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6. Shifts in Kabīr Contexts and Texts from Mughal to Modern Times

Abstract. Kabīr's extraordinary popularity was made possible by the fact that his poetry could be adapted to various contexts and was able to speak to various communities over the times. New interpretive communities recontextualised Kabīr's text through various means, such as selection, textual variation or providing a new context to existing textual strategies. After a survey of the major receptive communities and presenting possible reasons for neglect from Sufi and early Kabīr-panthī circles, this paper analyses textual variation in ten poems in the pada form as they transited from one receptive community to another. Each of these poems had been recorded by at least two of the six clusters of sectarian sources produced by Sikh*, Vaishnava, Dādūpanthī, Kabīrpanthī, Radhasoami and Nāthpanthī compilers between the late sixteenth and the early twentieth century. Many of their variant readings are indicative of sectarian preferences. Divine names, the importance of the guru and hagiographic details were particularly contested aspects of the padas.

Keywords. Kabīr, Pada, Textual variation, Interpretive community, Recontextualisation.

> 'I speak for all
> but no one knows me.
> It was okay then
> and it's okay now.
> Ages pass, I stay the same.'
> Kabīr, *sākhī* 183, *Bījak*

Continuous recontextualization of Kabīr

The poet-saint Kabīr (d. *c*. 1518) is one of the most outstanding authors of Old Hindi literature.[*] Kabīr's message of a higher devotional consciousness and his advocacy of a direct contact with an ineffable *nirguṇa* deity, expressed in powerful poetry with striking, elemental imagery, make him one of the most popular Indian poets both in India and abroad.[1]

This extraordinary popularity was made possible by the fact that Kabīr poetry could be adapted to various contexts and spoke to various communities throughout history. He has always been considered a poet–saint but has also become more than that. In contemporary India, for example, his vigorous attacks on hypocrisy in both religions has led him to be viewed as a symbol of Hindu–Muslim unity or as one of the early representatives of low-caste Dalit literature.[2] Interestingly, he is one of the few Hindi poets who transcended the linguistic confines of South Asia and, over the past hundred years, came to speak to popular Western audiences who perceived Kabīr as a mystic either from Christian, Beat, or New Age perspectives.[3]

In academia, the focus of Kabīr studies has gradually moved from the question of reconstructing an 'original Kabīr' to the examination of the multiplicity of voices in the available material both written and oral. While scholars such as Dvivedi, Tivari, and Vaudeville tried to arrive at what Kabīr was or was not, more recent scholarship investigates the multiplicity of Kabīr images and the multiplicity of Kabīr voices.[4] This multiplicity is examined in the tradition about the persona of Kabīr, as the telling plural in the title of an important volume, *Images of Kabīr*, indicates. It is also acknowledged in the latest Kabīr-edition through, for example, the synoptic presentation of all early variant versions in *The Millennium Kabīr Vāṇī* or through Dharwadker's translation of poems from markedly different Kabīr layers.

Reception in a particular community in early modern India is reflected, among others, through the manuscripts they produce. In these manuscripts, the process of selection is determined by two major factors: the availability and quality of source material and the sectarian principles of the interpretative community and manuscript editors. In sectarian anthologies—and all early Kabīr material is sectarian—

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1 The term Kabīr in this article, unless indicated otherwise, refers not to the historical person but rather to the persona who composed or inspired songs under the name Kabīr. This approach does not deny the historicity of Kabīr but reckons with the possibility of composite authorship of Kabīrian poetry. For arguments about the approximate date of death of the historical person, see Lorenzen (1992), p. 18.

2 See, e. g., Hedayetullah (2009) and Ralhan (2004). A Google search of 'Kabir' and 'Hindu–Muslim unity' resulted in over 12,000 hits. The seminal book on Kabīr as Dalit is Dharmvir (1998). For a recent Hindi monograph discussing Indian and Western approaches to Kabīr, see Agrawal (2009).

3 On English translations of Kabīr, see Kumar (2009), pp. 165–181 and the 'Introduction' in Friedlander (2017), pp. 5–42. Tagore and Underhill's English version, *One Hundred Poems of Kabir*, has been translated into French, German, Spanish, Italian, Hungarian, Russian, and Bulgarian. Interestingly, no prominent translations exist in non-European languages. See Imre Bangha, 'International Tagore Bibliography', University of Oxford, <http://tagore.orient.ox.ac.uk>. (Accessed 27 October 2018).

4 The groundbreaking article in this approach was Hess (1987). The books of Dvivedi (1950 [1942]), Tivari (1989 [1961]) and Vaudeville (1997 [1993]) are listed in the references.

poems are selected for inclusion and their text is sometimes modified. At other times, new meanings are acquired simply by transposing the unchanged poem from one community to another.

In this chapter, I intend to examine a particular aspect of this multiple reception, namely, the changes in particular poems when they pass from one interpretive community to another. In order to show how various communities received, accommodated, and recontextualized Kabīr, I will present examples of an influential part of texts, the padas, called *sabad*s in certain sources though other sources make a clear distinction between the two.[5] Other poetic forms, such as distiches (*dohā*s) or *ramainī*s are at least as important in the Kabīr literature as the padas, but in this chapter, due to constraints of size and the easy availability of the earliest pada corpus in publication, I am considering only the latter. The examination that can be contained within the framework of an article is limited and I will only be comparing versions of single poems used in two or more different contexts. A wider search may include the comparison of entire collections and identifying dominant themes, stylistic features, or keywords.[6] It may also assess the structures of various collections or compare the various forms of *dohā*s, *sākhī*s or *ramainī*s, and include hagiography.[7] A study of a certain theme, such as Kabīr's attack on orthodoxies, Hindu or Muslim, over the centuries would also be of special interest.[8] I will not include all communities that produced a record of their reception either and I do not even aim at a balance of all chronological layers. However, I aim to sample the most important old receptive communities and then give some examples of reception under colonial modernity as well. The work of Linda Hess, Shabnam Virmani, and others show how much Kabīr is a living presence.[9] However, extending my investigations to all major modern collections of texts would have considerably increased my article. I will be primarily examining written sources, but it should not be forgotten that Kabīr may have been more of an oral than a written presence during the period under investigation. However, the oral cannot be excluded from this analysis as it is

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5 Strictly speaking, *sabad*s are brief poems made by joining together three or four couplets of the same metre, normally *čaupāī*s or *dohā*s. The poetic output of Sant Čarandās, for example, apart from over a hundred padas, contains *sabad*s in *čaupāī, nisānī* and other metres. Brajendra Kumar Singhal, 'Svāmījī Śrīrāmčaraṇjī Mahārāj Kī Anubhav-Vāṇī' (unpublished work), pp. 587–590.

6 Such examination was carried out by Linda Hess in the 1980s on what appears now to be a limited number of texts (1987), pp. 114–141. About the limitations and the validity of her project within the light of recent scholarship, see Hess (2015), p. 146.

7 A comparison of the structures of two early Dādūpanthī collections is found in Strnad (2016).

8 Cf. Lorenzen (2011), pp. 23–25, 27–36. Pauwels (2010) shows that within the groups that nowadays are part of Hinduism, the Śāktas are singled out for special criticism.

9 Hess (2015) and Shabnam Virmani, 'The Kabir Project,' Srishti School of Art, Design and Technology, <http://kabirproject.org/>. (Accessed 27 October 2018).

always inherently present in the written. Kabīr's poems were first performed orally and the first recordings of Kabīr, though written, are snapshots of oral performances preserving extrametrical exclamations or explicatory phrases.[10]

In the changing world of Kabīr, silences are of special interest. We do not have early recordings of his poetry from several communities with which it has been associated. For example, we do not have extant Kabīr manuscripts of Sufi provenance even though he has repeatedly been associated with the Sufis.[11] No early Kabīrpanthī or Nāthpanthī manuscript recording of Kabīr's poems seems to exist although the former claims the custodianship of Kabīr's legacy through a disciple lineage and the latter shares the tantric and yogic imagery present in many of Kabīr's songs.[12] The accommodation of Nāthpanthī imagery in Kabīrian poems went so far that entire *Gorakh-bānī* songs were included under Kabīr's name with minor modifications in a Dādūpanthī manuscript containing the works of both Kabīr and Gorakh.[13] This may be due to the fact that the Nāthpanth initially did not pay as much attention to vernacular writing as did the Dādūpanth or the Nirañjanīs. In fact, vernacular Nāth manuscripts do not seem to appear before the eighteenth century.[14]

The lack of Sufi and early Kabīrpanthī archives requires a few words about Kabīr's reception in these circles.

Reception in Indo-Persian and Sufi circles

Although in the twentieth century there have been attempts to present Kabīr as a hero of Hindu–Muslim unity, his reception amongst Muslims was rather modest.[15] Textual scholarship does not mention the existence of any Sufi recensions of his poetry, or even his presence in *nasta'līq* manuscripts, and he was not discussed by Muslims as a poet until the twentieth century. Moreover, before the nineteenth century, he had only a moderate presence in the rich Indo-Persian religious discursive

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10 Bangha (2010) and (2013).

11 It should be mentioned that Tivari in his critical edition found traces of Urdu script transmission. However, his arguments seem to be highly speculative (1989), pp. 73–79.

12 Such recordings are missing from Dharwadker's list of Kabīr sources in Dharwadker (2003), pp. 33–39.

13 Strnad (2018), pp. 151-153, discusses the example of *tatva belī lo, tatva belī lo*; *avadhū gorakhanātha jānī* (Gorakhnāth) and *rāma guna belaṛī re avadhū gorakhanāthi jānī* (Kabīr).

14 James Mallinson, email communication, 13 November 2015. However, Nāth works on Haṭhayoga from north-west India, such as the *Amaraughaśāsana*, are found as early as 1525 CE. See also Mallinson (2011), p. 424.

15 On the Muslim reception of Kabīr, see Rizvi (1978), pp. 411–413, Vaudeville (1997), pp. 48–51, and Gaeffke (2002). At present, I am also preparing an article including further examples of Muslim reception.

literature. Out of the twenty-seven post-1530 Sufi biographical dictionaries discussed by Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi in his *History of Sufism in India*, only five mention Kabīr. Another telling silence is in the discourses of Dārā Shukoh, in his conversations with the *bairāgī* ascetic Bābā Lāl Dās or in his philosophical treatises, such as the *Majma'-ul-baḥrain*.[16] However, we have evidence that in 1698–1699 Ālamgīr made a grant to a village for the upkeep of the tomb of Śāh Kabīr in Magahar. Further grants followed later.[17]

Muslim appreciation of Kabīr may have been hindered by the lack of Islamic terminology in the poems. Nonetheless, it was a stumbling block for later Muslims that the Hindavi Sufi poets, such as Mālik Muḥammad Jāysī, wrote in a literary idiom of Hindi and translated Sufi terminology into Hindi hardly retaining any of the terms in Arabic. How can Kabīr talk from an Islamic standpoint or to a Sufi audience? Such Sufi usages in his corpus have hardly been studied.[18]

Two questions have been posed in this context, that of the vernacular language and that of the non-Islamic terminology. There are various explanations for the existence of Hindavi poems within Indian Islamic discourse. The nationalist idea that vernaculars were used as a missionary tool by Sufis to convert Hindus to Islam has been rejected by modern scholarship.[19] Moreover, no scholar has proposed to credit Kabīr with such an agenda. Scholars from Pitambardatt Barthwal (1901–1944) to Charlotte Vaudeville accounted for the lack of use of Islamic terminology by positing Kabīr as a Muslim poet of a recently converted weaver community that has only been partially Islamicized.[20] This explanation would accord with the view in which Muslim society is divided into *aśrāf* (high, non-indigenous) and *ajlāf* (low, indigenous) groups, the former using Persian and the latter Hindavi in their discourse.[21] Consequently, Kabīr, as a member of *ajlāf*, would not have direct

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16 On Shukoh's conversations, the *So'āl o Jawāb bain-e-Lāl Dās wa Dārā Shikoh* (also called *Mukālama-i Bābā La'l Dās wa Dārā Shikoh*), see Huart and Massignon (1926). His most discussed work is Mahfuz-ul-Haq (1998 [1929]).

17 Lorenzen (1992), p. 17.

18 Welcome exceptions are De Bruijn (2014) and Hess's session on Kabīr's poems with a Muslim association at the Fifth Early Hindi/Braj Bhasha Workshop-Retreat in Bansko, 29 July 2017.

19 See, e. g., Barthwal (1978), p. 1109, xii; Rizvi (1978), vol. 1, p. 327; Ernst (2004), p. 166. According to Ernst (2004), p. 157, 'the *malfūẓāt* texts of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries refer only to a few isolated cases of individuals who converted to Islam after becoming attracted to the Sufi saints.' Francesca Orsini and Samira Sheikh, in their 'Introduction' to Orsini and Sheikh (2014), p. 30, assert that 'there is little evidence of a large-scale conversion to Islam' in the 'long fourteenth century.'

20 See Barthwal (1978), pp. 250–251, and Vaudeville (1997), p. 72. This hypothesis has been sharply criticized by Purushottam Agrawal. See Lorenzen (2011), p. 31, and (2014), pp. 174–175.

21 Eaton (1978), pp. 42–43, 90–91.

access to Perso-Arabic resources and would not only use Hindavi language but also indigenous imagery.

