion' to the Indian context, but I see it here, *a minima*, as a reference and acceptance of a transcendent 'being' translatable into institutionalized rituals and doctrines. Bhakti, also a term taken for granted, includes a huge variety of religious experiences not covered by the categories of Western religious history. Vedanta, too, is a fuzzy category into which many traditions have been placed together since the time of the Upanishads. Here again the Indian delimitations of what a category includes are not the same as Western appellations.

3 A proposition made for instance by Suthren Hirst and Zavos (2011), pp. 115–116: 'The interaction of different teacher-pupil-traditions is a significant indicator of this dynamic . . . How might a model of teacher-pupil traditions disrupt the notion of separate world religions and give us a different way of approaching religious traditions in modern South Asia?'

How does a tradition survive over time and how does it become successful? Or more successful than all the others? Who is a 'true yogi'? Is a Sant a yogi? Are all yogis Sants?[4] Who has religious authority? How is religious authority built and how does it get accepted?

The Sant tradition was right from the beginning of the early modern world an often used but diverse designation.[5] This diversity raises the question of what it is that makes a Sant? Is there any common doctrine to justify a Sant identity? Even core concepts or terms were interpreted in various and distinct ways, yet it is this umbrella term of Sant that justifies their traceability.[6] Concentrating on the origin and rise of a Sant tradition is a rewarding perspective in the diachronic and dynamic aspect of tradition and content analysis teaches us about the crystallization of one strand at a specific moment in time.[7] Who are the people who join a certain group and not another in the eighteenth century? Through the contrastive picture of two Sant sadhus, Rāmcaraṇ and Carandās, we follow the different perspectives that identify with the appellation of Sant: while one is strictly *nirguṇa*, the other espouses a more mainstream form of Vaishnavism.[8] It seems that the stricter Rāmcaraṇ was more successful in terms of assuring transmission and continuation, whereas Carandās's more lukewarm position did not ensure a distinct lineage.

The case of the Biśnoī *sampradāya*[9] reveals how to become successful in a world of multi-sectarian competition and demonstrates the necessity to establish doctrinal frontiers. To understand this requires an analysis of the choices that are made operative in a tradition that become efficient and of the presentation of Jāmbhojī as a 'Sant' and founder of the Biśnoī *sampradāya*. The *Sabadvāṇī*, the central text of the Biśnoī *sampradāya*, contains religious criticism, such as the critique of the Nāth tradition, which serve as vectors to supplant the Nāth ideologies.[10] For the Biśnoī, Jāmbhojī is the perfect yogi, superior to all others. His religious

4 See the section below on yoga.

5 See Gold's contribution. On Sant culture, see Williams (2014).

6 Gold speaks of profound ambiguities, and points towards the doctrinal and class differences in the way dissent and opposition was expressed.

7 New Sants emerged in the eighteenth century who continued and developed the discourses of predecessors. Gold looks at processes of transmission and at what that entails in terms of the transformation of the flow of poetry to adjust to new mentalities and perspectives.

8 Neither figure sprang from the lower classes as their predecessors did but were middle class and showed a different Sant piety than their earlier colleagues. They were not householders like the earlier Sants but renouncers—celibate sadhus! Followers equally seem to stem from the middle rather than lower classes.

9 See the contribution by Kempe-Weber.

10 Other groups are also criticized, but yogis are the main target. The hypocrisy of the Nāths is well demonstrated in the verses where all exterior paraphernalia are specifically attacked.

criticism demonstrated his superiority and placed him in line with the theme of the '*true yogī*' who appears in each era to help the people.[11]

Gender is another realm that has to do with authority. The Sant tradition is an entirely male-dominated one and the feminine dimension of its key works is rarely addressed.[12] What kind of authority can we identify at this level? What is particular to the feminine voice that it should be identified as the religious experience par excellence?[13] And what constitutes the 'feminine' in the sources that have been preserved up to now?

