

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Sulh-i kull to Vedānta: The Dādū Panth and the Mughal-Rajput imperial paradigm

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Abstract

Centred on the ‘devotion to the ineffable divine’ (*nirguṇ bhakti*), the sectarian community known as the Dādū Panth (lit. ‘Dādū’s path’) had a class of *sant*-intellectuals who conceived their tradition on high literary and philosophical grounds. Succeeding on the local level, but aspiring to imperial ties, the intellectuals of the Dādū Panth not only built their community identity in relation to the Mughal-Rajput imperial milieu but also to the overlapping ideals of emerging *sulh-i kull* (universal peace) and Vedānta paradigms. Such expertise on the part of the Dādū Panthīs made their ties with the Marwar royal polity strong and long-lasting, as demonstrated in their hagiographical accounts which are corroborated by land grants by the kingdom. Later in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when the imperial order was waning, the Dādū Panthīs expanded their networks in the Rajput courts of not only Rajasthan, but also Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh. The *sants* of the *bhakti* movement(s) are normally thought to have had a lower-caste base—and thus a subaltern voice—but the example of the Dādū Panth presented in this article demonstrates that *sants*’ social base was broad and that the interrelation of *sant-bhakti* with the courtly order was strong; *sant-bhakti* therefore needs to be rethought in the study of *bhakti* traditions.

Keywords: Dādū Panth; Vedānta; Mughal-Rajput; Marwar; Banaras

Introduction

Know that [just as] the emperor of Delhi is the crowning glory of Turks,
The Rana [of Mewar] is the crest jewel of Hindus.
[And] the sovereign of Amber is the epitome of kings,
[So too] is Rajab to the sect of Dādū.¹

¹ Rāghavdās (1965, *Bhaktamāl* [rosary of saints], v. 383). The verse is attributed to Mohandās (seventeenth century), a disciple of Rajab/Rajjab who was trained by the Banaras-educated

This article re-examines the history of the sect of Dādū Dayāl (1544–1603), a saint-poet of Muslim cotton-carder caste (*dhuniyā*) origins who lived in modern-day Rajasthan and whose discipleship grew in the heyday of the Mughal-Rajput multicultural courtly milieu. Dādū and his disciples, known as Dādū Panthīs, hold a revered place in a branch of Hindi literature we typically designate as *sant* (that is, associated with communities of practitioners who favour a non-imagistic approach to the religious life). In principle, the *sants* indulge in the formless and interior god who is identical to the Supreme Self. Yet, Dādū's disciples did not constitute a typical *sant-bhakti* movement with monastic followers found only in small towns, among the lower classes and common folk; rather they participated in the urban intellectual and literary cultures of courtly places like Banaras, Fatehpur-Sikri, Amber, and Marwar. With their networks in such places, Dādū Panthī religious professionals interacted with scholars, poets, and administrators of different religious commitments and caste backgrounds as they aspired to form an influential community in the diverse yet competitive religious landscape of seventeenth-century North India. The Mughal emperor's patronage of the holy men and the works of intellectuals of various faiths and knowledge systems inspired their hagiographies. They also engaged in Vedānta discussions that were prominent among Brahman intellectual and courtly circles of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Furthermore, the Dādū Panthīs partook in the growing literary culture of ornate 'Hindi' that emerged in the Rajput Mansabdārī settings of Mughal imperial ranking. As such, this development was influenced by the new culture of literary, religious, and philosophical exchange encouraged by the Mughal policy of *sulh-i kull* or 'peace with all' religions. Thus religious communities such as the Dādū Panth should not be understood as having only operated within *bhakti* circles; rather, they were also shaped by their interactions with the intellectual and literary cultures connected with new centres of imperial and sub-imperial powers in early modern North India.

The article is divided into six sections. The first three show that the Dādū Panth was part of a major shift in the history of the *sant-bhakti* tradition. This change is demonstrated in two ways. First, the Dādū Panth's identity was formed through engagement with the new Mughal-Rajput imperial model. Second, it participated in the discourses of this new model, which was marked by the concept of *sulh-i kull*. The last three sections show that the Dādū Panthīs flourished in the Marwar kingdom, where they built networks with the local Rajput royal polity and other influential castes of bardic heritage, such as the Cāraṇs. The Dādū Panthīs shared with the regional courts an interest in aestheticized Hindi literature, and this, as well as their training in Banaras and expertise on Vedānta, contributed to their establishment as a culturally important religious community in the region.

Mughal-Rajput imperial paradigm and the *sants*

The political alliances between the Mughals and the Hindu Rajput kings of Rajasthan, which began in the age of the emperor Akbar (r. 1556–1605),

Sundardās (1596–1689) discussed in this article. The quoted verse is part of a long Marwari *kaṛkhā*, which is a genre of heroic songs. All translations are mine, unless noted otherwise.

developed a patronage network conducive to the flourishing of major centres of Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* in North India. Akbar's imperial self-fashioning as saintly and divine in the 1580s resonated with the ideology of devotion to the Hindu god Viṣṇu and his incarnations Rāma and Kṛṣṇa. For the Rajput kings in the growing Mughal imperium, patronizing new Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* institutions was a way to assert their rising royal status in the new imperial paradigm and a means to cultivate relations with a growing *bhakti* 'public'.² This developing patronage network and the 'new world' under Akbar witnessed both the merging of the Sanskrit and Persianate cosmopolis and an explosion of vernacular Hindavi (Bhāṣā/Bhākhā) manuscript production and circulation. These late sixteenth-century developments under Akbar, which continued into the seventeenth century, underpinned the abundance of *bhakti* literature in North India and enhanced the prestige of the more classically oriented Brajbhāṣā poetry in court settings.³

Although current historiography demonstrates that the overall historical framework of the Mughal and Rajput alliances were supportive of the growth of *bhakti* communities (and particularly Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* communities), little scholarly attention has been given to the question of how the traditions of North Indian *sants* responded to the imperial dispensation. The *sants* were the holy men who were not Vaiṣṇava in the strict sense, since they were devoted to the formless and all-pervading godhead (*nirguṇ brahma*) rather than to an anthropomorphic deity. In Hindi-language scholarship, the *bhakti* traditions are often presented as hostile to the Mughal-Rajput 'feudal culture', and the *sants*, in particular, as only supporting the concerns of the subaltern masses.⁴ Even in recent studies, *sants* like Kabīr (fifteenth century) and many others have been largely depicted as active in the realm of the 'folk' or public (*lok*) sphere, while reluctant to engage in courtly affairs.⁵ Yet, as will be discussed, this so-called 'feudal-culture' was not really antagonistic to the 'public sphere' of *bhakti*. *Sant* movements like the Dādū Panth, which had a wider social base in Rajput, merchant, and landholding pastoral castes, imagined themselves precisely within the new Mughal-Rajput imperial

² Novetzke (2007) presents a thesis of how *bhakti* seeks to form 'publics of reception' through performances. This argument complicates previous studies which describe *bhakti* as either an act of personal devotion or a social movement.

³ For a larger context of the developing Mughal-Rajput patronage networks in the late sixteenth century and their continuation in the seventeenth, see Burchett (2019: 99–126). For Brajbhāṣā court or *rīti* poetry, see Busch (2011).