Poems apparently lacking Islamic terminology were, however, used by Sufis in their discourses during the Sultanate period. A good example of the distribution of language functions is proposed by Carl Ernst who examined the Bābā Farīd poems recorded in the Khuldabad manuscripts of four fourteenth-century *malfūẓāt* works (preserved in relatively late, apparently post-seventeenth-century transcripts). The readership (and audience) of these *malfūẓāt* texts was restricted, consisting of elite Sufis who were familiar with the local language.[22] These verses used in Sufi discourses, where they are embedded between Persian verses and Qur'anic passages, do not convey any distinctively Islamic import. 'The purpose of this kind of poetry seems rather to be that of reinforcing the subject at hand by means of a powerful literary tool that had great appeal to an audience of Indian Sufis.'[23] This is in line with Rizvi's judgement made in the 1970s: 'Such songs were not composed for propaganda purposes but were a natural evolution from the deep and personal involvement of these two great mystics with their environment.'[24]

The equivalence or translation theory proposes an alternative to the already existing notion of different functions. Drawing on Tony K. Stewart's work, Francesca Orsini suggests approaching early Hindavi Sufi poetry in terms of translation:[25]

> In order to express their ways of imagining the world, we must assume that these Muslim authors did not 'borrow' terms but, in a more intellectually astute process, sought the closest 'terms of equivalence' in order to approximate the ideas they wanted to express.[26]

According to Stewart and Orsini, in their 'attempt to "think Islamic thoughts in the local language" they in practice thought new thoughts' in the vernacular.[27] The concept of seeking Hindavi equivalence for Perso-Arabic expressions may have even deeper roots since Ḥamīdudīn Nāgaurī (d. 1273) is credited with the translation of some verses of Niẓāmī into Hindavi.[28]

Kabīr has long been present in Sufi singing.[29] His links to vernacular Sufis show that he was not isolated in his poetry. Contemporary Sufi singers have been

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22 Ernst (2004), p. 166.
23 Ibid., p. 167.
24 Rizvi (1978), vol. 1, p. 327.
25 Pellò (2014), pp. 422, 426.
26 Pellò (2014); Stewart (2001), p. 273.
27 Pellò (2014), p. 426.
28 Rizvi (1978), vol. 1, p. 328.
29 For example, Śaikh Bāhā'uddīn Barnavī had a special affection for Kabīrī songs. See Rizvi (1978), vol. 1, p. 278.

documented in Rajasthan and Pakistan by Shabnam Virmani.[30] She has noted various ways in which Kabīr overlaps in language, symbol, affect, text arrangements, and narrative references with vernacular Sufi poets, such as Bulleh Shah, Shah Abdul Latif, Sachal Sarmast, and with the richly mixed Muslim–Hindu culture of the Sindhi and Punjabi mystical love legends.[31]

The archives of the Kabīrpanth

It has further intrigued scholars that no written Kabīrpanthī collection is known prior to the *Jñānsāgar* (*Ocean of Knowledge*) present in extant manuscripts from 1737 onwards, and Marco della Tomba's 1760 translation of the *Mūlpañjī*, *Register/ Quintet of the Root [Teachings]*, both belonging to the Dharamdāsī branch of the Kabīrpanth.[32]

The Dharamdāsīs, now centred at Damakheda and at Kharsiya in the state of Chhattisgarh, hold the *Jñānsāgar* as the authoritative book of Kabīr. This book is presented as a verse conversation between Kabīr and the merchant Dharamdās, who is mentioned in Rāghavdās's *Bhaktamāl* verse 353 as one of the nine direct disciples of Kabīr.[33] Some modern scholars, however, tentatively date Dharamdās to the eighteenth century.[34] Rāghavdās's *Bhaktamāl* does not present later than second-generation disciples of Dādū and verse 358 introduces five disciples of Dharamdās possibly of two generations, namely those of Čūḍāmani and his son Kulapati.[35] Apparently, the *Bhaktamāl* was written at a distance of two generations from both Dādū and Dharamdās. Dharamdās, therefore, appears to have been contemporary to Dādū Dayāl.

The *Jñānsāgar* was present in manuscript form as early as 1737 and its text does not seem to have undergone major changes from della Tomba's time until Yugalanand's edition in 1906.[36] Marco della Tomba, who talks about the Kabīrpanth of the 1760s, is silent about the *Bījak* and only mentions the *Jñānsāgar* and

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30 <http://kabirproject.org/music%20with%20books/pakistan%20mein%20kabir> and <http://kabirproject.org/music%20with%20books/rajasthan%20mein%20kabir>. (Accessed 27 October 2018).
31 Hess (2015), p. 96.
32 On Dharamdās, see Lorenzen (1992), pp. 58–61; on the Dharamdāsīs, see Friedlander (2015), pp. 195–198, and Hess (2015), p. 92. On Marco della Tomba's Kabīr, see Lorenzen (2002) and (2010), pp. 78–81.
33 Nahta (1965), p. 178.
34 Agrawal (2009), p. 165; Friedlander (2015), p. 195.
35 These two names also featuring in the modern Dharamdāsī list of gurus as found on the opening page of any *Kabīr-sāgar* volume. See Vihari (1906).
36 Lorenzen (2002), p. 38–39. The published version is Vihari (1906).

the *Mulpancì* (*Mūlpañjī*) as the 'books of the Kabīr Panth.'[37] The mostly regular *dohā–čaupāī* format, the themes, and the language used suggest a relatively late stage of composition, probably the early eighteenth century for both.[38] At that time, similarly to the Vaishnava sects of Rajasthan, an urge for theological systematization may have been felt within the Kabīrpanth. The *Mūlpañjī*, which della Tomba describes as a systematic description of their philosophy ('li loro sistemi') at the end of the *Jñānsāgar*, is more elusive since no independent manuscript of it exists.[39]

Interestingly, the Kabīr-čauṛā branch of the Kabīrpanth with headquarters at Varanasi has a completely different text, the *Bījak*, as the authentic voice of Kabīr and as their sacred book.[40] Kabīr-čauṛā lore names Kabīr's disciple Bhagvāndās or Bhaggojī (d. 1576) of Dhanauti, Bihar, as the compiler of the *Bījak*.[41] The *Bījak* has been present in innumerable manuscripts and publications over the past two centuries; yet its pedigree has been questioned on the ground that its earliest recording is a manuscript dating from 1797–1798 or 1802–1803.[42] Besides, Callewaert demonstrated that the often only partial overlap between the old Panjabi–Rajasthani Kabīr song tradition and the *sabad*s of the *Bījak* is limited to about one

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37 Gubernatis (1878), p. 94. Lorenzen (2002), pp. 38–39. The *Jñānsāgar* and the *Mūlpañjī* circulated in the Kaithī script.

38 Cf. Friedlander (2015), p. 195.

39 See De Gubernatis (1878), p. 94, and Lorenzen (2010), p. 233, ch. 7, n. 1.

40 This work has been present in countless editions since Pandit Gopinath Pathak ed., *Bījak* (with commentary by Vishvanath Singh, Benares Light Press, 1868). In this study, I am using Simh (1972). This edition lists its manuscript sources and occasionally gives variants. However, it is not clear on the basis of which manuscript the text was established.

41 See Hess and Singh (1986), pp. 165–166, and Lorenzen (1992), pp. 61–62.

42 Callewaert, Sharma, and Taillieu (2000), p. 3; Hess and Singh (1986), p. 166, and most subsequent literature mentions 1805 as the date of earliest manuscript consulted by Simh. Dharwadker (2003), p. 39, further confuses the matter as he refers to a Phatua recension manuscript of 1805 by Simh. Simh (1972), p. 25, indeed mentions a manuscript from VS 1862 (1805) and refers to his source as the 'Khoj vivaraṇ' (1958) of the Bihār Rāṣṭrabhāṣā Pariṣad. Vaudeville, strangely, only mentions the Hess and Singh (1986) translation and not Simh's edition in her list of the *Bījak* publications (1997), pp. 358–360. Apparently referring to the Simh edition she states that 'Shukdev Singh, unfortunately, does not give his sources and text criticism is absent.' (1997), p. 360. Actually, Simh lists several sources in his introduction but it is unclear how he used them. For example, he does not seem to have consulted the Bihār Rāṣṭrabhāṣā Pariṣad manuscript for his edition. This manuscript is described in Shastri (1971), p. 163 (entry 80). This entry erroneously calculates *sāl* 1212 mentioned in its colophon as VS 1951 (!) and 1805 CE. If *sāl* refers to *Faslī san*, as proposed by Simh, then it should be 1802/3 CE; if it refers to Hijri, then it is 1797/8 CE. As far as the Phatua-recension manuscript is concerned, Simh discusses it on p. 67. Without mentioning its provenance, he quotes its colophon that dates it to *san* 1268. As *Faslī san*, it dates from 1858–1859 and as Hijri, it is 1851–1852.

fourth of the *Bījak*.[43] Moreover, unlike in the case of Dharamdās, the name of the compiler, Bhagvāndās, does not figure in Rāghavdās's list of Kabīr's prominent direct disciples.

The similar mercantile connotations of the names *Mūlpañjī* (root-register), and *Bījak* (belonging to the seed/inventory), suggests that they may have been compiled within an atmosphere of sub-sectarian rivalry and are therefore contemporaneous. Is it possible that the Kabīrpanth took up writing under merchant influence?

Yet, there are indications of some early roots of the *Bījak*. Kabīr's poetic output, as recorded in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, contains padas (songs, called *sabad* in the *Bījak*), *dohā*s (distiches, called *sākhī*s in the *Bījak*), and *čaupāī-dohā* stanzas (called *ramainī*s, stanzas in the (Hindi) Rāmāyan metre). Interestingly, it is the *Bījak* taxonomy that figures in Rāghavdās's *Bhaktamāl* (1660?) twice when he refers to the works of Kabīr. One of them mentions the widespread respect they are held in:

> *sabada ramaiṁṇī sākhī, satya sagalā kari māṁnī/jāṁni* (125)
> His *sabad*s, *ramainī*s and *sākhī*s—all respect/know them as truth.

The other reference is more telling as it speaks of Kabīr's works as parts of both written and oral traditions:

> *sākhī sabadī grantha ramainī pada pragaṭa hai,*
>   *sohai sarbahī kaṇṭhi hāra jaisai hīra kau.* (126)[44]

> His *sākhī*s, *sabad*s, and *ramainī*s are present as handwritten books and songs,[45]
>   Everyone knows them by heart, they shine on everyone's neck like a
>   jewelled necklace.

The interpretation of the date of this *Bhaktamāl*, *saṁvat satrahai sai satrahotarā*, is contested as 1660 (VS 1717), 1713 (VS 1770), and 1720 (VS 1777). Since the work presents no *bhakta*s later than the second generation after Dādū, the inter-

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43 Callewaert, Sharma, and Taillieu (2000), p. 4, lists thirty-two padas that show at least some partial similarity between the old corpus and the *Bījak*. Lorenzen (2015), p. 220, mentions that this list is 'quite incomplete.' MKV30/*Bījak*112 is an example of further similar poems. Cf. Friedlander (2015), p. 192.

44 Verses 125 and 126 are numbered as 150 and 151 in Narayandas' edition of the same work. Verse 125 is also repeated as 351 (427 in Narayandas).

45 There are various ways to translate this line due to the lack of conjuncts, postpositions, and plural markers. The literal translation is '*sākhī*(s) *sabadī*(s) book(s) *ramainī*(s) song(s) are public.' The phrase '*sākhī-sabadī grantha*' may refer to a book of *sākhī*s and *sabad*s, and *ramainī* may then qualify the songs. It may also be that songs are a category different from the *sabad*s. There are other possible interpretations.

pretation VS 1717 (1660) is the most likely one.[46] The second oldest extant *Bījak* manuscript is in the Bodleian Library in Oxford (MS Hindi e.1). This Kaithī script *Bījak* was copied in 1805 and contains 113 *sabad*s, 365 *sākhī*s, and eighty-four *ramainī*s. Its *sabad*-arrangement is different from the two recensions, Dānāpur and Bhagatahīa, discussed in the introduction to Shukdeo Singh's edition.[47] The structure of the manuscript corresponds to the Phatuhā recension in the number of *sabad*s (113) and the other works included into it on folios 45–74.[48] In the *Bījak sabad*s examined in this article, I will give its non-orthographic variants below the poems quoted with the siglum Ox against those of the published version Bī.

The *Bhaktamāl*'s vocabulary shows that the *Bījak* drew on seventeenth-century concepts of structuring its content. It is also important to note that the material preserved in the *Bījak* is sometimes attested in very early layers of transmission: poem 416 of the *Millennium Kabīr Vāṇī* (hereafter MKV) is already present in the *Mohan-Pothī*s (M3), dating from around 1570, and in four seventeenth-century Rajasthani sources (A J C Gop) with a minimum amount of variation in the *Bījak* (see below). This can be taken as an example of the relative reliability of the transmission between the late sixteenth and seventeenth or eighteenth centuries, when the *Bījak* gained its written form.

Continuous recording

Poetry attributed to Kabīr has been transmitted orally, in handwriting, print, and contemporary media, such as sound recording and the Internet.[49] We know that all media have different dynamics. The difference in the dynamics of the two types of 'paper recording,' namely handwritten and print, are such that people are tempted to perceive print as revolution. What has been less studied, however, is the different methods of oral transmission. In India poems can be performed in at least three different ways. Firstly, they can be recited (or read aloud) without melody

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46 Nahta (1965), *Bhaktamāl*, p. da. Singhal (2007), vol. 1, p. 31, notes that in the VS 1840 *Bhaktamāl* manuscript used by Narayandas for his edition, there is another work by Rāghavdās called *Utpatti-sthiti-četāvnī-jñān*, which was composed in VS 1717. This determines Rāghavdās's floruit as VS 1717 (cf. Callewaert (1988), p. 14). Callewaert and Friedlander rely on the modern editor of this work, Svami Narayandas, who conceives Rāghavdās to be a fifth-generation disciple and is inclined to accept VS 1777 as date of composition. Callewaert and Friedlander (1992), p. 20, however, give the *Bhaktamāl*'s date as VS 1770. Recent discussion of the dating of this *Bhaktamāl* can be found in Rajpurohit (2013), pp. 51–72.

