

9. The *Sabadavāṇī* and its Relation to the *Gorakhabāṇī*: Establishing Jāmbhojī as the Supreme Yogi

Abstract. This paper engages with the literature of Jāmbhojī, the founder of the Biśnoī *sampradāya*. It examines the complex depiction of Nāths and Nāthism in Jāmbhojī's *Sabadavāṇī*. The *Sabadavāṇī* harshly criticizes Nāthyogīs for their hypocritical or harmful religious practices. However, it incorporates yogic-tantric terminology and concepts, especially when referring to the state of *sahaja* (the mystical state of unity and liberation). Moreover, it includes several passages of the *Gorakhabāṇī*, which are portrayed as the original teaching of Jāmbhojī. This paper seeks to demonstrate that the critique of Nāths and the adoption and reinterpretation of yogic-tantric elements as teachings of Jāmbhojī can be viewed as a strategy of authorizing Jāmbhojī and his teaching. In this way Jāmbhojī is established as the true teacher and supreme yogi. The quest for establishing the spiritual authority of Jāmbhojī reflects early processes of forging a community of followers in the multifaceted religious landscape of early modern Rajasthan.

Keywords. Sants, Biśnoī *sampradāya*, Nāthism, Early modern literature, Rajasthan.

Introduction

This paper seeks to explore the multifaceted depiction of Nāthism in Sant literature on the example of the *vāṇī* of Sant Jāmbhojī,¹ the so-called *Sabadavāṇī*. Jāmbhojī is considered to be the founder of the Biśnoī *sampradāya*, a religious tradition that originated in the fifteenth century in Marwar.

The relationship between Sants and Nāthyogīs has invited many different interpretations from the early modern period onwards, finding expression in legends, songs, and hagiographies of both traditions. From open hostility to friendly coexistence—the spectrum of this relationship has fueled the imagination of

1 Jāmbhojī is often considered to be one of Rajasthan's earliest proponents of Santism. See Śukla and Simha (1993), p. 31.

poets and bards.² Nāths and Sants share many key elements of their religious doctrine and practice, such as the emphasis on interior religion (*antaḥsāadhanā*),³ on reciting (*japa*) or memorizing (*smaraṇa*) religious formulas (*mantra*, the divine name),⁴ or the importance given to the guru. It is usually assumed that the Sant traditions have incorporated terms and concepts originally belonging to the older, already well-established yogic-tantric sources of the Nāths into their own religious teaching. Nevertheless, the Nāths' claim to achieve liberation and even bodily immortality through yogic practices was also strongly contested by the Sants. In the Sants' conviction, liberation is only possible by obtaining God's mercy through bhakti.⁵

The Sants' compositions, too, mirror these two aspects. Their songs and verses indicate familiarity with yogic-tantric terms and concepts pertaining to Nāthism. Those terms are often even used to convey their religious experiences. Yet, the same compositions voice critiques of Nāths as well. The *Sabadavānī* (hereafter SV), too, employs yogic terminology and simultaneously constantly criticizes Nāthyogīs. In addition, the SV includes entire passages and padas also contained in the *Gorakhabānī*, ascribed to one of the foremost gurus of the Nāth tradition.

In this chapter, I deal with the complex relationship of the Biśnoī *sampradāya* and its founder Jāmbhojī towards Nāthyogīs, by examining the diatribes against Nāths in the SV. I analyze which elements of yogic-tantric traditions that are transmitted in earlier sources and were known to the author(s) of the SV have been included in the text—not as being part of Nāthyoga, but as teachings of Jāmbhojī. In the final part of the paper, I illustrate that this multifaceted representation of Nāthism forms part of a strategy of authorizing the founder of the Biśnoī *sampradāya* and his teaching in the early process of forging a community of followers.⁶ Hence, not only are proponents of the Nāth *sampradāya* criticized, but moreover, yogic-tantric elements are reinterpreted as being original features of the teaching of Jāmbhojī⁷ that serve to establish Jāmbhojī as the supreme yogi and teacher.

2 The complex interplay of Nāth and Sant teachings has also sparked interest among scholars of Indian and religious studies. See Vaudeville (1974), pp. 81–97 on Kabīr and the Nāths, Thiel-Horstmann (1991), pp. 51–60 on tantric-yogic elements in Dādū's work, and Lorenzen (2012) on religious identities in Gorakhnāth and Kabīr.