⁴ In the tradition of Marxist criticism and progressive poetry in Hindi, the renowned post-independence Hindi poet G. M. Muktibodh, in his famous 1955 article, presents Kabīr and other *sants* as voicing the concerns of lower class masses and the Vaiṣṇavas, especially Rāma's devotees expressing the feudal values of the upper class Brahmins: see Devtāle (2002: 17–26). Manager Pandey (2003 [1982]: introduction to the first edition) claims that *bhakti* was 'in reality a pan-Indian movement of the rising of people/folk culture against feudal culture'.

⁵ In his influential study of Kabīr and vernacular modernity (*deśaj ādhunikā*), Purushottam Agrawal (2009: 137–46) describes the public sphere of *bhakti* as being autonomous from political settings. Nevertheless, Agrawal notes a relation between the two, but only in terms of the polity keeping a self-serving, watchful eye on the developing 'public sphere' of *bhakti*, since, in his words, 'Kabīr, Pīpā, Dādū and Rajjab as well, wanted to influence the common people' (p. 142).

paradigm and modelled their tradition on similar ideals by participating in the literary and intellectual cultures of the time.

Some of the large studies as well as essays in volumes such as the *Idea of Rajasthan* have explored the first two centuries of the Dādū Panth's existence—the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—within two frameworks.⁶ They discuss how the community was scattered across several places in the seventeenth century, with each group making their own sense of what it meant to be a follower of the guru, Dādū. During the seventeenth century, the Dādū Panthīs saw themselves as being devoted to the formless divine, and hence linked with other prominent *sant* figures like Nāmdev, Guru Nānak, and Kabīr, or with the Nāth-Yogī tradition, which had long been prominent in North India. The Dādū Panth is naturally grouped with the Kabīr Panth ('Kabīr's path'), assuming that it has the same 'non-caste Hinduism' character with 'an ideological content that is in direct opposition to basic socio-religious values characteristic of caste Hinduism'.⁷ These studies observe that the devotional message of inclusivity in terms of caste and Hindu-Turk affiliations, so prominent in Dādū's compositions and apparent in the wider social backgrounds of Dādū's disciples, was changing towards the end of the seventeenth century. The eighteenth century saw the formal organization of the Dādū Panth's branch of warrior ascetic (*nāgā* sādhus), whose membership was dominated by Rajputs and which developed close affinities with the Jaipur state.

Monika Horstmann's sustained engagement with the Dādū Panth, including its history, devotional practices, manuscript culture, and networks in eastern Rajasthan, has brought a nuanced understanding of the tradition.⁸ In contrast with previous studies, Horstmann demonstrates that the *nāgā* branch was already developing in the second half of the seventeenth century. During this time, the Dādū Panthī *nāgās* were not fully armed, but they cultivated a taste for high literature that was often modelled on the literary innovations happening at the Amber (Amer/Jaipur) court. This is made evident by Rāghavdās, the celebrated author of the *Bhaktamāl* (1660), who hailed from a *nāgā* background.⁹ Rāghavdās composed his hagiography in the quatrain (*kavitt-savaiyā*) style that was more popular among the courtly Brajbhāṣā poets of the time. Additionally, Horstmann demonstrates that from the late sixteenth century, the Dādū Panthīs developed networks with local ruling elites in the Amber area and cultivated a sophisticated tradition of homiletics centred on Dādū's poetry as well as that of other *sants* like Kabīr. Recently, the community has received extensive scholarly attention for its vernacular treatises on theology, metaphysics, and liturgy, and for its construction of support networks with the merchant castes in Rajasthan.¹⁰ From the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, the Dādū Panthīs produced major works of Advaita

⁶ For a detailed study of the Dādū Panthī warrior ascetic branch and its relation to the Jaipur state, see Hastings (2002). Another study of the same branch is Gold (2001: 142–264).

⁷ Lorenzen (1987: 280).

⁸ See, for example, (Thiel-) Horstmann, from (1983) to her latest book (2021).

⁹ Horstmann (2015: 45).

¹⁰ Williams (2019a and 2019b).

Vedānta (non-dualist thought) in the vernacular. These were prominent enough to receive high praise from the nineteenth-century reformer and monk Svami Vivekananda.¹¹

Engaging with the growing scholarship on the Dādū Panth, I demonstrate how the new Mughal-Rajput imperial paradigm, which generated the idea of *sulh-i kull* (peace with all or universal civility), became a new way for Dādū's disciples to make claims to high status among other religious communities within their ambit. For instance, Dādū's hagiography, the *Dādū janma līlā paracī* (DJLP, or *The Divine Acts of Dādū*),¹² which was written by his Fatehpur Sikri-based merchant disciple Jangopāl in circa 1610–20, evinces a competitive tone towards the Jains, who engaged with and received high imperial honours from Akbar and Jahangir. The hagiography draws on networks similar to those of the Jain monks who were brought to the Mughal court by Jain ministers. The Dādū Panthīs presented the Rajput king of Amber as being instrumental in bringing Dādū to the Mughal capital for discussions with Akbar.¹³ The idea of self-realization (*ātam khabar*) and the equality of all humans (*sab jīvani suṃ samitā*) are specifically highlighted in those discussions in the shorter recensions of the hagiography's manuscript. Highlighting the characteristics of Dādū's teachings as being beyond religious and caste boundaries, and against Brahman supremacy also ran parallel to Jain thought. In the larger recensions of Dādū's hagiography, the result of these discussions was precisely connected with Akbar's proclamations (*hadīs*, Hadith) that the slaughter of all animals should be banned. The Dādū Panthīs did indeed give credit to Dādū himself for such laws that honoured the Jain monks and community. Nonetheless, such hagiographic imaginations mark a new imperial paradigm at work that provides equal protections for all religions.

Drawing on the Sufi idea of *cillā* (from Persian *cihil*, 40 days of contemplation and austerities), the hagiography states that Dādū's interactions with Akbar and Mughal intellectuals like Abu'l Fazl lasted 40 days, and presents Dādū as the master, a *pīr* of both Hindu and Turks.¹⁴ In much the same way that the Andalusian mystic Ibn 'Arabi's (d. 1240) non-dualistic thought was politicized in the Mughal *sulh-i kull*, Dādū's hagiography politicizes *sant*-devotional ideas for ideal kingship.¹⁵ It bestows Akbar with the same spiritual epithets that were common for great *sants* like Kabīr. The Dādū Panthī attributes are in keeping with the *sulh-i kull* paradigm in which Akbar was considered the 'saint of the age', demonstrating that spiritual ability and intellectual

¹¹ Allen (2017) and (2020). Allen proposes a category of 'greater Advaita Vedānta' to study the vernacular texts about the non-dualistic thought besides the more classical Sanskrit works on the philosophy.

¹² The DJLP acronym is used in the article for citing the hagiography of Dādū.

¹³ The author, according to the hagiography, is said to have met with Dādū upon his visit to the Mughal capital (Callewaert 1988: DJLP 4:20).

¹⁴ For a fascinating discussion on the relevance of number 40 in Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, see Schimmel (1994).

¹⁵ For the politicization of Ibn 'Arabi's thought by Abu'l Fazl in the preface of the Persian translation of *Mahabharata* (the *Razmnama* or 'book of war'), see Pye's article in this special issue.

discernment are linked with kingship and thus politicized as a hallmark of sovereignty.