47 Simh (1972), pp. 65–71.

48 Ibid., pp. 67–68.

49 Cf. Hess (2015), pp. 102–111. Hess (2015) pp. 226–248, discusses the relationship of orality and the Internet in the light of modern perception theories.

but making the metre clearly felt (*sasvar pāṭh*). Secondly, they can be chanted or sung to a melody set to the appropriate metre (*dhun*), since there are several set melodies to various traditional metrical forms. Thirdly, they can be sung to a raga (musical mood) and a *tāla* (rhythm).[50] In the latter, the metre does not play an important role—singers have freedom to explore and vary the text through repetitions, inversions, omissions, and additions.[51] The role of metre can be overwritten by those of the *tāla* and the raga. As far as chanting is concerned, it has, probably, been a living practice for centuries. A vivid picture of modern chanting is given by Peter Friedlander:

> When I stayed at the monastery in the summer of 1984, all the novice monks, and some full monks, would sit together in an open colonnaded hall for about three hours each morning and rapidly independently repeat the *Bījak* in a kind of monotone chant over and over again. The novices had to recite while reading the text of the *Bījak* but the full monks had all learned the complete text by heart. I was told that the novices would spend several years memorizing the entire text of the *Bījak*.[52]

This also reminds us of the interplay between the written and the oral as written props are used for singing and recitation and oral performances get written down.

Through transmission, the poetry has been in constant metamorphosis over the past half millennium. The text of lines kept changing, some particularly popular lines or phrases floated from one poem to another, new lines were added and obscure, clumsy, corrupt, or theologically objectionable lines removed, the metrical pattern of lines changed, and entirely new stanzas were also added to the poetic corpus.[53] The creation and re-creation of Kabīr-poetry has been an ongoing phenomenon right up the present day.[54] The forces of metamorphosis were so strong

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50 Classical singing of 'Kabīrīs' is attested by Śaikh Bāhā'uddīn Barnavī's (floruit 1655) love for the genre. See Rizvi (1978), vol. 1, p. 278. It should, however, be mentioned that we do not exactly know what 'raga' meant to Dādūpanthī or Sikh compilers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

51 Cf. Tanaka (2012), p. 182.

52 Friedlander (2015), p. 189. This practice has, however, stopped due to recent anti-liturgical attitudes within the Kabīrpanth (Peter Friedlander, personal communication, 8 September 2017).

53 Hess (2015) examines fluidity 'in words, lines, passages, sequences' (pp. 80–90), in 'sectarian affiliation' (pp. 91–94) and 'fluidity driven by ideology' (pp. 94–102).

54 Some recent Kabīr songs, including one about a rail journey with an admonition not to lose the ticket, are presented in Singh (2002), pp. 191–198. Hess (2015) vividly describes how contemporary singers adjust Kabīr's songs to their audiences. She observes that 'nearly every song we heard from multiple sources in Malwa has variations from one singer to another, often from one occasion to another' (p. 82). On the 'Folk Invented Kabir' (episode 4 in Shabnam Virmani's film *Koi Sunta Hai*), see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9GJJcidA-Q8>. (Accessed 27 October 2018).

that, as we will see, it was not only the oral and the manuscript transmission that changed the text but also print, usually considered as a standardizing power, transformed it according to the interests of editors. Written and, from the twentieth century onwards, performed recordings from various points of the evolution of the Kabīr-poems can provide us with clues about their earlier layers and about the interconnectedness of various texts.

Later centuries added other poetic forms or genres to the song–distich–*ramainī* corpus, such as *Akharāvtī* or *Rekhtā*.[55] The 1805 *Bījak* manuscript, for example, includes *basant*, *pad kahrā*, *bel*, *hīḍolā*, and *čāčarī*.[56] However, they will only be of marginal interest with regards to how later layers developed from early versions.[57] Some later *sabads* and songs, nevertheless, will be examined in their relationship to texts recorded earlier.

Recent scholarly consensus normally deals with three old Kabīr collections: the eastern *Bījak*; the western Rajasthani *nirguṇa* manuscripts; and the northern *Gurū Granth Sāhib*.[58] This approach has been slightly modulated in recent years by taking into consideration the polyphony of the early Rajasthani tradition, which includes Vaishnava, Dādūpanthī, and Nirañjanī sources.[59]

While not denying the convenience of grouping the Kabīr-poems in eastern, western, and northern clusters, one should not neglect the fact that the Kabīr tradition has been a process of continuous recording and apparently production and reworking over the past half millennium. The academic search for the earliest forms of recorded Kabīr may date back to Shyamsundar Das's *Kabīr-Granthāvalī*, primarily based on a manuscript spuriously claimed to date from 1504.[60] Such efforts culminated in the publication of the *Millennium Kabīr Vāṇī* drawing on

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55 See, e. g., [Prasad] (1910) and (1913). A cursory search of Hindi manuscript catalogues in the Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute and the Nāgarī Pračārinī Sabhā Khoj Reports yielded thirteen manuscripts containing *Rekhtā* attributed to Kabīr.

56 Manuscript, Hindi e.1, in the Raja Chandra Sham Shere collection of the Bodleian Library, Oxford, fols. 65r–75r.

57 The earliest manuscript that I was able to locate containing Kabīr's *Rekhtā*, for example, dates from 1762 (VS 1819). It is 25187(8), fol. 6 in the Jodhpur collection of the Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute.

58 Hess (1987), pp. 114–141; Vaudeville (1997), pp. 20–33; Callewaert, Sharma, and Taillieau (2000), pp. 3–16.

59 The earliest Rajasthani manuscript with Kabīr's padas is Vaishnava and one of the earliest sources on Kabīr, the *Dabistān-i mazāhib*, mentions Kabīr as a Vaishnava *bairāgī*. See Rizvi (1978), p. 412. On the variety of approaches to Kabīr within the Vaishnava Fatehpur manuscript, see Hawley (2005). For a list of important Kabīr manuscripts and publications, see Dharwadker (2003), pp. 33–41. In this list, partially based on Callewaert, Sharma, and Taillieu (2000), pp. 19–22, Dharwadker also indicates the sectarian provenance of the manuscripts.

60 Das (1928). Das provides variants from a later manuscript as well.

sources from Rajasthan and Panjab between *c.* 1570 and 1681.[61] This study will attempt to extend this time frame in both directions by reconstructing earlier layers in the Kabīr-poems based on a metrical analysis of the *Millennium Kabīr Vāṇī* material and then give an insight into the later lives of some poems until the twentieth century. The survey is selective as it does not take into consideration the rich later sectarian anthologies such as, for example, Rambhajan Ramsanehi's *Sār-Saṅgrah-Bodh*, in which Kabīr is abundantly quoted, Yugalanand Vihari's *Kabīr-sāgar* (1906), Gangasharan Shastri's *Mahābījak* (1998), and so on.[62]

Manuscript collections are sectarian compilations and, in the investigation below, I will consider six clusters of sectarian sources:[63]

In manuscript form:

(1)   Panjab: the Sikh *Mohan Pothī* (*c.* 1570) and the *Ādi Granth* (1604)

(2)   Rajasthan: the Vaishnava Fatehpur manuscript (1582) and Callewaert's C (1660) and J (1681) manuscripts

(3)   Rajasthan: the Dādūpanthī *Pañc-vāṇī* (S V A) and *Sarvāṅgī* (Gop, Raj) anthologies (1614–1675)[64]

(4)   East: the Kabīrpanthī *Bījak* (before 1803)[65]

In print form:

(5)   Radhasoami: *Kabīr sāhab kī śabdāvalī* (1907 [1900])[66]

(6)   Nāthpanthī: *Śrī Śilnāth Śabdāmṛt* (1923 [1915])[67]

The manuscripts represent the earliest layers as well as the later but no less influential *Bījak* linked, apparently, to the eastern region, possibly the Benares

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61 Callewaert, Sharma, and Taillieau (2000).
62 On Rambhajan Ramsanehi, see Singhal (2015), p. 45. On Yugalanand Vihari, see Friedlander (2017), pp. 11–12. On the *Mahābījak*, see Hess (2015), p. 114–117.
63 Friedlander (2015) presents in brief the Sikh, the krishnaite, Dādūpanthī and Rajasthani, Eastern, Dharamdāsī, Kabīrpanthī, New Indian, and transnational audiences of Kabīr.
64 Items 1–3 are recorded in Callewaert, Sharma. and Taillieau (2000). For details of the individual sources, see pp. viii–x, 10–11, 19–23.
65 The standard edition is Simh (1972).
66 [Prasad] (1907[1900]). According to Dharwadker (2003), it was first published in 1900.
67 Shilnath (1923).

region. The first recorded Kabīr-poems come from Rajasthan and Panjab. One can speculate that the reason behind this is not simply the unfriendliness of the wet eastern climate towards manuscripts. It may also be cultural. Rajasthan has been less Brahminical on a popular level than Madhyadesha and vernacularization happened in Rajasthan earlier. Rajasthan and Panjab were also the soil of monotheistic writing sects such as the Dādūpanth, the Nirañjanīs, and the Sikhs. They took to writing around the turn of the seventeenth century as a powerful means of expressing their religious experience. The fact that Kabīrpanthī ascetics memorized the *Bījak*, at least in modern times but probably earlier too, may also have presented less need for writing. None of the early Rajasthani and Panjabi sources are devoted exclusively to Kabīr. All are anthologies presenting poems by several *nirguṇa* authors.

By comparing the *Bījak* with the western Rajasthani and northern Sikh traditions, Linda Hess found that the western (and northern) collections are linked to music as the *Bījak* is not. They are infused with bhakti feeling and language, featuring Vaishnava (especially Krishnaite) names for God and are linked with personal worship and devotional fervour. They also contain numerous poems of ecstatic realization, in which the poet may or may not be in the role of a lover. She has also found that the *Bījak* is more harsh and intellectual, uses more pervasive and unmitigated satire, has greater emphasis on the *nirguṇa* expression of truth by negation, riddle, and teasing mental challenge. According to Hess, such lyrics are not as appealing to the singer or to the singer's audience as those that emphasize worship and emotion. Kṛṣṇa is absent from these poems and *viraha*, *vinaya*, and ecstasy are rare in the *Bījak*. In sum, the *Bījak* is terse and unmusical, has a different set of keywords and has less Vaishnava bhakti in it.[68]

Out of the printed books, I am considering two influential selections, which apparently drew not just on manuscripts but also on oral tradition, representing the state of Kabīr songs at the time of their publication, and which also influenced some later volumes.

There is no straightforward linear succession between these groups of collections and most of them are records of different singing repertoires, which to a certain extent overlap. Nevertheless, we can assume that they reflect the image of Kabīr of their times or of the times that preceded their being committed to writing. However, it is clear in most of them that they are normally not direct recordings of oral performances but rather relied on manuscript archetypes. More importantly, they may also reflect the preferences of the community that committed them to writing.

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68 Hess (1987), pp. 117–118. Hess also noticed that at the time of her research on the *Bījak* in the late 1970s, the Kabīr-čaurā monks used a printed *Śabdāvalī* that represented padas more popular for singing. Interestingly, there was no overlap between the two collections.

The *Kabīr Śabdāvalī*, apparently edited in 1900 by Baleshwar Prasad, the head of Belvedere Steam Press, shows Radhasoami influence.[69] The Santiniketan scholar Kshitimohan Sen's edition (1910–1911) drew heavily on Prasad but by exchanging references to the guru into *prem* (love), he presented a Kabīr closer to Brahmo-concepts.[70] It was, eventually, Sen's collection that served as a basis for the English translation of Tagore (1914) that has made Kabīr world-famous. Based on the research of Peter Friedlander, A. K. Mehrotra observes that:

> As a member of the Radhasoami sect, which believes in the supremacy of a living guru, Prasad replaced the words used for addressing God—Kabir's Rama and Hari—with guru and *gurudev.* Sen's edition [relying to a certain extent on Prasad] lacks the *guru* words, instead including ones for love.[71]

The lesser known *Śrī Śilnāth Śabdāmṛt* containing 500 bhajans, the majority of which had Kabīr's signature, served as a source to many songs of Kumar Gandharva (1924–1992), which were then presented in Hess's *Singing Emptiness*.[72] Shilnath was a Nāthpanthī and his book is indicative of the esteem in which Kabīr was held by Nāths in the twentieth century.[73]

In the following pages, I will present some poems shared between various traditions and examine how poems were reshaped while being transmitted from one community to another. With the help of some standard philological tools, it is possible to speculate on diachronic changes in the poems and to assume some directions in those changes.

Continuous recontextualization

As an illustration of the similarity and difference between the *Bījak* and the western traditions, Callewaert gave the example of four *Bījak* poems (75, 99, 87, 106).[74] He pointed out that the inversion of lines and half-lines in them, as well as the insertion of floating lines, was the result of their handling by singers. Following on a similar comparison, one can also enter into an analysis of changes in the content. Keeping in mind the phenomena of textual variations within a line, changes in the metrical pattern, and anchoring floating lines, one can examine shifts within the poems as they appear in various traditions and various collections and speculate

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69 Mehrotra (2011), pp. xxvi–xxii.

70 Ibid.

71 Ibid., p. xxviii. Cf. Friedlander (2017), p. 18.

72 Hess (2009).

73 Ibid., pp. 19–22.

74 Callewaert, Sharma, and Taillieu (2000), pp. 5–10.

on how receptive communities recontextualized the poems according to their interest and understanding. It should be mentioned that not all textual change is the result of recontextualization. Many changes occur in a haphazard manner due to slips of memory, incomprehensibility of syntax and grammar, slips in copying, or damage to manuscripts.

It is, however, worth keeping in mind that recontextualization may take place simply by travelling from one community to another. For example, the *sabad* '*mo ko kahāṁ ḍhūṇḍhe bande*' (Where are you searching for me, my servant?) is contextualized in the Dharamdāsī tradition as a bhajan sung by Kabīr in response to a Dharamdās song. In the Kabīr-čauṛā understanding, and in most modern interpretations, the song contains the words of God addressing Kabīr.[75] The Dharamdāsī version elevates Kabīr to a godly status.