3 Often defined by the rejection of certain 'outward' religious practices (*bāhyācāraṇ kī ālocanā*), such as pilgrimages. See Śukla and Simha (1993), p. 16.

4 See Vaudeville (1974), pp. 139–ff.

5 See Thiel-Horstmann (1991), p. 60.

6 Contentions between bhakti traditions and 'other' traditions have been studied in depth by Dalmia (2014) on the example of the Vallabha *sampradāya*, and Pauwels (2010) on the example of diatribes against *śāktas* voiced by various communities.

7 A similar claim can be made concerning the depiction of Muslims and Islamic elements in the SV. See Kempe-Weber (2015).

Jāmbhojī and the Biśnoī *sampradāya*

The Biśnoī *sampradāya* traces itself back to Jāmbhojī. According to tradition, the son of an elderly couple of Pāmvar Rajputs, Jāmbhojī was born under special circumstances and displayed the signs of an extraordinary child early on.⁸ He spent his childhood and youth as a cow- and goatherd in the region of Nagaur. Leaving his home, he settled in Samarthal, where he allegedly started to advise and assist the local people—particularly during droughts and famines. Here, he founded a community of followers in 1485, which later came to be known as the Biśnoī *sampradāya*.⁹ Allegedly, Jāmbhojī spent the rest of his life spreading his teaching and travelling throughout Rajasthan and to different places in South Asia and beyond. It is believed that famous contemporaries, such as local kings and important religious figures, were among his disciples. Before his death in 1536, Jāmbhojī is said to have organized his succession by establishing different seats (*sātharī*)¹⁰ and appointing heads (*mahant*) to each seat from among his disciples, thereby constituting different teaching lineages connected to him. Temples and resting places (*dharmasālā*) for ascetic residents, devotees, or the poor were erected at those localities, further institutionalizing the *sampradāya*.¹¹ The main seat of the community is today in the village of Mukam near Nokha, where a shrine covering Jāmbhojī's body has been built.

According to various Biśnoī hagiographies (*jīvan-caritra*),¹² Jāmbhojī's advice and talks were collected and memorized by his disciples. His utterings or sayings—his *vāṇī*—were subsequently transmitted orally, passed down from teacher to teacher. Although the first compilation of the SV is attributed to the seventeenth-century poet Vīlhojī, the earliest found manuscript has been dated to 1743 only.¹³ The SV in its present form contains 123 *sabadas*: poetical songs or verses

8 For a summary of Jāmbhojī's hagiography, see Māheśvarī (1970), pp. 219–254.

9 The *sampradāya* was allegedly founded through the water pot ritual (*kalaśa sthāpana*)—a ritual comprising the congregational partaking of sacred water (*pāhaḷa*) and the uttering of the *pāhaḷa* mantra. The ritual is strongly reminiscent of the Nizārī Ismā'īlī *ghaṭa-pāṭha*. Before the Biśnoī evolved into a caste, this ritual was also used for initiation into the *sampradāya*. For more, see Khan (2003a), pp. 53–ff.

10 In the Biśnoī tradition these seats are called *sātharī* rather than *gaddī* (throne seat) and denote places where Jāmbhojī supposedly stayed with his closest disciples, turning these locations into important places of worship for the devotees. See Māheśvarī (1970), p. 447.

11 The building of monasteries, temples, or schools constitutes one typical element in the institutionalization of *sampradāyas* and is connected to the consolidation of the different teaching lineages. For more, see Malinar (2011).

12 In recent years the term 'hagiography' has been problematized by various scholars—mainly due to its numerous negative connotations—and was partly abandoned in favour of 'sacred biography.' See, for instance, Rinehart (1999), pp. 6–ff.