Jangopāl was an early disciple of Dādū who clearly applied the ideals of Advaita Vedānta to *sant* devotion and whose works became popular in Agra-based Jain intellectual circles—confirming the existence of interactions between Dādū Panthīs and Jains. This was, however, only the beginning of a long history of profound Dādū Panthī engagements with Vedānta. Dādū's prime disciples, like the Banaras-trained Sundardās (1596–1689), made non-dualist thought a primary intellectual position of *sant* devotion. Similar to Dādū Panthīs' earlier associations with the Mughal imperial paradigm, it is Sundardās and his fellow Dādū Panthīs' profound engagements with Vedānta and aestheticized Brajbhāṣā poetry that solidifies their relationship to the Rajput kings. This was the case, for example, with Marwar's Jaswant Singh (r. 1638–1678), who politicized Vedānta with the notion of ideal kingship in his Brajbhāṣā works. The Marwar kingdom's patronage of Dādū Panthī individuals remained strong until the late nineteenth century, a fact corroborated by land grants and hagiography. With such a significant Dādū Panthī presence in Marwar, the widely circulating *bhakti* poetry takes a regionally specific form: it is now presented in Marwari language (later called Rajasthani) and incorporates the specific poetic style that was cultivated by local bardic poets. Teaching and composing works on non-dualistic thought, however, remained current among the Dādū Panth until the nineteenth century. In the later period, the Dādū Panth's networks grew among the Rajput courts of not only Rajasthan but also of Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh to such an extent that they were able to train major court poets of bardic heritage.

The hagiography of Dādū in context

Dādū's hagiography registers the changes in *sant*-tradition that were occurring in the Mughal-Rajput imperial milieu. Heidi Pauwels has helpfully laid out some methodological aspects for reading hagiography, a genre that became central to the formation of religious communities in the early modern era.¹⁶ At first glance, the hagiographies contain generic topoi such as stories and conflicts between asceticism and worldly responsibilities, orthodoxy and *bhakti*, spiritual and mundane power, and so on. However, upon closer inspection, these topoi consist of complex layers of meaning and processes which can only be explored by situating the poems in the composer's context and investigating why certain aspects of the poem are elaborated upon, explained, or changed in the later circulation of a hagiography. Most importantly, Pauwels writes, it is necessary to read how the lives of holy men are perceived and how the devotional communities are 'imagined' in the image of the holy man, whose ideals the community want to emulate and record in such texts.¹⁷

¹⁶ Pauwels (2010). For earlier research on the hagiographical writings of India, see Snell and Callewaert (1994).

¹⁷ Taking a cue from Benedict Anderson's idea of 'nationality', Pauwels (2010: 53–4) presents the role that hagiographies play in the formation of religious communities. She demonstrates how the

Dādū's hagiography is composed in Marwari-influenced Brajbhāṣā, and it narrates the *sant's* life from birth to death.¹⁸ The poem says that Dādū was born in Ahmedabad in 1544 (vs 1601) in the house of a cotton carder. He arrived in Sambhar (Rajasthan) in 1573 (vs 1630) where his son Garibdās was born in 1575 (vs 1632). A few years later, he went to live in Amber, where he spent almost 14 years during the late sixteenth century.¹⁹ During his stay in Amber, Dādū is said to have met with Akbar in Fatehpur Sikri in 1585 (vs 1642). His interactions with Akbar, his courtiers, and the Amber ruler are expanded in the larger manuscript versions of the hagiography but are nonetheless presented in great detail in the shorter versions as well, both of which start a year apart.²⁰ According to the hagiography, Dādū left Amber a few years after his meeting with Akbar and for the next ten years he travelled to various places such as Kalyanpur in 1593 (vs 1650) and to Sambhar once again. Dādū arrived in Naraina in 1602 (vs 1659), where in the following year he died on a nearby hill. After that Naraina became an important centre for the Dādū Panthīs.

Jangopāl's hagiography is surprising for the readers of *bhakti* hagiographies due to the emphasis it puts on dating the events of Dādū's life. In this regard, the mid-seventeenth-century Sikh *janam-sākhīs* (hagiographies of Guru Nanak) are somewhat closer to Jangopāl as they note Nānak's dates of birth and death.²¹ This alludes to a parallel process at the Mughal court whereby the imperial reign of Akbar was chronicled and the composition of genealogies was gaining strength. The Rajputs took part in these practices with great fervour a little later in the seventeenth century.²² It is not clear in the hagiography why Dādū went to live near Amber; there is only a statement that he found the area a potent location to practise devotion, thereby evidencing Amber's growing importance in patronizing *bhakti* sects.²³ Nevertheless,

'religious groupings legitimize themselves by affiliation with holy men and how they go about "imagining" this affiliation in stories in praise of holy men'. 'Imagining' here doesn't mean invention or fabrication but rather 'the process involved in their [religious communities'] formation and the positive role played by human creativity and ingenuity'.

¹⁸ For the text of Dādū's hagiography, this article relies on the critical edition prepared by Winand Callewaert (1988), which pays special attention to the earlier manuscripts of the hagiography. Callewaert has helpfully translated the hagiography into English with reference to the shorter and larger versions, totalling seven manuscripts ranging from 1653 to 1711 CE.

¹⁹ Later tradition notes that members of the Amber ruling elites also joined his discipleship. One of the oldest Dādū temples is located at the foothills where the Amber palace currently stands. Haridās 'Hāpājī', a central guru of the warrior branch of the Dādū Panth, was possibly Amber's Raja Man Singh's illegitimate brother and came into the Dādū Panthī fold through Dādū's disciple Prahāddās (Hastings 2002: 171 and 174). Rāghavdās is within the disciple tradition of this Haridās. He remembers Haridās as the one who belonged to the Kacchwāhā clan and who was a Kacchwāhā prince. See Rāghavdās (1965, *Bhaktamāl*, vv. 528–29).

²⁰ Callewaert (1988: 17) notes the earliest shorter manuscript was composed in 1653 and the larger in 1654.

²¹ For a detailed discussion on the Sikh *janam-sākhīs*, see McLeod (1968: 34–67).

²² The project of history writing under Akbar is widely studied. See Moin (2012) and his framework article in this special issue. See Saran and Zeigler (2001) and a recent study by Kothiyal (2016) for Rajput histories and identity formation in the early modern era.

²³ Callewaert (1988: DJLP 3:24).

Amber's ties with the Mughals form the base through which Dādū's visit to the Mughal court is portrayed in Jangopāl's hagiography. Just as Emperor Akbar exemplifies how discussions and debates on faiths (*dīn kī goṣṭhī*) bring together kings and holy men, a large portion of Dādū's hagiography roots itself in this developing political milieu.