Before recording—metrical-sung transitions

1.

Elsewhere I have argued that when employing the criteria that John Smith used in his reconstruction of the *Vīsāḷadeva-rāsa* most early Kabīr poems can be reconstructed into conventional Hindi metrical frames.[76] I am reproducing below an extreme example of metrical confusion. The following poem is presented in the oldest *Pañč-vānī* as:

> *kāhe kūṁ kījai pāṁḍe čhoti bicārā;*
> *čhotihī taĩ upanāṁ saba saṁsārā. (ṭeka)*
> *hamārai kaisaĩ lohūṁ pāṁḍe; tumhārai kaisaĩ dūdha.*
> *tuma kaise bāṁbhaṇa hama kaisai sūda.*
> *čhoti čhoti karatāṁ tuma hī jāe; grabha vāsa kāhe kūṁ āe.*
> *janamata čhotī maratahīṁ čhoti; kahai kabīra hari ki nrimala joti.*
> <div align="right">(MKV171, S126)</div>

Why do you harbour untouchability, o pundit?
Is it out of untouchability that the whole world emerged? (Refrain)
How do I have blood, o pundit? How do you have milk? How is it that you are a Brahmin and I am a Shudra?
Were you born by caring for touchability and untouchability? Then why did you come from your mother's womb?
Untouchability when you are born, untouchability when you die. Kabīr says, God's light is stainless.

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75 Friedlander (2015), pp. 196–197. It should also be mentioned that the two versions present several further variables, though they are not immediately germane to the argument being made.
76 Bangha (2010) and (2013).

The metrical pattern is the apparently hopeless 22+19; 17+12+19; 18+15; 16+16 morae. The last two lines, however, suggest that *čaupāī* metre, the most popular in Kabīr, is the basis. More exactly, the rhyming pattern of the last couplet suggests a *čaupaī* with its long-short ending (*čhoti, joti*). If we excise the word *hī* or *tuma* from the third line, emend the two-mora *garbha* to the longer *tatsama garbha*, read the final syllable of the word *maratahīm̐* as short, and emend *kahai* to *kaha*, we arrive at a metrically correct line. But what to do with the monster-like lines in the beginning? In his reconstruction of the *Vīsāḷadevarāsa* Smith gives a list of forms most often demanding excision for a metrical reconstruction.[77] These forms include vocatives, personal pronouns, and possessive pronouns. Excising these forms (*pām̐ḍe, hamārai, pām̐ḍe, tumhārai, tuma, hama*) from these lines leads us, again, close to *čaupāī*s. We may need to excise the postposition *kūm̐* from the first line and the adjective *saba* from the second, as well as to read the final *ī* in *čhotihī* short, in order to get to the exact metre. The excision of the word *saba* is confirmed in the other manuscript of this poem (square brackets and dotted underline indicate editorial intervention):

> *kāhe* [*kūm̐*] *kījai* [*pām̐ḍe*] *čhoti bicārā; čhotihĭ taĩ upanām̐* [*saba*] *saṁsārā.*
> [*hamārai*] *kaisaĩ lohūm̐* [*pām̐ḍe*]; [*tumhārai*] *kaisaĩ dūdha;*
> [*tuma*] *kaise bāṁbhaṇa* [*hama*] *kaisai sūda.*
> *čhoti čhoti karatām̐ tuma* [*hī*] *jāe; garbha vāsa kāhe kūm̐ āe.*
> *janamata čhotī maratahĭm̐ čhoti; kaha kabīra hari ki nrimala joti.*

Why do you harbour untouchability?
Is it out of untouchability that the world emerged?
How is blood? How is milk? How is a Brahmin? And how is a Shudra?
Were you born by caring for touchability and untouchability? Then why did you come from your mother's womb?
Untouchability when you are born, untouchability when you die. Kabīr says, God's light is stainless.

The amplification in this poem can be the result of an explicatory process linked to the loss of an original environment, which included an oral homiletic exposition. In song, this homiletic environment is reduced but due to the flexibility of this performing genre, explanation is now included within the poem. It is easy to imagine how one singer would add short unemphatic explanatory phrases into the performed lines and another learn the song in the amplified form, and that later this version would be committed to writing.

Naturally, the reconstruction of a metrically correct poem does not mean that we have arrived to what Kabīr—or the pseudo-Kabīrs—composed. We can, however, say that a metrical reconstruction is possible in most of the cases and that the

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77 Smith (1976), p. 13.

reconstructed poems do not simply take us a step closer to the earliest versions but also present more compact and poetically more polysemic compositions.

Examining metrical deviances can tell us something about the performance history of these padas as well. The relative lack of flexibility in recitation and singing to a set melody also suggests that transmission in this way did not allow so much change in the original metrical pattern as did singing in a raga. The fact that in the early manuscripts the metre is still perceptible whereas in the later Kabīr tradition it is less so leads one to suspect that the early manuscripts were somewhat closer to a recited or set-melody performance, whereas with the process of time raga singing became more and more prominent. It may also have been the case that performance became more and more linked to profession-ally skilled singers. As has been seen, the written repertoires of these singers, the sources of the earliest Kabīr material, such as the Fatehpur manuscript, the *Pañc-vānī*s, and the *Sarvāṅgī*s, already contain the changes effected by the per-formers.

The earliest recensions: *Vaiṣṇava*, Sikh, and Dādūpanthī transitions

Ideological shifts in Kabīr reception may be represented by interpolation or omis-sion of entire poems as has been the case with two paradoxical 'upside-down-language' poems present in the earliest recorded source, the *Mohan Pothī* (1570–1572), which were first also included but then crossed out as useless in the earliest, Kartarpur manuscript (1604) of the *Ādi Granth*.[78] Following G. S. Mann's specula-tion on the reason for their omission, Hess writes, 'the Sikh gurus apparently had a strong preference for plain language and domestic propriety. They also emphati-cally avoided anything that had even a whiff of tantric influence.'[79]

Kabīr's Sikh reception has been studied extensively. Karine Schomer argued that the *Ādi Granth* verses of Kabīr underline themes that are more supportive of a sense of religious community and social morality rather than of an individualistic mystical religion.[80] The gurus often comment in this vein on the verses of Kabīr. According to Lorenzen, 'Guru Arjan sometimes uses the occasion to suggest some criticism or modification of Kabīr's point of view.'[81] Pashaura Singh summarizes the differences between Sikh teachings and Kabīr as follows:

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78 Mann (2001), pp. 114–115.
79 Hess (2015), p. 95. On pp. 94–102, Hess gives several further examples of ideologically motivated fluidity. Most of her examples (pp. 96–102) are modern.
80 Schomer (1979), p. 84.
81 Lorenzen (2012), p. 26.

6. Shifts in Kabīr Contexts and Texts from Mughal to Modern Times

There are some disagreements between Kabir and the Sikh Gurus on essential points. Kabir remains a solitary spiritual seeker who does not seem to have a sense of social mission or the idea of an organized religious community. In contrast, the Sikh Gurus seem to have a strong sense of mission that compels them to proclaim their message for the ultimate benefit of their audience and to promote socially responsible living. While as a mystic Kabir can afford to run away from the sinners (śāktas), the Sikh Gurus cannot do so and they keep their doors open for them principally because of their sense of mission. Kabir regards mendicity (madhukarī) as a means of acquiring merit in spiritual life and this may have been the reason for renouncing his traditional family craft of weaving. In contrast with Kabir, the Sikh Gurus are strongly opposed to begging. They stress the dignity of regular labour as an integral part of spiritual discipline. Whereas Kabir seems to be resentful because of his failure to win divine favour in spite of his stern asceticism, Guru Amar Das seems to correct his view through his comment that grace is a matter of divine free choice that does not depend upon any kind of previous growth in spirituality. In the Sikh doctrine, divine grace and human effort go together in spiritual life, because human effort too is a matter of divine grace. Kabir sometimes gives the impression of self-withdrawal from active life in the world and appears to be complaining against the divine will betraying a type of negative or escapist attitude. The Sikh Gurus, on the other hand, stress the spirit of optimism to confront life with a positive attitude and to create a harmonized 'balance' by avoiding the extremes of self-withdrawal and excessive indulgence in the things of the world.[82]

The shift from the individual to the communal is well illustrated in the overlapping texts of two padas, one attributed to Kabīr (MKV423, *aika nirañjana alaha merā*) and the other composed by Guru Arjan Singh (*Ādi Granth*, *Bhairau* 3, *eku gusāī alahu merā*).[83] Guru Arjan's version includes the Kabīr-poem and extends it with a commentary. However, Arjan does not quote the final verse, which reads:

> *kahai kabīra bharama saba bhāgā*; *eka nirañjana syauṁ mana lāgā.*
> (MKV432, version of A327 in MS)
>
> Kabīr says: All error has fled; my mind is attached to the one Niranjan.
> (trans. Lorenzen (2011), p. 26)

Guru Arjan's final verse is as follows:

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82 Singh (2003), pp. 109–110.

83 For a detailed comparison of the two versions, see Singh (2003), pp. 101–109, and Lorenzen (2011), p. 26.

kahu kabīra ihu kīā vakhānā; *gura pīra mili khudi khasamu pačhānā.*
(*Ādi Granth*, raga *bhairau*, *mahalā* 5)[84]

I made this declaration. Meeting with pir and guru, I recognised the potential
in myself. (trans. Lorenzen (2011), p. 26)

Kabīr's Vaishnava recension was studied much less. In his article 'Kabīr in his
earliest dated manuscript,' J. S. Hawley proposed to place the Fatehpur poems on a
spectrum with Vaishnava poems at one end and yogic at the other.[85] This spectrum
may also indicate recontextualization from a *nirguṇa* bhakti or yogic context into
a Vaishnava reception. The apparently later Vaishnava layer was appealing to and
maybe created by the Fatehpur scribe as he prepared his manuscript for a Vaishnava
patron, the landlord Narharidās in Fatehpur. Signs of recontextualization may be
found in a single manuscript but the phenomenon can also be observed in one
poem in various manuscripts prepared for different receptive communities. One
can elaborate this attitude further in investigating how the Kabīr-poems addressed
Sikh, Dādūpanthī, and Vaishnava communities in the later manuscripts.

2.

Let us now see what shifts occur in poems fully attributed to Kabīr. Hawley found
the following poem to be the most Vaishnava within the Fatehpur manuscript
(asterisked words are contested in various traditions):

> *kahā karau*, *kaise tarau*; *bhava-jalanidhi bhārī.*
> *rākhi rākhi muhi* *bīṭhulā*; *tohi saraṇi* *murārī.*
> [three couplets about failed efforts for liberation]
> *kahu kabīra*, *mere* *mādhavā*, *tohi saraba-biāpī.*
> *tohi samāna nahi ko* *dayāla*, *mosā nahi* *jācī.* (F14)[86]

> What can I do?
> How can I cross
> this heavy sea of being?
> Save me, save me, Viṭṭhal.
> Shelter me
> Murari.
> . . .
> Says Kabir:
> Oh my Mādhav, everything
> there is, is shot through
> with you.

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84 P. 1136 of <http://www.srigranth.org/servlet/gurbani.gurbani?Action=Page&g=1&h
=1&r=1&t=1&p=0&k=0&Param=1136>. (Accessed 27 October 2018).
85 Hawley (2005), p. 286.
86 Ibid., pp. 290–292. The text is taken from Bahura and Bryant (1982), pp. 189–190.

None is your equal, merciful one—
but as for me,
I'm through. (trans. Hawley (2005), p. 292)

Apart from the Fatehpur manuscript (F), this particularly popular poem is also present in the *Ādi Granth* and in three Dādūpanthī (S, V, Gop) and two Vaishnava (C, J) manuscripts of Rajasthan. On the basis of the meaningful variants listed in the apparatus below, we can also talk of these groups as three recensions of the poem. While there is a diachronic succession in the dating of these recensions, one should be cautious in automatically translating copying dates into a diachronic development of the text:[87]

> ***bīṭhulā***] F AG, *kesavā* S V (-*e*) J C Gop; ***murārī***] F S V Gop, *tumhārī* AG J C; ***mere***] F AG, *suni* S V Gop, *kali* J C; ***mādhavā***] F AG, *kesavā* S V J C (-*e*) Gop; ***dayāla***] F (-*u*) AG, *dātā* S V J C Gop; ***jāčī***] F C (*jačīṁ*) J, *pāpī* AG S V Gop.

One can observe in the poem and its variants a proliferation of the specifically Krishnaite designations of God, Biṭhulā (Viṭṭhala), Mādhava, Murāri, and Keśava, which do not comprise Kabīr's most frequent and somewhat less sectarian terms, Hari and Rām. Unlike in other poems, these designations, including the variants, fit well into the metre.

This poem is not an isolated case on the variation of divine names. One can find a similar proliferation in several other poems. In MKV 261, for example, where the divine names in the line *kahi kabīra raghunātha bhaja nara* (Kabīr says, worship Raghunātha) (S207) also appear as *gobyanda* (A), *hari nāma* (V), *yeka rāma* (J C), and *rāma nāma* (Gop). The *Ādi Granth* version is *kahi kabīra jagajīvanu aisā* (AG482;27) and the *Bījak* has *kahaiṁ kabīra bhagavanta bhajo nara* (Bī60). One explanation for such changes can be that the divine names in Kabīr are interchangeable precisely because his songs do not present a sectarian god.[88] However, if that had been the case, we would not be able to account for the frequent changes of divine names as well as for the scarcity of Islamicate designations of God, such as Allah and K͟hudā, or of Shaiva designations in the early corpus. Examining the use of divine names in the poetic corpus attributed to another Hindi poet-saint, Raidās, Callewaert and Friedlander argue that divine names occur according to context. Ramaite names tend to be used when God is evoked in his sovereign aspect. Kṛṣṇa and his synonyms are used when God's

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87 The critical apparatus is based on Callewaert, Sharma, and Taillieu (2000), pp. 578–580 (poem 473).