13 For further details about this manuscript, see Māheśvarī (1970), p. 59. Another early, but incomplete, version of the SV can be found in a collective manuscript (*guṭkā*) from 1743

of different length, written in prose and in varying metres.¹⁴ Apart from the SV, the Biśnoī *sampradāya* encompasses a huge corpus of literary works that were written by different poets over time, ranging from religious tenets to collections of songs to hagiographies of Jāmbhojī.¹⁵

Today the Biśnoī *sampradāya* is well known for its fierce protection of animals and trees, for strict vegetarianism, and for adherence to the so-called twenty-nine rules, or *untīs dharm niyam*. These rules comprise prescriptions pertaining to a range of topics: from general advice on good conduct to religious duties (such as reciting the name of Viṣṇu) to ecological rules. It is important to note that the community seeks to represent itself in the present time as belonging to a ‘purely’ Vedic Hinduism.¹⁶ This rather recent Hinduization within the Biśnoī *sampradāya* stands in stark contrast to its probable Ismā‘īlī background. Both ethnographical research¹⁷ and textual evidence indicates that the Biśnoīs have originally been a dissection of the Nizārī Ismā‘īlī *da ‘wa* stationed in Gujarat. This subdivision of the Sevener Shi’a branch of Islam carried out missionary activities in South Asia as well and acculturated strongly to the point of appearing identical with Sufī orders, bhakti *sampradāyas*, or yogic traditions. The teachings and songs of the Indian Nizārīs closely resemble those of other traditions.¹⁸ They adopted, for instance, the Hindu *avatāra* concept when referring to the imamate. The acculturation was apparently used as a strategy for conversion¹⁹ and a tool of concealing their faith in order to escape persecution. The Biśnoī *sampradāya* originated at a time when the bonds between the South Asian dioceses and the main seat of the Imam situated in Iran had already loosened, and when various Nizārī communities, such as the Imāmśāhīs, broke with the *da ‘wa* in Gujarat and established their own seats,²⁰ as might have been the case for the Biśnoīs.

(ibid., p. 94). Further research is needed to determine whether earlier manuscripts exist and what textual core they contain.

14 When referring to the verses of the SV, I am using the Rajasthani spelling *sabada*, as it is spelled in the SV itself, instead of the Sanskrit variant *śabda*. The number and order of *sabadas* differ in the various manuscripts (ibid., pp. 267–269).

15 About 408 Biśnoī compositions are currently stored in the various seats of the community. The majority of the manuscripts originated around 1800–50 (ibid., pp. 3–142).

16 See Pārīk (2001), p. 93.

17 For ethnographic research on the Biśnoīs’ likely connection to the Nizārī Ismā‘īlīs, see Khan (2003a), pp. 18–208.

18 For example, the *Gināns*—the religious literature of the Khojā Ismā‘īlīs of Gujarat—resonate with themes and motifs otherwise known from bhakti literature or Sufi songs. An elaboration of the history of the Khojā Ismā‘īlīs and their literature can be found in Mallison (1991 [1989]), pp. 93–103.

19 See Khan (2003b).

20 See Khan (1996), pp. 49–ff.

Criticism of Nāthyogīs in the *Sabadavāṇī*

The critique of adherents of other religious traditions constitutes one thematic focus of the SV. The three groups that are most criticized are Brahmins, Muslims (in particular their officeholders: mullahs and qadis), and Nāthyogīs. The criticism voiced in the SV is usually connected to an emphasis on the inner dimensions of faith and the rejection of exterior religious practices. Ascetics and yogis, in particular Nāthyogīs,²¹ receive the sharpest criticism in the SV. About twenty-five of the 123 *sabadas* criticize yogis and some of the verses are solely dedicated to this topic.²²

Yogis are often directly addressed in the SV, which denounces their physical appearance, their senseless yogic practices, or any practice that involves harming living beings. Typical Nāth insignia and paraphernalia,²³ such as wooden sandals, whistle horns (*sīṅghī*), big earrings worn in ears split through the cartilage (*mudrā*), or ragged ascetic garments are depicted as worthless paraphernalia, and the practitioner as lacking ‘true’ knowledge of the essence of yoga. In the following *sabada*,²⁴ ordinary Nāthyogīs are contrasted with the true yogi. The metaphor of a pair of scales weighing stones and diamonds is used to express the comparison between the many misled and ordinary yogis, whose worth is compared to stones, and the ideal yogi, who is as rare and precious as a diamond. In this stanza of *sabada* 46, Nāthyogīs are criticized because they only outwardly display the signs of a yogi. As their religious practice involves harming living beings, it can only be called hypocrisy (*pākhaṇḍa*), and certainly not yoga:

The weight measure that applies for a stone cannot be used for a diamond.
 A yogi is someone who is a yogi in each era;²⁵ he is a yogi now, too.
 You split your ears and wear ragged clothes. This is hypocrisy and not the way.
 Ascetics! You wear long matted hair and harm living beings. This hypocrisy
 is not yoga.²⁶

21 Often, the particular branch of the Nāth *sampradāya* is named, such as the Rāvalas or the Kānaphaṭas. See *sabada* 46 for mention of the Kanaphaṭas and *sabada* 48 for the Rāvalas.