The question of the feminine appears in the context of Kṛṣṇa bhakti, where Kabīr would speak on the emotional level like the *gopī*s, albeit the Kṛṣṇa references remain free of mythological constraints. On the symbolic level, it is not the *gopī* model that is identified, but the effort to burn the ego in fire, and it concerns poems alluding to the final deliverance. The symbolic level would be rendered more understandable through the image of the woman and her emotions assumed to be more widely known.[14]

We may ask Agrawal[15] whether the female alter ego of Kabīr corresponds to the nature of emotions that are actually lived, or whether it is a poetic convention/necessity. The Sant poetry attributed to women is not really different from that attributed to men, which might indicate that using a feminine voice corresponds to a literary convention.[16]

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11 Kempe-Weber analyses in a pragmatic manner the consolidation of authority through the mechanics that function on a village level in a very different way than in the context of the city or the court. At the village level, various teachings are confused and mixed. People would amalgamate the strands and layers that form the frame of traditions, and exchanges occurred by blurring, for example, borders of doctrinal traditions. Reflecting on the case of identity in reference to Nāthism in the *Sabadavāṇī* not only concerns shared and disputed doctrines but reveals a strategy to give authority to the founder in the process of forging a new community. The authority attributed at the time of Jāmbodhjī to the *Gorakhbāṇī* is transferred onto the *Sabadavāṇī* and hence brings authority to Jāmbhojī. He referred to the Nāths not out of interest but because of their importance. However, in the process, Nāth elements have been incorporated—just one example of the many exchanges between the Sants and Nāths.

12 In her contribution, Rousseva-Sokolova examines the paradoxes underlying the fact that male devotees may turn to the feminine to qualify different types of religious experience. Or, in other words, women are the enemy of the Sants, but at the same time, the Sants may speak, like Kabīr, with the voice of a woman. Rousseva-Sokolova uses two levels—emotional/feminine and symbolic—to guide us through the words ascribed to Kabīr.

13 Rousseva-Sokolova works at the level of interpretation, which differentiates her contribution from those who are primarily preoccupied with establishing textual accuracy.

14 Which is actually a male perception of what constitutes femininity.

15 Agrawal (2009), quoted by Rousseva-Sokolova.

16 Rousseva-Sokolova ponders over cross-gender rhetoric in the bhakti and Sant traditions. She argues that the subject of emotions and their treatment is a new field of inquiry from which we may expect new interpretative insights that are also valid for the Sant world.

Yoga

> 'When the mind and the self of the
> yogi unite like salt mixes with water
> it is called samādhi.'
> *Vivekamārtaṇḍa* 9.1.13,162

The role of the yogi as authority (see above) is only one instance of yoga in the vernacular texts of early modern North India. The word is part and parcel of many texts which hint at their ways of using the term. The appearance of Haṭhayoga texts, more tantric-oriented styles of yoga, in Sanskrit texts as well as in vernacular idioms, is a characteristic of the history of yoga during the period. The relation of *yoga and bhakti*, for instance, still needs further investigation to show how yoga is used in this context and what its exact meaning is, also along sectarian lines.

Who could qualify as the perfect yogi of this time? The answers are quite different when looking at the distinct uses of the term or the sources consulted. Though yoga was a generic term to express ways of liberation (see the Upanishads and the Gita), over centuries and through the influence of modern developments, we tend to identify yoga with the more physical meaning of the word. However, in the context of bhakti or more generally Vedanta, the meaning can be far more 'religious/philosophical' and the body be of little or no interest.[17]

One example is provided by the Dadūpanth in which yoga is based on *brahma*-bhakti.[18] In fact, yoga is defined as *brahma*-gnosis, and Dadū is the perfect *avadhūta* (yogi) who transmits *brahma*-gnosis to the disciple. Yoga without *brahma*-bhakti/gnosis is actually void. Hence yogic practices without a gnostic quest supervised by a proper guru are futile. The descriptions of the opponents, or not-perfect yogis, are interesting in so far as they suggest which yogas were important at the time and offer information about lineages. The perfection seen in Dādū places him as the *avadhūta* beyond all the other systems.[19]

The presence of discourses on yoga in Rāmdās's codex shows how important it was for the Sants to reflect on their religion in discourses concerning yoga. The doctrinal disputes indicate a direction from a more ancient Nāthyogic culture to a

17 Mallinson in *Roots of Yoga* (2017) pays more attention to texts relating to body yoga than to those mentioning yoga in the context of bhakti or Vedanta.

18 See Horstmann's contribution.

19 The primordial Nāth is referred to as *brahma*, who resides in the interior and responds to the idea of qualifying beyond and above sectarian questions. The case study allows Horstmann to single out two models of Nāthism, a tantric-Shaiva model and a bhakti-fied form of it. She shows convincingly that codices are a good subject of study as they can be regarded as traditions in progress, having taken a number of years to be completed. Rāmdās's codex took six years of piecing together a manuscript and testifies to a wide range of Sant traditions beside the Dādūpanth.