88 Francesca Orsini, personal communication, 7 May 2015.

grace is to be conjured, while Islamic names appear in a context where the irrelevance of sectarian divisions is underlined.[89]

The Krishnaite tint of the song above carried by the names of God cannot be missed. The fact that the different versions hardly have any major variant apart from in the divine names, and therefore the bulk of the poem remains unchanged, shows that the teaching, imagery, and emotion of such poems were accepted over sectarian divisions and they only needed to add some markers to anchor them into their own tradition.

Just as in most Kabīr-poems, divine names appear in the first and the last couplets of the poem.[90] The small apparatus shows that these names are not inalienable parts of the poem and are liable to change even within the western tradition. One can note that the obsolete word *bīṭhulā*, the name of a Maharashtrian deity who came to be identified with Viṣṇu, appears only in the two earliest sources but turns out to be useless or perhaps too closely linked to the Maharashtrian Vārkārī sect for the Dādūpanthī and the Vaishnava audiences. They introduced Keśava twice, a term that was absent in the two oldest sources. Apart from this, later books also felt uncomfortable with the alliterating phrase *mere mādhavā* expressing intimacy with God. A further noteworthy variation is the mixing up of the components of the *dayāla–pāpī* ('compassionate–sinner') and *dātā–jācī* ('generous donor–beggar') imagery. Only the two later Vaishnava manuscripts (C and J) get it right.

3.

Another example of shifts within the earliest recensions is the first Kabīr-poem in the Fatehpur manuscript. It is also present in three Dādūpanthī (A V Gop) and two Vaishnava (C J) sources of Rajasthan (these five will be marked collectively as Rāj). Since it is missing from the *Ādi Granth* and the massive early S manuscript, there is a time gap of forty-five years without recording and the five later sources populate a period of about fifty years (1627–1681):[91]

> saravara *kai taṭi haṁsinī tisāī; jugati binā hari jalu pīyo *na *jāī.
> kuṁbha līye ṭhāḍhī *papanihārī; *leja binu *nīra kau bharahi kaisai nārī.
> *kūvau *lorai lai *khaga *bārī; uḍi na sakaiṁ doū *para bhārī.
> *kahata *kabī[ra] *ika budhi *bicārī; sahaja subhāi *muhi *mile *banavārī.[92]

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89 Callewaert and Friedlander (1992), pp. 83–85.

90 On examining a corpus of Kabīr-poems in the Rajasthani *Pāñc-vāṇī* tradition, published in Shyamsundar Das's *Kabīr-Granthāvalī*, Linda Hess observed that designations for God in more than two thirds of the cases came in the refrain (ṭeka) or in the last line (bhaṇitā). See Hess (1987), p. 125.

91 The critical apparatus is based on Callewaert, Sharma, and Taillieu (2000), pp. 436–437 (poem 329).

92 Bahura and Bryant (1982), p. 76 (SSD 298, MKV329). My transcript also indicates the letters crossed out in the original manuscript.

kai] (unm) Faᶜ; (omits) Fᵖᶜ Rāj. ***na jāī***] Fᵖᶜ Rāj; *narjāī* Faᶜ. ***papanihārī***] (dittography) Faᶜ; *panihārī* Fᵖᶜ Rāj. *leja*] Faᶜ; *jala* Fᵖᶜ, *guna* Rāj. ***nīra kau***] (unm.) Faᶜ; *nī* [*rãra kā*] (unm.) Faᵖᶜ, *nīra* Rāj. ***kū***] Faᶜ, *hū* Faᵖᶜ. ***kūvau lorai***] Fa; *pīyau loṛai ta* A; *pīyau cāhai tau* V J C (-*yā*) Gop. ***khaga***] Faᵖᶜ, Rāj; *khaka* Faᵃᶜ. ***bārī***] Faᵃᶜ; *sārī* Faᵖᶜ, Rāj. *para*] Fa V Gop, *paṣa* A J C. ***kahata***] Fa V; *kahi* A; *kahai* J C Gop. ***kabīra***] Rāj; *kabī*(?) Fa. ***ika***] Fa; *gura* A V; *gura eka* J C Gop. ***bičārī***] Fa; *batāī* Rāj. ***muhi mile banavārī***] Fa; *mile rāma rāī* A J C Gop; *mile raghurāī* V.

At the edge of the lake
A thirsty *haṁs* bird:
But how, without the wherewithal,
Can she drink Hari's water?
There stands the watercarrier.
She's brought her waterpot.
But the well has lost its rope:
How can she draw it up?
The bird can make it
Down the well to the water,
But how can she fly back
When her wings get weighed down wet.
Kabir says, just one thought
To keep in mind:
In what's natural—what's your own—
You'll find The Forest One. (trans. Hawley (2005), p. 301)

One can observe here that the obscurities and the uncertainties of the Fatehpur manuscript have mostly been eliminated in the later versions. A good example can be found in the fifth half line, where the unclear *kūvau* (well) or *kūhū* (?) and the rare *lorai* (is restless, craves for, clings to, etc.) are substituted with the more comprehensible phrase *pīyau cāhai* (wants to drink). The intermediary *pīyau loṛai* (is restless to drink) reading of one source (A) suggests that the substitution occurred in two steps. The original *bārī* (water) reading of the same line is corrected into *sārī* (mynah) by a later hand in the Fatehpur manuscript in accordance with the reading of the later sources. These sources also make the verse hypermetrical by the insertion of the particle *tau* (then). In all variations, the reading is slightly unclear and the syntax loose.

Some variations are the result of oral transmission, such as the inversion of the second and third lines in V and Gop and the addition of an extra line in C. This interpolation is an elaboration on the five water-carrier image *sara sūkau kāyā kumilāṁnī; vimukha čalī pāṁčau paṁnihārī* (the lake dried up, the body withered, and the five water-carriers returned disappointed). Although it does not add much to the overall message of the poem, this pada indicates that the image of the five water-carriers, referring to the five senses, was particularly appealing to some seventeenth-century performers.

The last line of the poem is unmetrical in all versions, suggesting that all have been changed at some point. Its half lines contain several elements liable to be contested, namely the poetic signature, a reference to the guru, and the name of God. The **kahata ka*bī ika*** reading of the Fatehpur manuscript already suggests some previous scribal error.

In sources A C J and Gop, the punning word *banavārī*, which can refer to Kṛṣṇa but also to a flower garden and to the cultivation of sixteen-petalled lotuses, presumably a chakra,[93] is given as the flat *rāma rāī* (king Rām) and in V as *raghurāī* 'Rām, Lord of the Raghus). The overall content of the poem is about the difficulty of spiritual realization and apart from the name *banavārī* (and *raghurāī*—but this is not Krishnaite), there is no Vaishnava element in it. As Kṛṣṇa devotion seems to be superimposed on the poem in the Vaishnava Fatehpur manuscript, so may the reference in the signature pada below to the enlightening guru be a later addition to an earlier yogic or tantric layer in which enlightenment comes from within (*sahaja subhāi*) through mental realization (*eka budhi bicāri*):

> *kahi kabīra guri eka budhi batāī* (Gop C J)
>
> Kabīr says: 'The guru has indicated the enlightened thought.'

Shifts in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: *Ādi Granth*, Rajasthani anthologies, *Bījak*

4.
We can extend our investigation of textual shifts beyond the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Already Callewaert compared the Sikh, Rajasthani, and *Bījak* versions of the following poem (MKV 416) and drew attention to the inversion of lines which are proofs of oral transmission. I am quoting below the *Mohan Pothī* and the *Bījak* versions, along with two Rajasthani variants:

> (*sūhī rāgu*)
> *thara thara kaṁpai bālā jīu, *nā jānā kiyā karasī pīu.*
> *raini gaī matu dinu bhī jāi, bhavara gae baga baiṭhe āi.* (rahaū)
> *kācai karavai rahai na pānī, haṁsu calia kāiā *kumalānī.*
> *kāgu uḍāvata bhujā pirānī, kahai kamīru eha kathā sirānī.* (M3)
>
> ***nā*] emendation from the unmetrical *na* in MKV (*nā* is also the reading of the majority of the manuscripts).
> ***kumalānī*] emendation from the unmetrical *kūmalānī* in MKV (all other manuscripts read the word with a short *u*).

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93 Hawley (2005), p. 303.

This girl, my soul, trembles and shakes, she does not know what her beloved will do. The night has passed, lest the day also end.[94] The bees gone, now herons have come. Water, lustre, does not stay in unbaked pot. The wild goose is gone, the body withers.[95] My arm aches in beating at crows.[96] Kabīr says, this story is over.

(*rāga bhairu*)
raiṁni gaī jaisaiṁ dina bhī jāi, bhavara uḍe baga baiṭhe āi. (ṭeka)
tharahari kaṁpyau bārā jīva, ko jāṁnaiṁ kā karihai pīva.
kācai bhāṁḍai rahai na pāṁnīṁ, haṁsa calyau kāyā kumilāṁnīṁ.
kahi kavīra yahu kathā sirāṁnīṁ, kāga uḍāvata bāṁha pirānīṁ. (A340)

As the night has passed so is the day coming to an end. The bees are flown, herons have come.
This girl, my soul, trembles and shakes, who knows what her beloved will do.
Water, lustre, does not stay in unbaked pot. The wild goose is gone, the body withers.
Kabīr says: 'This story is over. My arm aches in beating at crows.'

(*rāga bhairuṁ*)
raiṁni gaī mata dina bhī jāi, bhavara uḍyā buga baiṭhe āi. (ṭeka)
kačai karavai rahai na pāṁnī, haṁsa ūḍyā kāyā kumyalāṁnīṁ.
tharahara tharahara kaṁpai jīva, nāṁ jānūṁ kā karihai pīva.
kaüā uḍāvata bahiyāṁ pirānī, kahai kabīra morī kathā sirāṁnīṁ. (C139)

As the night has passed lest the day also end. The bee flown, herons have come.
This girl, my soul, trembles and shakes, who knows what her beloved will do.
Water, lustre, does not stay in unbaked pot. The wild goose is gone, the body withers.
My arm aches in beating at crows. Kabīr says: 'My story is over.'

bhauṁra uṛe baka baiṭhe āya, raina gaī divaso čali jāya.
*thala-thala kāṁpai *bālā *jīva, nā jāṁnauṁ kā karihai pīva.
kāče bāsana ṭikai na pānī, uṛi *gai haṁsa kāyā kumhilānī.
*kāga uḍāvata bhujā pirānī, kahai kabīra yaha kathā sirānī. (Bījak 106)

*jīva] this reading of the Oxford manuscript (Ox) is preferred to the unrhyming *jibe* in the edition (Bī). The other non-orthographic variants, with the exception of *gā*, are either inferior or negligible: *thala-thala*] Bī, *halahala* Ox; *bālā*] Bī, *bole* Ox; *gai*] Bī, *gā* Ox; *kāga*] Bī, *nāga* Ox.

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94 The night is taken as symbolic of a youth with dark hair and the day as that of old age with white hair. The same applies to the colours of the bee and the heron. The words *bhī jāī* are separated, resulting in the meaning 'also goes.' However, the Old Hindi root *bhīj-* means to get wet and with regards to night it refers to its passing as it becomes colder and wetter. This meaning now applied to the day may also be at play, creating a more vivid texture.
95 The pot is a traditional simile for the human body, the wild goose for the soul.
96 Hess gives the note on the occurrence of this expression in the *Bījak*: 'The crow's cawing is auspicious: it means someone is coming. Women separated from loved ones chase crows to make them "talk."' In the context of this poem the phrase may stand for useless activities.

> The bee has flown, the heron remains.
> Night is over,
> Day is going too.
> The young girl quakes and shivers,
> Not knowing what her lover
> Will do.
> Water won't stay
> In unbaked clay.
> The swan flutters, the body withers.
> Beating at crows, the arm grieves.
> Says Kabir, the story sputters
> And goes out here. (trans. Hess and Singh (1986), pp. 76–77)

Indeed, the inversion of lines is one of the most conspicuous variations. Along with this, one can notice the use of synonyms (*uḍe–gae; karavai–bhāṃḍai–bāsana; čalyau–uḍyā; bhujā–bāṁha–bahiyā*) or equivalent idiomatic usages (*nā jānā* (no one knows)*; ko jānai* (who knows)*; nāṁ jānūṁ* (I don't know) in the four versions quoted. Dialectal variation is also present. Interestingly, the Rajasthani future *karasī* (will do) forms appear in Panjab, while the Braj *karihai* (will do) appears in the Rajasthani and the *Bījak* versions. The form of pronouns can also change (*iha–yahu–yaha* vs. *mori*)*.* In the manuscripts that I did not quote above, there are some further eccentric variations. Most of these transformations can only take place in oral transmission and do not seem to carry any change in meaning. They are also lost in translation. There are, however, two meaningful changes. The *Ādi Granth* version (792;2) adds an extra line before the concluding one:

> *kuāra kaṁniā jaise karata sigārā, kiu raliā mānai bājha bhatārā.*
>
> [The soul?] decorates itself like a young girl, but what delight does it have without the Lord?

This line, found only in the *Ādi Granth*, with conventional *virah* imagery is only loosely connected to the others that lament the vain passing of life. It may have been anchored in this poem because of the opening image of the girl-soul.

A less conspicuous yet more significant change can be observed with the omission or substitution of the prohibitive particle *mati* (don't, lest). While most early records agree on it and thus express an exhortation to the listener, the Rajasthani A340 and the *Bījak* version omit it and confront the listener with a finite state. Considering the date and the number of sources, it appears to be a later variation. This variant, however, represents not an ideological but rather a rhetorical shift. It is done to trigger a stronger inner protest in the listener in rejecting the course of such a life.

5.