22 See *sabada* 47–50.

23 For a list of the Nāth insignia, see Mallinson (2011), pp. 418–ff.

24 All translations of the SV are my own and are based on a text edition by Māheśvarī (1970), pp. 303–416, which has been compiled from seven different manuscripts—most of them stemming from the mid-nineteenth century.

25 I will illustrate later that the description of the ideal yogi as the yogi in each era is used as a title for Jāmbhojī.

26 *jīṇi tuḷi bhūlā pāmhaṇa tolo tiṇi tolo na hīrūṃ/jogī so to jugi jugi jogi aba bhī jogī soī/ the kāṃṇa cirāvau ciraghāṭa paharau, pākhaṇḍa poha na koī/jaṭā vadhārau jīva sīṅghārau, āyasām! ihām pākhaṇḍe joga na hoī* (SV, *sabada* 46, lines 5–8).

It is, moreover, important to note that the points of critique—the Nāths' religious hypocrisy, useless asceticism, or lack of understanding of what yoga truly is—are portrayed as symptoms of the *kaliyuga*, the last and worst of the four world ages. As it is stated elsewhere in the SV, people living in the *kaliyuga* are easily led astray by corrupt teachers, or lose themselves in senseless, outward religious practices.²⁷ Such useless or even harmful religious practices are usually called *kaṇa viṇi kūkasa*, meaning husk, or dry, grainless straw. The agricultural imagery that is repeatedly employed in this context is the threshing of grainless, dry straw or the watering of it.²⁸ This imagery is not only aimed at hypocritical Nāths but to Brahmins, pandits, mullahs, qadis, or, in general, to the people living in the *kaliyuga*. Of course, the *kaliyuga* also poses unique opportunities for achieving salvation through easily accessible means, such as *bhakti*²⁹ if one finds the right teacher as the guide knowing the path towards salvation. In the SV, the right or true teacher (*sadguru*) is repeatedly identified with Jāmbhojī.

Critique and mockery of yogis are typical features of the literature of early modern Sants.³⁰ The SV voices a similar critique of heretical Nāthyogīs. Their meaningless religious practices, as well as their not being guided by the right teacher, form the main points of criticism. Their hypocritical religious practices and lack of insight into yoga stand in sharp contrast to the path to salvation suggested in the SV: an interior religion under the guidance of the right teacher, Jāmbhojī.

Adopting elements of Nāthism

It is well known that Sants such as Kabīr and Dādū, but also proponents of other religious traditions belonging to Hindu and Muslim folds alike,³¹ are related to the Nāths and have incorporated terms and concepts pertaining to this yogic-tantric tradition into their religious teaching. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that the SV, too, abounds with yogic-tantric terminology. In the following, some terms and yogic-tantric concepts will be presented.³²

27 The unique challenges of the *kaliyuga* are depicted in *sabada* 24, where Jāmbhojī urges people to accept him as the teacher in this difficult time.

28 This particular imagery occurs, for example, in *sabada* 48.

29 See von Stietencron (1986), p. 145.

30 See Callewaert (2011), pp. 532–ff.

31 On the relationship between Sufis and Nāths, see Bergunder (2013).

32 At this point in research, it remains somewhat inconclusive whether the yogic-tantric terminology figuring in the SV is a genuine (re)interpretation of Nāthism—as Vaudeville (1974), p. 144 suggests it for Kabīr—, whether it refers to any actual yogic practice carried out in the *sampradāya*, or whether it is purely name-dropping.