Scholars agree that Jangopāl composed Dādū's hagiography somewhere between 1610 and 1620 CE.²⁴ Its last two chapters concentrate heavily on establishing and celebrating the authority of the next abbot of the sect—Dādū's son and disciple Garībdās (d. 1636).²⁵ There are instances of tension between Garībdās and Rajab, the foremost *sant* of the sect after Dādū.²⁶ This tension is obliquely reflected in the verse with which this article starts, in which Rajab is portrayed as the foremost disciple of Dādū, from a song written later than Jangopāl's hagiography and by a disciple of Rajab. These instances of tension between Dādū's prominent disciples might have propelled Jangopāl to strongly support Garībdās's position in order to encourage Dādū's followers to be a unified community. The hagiography makes it clear not only that 'all *sants*' made Garībdās the rightful heir to the community during a grand festival but also that Dādū actually spoke with Garībdās on the matter of whether the latter should lead the community further.²⁷ Such transmission of authority and divine truth from Guru to a worthy disciple—not merely monetary support or patronage—is essential to the formation of a religious community, and Pauwels has superbly studied a reverse case of such a phenomenon which illuminates the mechanics of such transitions.²⁸ Besides establishing Garībdās's authority, the hagiography institutes the geography of the Dādū Panthī community by mapping out the wanderings (*rāmat*) of Dādū. It notes towns and villages in the areas of Sambhar-Shekhawati, Amber, and Marwar, relating them to Dādū's visits. Jangopāl names Dādū's various adherents: people from royal to pastoral communities, Rajputs and Pathans to merchant followers, men as well as women, and his mighty disciples to lay followers.²⁹

Five chapters of the hagiography are devoted to Dādū's meeting with Akbar. This is the largest hagiographical account of the imagined event, as other disciples of Dādū also mention it in their poetry.³⁰ The grand portrayal of the episode known as 'Dādū meets Akbar' can be understood as Jangopāl competing with the Jain communities of the time, one of the few groups to receive high honours from both Akbar and his successor Jahangir (r. 1605–27). Most communities are neither mentioned in Mughal courtly literature nor given

²⁴ Ibid.: 11.

²⁵ See Horstmann (2021: 172–7) for an elaborate discussion on Garībdās's career and works.

²⁶ Śarmā (1937: 23–4) (*jīvan Caritra*: life of Sundardās).

²⁷ Callewaert (1988: DJLP 16:16).

²⁸ Pauwels (2010) studies the case of 'a lost community' of the sixteenth-century Harirām Vyās of Vrindavan/Orcha.

²⁹ See Horstmann (2000: 568–80) for an excellent map of Dādū's itinerary based on Jangopāl's hagiography, with dates, places, disciples, and lay followers he visited.

³⁰ Iraqi (1985: 247). Bakhnā, who brought Dādū to Naraina, writes a verse about the 'Dādū meets Akbar' event.

the importance accorded to them in their own written traditions. The Brahmans' attempt, in a bid to curry imperial favour, to get the Jains of the Tapa Gaccha branch prosecuted at court in the early 1590s for 'atheism' is a significant example of such competition for imperial patronage.³¹ There might have been, however, some events close in time to the composition of Dādū's hagiography which inspired Jangopāl to allude to the Jains. Rajiv Kinra notes that in 1610, 'Jahangir prohibited the slaughter of all animals throughout the Mughal dominion for 12 days out of deference to the Jain community in Agra, who were observing a sacred fast—a proclamation commemorated in two vivid paintings by the artist Ustad Salivahana.'³² Jangopāl, who was living in Fatehpur Sikri, must have been aware of these events. Significantly, Jahangir had already made donations in 1605 to the Dādū Panthī centre in Naraina in the form of a well and two residential buildings, as an inscriptional record preserved at the centre shows.³³ On his way to Ajmer, Jahangir's stop at Naraina and his meeting with Garībdās are depicted in vivid terms by Rāghavdās's later *Bhaktamāl* (1660 CE). Jangopāl, however, 'imagines' such imperial favours from Jahangir to have occurred earlier at the will of Akbar and in the more prestigious Mughal court itself.

The later hagiographer Rāghavdās adds a new aspect to this meeting between Dādū and Akbar. He mentions that Dādū revealed the throne of light (*tejmaya takhat*) to Akbar during the same meeting. The commentator on Rāghavdās's hagiography, Caturdās (fl. 1800), calls it the hidden throne (*ghaibī takhat*).³⁴ This might refer to the divine throne mentioned in the Quranic 'ayat al-Kursi' (the throne verse).³⁵ It could also refer to the well-known miracle in which the Prophet Muhammad goes on his ascension journey (*mi'raj*). He is the only one who can reach the final stage of the 'arsh ('throne') and witness Allah sitting on his throne. This would imply that Dādū had the same ability as Muhammad or any accomplished saint. Therefore, the 'Dādū-meets-Akbar' legend was growing ever larger within Dādū Panthī circles. As new identities emerged in the community, such as the warrior ascetic branch from which Rāghavdās hailed, such imagined interactions gave Dādū's disciples a sense of the mystical power and authority of their guru.

Hagiographic display of a Mughal *goṣṭhī*

In 1679, the Maratha king Shivaji Bhonsle (r. 1674–1680) reportedly wrote a persuasive and poetic letter to the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb Alamgir (r. 1659–1707), requesting him to rescind the poll tax on non-Muslims (*jaziya*) that had been implemented in the same year.³⁶ The Mughal monarch

³¹ Truschke (2017: 174–6).

³² Kinra (2013: 269).

³³ The Dādū Panthī historian Nārāyaṇdās (1978–79, Book 1: 22) testifies to this. One of the inscriptions is still preserved in Naraina and has remained unpublished.

³⁴ Rāghavdās (1965, *Bhaktamāl*, v. 359 and Caturdās, v. 557).

³⁵ Āyat 255 (2nd surāh). Ali (2008: 102–03).

³⁶ Sarkar (1920: 323–9) translates and discusses the letter in detail. The authorship of this letter is disputed among historians. Sarkar convincingly attributes it to Shivaji, refuting its authorship to

is reminded of the policy of ‘universal peace’ (*sulh-i kull*) in the letter, which was developed under the reign of his great grandfather, emperor Akbar.³⁷ What concerns us here is the following section of Shivaji’s letter which mentions several sects that benefited from this policy:

That architect of the fabric of empire, [Jalaluddin] Akbar Padishah, reigned with full power for 52 [lunar] years. He adopted the admirable policy of perfect harmony (*sulh-i kull*) in relation to all the various sects, such as Christians, Jews, Muslims, Dadu’s followers, sky-worshippers (*falakia*), *malakias*, materialists (*ansaria*), atheists (*daharia*), Brahman and Jain priests. The aim of his liberal heart was to cherish and protect all the people. So, he became famous under the title of ‘the World’s spiritual Guide’ (*Jagat Guru*).³⁸

Among the several religious communities and sects mentioned, the reference to Dādū and his disciples is particularly significant, since they are the only new community in Akbar’s era that are clearly named with reference to their founder. Dādū’s initial followership undoubtedly grew during Akbar’s reign. While other communities, such as the Jains, received attention in Akbar’s court histories, no such contemporary accounts exist for Dādū or his followers.³⁹ The opinion in the letter attributed to Shivaji, however, is very much in line with outsider perceptions of the Dādū Panth. The *bhakti sants* of Shivaji’s own Maratha region give one of the earliest testimonies of Dādū’s social background—his *dhuniyā/pinjārā* (cotton-carder) origin—as his caste was later Brahmanized in the sect.⁴⁰ Also, the famous encyclopedia of religions written in Persian by the Azar Kayvanis, *Dabistān-i Mazāhib* (*School of Religions*, circa 1650), notes several of the Dādū Panth’s non-conformist practices.⁴¹ It calls Dādū a dervish (charismatic holy man, often a Muslim Sufi) and mentions his origin as a cotton-carder.⁴² While there are possibly no existing

others such as Shambhaji, Jaswant Singh (the Marwar king), or Raj Singh (of Mewar). Following the claims made by G. H. Ojha, who relied on James Tod, historian Hooja (2006: 620) attributes the letter to the Mewar king Raj Singh (r. 1652–1680).