Let us now have a further look at the later life of the Kabīr-poem about mortality. The text of the quatrain MKV102, which shares a line with MKV350 (F2), is present in the Rajasthani (S A V J) and Panjabi (G) traditions.[97] While the quatrains in the Rajasthani manuscripts present negligible variation, the tercet in the *Ādi Granth* has an interesting shift. Two out of its three lines are present in the Rajasthani versions of the same poem, but its first line is shared with poem MKV350.

> *jhūṭhe tana kūṁ kā grabaīe*; *mūṁvāṁ palabhari rahaṇa na paīye*.
> *khīra khā̃ṛa ghrita piṁḍa savārā*; *prāṁṇa gayeṁ le bāhari jārā*.
> *čovā čandana čaračata aṅgā*; *so tana jarai kāṭha kai saṅgā*;
> *dāsa kabīra yahu kīnha bičārā*; *eka dina hvaigā hvāla hamārā*. (MKV102 S77)

> Why do you pride yourself falsely in your body? When dead, it does not remain for a moment.
> You nourished your flesh with khir, jaggery, and ghee; when the life-breath leaves it, it will be taken out to burn.
> You cared for your limbs with fragrance and sandalwood; that body will burn together with the funeral wood.
> The devotee Kabīr has thought it over; this will be your condition one day.

> (*Rāg gauḍī*)
> *jihi siri rači rači bāṁdhata pāga*; *so siru čuṁča savārahi kāga*. (2) (cf. MKV350,5)
> *isu tana dhana ko kiā garabaīā*; *rāma nāmu kāhe na driṛīā*. (1, *rahāu*) (cf. MKV102,1)
> *kahata kabīra sunahu mana mere*; *ihī havāla hohige tere*. (3) (cf. MKV102,4) (*Ādi Granth* 330,35)

> The head where you carefully tied the turban, a crow will take care of it with its beak.
> Why do you pride yourself in your body and wealth? Wy didn't you stick firmly to
> Kabīr says: 'Listen, my mind; this will be your condition.'   [God's name?

The Dādūpanthī version of this stanza talks about 'our' shared human condition without any explicit exhortation. The slightly overlapping *Ādi Granth* version is a straightforward address to the listener. The dismal admonition about death is the theme of all eight padas in the Rajasthani version. The refrain 'When dead, it does not remain for a moment' reinforcing this message becomes an exhortation in the *Ādi Granth*, 'Why didn't you keep firm in God's name?'—a reminder of one of the most important devotional practices, the repetition of the divine name.

Let us now consider another similar poem on mortality in the *Ādi Granth* (*Goṇḍ* 2), a line of which can also be found in one of Kabīr's distiches. The spirit of the *antarās* of this pada is close to the above two stanzas. However, the refrain introduces an entirely new concept, a question on the ways of the karma. The

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97 A brief presentation of variations on this poem in *Bījak* 99, *Ādi Granth* 330,35, MKV102 (S77), and Tivari 62 is given in Callewaert, Sharma, and Taillieu (2000), pp. 6–7.

repeated question, showing some discrepancy with the admonition about death, incites the listener to think about his or her karma. Another difference here is the direct address to the listener, *bābā re*, translated here as 'o my brother':

> (*Rāg goṇḍ*)
> *narū marai naru kāmi na āvai*; *pasū marai dasa kāja savārai*. (2)
> *apane karama kī gati mai kiā jānaü*; *mai kiā jānaü bābā re*. (1, *rahāu*)
> *hāḍa jale jaise lakarī kā tūlā*; *kesa jale jaise ghāsa kā pūlā*. (3)
> *kaha kabīra taba hī naru jāgai*; *jama kā ḍaṃḍu mūṃḍa mahi lāgai*. (4) (*Ādi Granth* 2)

> When man dies he becomes useless— when an animal dies it is useful for
> a dozen tasks.
> How can I know the ways of my karma? How can I know it, o my brother?
> Your bones will burn like firewood; your hair will burn like a sheaf of grass.
> Kabīr says: 'Man will only awake when Death's rod touches his head.'

The following *dohā* is also present in the *Ādi Granth* (AG1366,36) and in the *Bījak* (Bī174). The version reconstructed by Tivari (Ti *Sākhī* 15/7) follows the one published by Shyamsundar Das (SSD12/16). The *Ādi Granth* version is given below (in the apparatus, the siglum Bī[BH] stands for the Bhagtāhī recension text of the *Bījak*, as opposed to the reference to Shukdev Simh's edition based on the Dānāpur recension marked by Bī):

> *kabīra hāḍa jare* jiu lākarī, kesa jare* jiu ghāsu*; (cf. AG, *Goṇḍ* 2,2)
> *ihu** jagu jaga jaratā* dekhi kai, bhaïo kabīru udāsa.***

> *jarai/jarai/jaratā*] AG Bī; *jalai/ jalai/ jalatā* SSD. **ihu*] AG; *saba* SSD.
> ***ihu... udāsa*] SSD, AG; *kabīrā jarai rāma rasa*; *jasa kāṭhina jarai kapāsa*
> Bī.

With its statement about Kabīr becoming disillusioned and indifferent (*udāsa*) towards the world, the distich exhorts the listener to similarly turn away from maya, since he will end up dead. The *Bījak* version also proposes a way forward, 'Kabīr is burning in the emotion of God,' an example exhorting the listener towards bhakti.

What happened to these poems later? The *Bījak* (Bī99) presents an interesting composite text based on the three different earlier padas. It is also amplified by two more lines not found in the early corpus:

> *aba kahā̃ calehu akele mītā*; *uṭhahu na karahu gharahu kā čiṃtā.
> *khīra khā̃ra ghṛta piṃḍa saṃvārā*; *so tana lai bāhara kara ḍārā.*
> (cf. MKV102,2)
> *jo sira raci raci bā̃dhyo pāgā*; *so sira ratana *biḍārata kāgā. (cf. MKV350,5)
> *hāra jarai *jasa jaṅgala kī lakaṛī*; *kesa jaraĩ *jasa ghāsa kī pūlī. (cf. AG,
> *Goṇḍ* 2,2)

māyā ke rasa lei na pāyā; antara jama bilāri hoe dhāyā.
*kahaĩ kabīra *ajahũ na jāgā; jama kā mugadara *sira bica lāgā.* (99) (cf.
AG, *Goṇḍ* 2,3) (*Bījak* 99)

*uṭhahu] Bī, *uṭhīvo* Ox; *jo*] Bī, *jehī* Ox; *biḍārata*] Bī, *bīḍāre* Ox; *jasa*
jaṅgala kī lakaṛī] (unrhyming) Bī, *jaise lakaṛī jhūrī* Biᴮᴴ Ox; *jasa ghāsa*
kī pūlī] Bī, *jaise trīna ke kūrī* Biᴮᴴ Ox; *māyā*] Bī, *āyata saṁga na jāta*
saṁghātī, kāha bhaai dala bāghe hāthī. maā Ox; *ajahũ*] Bī, *nala ajahu*
Ox; *sira bica*] Bī *mājha śira* Ox.

Where are you going alone, my friend?
You don't get up, or fuss
About your house.
The body fed on sweets, milk and butter,
The form you adorned
Has been tossed out.
The head where you carefully
Tied the turban,
That jewel,
The crows are tearing open.
Your stiff bones burn
Like a pile of wood,
Your hair like a branch of grass.
No friend comes along, and where
Are the elephants you had tied?
You can't taste Maya's juice,
A cat called Death has pounced inside.
Even now you lounge in bed
As Yama's club
Falls on your head. (trans. Hess and Singh (1986), pp. 74–75)

Although this *sabad* can be analysed as composed of earlier, different Kabīr lines,
it has developed into an organic unit. The poem becomes a powerful admonition
through a longer sequence of reminders to death, kicked off with the familiar ad-
dress 'my friend.' As with some of its antecedents, it leaves in the shadow any
reference to the means of salvation.

The reconstruction by Parasnath Tivari (Ti62) is a purged version of the *Bījak*
poem with a different refrain. His lines are picked up from the same three early
sources and while such a reconstruction does not have any pedigree to represent
the earliest Kabīr, it is in line with later tradition in making new poems by combin-
ing lines from early padas, as has been seen in the case of the *Bījak*:

jhūṭhe tana kaũ kyā garabāvai; marai tau pala bhari rahana na pāvai. (*ṭeka*)
(cf. MKV102,1)
khīra khāṁḍa ghṛta piṁḍa saṁvārā; prāṇa gaeṁ lai bāhari jārā. (2)
(cf. MKV102,2)

jihiṁ siri raci raci bāṁdhata pāgā; *so siru caṁcu savārahi kāgā*. (3)
(cf. MKV350,5)
hāṛa jarai jaisai lakaṛī jhūrī; *kesa jarai jaisai trina kai kūrī*. (4)
(cf. AG, *Goṇḍ* 2,2)
kahai kabīra nara ajahuṁ na jāgai; *jama kā ḍaṁḍ mūṁḍ mahiṁ lāgai*. (5)
(cf. AG, *Goṇḍ* 2,3) (Parasnath Tivari, 1961)

Kabīr's imagery is part of a larger tradition and was used by other *bhakta* authors. For example, the same theme also occurs in the later layers of the *Sūrsāgar*:[98]

(*rāga jhījhauṭī*)
jā dina mana pañchī uṛi jaihai;
tā dina tere tana taruvara ke sabai pāta jhari jaihaĩ;
yā dehī kau garaba na kariyai, syāra-kāga-gīdha khaihaĩ; (cf. MKV102,1)
tīnani maĩ tana kṛmi, kai biṣṭhā, kai hvai khāka uṛaihai;
kahā vaha nīra, kahā̃ vaha sobhā, kahā rāga-rūpa dikhaihai;
jina logani saũ neha karata hai, tehi dekhi ghinaihaĩ;
ghara ke kahata sabāre kāṛhau, bhūta hoi dhari khaihaĩ; (cf. MKV102,2)
jina putranihĩ bahuta pratipālyau, devī-deva manaihaĩ;
teī lai khoparī bã̄sa dai, sīsa phori bikharaihai;
ajahũ mūṛha karau satasaṅgati, santani maĩ kachu paihai;
nara-bapu dhāri nāhī jana hari kaũ, jama kī māra so khaihai;
sūradāsa bhagavaṁta-bhajana binu bṛthā su janama gã̄vaihai.
(*Sūrsāgar* 86)

On the day that the bird of your soul flies away
All the leaves of your body's tree will be shed.
Don't take pride in this body—jackals, crows or vultures will eat it.
Your corpse will turn into one of these three:[99] worms or excrement or will be blown away as ashes.
Where is the old brilliance? Where is the old lustre? Where will it show its
The people you loved will be disgusted by seeing it.   [beauty and colour?
Everyone of your house will say 'take it away! It will become a ghost and overpower[100] us.'
The same children that you protected so much and considered to be gods and goddesses
Will apply a bamboo stick to your skull and will burst and scatter your head.
O you dull, go to the company of the true one right away; among the truthful ones you will receive something.
If receiving human birth, one isn't Hari's servant, then he will be struck by Death.
Sūrdās says: 'Without praising the Lord he wastes his life in vanity.'

---

98 *Sūrsāgar*, vol. 1. p. 28. It is absent from the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century manuscripts of the Sūrdās poems (J. S. Hawley, personal communication, 29 May 2012; cf. Bryant and Hawley 2015).

99 Or 'fall apart into its three qualities.'

100 Cf. *dharikhāyo* ('to overpower') in Callewaert and Sharma (2009), p. 1002.

6.

The next poem to be examined (MKV261) is about the workings of maya and how to become liberated from it:

> *māyā moha mohi hita kīnha, tātai merau gyāṁna dhana hari līnha.* (ṭeka)
> . . .
> *kahi kabīra raghunātha bhaja nara, dutī nāṁhī koī.* (S207)
>
> My infatuation with illusion did good to me[101] since it snatched away my wealth of knowledge. (Refrain)
> . . .
> Kabīr says: 'Worship Rām, the Lord of Raghus, o man. There is no one else (in the world).'

The way to liberation, however, is highly contested as various manuscripts offer different objects for man's devotion. While the Rajasthani manuscripts have Vaishnava names in the last line—*raghunātha* (S), *gobyanda* (A), *hari nāma* (V), *yeka rāma* (J C), *rāma nāma* (Gop)—and propose to worship God either directly or through his name, the *Ādi Granth* and the *Bījak* deploys more generic terms, such as *jagajīvanu* (AG482,27) and *bhagavanta* (Bī60) respectively.

  This is, however, not the only variation. The *Bījak* (Bi60), as compared to the early Sikh and Rajasthani versions, interpolated a couplet that may have been useful for community building. These two extra lines (Bī60.6–7) distance the listener or the reader from the learning of both Islam and Hinduism and direct them to the true guru:

> **saiyada sekha kitāba *nīrakhai, *paṇḍita sāstra *bičārai.*
> *sataguru ke upadesa binā *te, jāni ke *jīvahi mārai.*
>
> **saiyada sekha**] Bī, **sekha saiata** Ox; *nīrakhai*] Bī, **nīrakhata** Ox; **paṇḍita**] Bī, **sumrīta** Ox; *bičārai*] Bī, *bičārī* Ox; *te*] Bī, **tuma** Ox; *jīvahi mārai*] Bī, *jīva mārī* Ox.
>
> The sayyid and the shaikh look at the Qur'an; the pundit ponders on the shastras. Without the teachings of the true guru, they destroy their lives on purpose.