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To begin with, yogic terms are mostly used when referring to the state of *sahaja*, the mystical state of unity and liberation or, in more yogic terms, of transcending the double aspects of the Supreme Reality within one's body,³³ which is perceived as happening naturally or spontaneously. The SV not only refers to the state of *sahaja*, but frequently to various practices or stages of mind leading up to it or coinciding with it. For example, the highest state of mind, *unmanā* or *unmani*, is mentioned in a few passages.³⁴ In the *unmanā* stage, the mind is not just controlled, but overcome or 'killed'.³⁵ Importantly, most of the mentions of *sahaja* and the various aspects connected to it refer to Jāmbhojī. They are represented as features or accomplishments of Jāmbhojī or the perfected, accomplished yogi, denoting no one less than Jāmbhojī himself.

Another concept used in yogic-tantric sources which the SV frequently resorts to is *śabda*—the divine word or 'the sound-form of the supreme Energy'³⁶ as Vaudeville rendered it. *Śabda* is perceived as already existing within a person, where it has to be realized by the practitioner—typically with the help of an accomplished guru. Its realization, in turn, leads to *sahaja*, the spontaneous experience of unity with the ultimate reality. In the SV, mention is made of particularly the two sound aspects, *nāda* (resonance) and *bindu* (drop of energy),³⁷ and so too is the highest form of *śabda anāhata* (the unstruck, silent sound) revealing itself within the practitioner's body.³⁸

On a more specific level, the necessity to gain control over the vital forces, *prāṇa*, as well as over body and mind, is expressed in the SV. One also finds references to the chakras (energy centres) in numerous verses, in particular to the top-most chakra, the *sahasrāra cakra*. In accordance with the Nāth tradition it is called *śunya-maṇḍala* (lit. 'circle of the void') or *gagana-maṇḍala* (lit. 'circle of sky'), and denominates the place where unity is believed to be achieved. Furthermore, the energy channels, the *nāḍīs*,³⁹ running through and alongside the spinal cord, in particular *īḍā* and *piṅgalā*, are named. They are often designated as sun and moon or the rivers Yamunā and Gaṅgā.

In verse 109, Jāmbhojī refers to the *nāḍīs* in a unique way, combining yogic-tantric terms and the symbols used to convey them (sun and moon, Gaṅgā

33 See Vaudeville (1974), p. 124.

34 For a reference to *unmanā*, see *sabada* 108.

35 See Vaudeville (1974), pp. 132–ff.

36 Ibid., p. 128. A complex mystical and philosophical teaching underlies the concept of *śabda*, which cannot be further elaborated in this paper. For a detailed analysis of the meaning of *śabda* in the Nāth *sampradāya* and in Kabīr, see *ibidem*.

37 Ibid., p. 129.

38 For the term *anāhata* in the SV, see *sabada* 94.

39 For an analysis of the terms *cakra* and *nāḍī*, as well the relationship between yoga and tantra, see White (2000), pp. 14–ff.

and Yamunā) with agricultural metaphors: ploughing, sowing, harvesting. In this stanza, *īḍā* and *piṅgalā* are described as two bullocks that are yoked to the plough or as two reins keeping them to the yoke. This passage, furthermore, emphasizes the need to control one's mind—a central objective in yogic practices. However, what the last line of the *sabada* also highlights is that perfection cannot be achieved by yogic practices alone. Rather, it is the guidance of the true teacher Jāmbhojī, who knows the path to liberation, which facilitates it:

When you handle the plough well, you care for your perfection.
Make moon and sun your two bullocks, Gaṅgā and Yamunā their reins.
Sow the seeds of truth and contentedness and the crop will grow sky-high.
Cultivate the consciousness of a Rāvala yogi, and no animals will eat away
your crops.
I possess knowledge about eternal salvation, thus you shall truly attain
perfection.⁴⁰

Apart from adopted yogic-tantric terms and concepts, the SV contains passages that can also be found in the *Gorakhabāṇī*.⁴¹ The *Gorakhabāṇī* is ascribed to one of the foremost gurus of the Nāth tradition: the semi-legendary figure Gorakhnāth (or Gorakṣanātha in Sanskrit). Both the authorship and the date of composition is subject to scholarly debate. The earliest manuscripts can be dated to the seventeenth century. In all likelihood, the compositions today called *Gorakhabāṇī* were transmitted orally before the first manuscripts were produced and have likely changed in the process of oral transmission.⁴² Based on its language, most scholars doubt that the *Gorakhabāṇī* could have been composed by Gorakhnāth himself, and date the text to later centuries.⁴³

