

11. To Go to Vrindavan—or Not: Refashioning Sant Tradition in the Eighteenth Century

Abstract. By the eighteenth century, the religious cultures emerging around many North Indian Sants looked rather different from those that took shape around Kabīr and other fifteenth and sixteenth century Sants, who were typically low-caste and at least moderately iconoclastic. Eighteenth century Sants often themselves came from middle castes and had middle-class disciples. Even while identifying with the broad Sant tradition arising in the wake of Kabīr, moreover, many embraced aspects of the conventional religions he disparaged. The chapter suggests some sociohistorical reasons for the broad changes that occurred in Sant tradition, illustrating its diverse development through a focus on the contrasting religious personas of Sants Rāmcaran of Shahpura and Carandās of Delhi.

Keywords. Sants, Carandās/Charandas/, Rāmcaran/Ramcharan, Eighteenth century, Shahpura.

Although Kabīr, Dādū, and other great Sants of the fifteenth and sixteenth century were largely from the humblest strata of Indian society, their teachings were directed also to people from higher classes, who sometimes paid attention to them. Devotees of all sorts were drawn to these Sants' particular style of piety—oriented towards a loving but aniconic Lord who might be reached through yogic means. A still wider range of less devoted souls were taken by the trenchant turns the great Sants' popular Hindi verse could take. Even as memories of their low-caste origins lingered, by the eighteenth century the great early Sants were seen as well-respected forebears of a broadly imagined community of North Indian devotion.

New Sants of the eighteenth century built on the heritage of their great and less great predecessors, using the early Sants' characteristic language of yoga and devotion to develop their own versions of a recognized stream of internalized piety. Called *nirguṇa bhakti*, 'devotion to the Formless Lord,' that stream was expressed through verse that could be by turns sweet, didactic, illuminating, and confrontational. The new Sants, though—in contrast to the earlier—very often came from the middle classes (trading communities are particularly visible) and sometimes

developed styles of Sant religious culture meant largely for people of similar social origins. What did these new versions of Sant tradition look like and how did they emerge? Let us begin with the stories of two eighteenth-century Sants: Rāmcaran (1720–1798), the first guru of the Shahpura Rāmsnehī¹—a Sant lineage still vital in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh—and Caraṇdās of Delhi (1703–1782), with a less distinctive living lineage but more widely known as a poet.

While reading a contemporary Hindi hagiography of Rāmcaran, I was struck by an account of an aborted trip the Sant had started to Vrindavan.² Rāmcaran had found a guru in Kṛpārām, who traced a lineage through several generations to the legendary sixteenth-century Rāmānandī ascetic Kṛṣṇadās Payahārī of Galta.³ Rāmcaran had, however, grown uncomfortable with the company of the rough and argumentative yogis who also followed Kṛpārām, so he requested and received his guru’s permission to go his own way. Not quite sure which direction to take, Rāmcaran set out for Vrindavan—maybe the more refined styles of devotion there would suit his temperament better. On his way, though, he met a mysterious Sant who convinced him that he was making a mistake: ‘Over there is *sagun* thought,’ the Sant tells Rāmcaran, ‘and you’re a *nirgun* sadhu.’ Here our late twentieth-century hagiographer quotes a nineteenth-century predecessor to highlight the difference between the aniconic *nirguṇa* bhakti of Sants in the Kabīrian tradition and its binary counterpart, known as *sagūṇa* bhakti: devotion involving an *image* of the Lord, such as Rāma with his bow or Kṛṣṇa with his flute. Although not all devotees are exclusive in their orientation towards *nirguṇa* or *sagūṇa* worship, our hagiographer’s attention to the distinction indicates its importance in the Rāmsnehī tradition. The Sant appearing to Rāmcaran on the road, we hear, thus advised him to keep to his own way; living in Vrindavan would just raise doubts in his mind. Instead, the Sant suggested an alternative: ‘You go to Mewar; chant Ram’s name and spread it. Offer a true teaching: start a path to liberation.’⁴ The mysterious Sant then disappeared, and Rāmcaran concluded that he had just had the darshan of Viṣṇu. The eventual result was his starting a new *nirguṇa* Sant lineage based in Mewar.