³⁷ Moin (2012: 287, n. 53) discusses *sulh-i kull* as a unique expression used in the court history of Akbar, the *Akbar-nāmā*. Moin suggests ‘universal peace’ or ‘total peace’ as a suitable translation of the term. The policy is variously discussed as ‘peace with all’, ‘universal toleration’, or in Kinra’s (2013) words ‘absolute civility’. Richard Eaton (2019: 238) writes that through this policy Akbar challenged his subjects to ‘engage with new sources of knowledge’, no matter if it conflicted with the ‘traditions of their own community’. The Aligarh historians, such as Athar Ali (1991: 35–44), maintain that giving more representation to the Rajputs and Shi’as in the Mughal administration was also a pragmatic implementation of this policy.

³⁸ Sarkar (1920: 326).

³⁹ For Jains at the Mughal court, see Truschke (2017: 30–7).

⁴⁰ Dādū is remembered by the Marathi devotional poet-saints Eknāth (sixteenth century) and Tukārām (seventeenth century): see Callewaert (1978: 30–1). Callewaert (1988: 18–19) notes that in the later manuscript recension of Dādū’s hagiography, his cotton-carder origin is changed to Nagar Brahman.

⁴¹ Like corpses being devoured under open sky by birds and animals.

⁴² Shea and Troyer (1843, Vol. 2, Chapter 18).

historical records of Akbar's favour to Dādū's followers, the *sulh-i kull* paradigm and the spirit of religious innovation, accommodation, and renewal it generated are precisely that which inspires the Dādū Panthī hagiography.

Azfar Moin demonstrates that 'Total Peace' (*sulh-i kull*) 'was a radically accommodative stance for its day, especially when compared to the intolerant manner in which other Muslim and Christian polities of the early modern world dealt with religious difference'.⁴³ He persuasively argues that the paradigm was meant to solve a long-standing problem created by the monotheistic ban on oaths sworn on non-biblical deities. Such a ban restricted the ability of Muslim kings to 'solemnize peace treaties with their non-monotheist rivals and subjects'.⁴⁴ By explicitly and unapologetically overturning this ban and declaring an age of religious freedom, Akbar unleashed new imperial rationalities that inspired a host of inter-religious engagement, the rethinking of religious identities, and the emergence of new religious movements. Other Mughal emperors continued Akbar's open-minded policy towards managing religious difference in the seventeenth century because it had, in Rajiv Kinra's words, 'the balance and compromise necessary to maintain the stability and peaceableness of the social order within a ruler's dominion'.⁴⁵

This bold new policy of the Mughals resonated with emerging religious communities such as the Dādū Panth. Hints of the new Mughal imperial rationality and religion-making impulse entered their hagiographical discourses. The most noteworthy aspect of this imperial rationality is the idea of discussion and debate itself: the *goṣṭhī* of Dādū with Akbar and his courtly intellectuals and noblemen for 40 days. These discussions are based in an exchange of ideas and significantly tend to avoid miracles—a ubiquitous feature of the genre. More important than miracles is the fact that Dādū is presented to Akbar and his courtly elites as 'Kabīr embodied'—as possessing the *jñāna* (gnosis) of Kabīr.⁴⁶ In other words, Akbar wanted to speak with Dādū because he had heard that the latter was the true embodiment of Kabīr. Indeed, presenting Dādū as such was not Jangopāl's innovation. The fifteenth-century *sant* Kabīr is, apart from Dādū himself, the most important figure for the Dādū Panthī community. Kabīr's poetry is thoroughly preserved in Dādū Panthī anthologies and evidently Dādū himself remembered Kabīr as the one who established the ideals of *nirguṇ bhakti*. Jangopāl, however, shows members of the Mughal court, including Akbar, talking about Kabīr and seeing his image in Dādū:

तब राजा भगवंतदास सुनाई तुम्हारे स्वामी सब सुखदाई ।
बहु बिधि सुनौ नांव प्रकासूं मानूं लीयौ कबीर निवासूं ॥ DJLP 4:8

Then [Akbar] told king Bhagvantdās, 'your lord is the joy-giver to all, I have heard the glory of his name in many ways, as if Kabīr is residing in him'.⁴⁷

⁴³ See Moin's framework article in this special issue.

⁴⁴ See *ibid.*

⁴⁵ Kinra (2013: 261).

⁴⁶ Callewaert (1988: DJLP 7:1).

⁴⁷ The hagiography is also translated by the editor.

It appears from such descriptions as if Jangopāl was aware of the popularity of Kabīr in Mughal courtly circles. Akbar's main intellectual, Abu'l Fazl, remembers Kabīr as 'the assertor of the unity of god', a *muwāhid*, in his Persian accounts.⁴⁸ The *muwāhid* idea is used by Abu'l Fazl to refer to followers of Ibn 'Arabi's doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud* (the Unity of Existence). In other words, these are the categories into which the Dādū Panthīs may be assimilated. By the time of Akbar's reign, several traditions, such as the Vaiṣṇavas in Vrindavan, the Rāmānandīs, the courtly anthology traditions of Jaipur, Sikhs, as well the Dādū Panthīs, were remembering Kabīr and giving him an important position in their textual traditions. There may be several reasons why Kabīr was known in Mughal courtly circles, but Jangopāl constructed his account to suggest that it was Kabīr's popularity that brought Dādū to Fatehpur Sikri. It is then Dādū who conveyed Kabīr's poetry to the Mughal court. In order to do so, Jangopāl imaginatively moved Dādū from Amber to Fatehpur Sikri.

The philosophical discussions of holy men with courtly elites was not a readily available model for Jangopāl to draw from, at least not in the Indic-language hagiographical tradition. Devotional poets and figures are said to have avoided courts and courtly affairs, as reflected in both devotional hagiography and the Chishti Sufi tradition.⁴⁹ But as we will see in the next section, the reality of land grants demonstrates that this model had its limits. Jangopāl indeed evinces some of this earlier ambivalence about the court, but he adopts new strategies in order to make the meeting happen. His model was actually Akbar's discussions with individuals representing various religious traditions reported to have occurred at the Ibādāt Khānā. Jangopāl calls such conversations 'discussions on faiths' (*dīn kī goṣṭhī*), and they happened in Fatehpur Sikri earlier than the hagiography places them. A somewhat earlier idea, displayed elaborately in the hagiography of Kabīr composed by the Rāmānandī Anantdās around *circa* 1600, is that the power of *bhakti* (*bhagati pratāp*) makes the *sants* superior to worldly rulers.⁵⁰ The *sants* also perform miracles (*karāmāt*) which exhibit their divine power. In Kabīr's hagiography, fierce contestations are depicted between him and the current rulers. The Delhi sultan Sikandar Lodi is often referred to as demonic (*asura*), and other

⁴⁸ Blochmann and Jarrett (1873–1907, Vol. 2, Chapter 259: 129 and 171).

⁴⁹ A famous verse attributed to one of the eight-seal (*aṣṭa-chāp*) saints Kumbhandās of the Vallabha Sampradāya has these sentiments. In his *Vārtā* (Tripāṭī 2008: 177), Kumbhandās says, '*bhaktan ko kahā sikarī kām*', meaning 'what do the devotees have to do with going to Fatehpur Sikri?'. Eaton (2016: 46–50) discusses the tradition of avoiding court and courtly affairs by the Chishti Sufis in the Delhi Sultanate period. This tradition is altered from the late fourteenth century when the Sufis start becoming associated with the Bahmani court in Deccan. This process is intensified further in the fifteenth century.