When comparing the padas and *sabadīs* of the *Gorakhabāṇī* with the *sabadas* of the SV one can find several textual parallels. Usually they only concern a few lines or a stanza, but in some cases, they extend over entire *sabadas*.⁴⁴ The next

40 *hāḷilo bhala pāḷilo, sidha pāḷilo/kheta kharai sūnya rānūm/canda sūri doya baila racīlau gaṅga jamana rāsī/sata santoṣa doya bīja bījīlau khetī kharī akāsī/cetana rāvaḷa paharai baiṭhā mraghā khetī na cari jāī/mheī avagate kevaḷa nyāmī sāca sidha pāḷilo//* (SV, *sabada* 109).

41 For the *sampradāya*'s explanation of the textual overlaps between the SV and the *Gorakhabāṇī*, as well as the interrelation of Biśnoīs and Nāths, see the articles by Kṛṣṇalāl Viśnoī (1997) and Maṅgalrām Viśnoī (1997).

42 See Bārthvāl (1942), p. 16.

43 Lorenzen (2012), p. 21, states that the *Gorakhabāṇī* might be older than the earliest collections of Kabīr and Guru Nānak, but younger than the historical Gorakhnāth, dating it to the thirteenth century. Mallinson (2011), p. 424, in contrast, suggests that the *Gorakhabāṇī* originated in the sixteenth or seventeenth century—a time when numerous vernacular texts were produced by the Nāth *sampradāya*.

44 For example, see *sabada* 10 of the SV and *sabadī* 9 and 225 of the *Gorakhabāṇī*.

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quotation is a key passage for the SV and, told from the perspective of the *sam-pradāya* itself,⁴⁵ illustrates the singularity and superiority of their founder Jāmbhojī, who not only encompasses all these seemingly paradox religious strands that are enumerated, but essentially surpasses them. In comparison to the *Gorakhabāṇī*, the *sabada* of the SV is more diversified and contains a few more references to other traditions. The *Gorakhabāṇī* mentions identification with three traditions: Hindu, yogi, and Muslim. The *Sabadavāṇī* additionally names the Brahmin, the dervish, and the mullah:

I neither sat near someone nor did I ask for instruction
I gained knowledge through *nirati* and *surati*.
[I am] a Hindu by birth, a Yogi through endurance,
A Brahmin through rituals, a dervish by heart,
A mullah through neutrality, a Muslim by consciousness. (*Sabadavāṇī*)⁴⁶

I am a Hindu by birth, a yogi through endurance, a Muslim *pīr* through understanding.
Recognize the path, oh mullahs and qadis, that was accepted by Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva.⁴⁷

How can these textual overlaps be explained? Monika Thiel-Horstmann has shown with the example of certain similar poems of Dādū and Mīrābāī that textual elements, topoi, and motifs were used in a formulaic way by different Sants.⁴⁸ In the examples she cites, this linking together of topoi and textual formulas has led to an almost word-by-word congruency of two poems. The shared verses of the SV and the *Gorakhabāṇī* could be explained with the same phenomena. These passages would then represent a common sphere of literary motifs, metaphors, and songs—resulting from the mobility of those carrying the tradition forth and reflecting the permeability of the different regions in which the traditions originated.

Seeing such early modern compositions less as individual works than as the result of the reception and compilation of a primarily oral tradition with which a given poet aimed to identify,⁴⁹ I would like to suggest the following perspective on the textual parallels: by adopting elements of the *Gorakhabāṇī*, Jāmbhojī is identified with Gorakhnāth, and the latter's authority is claimed for Jāmbhojī. Hence, by using these topoi and textual elements belonging to the oral tradition of the

45 See Pārīk (2001), p. 93.

46 *mhe sarai na baiṭhā sikhā na pūchī/nirati surati sā jāṃhī/utiputi hindū jarāṇām jogī/krīyā brāhamāṇa dila daravesām/umnamāṇa mullām akali misalimāṇī/* (SV, *sabada* 5, line 9–11).

47 *utapati hindū jaraṇām jogī akali pari musalmānnī/te rāha cinho ho kājī mulām, brahmā bisnu mahādeva mānnī/* (*Gorakhabāṇī*, *sabadī* 14).