1 In addition to Rāmcaran’s lineage in Shahpura, there are three other regional Rajasthani Rāmsnehī lineages based in Rain (Ren, dist. Nagaur), Sinthal (Bikaner), and Kherapa (Jodhpur). Even though the four lineages look to some related sources, they have developed separately and see one another as distinct.

2 Vintiram Ramsnehi (1984).

3 On the Galta Rāmānandī, see Pinch (1999), Horstmann (2002), and Burchett (2012), ch. 2.

4 *vahāṃ hai sarguṇ khyāl āp ho nirguṇ sādhu*

duvidhā māhi duramg upaja hai bād vivād

tum jāo mevār rām sumiro sumirao

karke jñān updeś mukti ka panth calāo. (Laldasji 46–47, Vintiram Ramsnehi (1984), p. 59).

Vintiram’s prose work regularly gives long verse quotes from three hagiographical predecessors (including the just-cited Laldasji) to help his book speak with the voice of authority (see Gold 2018).

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This incident led me to recall an event in the life of Carandās, whom I had first come across many years earlier.⁵ He also one day set out for Vrindavan, but unlike Rāmcaraṇ, Carandās completed his journey and had a highly transformative darshan of Kṛṣṇa himself. He would then incorporate this experience into the largely *nirguṇa* teachings he had previously espoused as a guru.

Even though these two eighteenth-century Sants responded differently to the pull of Vrindavan, the two were similar in some important socio-religious ways that differentiated them from their better known early Sant predecessors of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In contrast to most of those, they lived as celibate sadhus, not householders. And while most of those came famously from the lower ranks of society, Rāmcaraṇ and Carandās both came from respectable mercantile communities and had large middle-class followings. Beyond these significant socio-religious commonalities, however, the two figures were in many ways dissimilar. To their middle-class and other devotees, they presented different versions of Sant piety—Rāmcaraṇ more strictly *nirguṇa*, Carandās more mixed—and along with these, strikingly different images of what it meant to be a Sant.

A simple ascetic becomes a prolific poet

Rāmcaraṇ, born to a Vijayavargiya baniya family in a village near Malpura, then under Jaipur rule, renounced the world in his thirty-first year and thereafter appeared always as an ascetic living a simple life. His development as a religious teacher seems rather conventional. After finding a guru and then setting off on his own, he eventually achieved the status of a *jivanmukta*—someone ‘released while alive’—in a grove outside Bhilwara, in the north-east part of Mewar. There he found his first followers among a group of young men from a trading community, who spread the word about him among their friends and relatives. When some Brahmins there complained to the rana in Udaipur about him, he moved to Shahpura, about fifty kilometres further to the north-east and controlled by an independent raja who welcomed him. He made his home in Shahpura until his death twenty-five years later, a settled sadhu surrounded by an increasing number of devotees.

Scenes of Rāmcaraṇ’s early days as a wanderer—largely unwitnessed by his contemporary devotees—provide the backdrop for some dramatic miracle stories about him: he raised a young man from the dead⁶ and turned a dim-witted farmer into a brilliant scholar.⁷ But the stories reported about the unusual abilities he

5 Gold (1987), pp. 67–77.

6 Vintiram Ramsnehi (1984), pp. 50–51.

7 Ibid., pp. 66–67.

demonstrated during his settled days as a guru are mostly more prosaic: they tell of his knowledge about distant events, for example, or his avoidance of imminent danger.⁸ He is represented as sometimes outspoken but generally reserved, observing the proprieties of a well-behaved monk.