⁵⁰ The hagiographies (*parcāis*) of Kabīr, Ravidās, Nāmdev, Pīpā, and the like were written by the Rāmānandī Anantdās (Callewaert 2000: 1). Anantdās's hagiography of Nāmdev is dated to 1588 AD, and the others are believed to have been composed before or around 1600. Pauwels (2014: 314–5) studies the hagiographies of Kabīr as Rāmānandīs' self-fashioning as the 'saviors of the lower castes' who, while 'preaching in rural Rajasthan, [and] vying for the sponsorship of local landowners with other religious groups such as the Nāths', portrayed Kabīr as the disciple of the Vaiṣṇava Brahman preacher Rāmānand and appropriated him as a model *sant* and devotee.

ruling elites are mostly rejected by Kabīr.⁵¹ The rulers only accept Kabīr as a great saint after he shows his divine might. Such contestations are not entirely absent in the hagiography, but during Dādū's interactions with the Mughal emperor and Rajput kings, discussions and debates take the place of such miracles.

The hagiography also exhibits a tension fundamental to such discussions. On the one hand, Dādū reformulates Kabīr's ideals as being totally dependent on an orientation towards the divine, a renunciation of wealth, and a rejection of the favour of worldly authority. Yet, on the other hand, the newly arising political formations and opportunities for patronage in Mughal-Rajput settings lead Jangopāl to portray Dādū following the orders of the worldly rulers. The situation arises when Dādū simply rejects Akbar's notifications (*parwānā*) to go to Fatehpur Sikri:

साहि अकबर सुनी सु बातां परवानें पठवै दिन राता ।
स्वामी जाइ न सौ सुख पावै समझि समझि मन मैं पछितावै ॥ DJLP 4:7

Emperor Akbar heard about him and sent summons day and night.
Akbar lamented that if Swami (Dādū) wouldn't come then he [Akbar] wouldn't be happy.

Dādū's repeated rejections of Akbar's invitation posed an even bigger challenge to Akbar's *mansabdar* (rank-holder) and Amber's Rajput king Bhagwant Dās (r. 1574–89).⁵² The king promises Akbar that he will bring the *sant*, who resides in his political territory, to the Mughal court, or else he will face the emperor's wrath. The pressure increases further upon Dādū too when he receives a letter from king Bhagwant Dās. Dādū finds himself in a dilemma. He is apprehensive that the king may force him to go to the Mughal court.⁵³ The hagiography therefore adopts a strategy to resolve such dilemmas and contestations, which brings the *sants* and the kings into an amicable relationship. Unlike the life narratives of previous *sants*, in Dādū's hagiography, the God (Hari/Ram) plays the role of an intermediary. With Dādū facing such pressure from the king, it is Ram, dwelling within him, who appears in Dādū's meditation and permits him to visit the emperor:

स्वामी बात राम परि राखी, ध्यान सैन चलिबे की भाखी । DJLP 4:16

The lord (Dādū) left it to Ram, who indicated in [Dādū's] meditation his call to go!

⁵¹ For Kabīr's contestations with Sikandar Lodi, see Callewaert 2000: Chapters 7, 8 and 9. When the Rajput queen (*Jhālī rānī*) approaches Kabīr (in Ravidās's hagiography) to accept her as his disciple, Kabīr is depicted as saying 'what does he have to do with kings and queens!' (*mere kāmim na rānī rājā*) (ibid.: 346).

⁵² King Bhagwant Dās/Bhagwān Dās continued his father's (Bhārmaal r. 1548–1574) policies by joining forces with the Mughals and further strengthening the geographies of Amber state. Cementing their relations with the Mughals with a marriage alliance like his father Bhārmaal, Bhagwant Dās also married off his daughter Princess Man Bai (later Sultan-un-Nisa) to Prince Salim (later the emperor Jahangir); see Hooja (2006: 484).

⁵³ 'If I don't go [then] there might be force and people will also mock if I abstain from going.' (Callewaert 1988: DJLP 4:17).

There is, in essence, a new religious worldview at work here, one in which saints are being redirected to engage with the world rather than renounce it. While resolving the initial dilemma of bringing Dādū to the Mughal court, the hagiography finds occasion to place *sant* poetry in courtly contexts by highlighting Dādū's interactions with other religious scholars (*paṇḍits* and *shaikhs*) and courtly intellectuals. The popular *sant* genre of couplets (*sākhī*) becomes the medium through which Dādū engages in such discussions. Themes like 'the greatness of reciting the name' (*nām pratāp/mahimā*), the 'formless god' (*nirguṇ Rām*), and 'allegiance to the inner dwelling supreme' (*ghāṭ main niranjan*), contentment (*santoṣa*), controlling the senses, and so on emerge in the discussions led by Dādū. Before such discussions happened, however, Akbar and his courtly intellectuals Abu'l Fazl and Bīrbal closely examined Dādū.⁵⁴ The way in which the court assembly's first discussion on the question of the inner-dwelling and 'abstract' supreme self (*iṣṭa*) is portrayed has a parallel on the Mughal side with *sulh-i kull*, an abstraction of the supreme truth. Jangopāl makes Dādū explain the meaning of several names for the Creator which were popular in Hinduism and Islam, among them Rām, Alah/Alakh, Rahīm, Gopāl, or Sirjanhār. This was done to reach a higher level of abstraction in which the truth of diverse religious traditions becomes translatable across different faiths. The hagiography also brings forth a performative aspect of *sant* poetry to the Persophone audience. The contextual performative space makes Dādū's language Persianized with a Sufi tone. Responding to Akbar's call of describing the 'state of being/mind', Dādū recites:

दादू इसक महबति मस्त मन तालिब दर दीदार।

दोस्त दिल हरदम हज़ूरि यादिगार हुसियार। DJLP 6.3

Dādū says one should remain intoxicated in passion and one's heart should yearn for the vision of the beloved.

Every moment one should remain absorbed in the presence of god, and be mindful and alert.⁵⁵

At the end of the discussions Akbar offers Dādū villages and wealth. The guru rejects the offer, contextualizing his response within themes of *bhakti* poetry further along in the narrative. Here Jangopāl has Dādū recite Kabīr's verses which proclaim some of the prime philosophical positions of the *sants*, such as 'total allegiance to the one and only lord' (*pativrāt*) and 'poverty as spiritual strength' (*dīn gharībī laghutā*). Akbar recognizes Dādū as a master of both Hindus and Turks. Here, when the discussions ends, Akbar is described with an important attribute that was previously reserved for *sants*, namely having 'the power of discernment or verification' or 'the consciousness of oneness/equanimity' (*bamek* or *bamek samitā*). Kabīr is described as having

⁵⁴ 'The knowing Abu'l Fazl and Bīrbal came to the swami to discuss matters' (ibid.: 5: 6).

⁵⁵ The extra imperatives are added in the translation to place the verse in its performative context as depicted in the hagiography. The couplet is recited by Dādū as an answer to Akbar's question.

this power in his hagiography.⁵⁶ Dādū's hagiography confers upon Akbar the same virtue of being discriminating (*bamekī/vivekī*):

साहि अकबर बड़ौ बमेकी खोटी खरी म्यान करि देखी। DJLP 4:27

Emperor Akbar is very discriminating, [he] has examined good and evil with truth.