This particular importance lent to the guru in the *Bījak* is in contrast with the poem's variant readings. For example, the second half of the first *antarā* in the texts of the Rajasthani manuscripts and in the *Ādi Granth* are similar. The only difference is that the *Ādi Granth* version is more personal while the Rajasthani recension is more neutral:

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101 Alternatively, 'Illusion and infatuation are impassioned with me.' For a discussion of the word *hita* in this poem, see Strnad (2013), p. 91, n. 1. My translation makes use of the irony found in the *Hari ṭhagi* ('God the swindler') poem (MKV97) to be discussed below.

sāča kari nari gāṇṭhi bāndhyau čhaḍi parama nidhāṁna (S207)

Collecting money, man tied it into his knot-purse and abandoned the highest treasure.

sāṁča kari hama gāṭhi dīnī soī parama nidhāna (AG482;27)

Collecting money, we tied it into our knot-purse and that is the highest treasure for us.

The *Bījak*, however, takes the poem into a different direction, reminding us of the importance of the guru:

sabda guru upadesa diyo te čhāṁḍeu parama nidhānā (Bi60)

The guru gave guidance through the word but you abandoned the highest treasure.

te čhāṁḍeu] Bī, **tuma čhoḍo** Ox.

7.

The next poem to be discussed (MKV486) is one of the few 'autobiographical' Kabīr-poems with a reference to his imminent death in Magahar, a notoriously impure town for Hindus.[102] In its earliest recorded forms (in M, AG, S and V), it is an exhortation for internal devotion to a gracious God given into the mouth of the dying or already dead Kabīr. As we have seen, the use of death imagery to awaken the listener to an internal realization is a frequent theme in the Kabīr-poems. The second and the third lines remind us of God's grace. The real novelties here are the repeated inclusion of Kabīr's name, the first-person statement in the penultimate line and the reference to Magahar:

> *lokā re, mati bhorā re,*
> *jau kāsī tana tajai*[103] *kabīrā; to rāmahi kauna nihorā re.* (ṭeka)
> *jaupaiṁ bhagati bhagati hari jānai; milai ta aciraja kāhā re.*
> *jaisaiṁ jalaihi jalahi ḍhuri miliyau; yūṁ ḍhūri milyau julāhā re*
> *kahai kabīra rāma mai jānyāṁ; bhrami bhūlai jini koī re*
> *jasa kāsī jasa magahara usara, hṛdai rāma jo hoī re.* (S365)

O people, it's so foolish![104]
If Kabīr gives up his body in Kashi, then, tell me, what is the role of Ram's compassion? (Refrain)
If a devotee knows Hari through his devotion then, say, what is the surprise

---

102 Variation in this song has been discussed in Strnad (2018); the *Bījak* version has been studied by De Bruijn (2014), pp. 145–147.

103 Emendation from *jai jai*. Cf. Strnad (2013), p. 133, n. 2.

104 This formulation aims to reflect the ambiguity of the Hindi as it allows the interpretations, 'It is so foolish of you!' and 'It's so foolish of Kabīr'; cf. Strnad (2013), p. 133, n. 1. The Hindi exclamation *re* is not present in each line but its function of directly addressing the listener is indicated by phrases such as 'tell me,' 'say,' and 'you see,' or by using second-person addresses instead of third-person narration.

if he meets Him?
Just as water poured into water merged, so has the weaver, you see.
Kabīr says: 'I have known God, none of you should be lost in doubt.'
Kashi is just as the barren land of Magahar, if you hold Rām in your heart.

The interpretation of the last third of the refrain, *to rāmahi kauna nihorā re*, calls for some comment as it has several opacities and is a good example of how elusive Kabīr's texts can be for a modern translator and how much can be lost when the translator needs to pick up only one meaning. Apart from the conjunct *to* (then) and the exclamation *re*, translated here as 'tell me,' all words present some ambiguity. Firstly, this half line lacks a clear finite verb, which should apparently be a form of either 'to be' or 'to do.' The word *rāmahi* is in the oblique case and most probably stands for a direct or an indirect object, that is, accusative or dative case. More-over, a dative is often used to express concepts to be translated with the genitive (for example, '[the role of] compassion for Rām'). The word *kauna* can stand for 'what,' 'who,' 'what kind of,' or 'which.'[105] To create some clarity and reduce the meanings to 'what,' two sources (AG and Gop) present the word *kahā*, equivalent of the modern Hindi *kyā* (what). Yet, the most intriguing word is *nihorā*, which means 'entreaty,' 'favour, compassion,' and 'support' and the line can be translated in either of these meanings. Thus, some further probable alternatives are 'who will then implore God?' and 'How does God's support work in it?'[106] The variation in meanings represents various shades of agency attributed to God or to the devotee.

In contrast with the earliest sources, the three other Rajasthani anthologies (J C Gop), which can be called the Vaishnava recension, invert lines 3 and 4 and add two lines (7, 8) after the second and the inverted third line.[107] The new line order we arrive at is as follows:

1
2
[7]
4
3
[8]
5
6

---

105 Cf. McGregor (1993); Prasad, Sahay, and Shrivastav (1992); Callewaert and Sharma (2009). Out of these, the first two meanings have been recorded in Rajasthani as well (see Lalas 1962–1988) and the first three in Brajbhāṣā (see Gupta, Shukla, and Tandan 1974).
106 Vaudeville (1997), p. 214 seems to opt for the first solution: 'If Kabīr leaves his body at Kasi, who will take refuge in Rām?
107 M has two couplets appended at the end, apparently by Nāmdev. This is a transcription mistake either by the *Mohan Pothī* scribe or by Callewaert and his collaborators.

A novelty in these versions is the inclusion of a reference to the guru, which can again be perceived as a means of community-building:

> *gura parasāda sādha kī sī saṅgati, jaga jītyoṁ jāhi julāhā.* (line 8 J76)
> Through the grace of the guru and the companionship of the truthful,
> the weaver goes —having conquered the world.

The expression *jītyo jāhi* in the second half of this line is in fact a combination of the perfective participle *jītyo* (having conquered) and the present *jāhi* (goes). To avoid confusion with the passive *jītyo jā(h)i* (is conquered), the other versions have the adverbial form *jītyeṁ jāi* (C) and *jīteṁ jāi* (Gop). The conquest refers to the fact that Kabīr has become independent of worldly customs.

In the same poem, the fifth line has contested readings in the early layer manuscripts:

> *kahatu kabīra sunahu re loī* (AG, M)
> *kahai kabīra rāma maiṁ jānyāṁ* (S, [*jānauṁ*] V)
> *kahai kabīra sunahu re santo* (J, C, [*kahata*] Gop)

The earliest recorded version (AG, M) is a fully formulaic reference to the poet Kabīr's authority, positioning his persona in dialogue with his audience. The second version omits the direct address to the audience and reinforces Kabīr's authority with a self-confident first-person statement. The third version is a slight variation on the first, already presenting a community of truthful people. The same poem with more substantial variations is also present in the *Bījak*:

> *logā tumahīṁ mati ke bhorā*
> *jyoṁ pānī pānī mili gayaū, *tyoṁ dhuri mile kabīrā.*
> *jo maithila ko sācā byāsa, tora marana ho magahara pāsa.*
> *magahara marai marana nahi pāvai, anta marai to rāma le jāvai.*
> *magahara marai so gadahā hoya, bhala paratīta rāma se khoya.*
> *kyā kāsī kyā magahara ūsara, jo pai hṛdaya rāma basa mora.*
> *jo kāsī tana tajai kabīra; to rāmahi, kahu, kauna nihora.* (*Bījak* 103)

> *jo*] Bī, je Ox; *tyoṁ*] Bī, te tehī Ox; *jo maithila ko*] Bī; *jauṁ meṁthī kā* Bī^BH; *jyau maithī ko* Ox; *byāsa*] Bī Bī^BH, *bāsā* Ox; *le jāvai*] Bī, *lajāve* Ox.

> You simple-minded people!
> As water enters water, so Kabīr
> Will meet with dust.

> That Maithili pandit said
> You'd die near Magahar.
> What a terrible place to be dead!
> If you want Ram to take you away,
> Die somewhere else instead.

Besides, they say
Whoever dies at Magahar
Comes back a donkey.

So much for your faith in Ram.
What's Kashi? Magahar? Barren ground,
When Ram rules in your heart.
If you give up the ghost in Kashi
Is there some debt
On the Lord's part? (trans. Hess and Singh (1986), pp. 75–76)[108]

One is tempted to say that the chronologically earliest sources (M AG S and V) represent the earliest accessible layer of the poem going back to the late sixteenth century. Some amplification happened in the Rajasthani *vaiṣṇava* recension that came to life towards the end of the first quarter of the seventeenth century and a more radical shift took place in the *Bījak* in the late eighteenth century. The fifth line containing the contested readings in the early layer manuscripts is omitted from the *Bījak* just as the extra lines [7] and [8] of the *vaiṣṇava* recension. In its turn, the *Bījak* elaborates on the theme of Magahar in three additional *čaupāī* lines (b3–b5). The inclusion of these internally rhyming *čaupāī*s not only confuse the poetic metre, but the inversion of lines also breaks the rhyming pattern (and forces the word *bhorā* to rhyme with *kabīra*). The *Bījak* also turns the exhortation of the audience into polemics about brahmanical orthodoxy. The line correspondence between the older sources, represented here in the *vaiṣṇava* recension's line order, and *Bījak sabad* 103 is as follows:

Raj	*Bījak*
1	1
2	7
[7]	
4	2
	b3
	b4 (b5 in Ox)
	b5 (b4 in Ox)
3	
[8]	
5	
6	6

---

108 A different translation is in Vaudeville (1997), p. 156, no. 2180.

The *Bījak* version expresses a later fascination with Magahar and indeed with Kabīr hagiography, which by that time has, apparently, become an important Kabīrpanthī centre.[109] As an Indian singer relishes some poetic or musical turn and explores its variations, the pseudo-Kabīr of these three lines does the same. In his study of this *sabad*, Thomas De Bruijn found that it was moulded to suit hagiography about Kabīr's death in Magahar. Like most other *sabad*s in the *Bījak*, this one comments on, rather than narrates, a hagiographic event and by doing so it actively addresses and challenges the audience.[110] One is reminded that the hagiographic interest in the Kabīrpanth on the eve of the compilation of the *Bījak* may have been one of the major forces of sectarian identity. Marco della Tomba in the 1760s was told by Kabīrpanthīs that Kabīr had 'performed great miracles' and was also the guru of Alexander the Great.[111]

8.

The last early layer poem to be examined is present in AG, S, A V, J, and Gop:

> *hari ṭhagi jaga kūṁ ṭhagorī lāī*; *hari kai bivoga kaisaiṁ jīu merī māī.*
> *kauṇa pūta ko kāko bāpa*; *kauṇa marai kauṇaṁ karai saṁtāpa.*
> *kauṇa puriṣa ko kākī nāri, abhi antari tumha lehu bicāri.*
> *kahai kabīra, ṭhaga syūṁ mana mānyā, gaī ṭhagaurī ṭhaga pahicānyāṁ.*
> (S74, MKV97)

> That con man Hari has conned the world; but, my companion, how can I live without Him?
> Who is son and who is whose father? Who dies and who suffers?
> Who is husband and who is whose wife? Think this over deep within.
> Kabīr's heart accepts the thief. Cheating disappears when you recognise the cheat.[112]

The poetic form is the most frequent early Kabīr stanza, a quatrain of four *čaupāī* lines, although the metre needs to be emended at certain places. For example, the second half line with suggested metrical correction (underlined) and excision (in square brackets) is as follows:

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109 Kabīr legends composed from about 1600 onwards always mention Kabīr's death in Magahar (Lorenzen (1992), p. 41). Magahar may refer to the village of the same name near Gorakhpur although contesting sites exist (ibid., p. 42). A land grant from 1688–1689 confirms this site's connection to Kabīr Śāh (ibid., p. 17).

110 In his analysis of the *Bījak* version of this poem, De Bruijn (2014), pp. 145–147, demonstrated how this song had been moulded to suit hagiography about Kabīr's death in Magahar. As with most songs in the *Bījak*, this one, commenting on rather than narrating a hagiographic event, actively addresses and challenges the audience.

111 Lorenzen (2002), p. 40 speculates that della Tomba may have misunderstood the story of Kabīr's legendary encounter with Sikandar Lodī.

112 Parts of the translation draw on Hess and Singh's English version in Hess and Singh (1986), p. 53.

> *hari kai bivoga kaisaiṁ jīu̱* [*merī*] *māī* (S74)
> *hari ke bioga kaise jīu̱* [*merī*] *māī* (AG331;39)
> *hari ke biyoga kasa jiyehu re bhāī* (Bī36; *harī ke bīvoga kaise jīu māī* Ox64)
>
> *hari kĕ bi|vŏga kasa| jīū̱ṁ|, māī* (metrical reconstruction)
> or
> *hari bi|voga kasa| jīū̱ṁ|, māī* (metrical reconstruction)

The only noteworthy variation within the early layer is that manuscript J felt the gender incongruence in the feminine verbal form *lāī* in the first pada and emended the text to *hari ṭhaga jaga ṭhagorī lāyā*. This triggered a change of the rhyme in the next pada into *merī māyā* (my illusion). The *Bījak* inverts lines 2 and 3 and adds an extra, explicatory line before the concluding *čaupāī*:

> *ṭhagi ṭhagi mūla sabana ko līnhā, rāma ṭhagaurī kāhu na cīnhā.* (4)
>
> Cheating repeatedly, it has snatched away everyone's capital; no one recognized God, the swindler.

Such *geyavikāra*s, sung inflections, show that the *Bījak* text cannot directly derive from the early written archetype. The inverted lines, apparently less emphatic than the rest of the poem, are also more liable to change. Manuscript J and the *Bījak* also unfold and slightly confuse the simple grammar and the correct metre of the earlier forms *kaüna ko pūtu pitā ko kāko* (AG) and *kauṇa pūta ko kāko bāpa* (S A V Gop) into *ko kāko putra, kavana kāko bāpā* (J Bi). The half-line *abhi antari tumha lehu bicāri* (S A V Gop; *iā tata lehu sarīra bicāri* AG) is changed into *akatha kathā sādho lehu bicāri* in manuscript J and into *akatha kathā yama dṛṣṭi pasārī* in the *Bījak*. The result is that while the older versions exhort and instigate direct involvement, that is agency, the *Bījak* makes a threatening statement, which unlike the old versions would allow the assistance of a guru.