Nāthyogic bhakti, just as many of Kabīr's poems demonstrate preference for an interpretation of rasa in a more bhakti line.[20] Through a parallel reading of what is happening in the distillation process and in the 'yogic' path of liberation,[21] we learn how Kabīr wishes to produce rasa in the sense of the immortal drink that, produced in the body, can be consumed. Kabīr, bound through this process to the Nāth tradition, will however transform it into Rāma rasa and finally it is the name of Rāma itself which is the sweet rasa to be drunk. Rāma rasa is equated with the name to obtain altered states of consciousness. We have here an example of a yogic practice transformed into one related to bhakti.

Bhakti and yoga can also be differentiated in reference to the acceptance of divine or yogic power by a bhakta or a yogi.[22] In the Sant tradition, it is the yogi who is able to receive the help of his God who has more power.

The *Sarvāṅgayogapradīpikā* of the Dādūpanthī Sundardās is an eighteenth-century testimony to these debates and the plurality of yogas at work, in the opinion of those interested in confirming which one was the more important.[23] For Sundardās, yoga covers many fields, even if he finally establishes a hierarchy in which Advaita Vedanta is the most important path of liberation. Advaita can only be a spiritual understanding of yoga.

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20 Zhang singles out three types of origins or knowledges for the word rasa in Kabīr—alchemy, wine distillation, and Haṭhayoga. Rasa was integrated from what Zhang calls pre-bhakti thoughts into the world of Kabīr where it bears traces of these different meanings related to different contexts. A first meaning relates rasa to the world of alchemy (*rasāyana*) where rasa has the same rejuvenating properties as we find in alchemy. In a second usage rasa refers to an alcoholic drink with all the metaphors attached to the description of drinking as a way to achieving the highest liberating goal or explaining a mystical experience.

21 Zhang reads the poems referring to the processes of distillation in terms of the physical experiences of yogic nature. Images drawn from the world of distillation allow Kabīr to explain what happens inside the body prepared to enjoy rasa, here the divine intoxication. For Zhang, it is a significant feature in the intellectual history of the many layered influences in Kabīr's work and reception.

22 Pinch (2006) and Burchett (2012) have studied the disputes that differentiated yogis at the time. They discuss the two strands, one based on self-effort and the yoga which includes the idea of a 'God' bestowing power and knowledge to the yogi. This resonates with Horstmann and Zhang.

23 For Sundardās and his *Sarvāṅgayogapradīpikā*, see Burger (2014).

Translationality and identity

> 'For after all, how can we know
> why it is that some things are just not
> sayable in certain languages?'
>
> 'All a translation can ever be is the
> manifestation of one's reader's read-
> ing. That means that all translators
> are *creative* in that they are rewriting
> for a new set of readers a text that
> came into existence in another time
> and place.'[24]
>
> Susan Bassnett

All papers in Part III, and actually the entire book, are concerned with questions of translation. Thus, they document translationality, the concept coined by Matthew Reynolds to characterize the possibilities and layers of activities that are at the basis of translation. If translation is long seen as a 'noble' yet 'tricky' activity, since the so-called translational turn[25] scholars have emphasized the creative character inherent in it. We do not simply move from one language to another, but starting from the very process of reading (or listening), we create a new text with our comprehension of the 'original,' assuring the survival of texts even where their translations are very creative. Translations render a text fit to survive in a new context for which it is made intelligible. To quote Reynolds once more: 'Translations are not mere shadows of the source; nothing in translation is exactly the same as its source: the connection is, rather, one of *likeness* in which either term of the pair can become the focus of attention and in which differences can be as interpretively nourishing as similarities.'[26]

We may add two important elements valid for the early modern, especially in the realm of the large corpus of Braj poetry. The question of authorship is not decisive: even though poems are certainly attributed to an author through the ideograph[27] (*chāpa*), they belong more to a strand of transmission; hence, the *likeness* is already inherent in the way poems travel over North India by performers who add lines and change languages in the name of an author to whom they want to resemble or be identified with. Secondly, it is through this process that the poems have come down over centuries through a succession of performances—what

24 My emphasis.
25 This is summed up well in the *Translation Studies Reader* by Venuti (2012).
26 Reynolds (2013) p. 97; my emphasis.
27 I take up Novetzke's proposition to speak of ideograph rather than signature as this shows not authorship but represents the idea of authorship within a particular tradition. Novetzke (2003), p. 238.