By bestowing upon Akbar the attribute of discernment, Jangopāl brings the *sant-bhakti* ideals to the political realm. Here spiritual ability and intellectual discernment are equated and politicized. A similar process had already taken place in the extensive writing of Abu'l Fazl who, in his preface to the Persian translation of the *Mahabharata*, politicized Ibn 'Arabi's mystical method of *tahqiq* ('realization' or 'verification' of divine truth)—a key Neo-Platonic principle behind *sulh-i kull*—for managing religious difference.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, the hagiography implies that Akbar obtained his discerning qualities and discriminating nature only *after* hearing the poetry of Kabīr and engaging in conversation with Dādū. Jangopāl completely abstains from showing any kind of miracle, but the divine glory of Dādū lies in him, satisfying the elite audience with his answers to their questions and in his apt presentation of *sant* poetry and philosophy in courtly contexts. This is a key shift that conforms to the new culture of rational debate among religions at the court. Only through such discussions did Akbar recognize that Dādū was not just an ordinary cotton-carder wandering on the streets of Fatehpur Sikri but a true holy man. He says, according to the hagiography:

जौ तुम नहीं गुसईयां पाये तौ कैसे मैं निकटि बुलाये। DJLP 7:11

निसदिन करत फिरत बेगारे सहर सीकरी बहुत पिंजारे। DJLP 7:12

If you have not found the lord, then for what reason have I called you here?

Many cotton-carders (*pinjārās*) keep wandering in the city of Sikri doing hard labor.

While Akbar is described as the man with discerning qualities (*vivekī*), the Amber king too is portrayed as a benefactor of the *sants*. It is the Amber king Bhagwantdās who first greets Dādū in Fatehpur Sikri, serves him at his residence, and arranges his meetings with several others.⁵⁸ The hagiography demonstrates that in addition to bringing the *sants* to the Mughal court, these Rajput kings also established the holy man in their own region's public as well. This developing scenario is given great importance in the hagiography:

अरू राजा दादू कौ थापै तौ दादूपंथी सब को आपै। DJLP 11:3

⁵⁶ Kabīr's hagiography calls Kabīr as '*bamekī*' (Callewaert 2000: 65). The word relates to '*vivekī*' meaning judicious, discerning, and discriminating, or person with a great sense of discretion.

⁵⁷ See Pye's article in this special issue.

⁵⁸ 'He [Dādū] arrived near Sikri, then Bhagwantdās got the news, / Greeted him going forward, [Bhagwantdās] showed hospitality for two-three days': Callewaert (1988: DJLP 5:1).

And if the king establishes the honor of Dādū,
Then all naturally become Dādū's followers.

While kings are described as supporting the *sants* in this new historical context, the idea that kings are, and should be, discriminating (*bamekī/vivekī*) is further emphasized. During the latter part of Dādū's stay in Amber, religious authorities complained to the then king Man Singh (r. 1589–1614) about Dādū's rejection of caste norms and religious boundaries, his opposition to child marriage, his censure of the hardships and taboos imposed on Hindu child widows, and his support for celibacy.⁵⁹ Some of these descriptions are classic topoi of hagiography but the way in which the age of marriage is so specifically discussed and child marriage is contested by Dādū again resonates with Akbar's censure of child marriages in his ordinances regarding the same issue in 1585–86.⁶⁰ The hagiography notes that the Brahmans and Baniyās (merchants) of Amber were angry, and the king acted upon their complaints. Yet Man Singh faces the dilemma that any action taken against the saint could cause Dādū to leave Amber. Dādū does leave Amber, but through Jangopāl's strategy, he departs from the king's domain rather amicably.⁶¹ This episode may be interpreted as Dādū falling out of the Jaipur king's favour after living there for 14 years, and Jangopāl's description could be a form of 'damage control' in which the Dādū Panthī community sought new ties with the Amber king.

This hagiographical narration of Dādū's encounters with Mughal-Rajput courtly patronage closely resembles the literature that emerged in similar political settings. The way in which the Dādū Panthīs describe local kings forming networks to bring holy men to the Mughal court, as well as supporting them in their respective regions, bears striking similarities to how the Jains described such events. Amber's king convinces Dādū to meet Akbar in Fatehpur Sikri, and the Jain minister Karmacandra Bacchāwat of Bikaner is the facilitator in bringing Jinacandra Sūri from Khambhat (Cambay) to Lahore in 1591. The Jain side of the episode is described in short hagiographical poems in Gujarati and Brajbhāṣā by the Jain monk and polyglot Samaysundar (1563–1646), a śvetābmar Jain monk-intellectual with multilingual talents from the Kharatara Gaccha branch who was active in Rajasthan and Gujarat. Samaysundar was also one of the monks who accompanied Jinacandra Sūri on their journey to meet Akbar in Lahore. In his accounts, the Jain minister Karmacandra Bacchāwat assumes the same role that Bhagwantdās is portrayed to have played for Dādū:

इक दिन अकबर भूपति इम भाखइं, मंत्रीसर कर्मचंद सु दाखइ।
तुम्ह गुरु सुणियइ गुज्जर खंडइ, सिद्ध पुरुष सुप्रताप अखंडइ।

⁵⁹ Ibid.: DJLP 10: 4–23 and 11: 2–6.

⁶⁰ Bano and Bano (2003: 598).

⁶¹ The verse says 'God is between you and me, where there is no good or evil teachings': Callewaert (1988: DJLP 11:7).

वेगि बोलायउ लिखि फुरमाण, आदर आधिक देइ बहु माण।⁶²

One day Akbar says to the minister Karmachandra,
'I have heard about your Guru in Gujarat, an expert man with endless grandeur.

Invite him soon with an edict, giving him enormous reverence and respect.'

Jain sources broadly depict the monks conversing with Abu'l Fazl in the manner we have noted in Dādū's hagiography above.⁶³ Both traditions praise Akbar for his ability to recognize true holy men. The Jain monk Samaysundar extols the emperor for the gesture of honouring the Jain monk Jinacandra Sūri.⁶⁴ Dādū Panthīs shared a common habitus with the Jains, and these similarities show how the Dādū Panthīs were aware of the activities of the Jain monks at the Mughal court. Dādū had a strong merchant following that put this sect in conversation with the Jain tradition. Take, for example, Samaysundar's description of the Jain congregation that stopped at the town of Didvana in Rajasthan on their way to Lahore to meet Akbar.

एजु प्रणम्यां श्री शांतिनाथ, गुरु सिर धरयउ हाथ; समयसुन्दर साथ, चाले नीकी वरियाँ ॥
अनुक्रमि चलि आए, सीरोही मई सुख पाये; सुलताण मनि भाए, पेखत अन्खरिया ॥
जालोर मेदनीतट, पइसारउ क्रियउ प्रगत; डिंडवाणइ जीते भट, जयसिरी वरियाँ ॥

He bowed to Shri Śāntināth, the guru placed hand on head, Samaysundar accompanied, set off in grandeur.

Gradually [we] moved, Sirohi was pleasant, the Sultan was pleased, seeing [Jinacandra] in front of him.

Around Jalore, his arrival was revealed, he conquered the opponents in Didvana, and obtained victory.⁶⁵

Didvana was the primary town from which Dādū's merchant followers originated. Samaysundar describes Didvana as a place of debates and discussions (*dindvānai jīte bhaṭ*).⁶⁶ It was actually a few years after this Jain congregation passed through the town that Dādū visited Didvana on the invitation of his

⁶² Nāhaṭā et al. (1956: 359). Samaysundar wrote several poems that describe this event in Brajbhāṣā, with multiple Maru-Gurjar archaic grammatical features. Nāhaṭā et al. (1956: 359–409) edited a collection of 563 of Samaysundar's short compositions.