Although quiet in his demeanour, Rāmcaraṇ was a very energetic author of Sant verse, producing twenty-four named treatises—some rather short, others quite long. These were first published, all together, in 1925 as one large-sized tome of 1,000 pages. Copies of that book, called *Aṅbhai Vāṇī* (*Verses of Experience*) after the first long manuscript it records, are found at all Rāmsnehī institutions—big and small. Called Ramdwaras, these continue to flourish in several regions of Rajasthan and into Madhya Pradesh. In Ramdwaras, the *Aṅbhai Vāṇī* is read from daily and treated as scripture. The substance of the *Aṅbhai Vāṇī*, covering all the topics conventionally treated by the Sant, should be familiar to anyone conversant with Sant texts from Kabīr onwards.⁹ Most of the verse seems straightforward and didactic, but two of Rāmcaraṇ's shorter treatises focus on internal yogic experiences.¹⁰ The compilation stands out through its sheer bulk and its use of some popular eighteenth-century metrical forms: Rāmcaraṇ was particularly fond of composing simple *kuṇḍaliyās*.

However one may judge the quality of its verse, the *Aṅbhai Vāṇī* serves its purpose as the scriptural basis for a particular version of Sant religious culture—one with an aniconic aesthetic, a renunciatory ethic, and an emphasis on non-violence that has often found a response within Rajasthani trading castes, Hindu as well as Jain.¹¹ Though less rigorous in their practice of non-violence than the most pious Jains, the Shahpura Rāmsnehīs, for example, like pious Jains, are concerned about the microorganisms living in water and advocate straining it for all personal use.¹² Their aniconic aesthetic is expressed at the extremely large Ramdwara in Shahpura,

8 Ibid., pp. 121, 147.

9 Rāmcaraṇ's verses run the gamut of Sant genres, including prayers (*vinī*), songs of longing (*viraha*), and praises to the guru. The first edited collection of them (of 500 ordinary-sized pages) was not published until 2008 (Samarthram Ramsnehi 2008).

10 These two treatises are included in Samarthram Ramsnehi (2008), pp. 158–166 and include an unconventional description of the movement of *rāmnām* through the yogic chakras together with some of Rāmcaraṇ's experiences of the *śabda* (sound) that is frequently referred to in Sant verse.

11 On the close interrelationships between Jain and Hindu trading castes in Rajasthan, see Cottam Ellis (1991). Babb (1999) and (2002) examines Rajasthani trading caste identity and the place of non-violence in it. On the important roles these castes have played in Rajasthani Sant traditions from the seventeenth century generally, see Williams (2014), pp. 199–209. On their foundational role for the Shahpura Rāmsnehīs, see Gold (2018).

12 Straining water has since been enjoined on all good Rāmsnehīs, listed as one of eleven 'principles and rules' in a contemporary authoritative Shahpura publication (Ramdayal 2005).

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which is very well kept up as the ‘international centre’ for members of Rāmsnehi families living abroad. There worship practices remain spare and involve no visible likenesses of the divine: the central object of reverence is a tall pillar with only the name Rāma written on it.

A playful Sant becomes a Kṛṣṇa devotee

The picture is different in Carañdās *galī*, the lane in central Delhi of Hauz Qazi where that Sant spent his last years. There the main monument to him is an elaborate Kṛṣṇa temple, jointly kept up by the spiritual descendants of Carañdās’s three main disciples, who all maintain their own establishments in the neighbourhood. Although the Carañdāsīs eventually developed as a tradition of more or less conventional Kṛṣṇa worship, Carañdās himself was steeped in the *nirguṇa* Sant tradition, writing padas to the *sat guru* and *nirguṇa* Rāma¹³ as well as treating secrets of the subtle yogic body.¹⁴ Emerging as a Sant in the ups and downs of eighteenth-century Delhi, however, he appeared as an arresting character—remarkable in his own right and a striking contrast to Rāmcarañ.