48 See Thiel-Horstmann (1991), pp. 27–33.

49 See *ibid.*, p. 32.

Nāth attributed to their foremost teacher Gorakhnāth, the authority of Gorakhnāth is claimed and used to authorize Jāmbhojī. In my argument, this is precisely the strategy pursued in the SV: the authority ascribed to Gorakhnāth or other proponents of the Nāth *sampradāya* is claimed for Jāmbhojī and transferred onto him.

Establishing Jāmbhojī as the supreme yogi

I have attempted to demonstrate how Nāths and Nāthism are depicted in the SV. It is my hypothesis that the criticism as well as the adoption and reinterpretation of elements of Nāth teaching up to the word-by-word inclusion of compositions circulating among the Nāths should be understood as parts of a strategy of authorizing Jāmbhojī vis-à-vis representatives of the Nāth *sampradāya*. It seems likely that Nāths and Biśnoīs have operated in similar social strata of society, representing traditions with similar religious claims at a basic level of rejecting caste, idol worship, and *saguṇa* forms of god.⁵⁰ Anne Grodzins Gold has expounded how at the village level the teachings of Sants and Nāths are often even perceived as identical.⁵¹ The SV's constant preoccupation with the Nāths—both in its criticism of them and its relating to their teaching in positive terms—bears testimony to this close contact and competition. A closer look at the text passages dealing with Nāths and Nāthism shall clarify how the claims of the superiority and authority of Jāmbhojī are constructed.

The representation of Nāthism follows a distinct tripartite structure. Firstly, hypocritical proponents of the Nāth tradition are rejected but not the tradition itself. Secondly, concepts pertaining to this yogic-tantric tradition are adopted and portrayed as possible paths to liberation. This has been illustrated in the previous section. In a third step, the original Nāth teachings are equated with Jāmbhojī's teachings due to his being the best or the only 'true' yogi. In this way, all passages dealing with the Nāth tradition, in one way or another, are utilized to exalt the status of Jāmbhojī as the supreme teacher and yogi. In the next quotation, the ideal yogi is described and later identified with Jāmbhojī. This yogi does not need to outwardly display the signs of a yogi since he has fully internalized them and reached the highest stages of yogic practice. He furthermore acts as a guide along the path towards liberation for his disciples. The Nāths, in contrast, cannot attain yogic accomplishments and they will certainly not conquer death without the help of the 'only' real yogi, Jāmbhojī:

50 See Martin (2009), p. 286.

51 Gold maintains that both teachings blend together in village traditions and are more or less reduced to a few common features: worship of a formless god, the practice of *sumiran*, and the necessity of a guru's guidance. For more, see Gold (1992), pp. 43–ff.

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Whose mind is the yogi's earring (*mudrā*), whose body is the ascetic's garment,
Whose body parts are kept still,
Such a yogi you should serve.
If he wants, he can make you cross over the ocean to the other side.
Those who are called Nāths, will also die.
So why are they called Nāths?
Small and big living beings are defeated and created,
Again, and again, they come back.
Only I am a Rāvaḷa, only I am a yogi,
I am the king of kings.⁵²

The above-quoted stanza of the SV illustrates that once both the criticism of Nāths and the appraisal of yoga are established in the *sabadas*, the focus shifts to Jāmbhojī. He is depicted as a unique and supreme teacher, who could only be compared to the best yogi or even to Gorakhnāth⁵³—his teaching measuring up with yoga or surpassing it. Hence, the spiritual authority of Jāmbhojī is constructed also in relation to other traditions, in this case to the Nāth *sampradāya*. Adherents of this tradition are strongly contested, but their religious doctrine is not rejected completely. Rather, parts of the doctrine, including passages of the *Gorakhabāṇī*, are adopted and portrayed as Jāmbhojī's yoga, which is represented as the only 'true' path to salvation.⁵⁴ What the SV seems to suggest in this context is that a person should follow Jāmbhojī, since he is the best yogi and his teaching can be compared to the yoga path anyway. One can assume that such references were vital in turning followers of the Nāth *sampradāya* into followers of Jāmbhojī. As this demonstrates, terms, concepts, and textual elements of Nāth teaching are claimed to be part of the original teaching of Jāmbhojī and they thereby contribute to authorizing Jāmbhojī and the tradition he was beginning to establish. Rejecting Nāths and adopting and reinterpreting elements of their teaching are therefore part of the same strategy of claiming spiritual authority for Jāmbhojī and serve the purpose of representing him and his tradition as singular and superior.