Hawley calls a 'storm of songs'—and of writing down (another mode of translation), of reperformances, rewritings, and copying that have ensured their survival over centuries. More so, translation is in itself an exercise of writing/performing and it *frees* the language of the original.[28]

In translation, a text is more than a 'simple' text. The relation between oral and written traditions in early modern India (as is the case elsewhere) is complex and their interdependency has to be looked at in each case. When speaking of translation, the spontaneous reference is to the 'written' text that is translated into another language. However, a text is and can be much more than the written text (a certain moment in the history of a poem or an idea); if the text lives through its translations, it also lives through performativity, which gives it a peculiar status.

Novetzke shows how in many cases there is an overlap of the oral and written in terms of performances.[29] During the performance of a poem or song, elements are woven by the *kīrtankār* into a given 'text' which could stem from any kind of source, hence submitting the text to the demands of performance: Orality and literacy existed in a symbiotic relationship, in Braj no less than in Marathi, 'Literacy is always afloat in a sea of orality.'[30] Novetzke accentuates the telling rather than the text and states 'in other words, certain texts themselves suggest that *sometimes the telling is the text*, fossilized in literacy, imperfectly cemented in time.'[31]

In the specific case of early modern poetry in North India, translation comprises the following aspects. The first consists in building a corpus that researchers can work with. The passage from oral traditions to manuscripts carry the imprints and traces of their time, space, and interest communities. These imprints and traces belong to translationality just as much as the involved technicalities and interferences. The next step leads from processes of copying down to standardization

28 As Paz (1992), p. 159, puts it: 'The translators' starting point is not the language in movement that provides the poet's raw material but the fixed language of the poem. A language congealed, yet living. His procedure is the inverse of the poet's; he is not constructing an unalterable text from mobile characters; instead he is dismantling the elements of the text, freeing the signs into circulation, then returning them to the language.' Quoted in Bassnett (2016), p. 43.

29 The study of the figure of the *kīrtankār* in Marathi literary performances sheds light on the debate of the interplay and interrelation of the oral and the written. Writing appears in the case presented by Novetzke as a tool in the practice of performance. The *kīrtankār* uses a notebook called *bada*, in which the *kīrtankār* is used to write about performances and hence offers a good research tool. Exploring the *bada* enables researcher to learn about the performers of songs and their authors, who were the guarantee of the living tradition.

30 Goody and Watt, quoted in Novetzke (2015), p. 183.

31 Novetzke (2015), p. 183, my emphasis. Even though Novetzke speaks of the context of Maharashtra, where the written had an important place, he convincingly shows that performances seem to have been the main attraction, as people did not want to read but see and hear. 'One does not want to lose the immediacy of cultural memory, physical display, devotional interaction . . . the tongue would always make the best book.' (p. 184)

via printing. All these steps leave the traces of those who took them. Translation happens when the poems are made intelligible in other languages, and it accentuates the choices made in transposing them into different contexts, from old idioms into modern ones, or to languages in other cultures.

To pay attention to these different layers is not just an academic occupation, but the guarantee of an awareness, 'translationally' speaking, of the challenges at stake.[32] For example, for Namdev and the relation between oral and written in connection with authorship, Novetzke says:

> Here however we see the technology of writing eschewed in the Namdev tradition: it is neither a marker of oral performance as a lesser medium devoid of historical aptitude but rather just the opposite—orality is the medium of historical remembrance, yet it is centered around an individual author, perpetuated by networks of performing authors, and attributed, ultimately, to the author of the form of performance itself.[33]

Metrical changes in a transmission represent another opportunity to single out changes that occur during passages from one medium of communication to another.[34] I include the effort of attribution in the notion of translationality; the knowledge of the metres at a given time can correct previous translations and render new translations more accessible. The very fact that certain reconstructions are easier and more explicable or evident than others provides a criterion for their proximity to what might have been the 'original.'[35] This rewriting in the process of the reception history of Kabīr is a creative act that not only brings out an 'old' Kabīr but assures its survival.

The quest of the identity of the 'original,' as important as it is for the tradition under scrutiny, may be put into perspective by recent studies on issues of translation. From the perspectives of new trends in translational studies, the 'original' text, or source text, fades out of focus, as it is seen as a vibrant moment in a longer

32 Hawley (2015), p. 318 speaks of a bhakti network to show how the different trends in bhakti were linked one to the other: 'the Kabīr who came down to us is inextricably a construction of those who received him, sang his songs, performed his words and added their own already in the early modern period.'