Growing up in roughly parallel socio-religious strata—Carañdās was a Dhursar baniya from Haryana—the two Sants have been depicted developing as holy persons of contrasting types. Stories about Rāmcarañ’s childhood show him as a brilliant child quickly becoming fully literate and gaining mastery of ‘Hindi, Urdu, Farsi, Sanskrit, Rajasthani and other languages.’¹⁵ Those about Carañdās, by contrast, show him as indifferent to worldly subjects and given to religious reveries.¹⁶ Rāmcarañ’s father is presented as a responsible civil servant and businessman.¹⁷ Carañdās’s father, we hear, liked to go meditate in the woods—and one day went off without coming back, leaving his young son to be raised by his wife’s family.¹⁸ And while Rāmcarañ is said to have experienced a period of responsible working adulthood before he renounced and found his guru, Carañdās is depicted as having had a vision of his guru as a child, meeting him in the flesh for an initiation at nineteen, and then moving seamlessly into his role as a holy man. Importantly, moreover, Carañdās’s guru, unlike Rāmcarañ’s, is represented as no normally embodied human being—however exalted—but the siddha Śukdev, the son of Vyāsa, perpetually embodied as a twelve-year-old boy. With a guru who was the legendary

13 See, e. g., Charandas (1966), pp. 422–423.

14 Ibid., pp. 105–109.

15 Vintiram Ramsnehi (1984), p. 19.

16 Ghanshyam Das (2000), pp. 19–21.

17 Vintiram Ramsnehi (1984), p. 11; Pandey (1982), p. 36.

18 Ghanshyam Das (2000), pp. 12–18.

son of the divider of the Veda, Carañdās need have no qualms about making some radical innovations in the *nirguṇa* tradition he inherited.¹⁹

Presaging his turn to Kṛṣṇa, Carañdās was presented as a playful figure even before he went to Vrindavan. Thus we hear that when thieves had broken into his house one night and were about to leave with sacks of his valuables, he gave them a scare by blinding them temporarily so they couldn't get out and later appeared to them, at dawn. He then not only told them to keep what they had gathered—they'd worked so hard for it—but also showed them the way to the road and helped them load their sacks onto their backs.²⁰ In an encounter with the Iranian invader Nadir Shah, Carañdās is portrayed as wise and powerful, but also a tease who could get a little violent. After Nadir Shah had heard of the Sant's successful prediction of the date of his arrival, he had him arrested, but Carañdās disappeared from his cell and simply went home. Easily found and arrested a second time, he appeared in Nadir Shah's room and hit him on the head with a stick.²¹ At this point Nadir Shah finally acknowledged the Sant's spiritual authority.

Carañdās, however, was often not so confrontational: if things got tedious for him, his response was sometimes just to leave the scene. Thus, after Nadir Shah went back to Persia and Carañdās's friend Muhammad Shah came to the throne in Delhi, nobles started visiting the Sant for all the wrong reasons; he then went incognito to Shahdara, across the Yamuna, eventually letting himself be discovered by devotees and returning to Delhi. He then left Delhi again, this time for his fateful trip to Vrindavan.²² But even as Carañdās became attracted to ritual Kṛṣṇa bhakti, his Vrindavan was informed by a Sant's yogic vision. The sphere in which it *really* existed was not of this world. In a verse placed near the very beginning of his major collection, he tells us:

Kṛṣṇa always lives in Vraj, but doesn't meet me.
He hides from worldly vision, but will meet the one with fixed attention.
The sphere of Mathura is nowhere manifest; if it's manifest it isn't Mathura.
To see what's called the sphere of Mathura, you need the inner eye.²³

19 See Gold (1987), p. 72.

20 Ghanshyam Das (2000), p. 38.

21 Ibid., pp. 60–66.

22 Ibid., pp. 66–72.

23 *sadā kṛṣṇa vrajmeṃ rahaiṃ, mohiṃ milata haiṃ nāhiṃ . . .*
jagata dṛṣṭi soṃ rahaiṃ alopā, milhaiṃ tāhi dhyān jina ropā
mathurāmaṇḍal paraḡata nāhiṃ, paraḡata hai so mathurā nāhiṃ
mathurāmaṇḍala yahī kahāvai, dīvyā dṛṣṭi bina dṛṣṭi na āvai. (Charandas (1966), p. 3).