Into the twentieth century:
*Bījak–Śabdāvalī–*Kumar Gandharva transitions

Independent documentation in the twentieth century hardly had any overlap with the earliest versions published in the *Millennium Kabīr Vāṇī*.[113] To sample the rich archive surfacing in that century, I will use two early-twentieth-century sources and will examine the relationship of a few overlapping songs to their *Bījak* equivalents. The *Kabīr sāhab kī śabdāvalī* (1907 [1900]) has been a particularly popular book

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113 Cf. Callewaert, Sharma, and Taillieu (2000), p. vii, and Callewaert (2004), p. 121. Callewaert's statement is based on Tagore's translations, the recordings of Bahadur Singh in 1995–1996 in Rajasthan, and David Lorenzen's research in Benares in 1990–1992. On

of Kabīr songs. Its Radhasoami background and its being a source for Kshitimohan Sen and Tagore has been discussed earlier. Our other resource here is at the intersection of print and song culture. Hess published the transcript of thirty songs performed by Kumar Gandharva, who, in turn, relied on the print collection *Śrī Śilnāth Śabdāmṛt* (1923 [1915]), which had Nāthpanthī background and limited circulation. A concordance of the twenty-one Kumar Gandharva songs that bear Kabīr's signature is given in Table 6.1.[114]

As can be seen, there is only minimal overlap across these three selections. Only one song (*māyā mahā ṭhaganī*) is shared by all of them. The Kumar Gandharva repertoire shares two songs with the *Bījak* and eight with the more musical *Śabdāvalī*.[115] A comparison of the *Śabdāvalī* and the *Bījak* (not in the above table) shows that these two collections share four songs (*Bījak* 24, 91, 59, 54 are *bhed-bānī* 24, *citāvanī* 33, *citāvanī* 31, and *citāvanī* 11 in the *Śabdāvalī*). Nonetheless, when a text is shared, it shows much less variation than the chronological distance between the repertoires would suggest. This phenomenon can be explained by the growth of the Kabīr corpus over the centuries and with the influence of print.[116] Twentieth-century anthologists had a wider range of poems at their disposal to select from than their predecessors and with the advent of print culture many of these poems were standardized.

A good example of this phenomenon is the poem *māyā mahā ṭhaganī* (Kumar Gandharva 12/Shilnath 257–*Śabdāvalī*, *čitāvanī* 31–*Bījak* 59) a poem about the workings of maya, illusion. The only variation within its text across the three sources is that *suno ho santo* (listen, o truthful ones) of the *Bījak* becomes *suno bhāī sādho* (listen, my truthful/ascetic brother) in the *Śabdāvalī* and in Kumar Gandharva. This song is reminiscent of the early *Hari ṭhagi* poem (MKV97) discussed earlier. However, its tone is much more subdued as the swindler here is not Hari but the more conventional Māyā.

There are instances where there is variation in the imagery and sometimes in the vocabulary. An example of the former is the song *avadhūtā gagana ghaṭā gaharānī* (Kumar Gandharva 1/Shilnath 198–*Śabdāvalī*, *bhed-bāni* 9 p. 50), which

the Rajasthan research, see Singh (2002), pp. 192–198, and on Benares, Lorenzen (1996) and Singh (2002), pp. 205–223.

114 The remaining nine songs in the repertoire, some of them attributed to Gorakhnāth, do not overlap with the other two sources. However, one of them (22 *bholā mana jāne amara merī kāyā*) opens with a line familiar from the earliest records, including the Fatehpur manuscript (*nara jāṇai amara merī kāyā*, MKV110) and later evokes the image of the well and the five water-carriers found in MKV329.

115 On the musical and non-musical contrast between these two collections, see Hess (1987), p. 118.

116 While Callewaert documented 593 Kabīr padas recorded between 1570 and 1681, Parasnath Tiwari used sources presenting 1.579 padas documented between 1604 and 1937; cf. Dharwadker (2003), pp. 54–58.

TABLE 6.1   Kumar Gandharva (*Singing Emptiness*).

	Śabdāvalī	*Bījak*
1 *avadhūtā gagana*	*bhed-bānī* 9 (p.50)	—
2 *avadhūtā kudrat kī gata*	—	23
3 *avadhūtā yugana*	—	—
4 *bina satagura*	*čitāvanī* 1 (p.1)	—
5 *dhuna suna ke*	—	—
6 *gurujī ne diyo*	—	—
7 *hama paradesī paṁčhī*	—	—
8 *hiranā samajha būjha bana čaranā*	—	—
9 *jhīnī jhīnī*	*bhed-bānī* 10 (p.51)	—
10 *kauna ṭhagavā nagariyā*	*čitāvanī* 4 (p.2)	—
11 *mana bhāvarā bhayo*	—	—
12 *māyā mahā ṭhaganī*	*čitāvanī* 31 (p.14)	59
13 *naiharavā hama kā na bhāvai*	*bhed-bānī* 5 (p.48)	—
14 *naiyā morī nīke nīke*	—	—
15 *nirabhaya niraguna*	—	—
16 *rāma nirañjana nyārā re*	—	—
17 *ramaiyā kī dulahina lūṭā bazār*	—	—
18 *sakhiyā, vā ghara saba se nyārā*	—	—
19 *sataguru morī čūka saṁbhāro*	*birah aur prem* 33 (p.79)	—
20 *sunatā hai guru gyānī*	*bhed-bānī* 22 (p.62)*	—
21 *uṛa jāegā haṁsa akelā*	—	—

Source: Author.

presents considerable paraphrasing in the imagery. However, the overall sense of a half-hidden metaphor is kept in both versions and both culminate in the praise of the divine name.

9.

In two songs—9 *jhīnī jhīnī* and 20 *sunatā hai guru gyānī*—Shilnath/Kumar Gandharva add two lines to the *Śabdāvalī* versions (*bhed-bānī* 10 and *bhed-bānī* 22). The latter poem also introduces changes in the terminology and Kumar Gandharva has *ādi puruṣa* and *āda kī bānī* where the *Śabdāvalī* reads *alakha puruṣa* and *amara bānī*—otherwise they are identical. Some changes are even more subtle. In a line about not finding help in the world in the song *sataguru morī čūka saṁbhāro* (Kumar Gandharva 19 and *Śabdāvalī, birah aur prem* 33), Kumar Gandharva uses perfectives (*dekhyo, milyo*) instead of the eastern Hindi future forms (*dekhiba, mileba*) of the *Śabdāvalī*, which expressed more conviction than experience.

> *kara dekhyo hita sāre jagata se, milyo na koū puni sahāro*. (Kumar Gandharva 19)

> I've looked for help
> Everywhere in the world
> And found nothing to rely on. (trans. Hess (2009), p. 96)

> *kara dekheba hita sāre jaga soṁ, koi na mileba puna bhāro*. (*Śabdāvalī* 33)

> You may look for help everywhere in the world and won't find anyone to take on its Load.

10.

The song *bina satagura nara rahata bhulānā* (Without the true guru, humans are lost) is built on two conventional images for the realization of one's true nature. The first image is about a lion brought up among sheep and the second is of a musk deer searching in the outside world for the scent coming from within:[117]

> *bina satagura nara rahata bhulānā,*
> *khojata phirata rāha nahīṁ jānā.* (ṭeka)
> *kehara suta le āyo gaḍariyā pāla poṣa una kīnha sayānā.*
> *karata kalola rahata ajayana saṁga, āpana marma unahuṁ nahīṁ jānā.*
> *. . .*
> *kahata kabīra suno bhāī sādho, ulaṭi āpa meṁ āpa samānā*. (Kumar Gandharva 4b)

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117 The image of the lion is found, for example, in the Ismaili *ginān* of Pīr Śams, *eji kesari siṁha sarūpa bhulāyo, ajā kere saṅge ajā hoi raheyo; ese bharama meṁ jivana kuṁ bhulāyo* (The lion forgot its lionish form, and in the company of goats it lived as a goat. In such delusion life's purpose is forgotten). Shackle and Moir (1992), hymn 5. The musk deer imagery has been so popular that the Kabīr *sākhī* corpus has an entire *aṅg* (section) dedicated to it, the *kasturiyā mriga kau aṅg* (section on the musk deer). See Simh and Simh (1993), pp. 317–319.

Without the true guru, humans are lost.
They search and wander but can't find the way.

A shepherd raised a lion cub,
He cared for him so cleverly.
That cub gambolled with the goats,
Not knowing his own nature.
. . .
Kabir says, listen seeker, friend,
Self turns, merges
With self. (trans. Hess (2009), p. 66)

The sixteen-mora first line of the refrain is presented as a proper *čaupāī* in this version, which introduces the second pada. The *Śabdāvalī* does not turn the refrain into a *čaupāī* but follows it with an extra *antarā*, 'He goes up and down without steadfastness and wanders drunk and mad.' Its markedly Perso-Arabic phrase *alamasta divānā* stands in contrast with the rest of the poem, which uses Indic vocabulary. After this, the two poems match almost exactly until the closing line. While Kumar Gandharva is more cryptic in the last line and focuses on the result, the *Śabdāvalī* is more explicit and talks of the way:

bina satagura nara phirata bhulānā. (*ṭeka*)
ūṁca nīca laga dhīraja nāhīṁ tāsu phirai alamasta divānā.
kehara suta le āyo garaḍiyā pāla poṣa una kīna sayānā.
karata kalola rahata ajayana saṁga, āpana marma unahuṁ nahīṁ jānā.
. . .
kahaiṁ kabīra suno bhāī sādho ulaṭī rāha sahaja mastānā.
<div align="right">(*Śabdāvalī, čitāvanī* 1)</div>

Without the true guru, man wanders lost. (Refrain)
He goes up and down without steadfastness and wanders drunk and mad.
A shepherd raised a lion cub, he cared for him so cleverly.
That cub gambolled with the goats, not knowing his own nature
. . .
Kabir says: 'Listen seeker friend, the road to the drunken, inborn God is reverse.'[118]

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118 This rendering draws on Hess's translation of the previous version.

Kabīr as lasting presence

Many twentieth-century scholars claimed a formidable 120-year lifespan (1398–1518) for Kabīr. Yet, even this lifespan is too tight to contain all Kabīr-poetry. Many poems are indebted to centuries of earlier layers of Indian vernacular compositions and after the poet's death, poems with 'his' signature continued to evolve[119] and have been continually produced and remoulded over the past five centuries, leaving the idea of the original poet very much in a haze.

Kabīr has an extraordinary capacity to speak to a wide range of communities and to each in a different way. Kabīr's poetry has been in constant metamorphosis and with the help of forms recorded over the past four and the half centuries, we can speculate about how they kept being adopted not only to new performative environments but also to new receptive communities.

The earliest Kabīr-poems appearing in the oldest manuscripts and published by Winand Callewaert as *Millennium Kabīr Vāṇī* had already undergone two phases of oral transmission. In the earliest phase, they were metrically correct poems, probably recited or sung to a fix melody and embedded into an environment where explanation was either unnecessary or was provided along with their performance. This phase can be inferred from the fact that in the case of early sources a systematic reconstruction of metrically correct poems is relatively easy and that the reconstructed poems curtailed of explicative fillers are more compact, more polysemic, and therefore, more poetically more powerful. This phase in transmission may be called the metric phase. In the next, the musical phase of oral transmission, these poems entered into singers' repertoires and spread over wide regions. Probably it was only in this phase that they were set to raga and, in order to compensate for a lost homiletic context, explanations of certain aspects were incorporated to them in the form of hypermetrical fillers.

Circulation between receptive communities resulted in the continuous recontextualization of the poems. The earliest extant Kabīr manuscripts come from Vaishnava, Sikh, and Dādūpanthī singing environments. Although it is not possible to detect sectarian involvement in the earlier metric phase of their oral transitions, their often-cryptic nature easily lent them to sectarian appropriation. As has been discussed, one major area of contestation was the use of divine names. While the frequent use of the terms Rām and Hari for a non-sectarian God have deep roots in the Kabīr tradition, the Vaishnava origin of these terms lent the poems to a Vaishnava interpretation. Moreover, at times more markedly, Vaishnava names also pop

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119 As far as the precursors of the Kabīr verses are concerned, see Dasgupta (1962), pp. 416, where a *čaryāpad* of Ḍheṇḍhaṇa closely shares its enigmatic imagery with a Kabīr pada. The third chapter in Dvivedi (1950) compares the Nāth doctrines with the teaching of Kabīr.

up in the Kabīr-poems. Another contested area was the importance of a guru and of the community of devotees, which seem to have become more and more dominant over the centuries. A further contested area was hagiographic interest. This shift in emphasis is clearly perceptible in the *Bījak*, set into its 'final' form possibly in the eighteenth century. The twentieth century witnessed an unprecedented richness in the Kabīr corpus as well as early print standardization. A particularly remarkable later phenomenon is the multiplication of imagery, as if the performer was relishing a particularly successful image by building parallels to it.

While examining the changes in the Kabīr corpus, his recent translator, Vinay Dharwadker identified *enlargement* and *discursive variation* as major forces in operation in manuscript transmission.[120] A further study of the evolution of the Kabīr corpus reveals that changes involve shifts not only in phrasing, metre, and imagery but also in attitudes as poems travel between both performative and sectarian environments. The transforming forces, among others, include bhaktification, especially, Vaishnavization, musicalization, and community-building.

While many sectarian and non-sectarian 'Kabīrs' were created and some communities may even claim to represent a more authentic Kabīr, a contemporary reader or listener, whether in India or abroad, can relish the richness produced over the centuries by a powerful yet elusive presence.

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120 Dharwadker (2003), pp. 52–53.

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