52 *jimha jogī kai mana hī mundarā tana hī khandhā/piṇḍai agani thambhāyauṃ/jimha jogī kī sevā kijai/tūthau bhayaṃ jaḷa pāri laṅghāyau/nātha kahāvai mari mari jāvai/te kyom nātha kahāvai/ nānhīm pavanī jīvā jūmṇī nirajata sirajata/phiri phiri pūṭhā āvai/hamahīm rāvaḷa hamahīm jogī/hama rājā ke rāyauṃ/ (SV, sabada 49, line 1–10).*

53 In *sabada* 93, Jāmbhojī is depicted as '[a]n eternal teacher like Gorakh[nāth]' (*gorakha garū apārā*).

54 The different strategies of dealing with other doctrines have been a recurrent topic in Indian religious history as well as of the academic discourse. For a detailed elucidation of ritual eclecticism as a defining marker of religious communities, see Granoff (2000). For an analysis of the combination of the exclusiveness of one's own tradition and the hierarchical subordination of other teachings, see Malinar (2007), pp. 134–ff.

Conclusion

Biśnoīs and Nāths shared a common religious and literary space. When Jāmbhojī founded the Biśnoī *sampradāya* in the fifteenth century, the Nāths were in all likelihood already well-established in that area and attracted people from the same social milieu. It is for this reason that the SV represents Jāmbhojī and his teaching primarily vis-à-vis the Nāth *sampradāya*. The need to attract and keep followers is reflected in the recurrent claims to Jāmbhojī's spiritual authority that finds expression in many verses of the SV. It explains why the SV voices such strong desire to distance Jāmbhojī from proponents of the Nāth *sampradāya* and render their outward show of yogic insignia and their pretence of having accomplished yoga as hypocritical, only to then portray Jāmbhojī as the true yogi. At the same time, yogic-tantric terminology and textual elements circulating in the Nāth *sampradāya* were also utilized to claim the superiority of Jāmbhojī, and to present his teachings as superior to Nāthism. In this way, Jāmbhojī is established as the supreme yogi and as the true teacher. The two terms that are used for him in this context are *juga juga jogi*, the yogi in each era, and *sadguru*, the true or supreme teacher. Both terms designate Jāmbhojī's claim to spiritual authority and superiority in a religiously diverse and multifaceted landscape in which the Biśnoī *sampradāya* sought to establish and disseminate its tradition. One last quotation should serve to illustrate this complex interrelationship between Jāmbhojī and the Nāths as it is depicted in the SV. In *sabada* 46, a real yogi is characterized as a yogi in each era (*jogī so to jugi jugi jogi*⁵⁵). In *sabada* 97 this motive appears once more. Here, it is claimed that Jāmbhojī is precisely this yogi in each era, who has come to help the people, and that he is the true teacher (*sadguru*). Both of these titles, the yogi in each era and the true teacher, are thus used to designate the spiritual authority rightfully claimed by Jāmbhojī:

The yogi in each era has come; the true teacher (*sadguru*) established the goal.
He possesses knowledge about eternal salvation, knows the *brahman*, is
immersed in *sahaja*.
Your good deeds have not been wasted.⁵⁶

55 *Jogī so jo juga juga jogi* is also a famous *Ginān* ascribed to Pīr Hasan Kabīruddīn and contains literally the descriptions that are used for Jāmbhojī in the SV. The overlap with this *Ginān* might reflect the Biśnoīs' own Ismā'īlī heritage and suggests a complex triangular relationship between Biśnoīs, Nāths, and Nizārīs. For a transcription and translation of this *Ginān*, see the website of the Ismā'īli Heritage Society, '*Jogī so jo juga juga jogi*,' <<http://ismaili.net/heritage/node/4166>>. (Accessed 18 May 2015).

56 *jugām jugām ko jogī āyau satagura sīdha vatāī/kevaḷa nyāmni vrambha giyāmni sahaja sināmni/sukarata ahalyau na jāī/* (SV, *sabada* 97, line 5–8).

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