Refashioning Sant tradition

The contrasting stories of Rāmcaran and Caraṇḍās illustrate the diversity that had emerged within Sant religious cultures by the eighteenth century—but the Sants had *never* constituted a tightly coherent tradition. What they had in common was a heritage of religious verse featuring characteristic themes and styles, with some commonly recurring terms that could be taken in a variety of more and less esoteric ways. The wider Sant tradition was thus approachable at different levels. The term *śabda*, for example, which means ‘sound’ or ‘word,’ can refer to the internal sounds heard in yoga, the words of a teaching, a piece of Sant poetry or a genre of verse. The term *guru* or *sat* (true) *guru*—the distinction is not always clear—could easily be taken to refer to a living guru or to the founder of a lineage, but it also frequently seems to be used as a name for the highest divine principle. Although in certain contexts, *guru*, *śabda*, and, say, *satsaṅga* (good company) had clear referents, they could also present devotees with profound ambiguities. These central but polyvalent terms of Sant texts, together with a characteristic, often opaque, language of yoga inherited from the Nāths,²⁴ make Sant verse clearly recognizable as a broad class of Hindi literature—but one that offers ample scope for interpretation, with the same key terms often having different primary significances in different Sant religious cultures.

Also amenable to alternative treatments is the spirit of dissent suffusing Sant verse, famously initiated by Kabīr’s diatribes against the hypocritically orthoprax in both Hinduism and Islam.²⁵ It is easy to see how that spirit of dissent could come naturally to the low-caste early Sants, who, along with many of their devotees, might see religious authority undergirding hierarchies that they could only find oppressive.²⁶ As we will see, this spirit of dissent—eventually taken as characteristic of Sant verse—could also resonate with the not-so-oppressed middle-class Sants and their devotees of subsequent eras, if not in quite the same ways.

Never excluded from Sants’ circles, middle-class devotees and gurus make their appearance more widely in Sant tradition by the turn of the seventeenth century, as the appearance of Nābhājī’s *Bhaktamāl* marks the incorporation of the great early Sants into a widely inclusive community of North Indian devotees—*saguṇa* and *nirguṇa* alike.²⁷ Although this community certainly had room for householder devotees such as Kabīr and Dādū, by then many Sant institutions had developed along monastic lines.²⁸ In this they followed sectarian traditions in the broader

24 Gold (1987), pp. 117–147; Gold (2015).

25 For some fine illustrations from Kabīr, see Hess (1983), pp. 46–47 and *passim*.

26 See Dube (1998); Wakankar (2010).

27 See Hare (2011).

28 See Thiel-Horstmann (1986).

Hindu world—in the process, perhaps, making themselves appear more refined. Thus, the Nirañjanīs and Dādūpanthīs of Rajasthan developed as monastic traditions while attracting many lay devotees from mercantile and scribal castes. They also include a number of important middle- (and higher-) caste disciple-monks. In eastern Uttar Pradesh, with the gurus of the Bauri *paramparā*, based in Bhurkura, including early householder Sants of increasingly upper-caste status.²⁹

These middle- and upper-caste Sants, too, could write about the uselessness of outward ritual, but they didn't always seem particularly angry about it. Unlike the often strident Kabīr, their tone often seemed simply dismissive: they had their own secrets of yoga and devotion and didn't need any priestly mediation. Paltu Sahib of Ayodhya, an eighteenth-century figure with links to the Bauri *paramparā*, tells us just that customary forms of Brahminic ritual are not for him: 'I won't worship Brahmā, Viṣṇu, or Maheśa, or fix attention on a god of stone.' He won't go to die in Kashi or bathe in Prayag either. He tells us instead of his inward alternative: 'The object of my love resides within my body, to him alone I'll bow my head.'³⁰ During the eighteenth century, the inner but loving lord of the Sants could have an increasing appeal not only for devotees from the middle castes, but also for independent holy persons of similar background wanting to make their mark. Now seen as members of an established community of bhakti, but still carrying a lingering spirit of dissent, the Sants and their verse proved attractive to charismatic figures from trading and scribal communities—whose social and economic importance had grown in early modern India.³¹ These could now find support in a weighty tradition that bypassed Brahminical authority and spoke to them in vernaculars they could readily understand—and, just as importantly, easily write.