33 Novetzke (2003), p. 238.

34 In his contribution on the Kabīr tradition and its reception history, Imre Bangha shows a way to establish a good manuscript and a certain chronology of texts. Metric shapes and their reworking reach a layer of poetry that could be attributed to the admittedly historical Kabīr. This attribution of a poem can be considered as a point of crystallization of a chain of ideas.

35 Bangha also explains what happens when poems are put into the raga system, which illustrate a further estrangement from the original that cannot easily be reconstructed (the raga system allowing for more freedom and hence changes in the poems).

story of texts in transmission and translation.[36] Walter Benjamin already insisted on the fact that translation is what allows a text to survive over time, hence he 'diminished' the importance of an 'original' text to emphasize the need and the effort to let texts survive over time and preserve them. The problematics of the early modern concerns also the Sanskrit corpuses, and the *Rāmāyaṇa* is an illustrative example. Similarly, over centuries, stories have been enacted and brought down to new generations. The ocean of tales (*Kathāsaritsāgara*) is a memorial to this flow of stories: it is a collection, yet there is a world before this text and there is a world after it. If there is no definitive text, the following statement demands consent: 'To assume that any recombination of elements is necessarily inferior to its original form is to assume that draft nine is necessarily inferior to draft H—for there can only be drafts.'[37] Even in classical literature, storytelling is a form of performance.[38]

Another intrinsic relationship belonging to translationality is evoked by the musical tradition, which can only survive through the interplay of shastra and *prayoga*. Musical treatises have come into existence as memories of an earlier time. They become authority and a source of inspiration when musical traditions are at crossroads or in need of fresh inspiration, which occurs in the interplay of theory and actual performative practice. To see Kabīr and his tradition in the wider scope of translations to various other media (like music) brings into clearer light the creativity inherent in the process of translation and transposition.[39]

Another mode of translationality is captured with the idea of following the traces of a word in order to scrutinize a key term with a complex history, to contrast its uses and meanings.[40] Rasa is one of these terms. We all feel anxious translating it, and once more, it is the context that provides the clue to understanding the term. On a more pragmatic level, the comparison of various translations of a text is rewarding work that allows us on the one hand to confront interpretations, and on the other, to testify that translations are marked by the stamp of time. The historiography of translation reflects the state of scholarship and interests, and remains an indispensable tool to testify to epistemological options, and for the

36 See Bassnett (2016) ; Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère (2016).

37 Borges (2002), p. 15, quoted in Bassnett (2016), p. 58.

38 'Stories are not merely utterances; they are part of the action. They change its course, but they affect the addressee. In this tale, the tales of woe are told to express and affect the speaker's own mood, to change the speaker's state of being. Telling the story is cathartic for the teller of the tale.' Ramanujan (1989), p. 249.

39 An interesting example of transposition of the *Mahābhārata* is produced by the graphic novels of Amruta Patil (2012), (2016). Though it is no longer the *Mahābhārata* in its critical edition, it is a new version, recontextualized to adopt the stories in a twenty-first-century fashion.

40 Such as we see in the case of rasa in Zhang's contribution.

scholar to clarify his or her position. The concept of translationality expresses this awareness of all the layers that are at stake in the act of moving from one language to another, including reflections such as the relation between the written and oral and the transposition of the written in oral performance (changing the experience of the written in yet another way).

What is presented in Part III of this book, however specific it is to the early modern literatures of North India, also reveals many aspects that are fine material to initiate comparative studies, be it on the level of translation, doctrinal or social authority-building, yoga or gender issues. It is, of course, not a simple comparison we are alluding to here, such as putting similar elements together, but rather the profound interest in seeing how similar topics and subjects are dealt with differently in various contexts. This cross-viewing, concerned with preserving the specific, has the potential to make us aware of new questions and inquiries that may not otherwise have emerged had we not been curious to see what happens elsewhere. The differentiation between specific and more general statements is certainly necessary to preserve and understand contexts and specificities, but it opens horizons of transversal questionings which have the potential to enrich reflections. The early modern context of North India is so abundantly rich in terms of multilingualism, literary genres, connected histories, and religious plurality (indeed, every level of cultural production) that it entails the potential to decenter scholarship and to bring new thought to academia more generally.

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