As Tyler Williams thoroughly describes for Rajasthan, the seventeenth century saw the efflorescence of a Sant manuscript culture. Monks in sectarian traditions prepared valued compilations of verse from figures in their own lineages and more broadly—relying on oral and written sources as well as their own memories.³² Householder devotees made copies of these collections while also compiling less authoritative ones using local sources such as performers' chapbooks. As the circulation of manuscripts became normal, the poetic sophistication of Sant verse increased, and gifted educated Sant poets such as the Dādūpanthī Sundardās and the Nirañjanī Tursīdās began to participate in a literary culture that transcended

29 See Gold (1987), pp. 89–90. An important collection of songs from the Bhurkura lineage has been edited by Indradeva (2005).

30 *Brahmā, bisnu, maheś na pujihaum, na murat cit lehaum
jo pyārā mere ghaṭa māṃ basatu hai, vāhī ko māth navaihaum
na kāśī maiṃ karvat lehaum* . . .
prāg jāy tirath nahīm karihaum (Paltu Sahib (1974), p. 2).

31 See Bayly (1983), pp. 163–196.

32 Williams (2014).

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clear distinctions between courtly and devotional norms.³³ By the time Rāmcaraṇ and Caraṇḍās encountered Sant tradition in the eighteenth century its literary culture was already well known to many trading-caste monks and lay devotees—an element taken for granted in their own separate refashionings of it.

Rāmcaraṇ, who during his early years gained substantial experience of Rajasthani Sant sectarian life as well as familiarity with its written traditions, also had a model of what a Sant lineage establishment should be. That model included a founder who had produced ample verse and—as with the Dādūpanthīs and Nirañjanīs—left a collection of that verse to serve as a primary scripture. Having abandoned his trip to Vrindavan to start a new Mewari ‘path of liberation,’ Rāmcaraṇ nevertheless lived in a world where educated Sants composed in literary styles. He thus faced an implicit conflict between the religious authenticity of a spiritual pioneer and the refined aesthetics now expected of him as a Sant poet. He is presented, in the manner of one of the early (presumably unlettered) Sants, as a divinely inspired seer—with his spontaneous, orally composed verses immediately copied by an amanuensis.³⁴ How could he then care—as did the good Dādūpanthī monk Sundardās—about crafting polished literary works? In Rāmcaraṇ’s case, repeated bursts of inspiration seemed to trump ideals of aesthetic perfection, with the *Aṅghai Vāṇī* showing a learned understanding of literary forms of the day while being itself composed very fluidly.³⁵ It has some nice examples of familiar Sant genres among much else and is certainly voluminous enough to be a weighty Indian scripture—but it is yet to be mined by literary scholars for any poetic gems.

Caraṇḍās, by contrast—even though the source of a once-vibrant tradition—didn’t seem to take himself to be a religious founder as seriously as did Rāmcaraṇ. Living playfully in Delhi, Caraṇḍās too could write very fluidly, but he also seems to have had no qualms about polishing some of his verse. Having been exposed to a version of Sant tradition early in his life, he adopted its song genres and wrote many artful padas, and has been characterized by McGregor as one of the more ‘poetic’ and ‘subtle’ Sant poets.³⁶ Like other later Sants,³⁷ he took up some well-known topics from Hindu scriptural tradition as well, in his case offering a Sant’s

33 Williams’s treatment of the development of Nirañjanī manuscript culture (2014), pp. 196–267, emphasizes its scholarly side, but he offers a concise treatment of the Nirañjanī poet Tursīdās (pp. 232–233). Horstmann (2014), pp. 238–239, writing about Sundardās, notes the Dādūpanthī scholar’s felt need to educate bright monks in order to participate successfully in intersectarian debate. On the Hindi literary world in Mughal times, see Busch (2011).

34 Vintiram Ramsnehi (1984), pp. 86–87.

35 Pandey (1982), pp. 482–494, lists examples of twenty-nine different metres in the *Aṅghai Vāṇī* as well as the use of fifteen classical poetic adornments (*alaṃkāra*) (pp. 451–459). Some of the latter, such as *anuprāsa*, which plays with the same sound in individual lines, require considerable verbal dexterity.

36 McGregor (1984), p. 147.

37 For example, Malukdas (2002).

unorthodox treatment of the eight-limbed yoga and the story of Naciketas from the *Kāthopaniṣad*, which is given an extensive retelling.³⁸ His literary approach to Kṛṣṇa bhakti was also unconventional: instead of using Kṛṣṇa bhakti's delicate lyric genres, he composed sometimes long narrative-verse renditions of stories from the Kṛṣṇa *līlā* that might also explicitly offer a glimpse of the inward meanings he saw in them.³⁹ It is this broader, inclusive, aspect of Carañḍās's literary legacy that has overshadowed his lasting sectarian heritage, giving it a very different relationship to the broader Hindu world than that of Rāmcaraṇ.

At the same time, neither Carañḍās nor Rāmcaraṇ, as Sants of their day, had a spiritual profile neatly conforming to the generic image of the great Sants living two or three centuries earlier. Rāmcaraṇ's message, like that of the great early Sant exemplar Kabīr, could be stridently aniconic—certainly enough to get him into trouble in Bhilwara. Unlike Kabīr, however, his lay following had spread through trading caste networks and he seemed intent on building it into a coherent religious community, clearly delegating his second (and last) amanuensis as his successor.⁴⁰ Settled quietly in Shahpura for twenty-five years, his story resembles more that of a conscious sectarian founder than an early Sant such as Kabīr—whose life is generally depicted as more unsettled, with conflict driving his story along until the end.⁴¹

Carañḍās, by contrast, if more averse than Kabīr to conflict, was like him unsettled—regularly moving house in Delhi, going away and returning again. And like Kabīr, he was clearly an unconventional fellow, if in a softer, more endearing way. The social range of his following, moreover, is depicted as very broad: we've seen some memorable miraculous interactions with thieves and potentates, but there were also plenty of more ordinary interactions—such as giving a barren woman a child—with devotees most often identified as middle-caste: Vaishya, *kāyastha*, *khatrī*.⁴² Very broad, as well, in his religious vision, Carañḍās eventually took the Sant's *nirguṇa* bhakti as a way back into a larger Hindu tradition that embraced *saguṇa* worship too.

This was a vision, however, that turned out to be too broad to maintain its distinctiveness over generations, especially given its apparent social inclusiveness. So even though the Carañḍāsīs seem to have flourished as a named Vaishnava lineage for a while,⁴³ that lineage is now rather quiet, with hereditary devotees prac-

38 Charandas (1966), pp. 53–109, 558–646.

39 For example, Charandas (1966), pp. 486–495.

40 This successor was Rāmjana, whose own works are compiled in a voluminous book (Ramjana Ramsnehi 2002). Many of the later Rāmsnehī gurus were also prolific Sant poets whose verses have been published by the main Rāmsnehī *āśrama* in Shahpura.

41 See Lorenzen (1991), pp. 93–128, a passage giving a translation of Anantadās' *Kabir Parachai*.

42 Ghanshyam Das (2000), pp. 146, 44, 48.

43 Shukla (1988).

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ting familiar traditions of Kṛṣṇa worship. The Shahpura Rāmsnehīs, by contrast, continue as a distinctive community, with a fairly homogeneous lay following grounded in trading castes and led by a mixed-caste group of monks—all following well-enunciated precepts based in a particular strictly *nirguṇa* Sant path. Although the number of young Rāmsnehī monks is dwindling, strong lay leadership is often able to keep religious life vital at established local Ramdwaras. And at the main Shahpura *āśrama*, a distinctive Rāmsnehī religious culture remains evident, with nightly congregational chanting of Ram’s name in intricate choral response patterns that I have never heard before.

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