⁶³ Truschke (2017: 42–3) discusses how the texts of the Tapā Gaccha Jain sect describe Abu'l Fazl meeting with the Jain monk Hīravijaya Sūri.

⁶⁴ As in this verse: 'Emperor Akbar of Babar's [clan], was delighted to see the Guru's face, I have examined Yogis, ascetics, sages, the pious ones, as well as of the six-philosophies.

In penance, recitation, and beholding the righteous conduct and mercy, he is unparalleled in the world,

Samaysundar's lord is the blessed guru, who is tested by Emperor Akbar!

Nāhaṭā et al. (1956: 363).

⁶⁵ Nāhaṭā et al. (1956: 391).

⁶⁶ 'Bhaṭ' usually means warriors or soldiers, but here the allusion is to ideological opponents. It may also be referring to the Digambar Jain monks who held titles as *bhaṭṭāraka*.

merchant disciples.⁶⁷ This suggests the awareness of Dādū Panthīs, and possibly Jangopāl, of the Jain's activities at the Mughal court, some of which might have inspired him to present his own tradition—in competition with the Jains—as one honoured by the same highest authority.

With these similarities being noted, there are differences between the Jain hagiographical poems and Dādū's hagiography, which lie in their acceptance of elite patronage. Dādū's hagiography still presents a tension with accepting royal favours. By contrast, the Jain literature in Gujarati, Marwari, and early Hindi thoroughly celebrates the edicts received from the Mughal emperor on behalf of the Jain monks. The Jain minister Karmacandra Bacchāwat is remembered for his magnificent display of wealth in celebrating the success of Jain monks in the Mughal court.⁶⁸ The disregard for royal favour prevalent in North Indian *sant* hagiographies is still present in the hagiography of Dādū. Additionally, in the context of Akbar's favouring of diverse religious communities, the Dādū Panthīs' competition with the Jains, who evidently received high royal honours, cannot be ignored as a possible motivation for the hagiography.⁶⁹ Declaring that Dādū was honoured by Akbar and his intellectuals, Jangopāl's work implies that elite circles viewed the *sant* tradition as desirable; by building the whole account on Kabīr' legends and poems, the hagiography aspires to bridge elite and popular cultural arenas.

Networks of Banaras-trained Dādū Panthīs in Marwar

Rāghavdās's *Bhaktamāl*, which comes later than Jangopāl, highlights a different phenomenon that was nonetheless related to the *sulh-i kull* paradigm: the Dādū Panthīs' strong engagement with Vedānta and non-dualist thought. The hagiography mentions 52 disciples of Dādū but only describes 16 of them in detail. While all of these *sants* are lauded for their realization of the ultimate truth through Dādū, they are extolled for self-realization and perfection by the means of *bhakti* and yoga. A few of them are singled out for their translations and poetry, as well as their expertise on Sanskrit texts popular among the Advaitins like *Yogavāśiṣṭa*, *Prabodha Candrodya*, *Bhagvatgītā*, and the *Upaniṣads*.

⁶⁷ Dādū's merchant (*Mahājan, baniyā*) devotees, notably Prāgdās Bihānī and Gopāldās, invited Dādū to this area around 1593–94, and large celebrations took place in his honour. See Callewaert (1988: DJLP 13:1–5).

⁶⁸ Nāhaṭā's (2009) commemorative volume on the minister Karmachandra Bacchāwat includes four Marwari praise poems from the early modern period that extol the minister for his generous donations in celebration of the Jain monk's success at the Mughal court. For the Jains' influential presence at the Mughal court, including Jinacandra Sūri and Samaysundar, as well as the ever-changing relations of Jain monks and laity with the Mughals, see Truschke (2017: 30–48) and Jain (2013).

⁶⁹ Monika Horstmann (2017: 32–3) rightly points out that the success of the Jain monk of the Tapā Gaccha sect, Hiravijay Sūri, at the Mughal court must have made the Dādū Panthīs jealous and stimulated the production of the Dādū Panthī hagiography. Horstmann writes that the later recensions of the manuscript of Dādū's hagiography claim that the concessions given to Hiravijay Suri by Emperor Akbar were granted to Dādū.

Then the *Bhaktamāl* goes on to give accounts of a few of Dādū's third-generation disciples. In this context of describing those Dādū Panthīs, who were also contemporaries of the author Rāghavdās, the *Bhaktamāl* mentions a connection between the Marwar royal polity and the Dādū Panthī community. The Marwar kingdom may have been patronizing the Dādū Panthīs from an earlier period than that of Rāghavdās. However, it is during King Jaswant Singh's time that the *Bhaktamāl* descriptions are corroborated by land-grant records. The Banaras-educated Dādū Panthīs emerge as the prime beneficiaries in such land deeds. Jaswant Singh's land grants to the Dādū Panthīs set a model for the later kings of Marwar, because almost all kings of Jodhpur until Man Singh (d. 1843) refer to the earlier example set by Jaswant Singh when they gave or reinstated grants and concessions to their contemporary Dādū Panthīs. Therefore, Jaswant Singh's land grants will be the subject of close study in this section. Through this exposition, we will see that the community's presence in Marwar was strong and enduring.

Themes in the works of Jaswant Singh on Vedānta and Brajbhāṣā aesthetics overlap with the works of Dādū's foremost scholarly disciple Sundardās, a contemporary of the Marwar king. Besides Jaswant Singh, the Maratha king Shivaji's court poet Bhūṣaṅ Tripāṭhī adopted, or rather politicized, Vedānta ideals for ideal kingship. A prominent Mughal example of the Vedānta paradigm's usage for the purposes of kingship is that of Prince Dara Shukoh. Therefore, we see that the Dādū Panthī case in Marwar of the 1660–70s is part of a wider phenomenon wherein the Mughal and Rajput kings were drawn towards the Vedānta paradigm for kingly self-fashioning.

The renewed prominence of Vedānta, especially Advaita Vedānta, in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is associated with the growing participation of Banaras-based Sanskrit Pandits (Brahman scholars) in major theological discussions.⁷⁰ Describing a process that helped Banaras re-emerge as a major city in Mughal India, Rosalind O'Hanlon writes that Banaras was an unrivalled centre of education where the learned could benefit from the well-connected networks of sponsors and the pious could find wealthy patrons.⁷¹ The Pandit communities of Banaras supplied the moral and judicial authority over matters pertaining to 'Hindus' that Muslim state officials did not have. Due to these opportunities in the Mughal setting, the Brahman Pandits in Banaras could invest authority in themselves in matters of religious law. Similarly, in mapping the social history of Advaita Vedānta in early modern India, Christopher Minkowski remarks on the importance of Banaras from a theological point of view. Banaras became a major centre of the production of Sanskrit works on Advaita Vedānta, and the city became connected to South India through the networks of Pandits. Eminent Vedāntins of the period lived in the city, and Advaita Vedānta became the most common intellectual idiom for theological debates happening in Banaras.⁷² These Pandits represented Advaita philosophy as a broad concept within Hinduism, under which

⁷⁰ For Advaita Vedānta in early modern times, see Minkowski (2012) and Allen (2017).

⁷¹ O'Hanlon (2012: 122).

⁷² Minkowski (2012).

the different and contesting belief systems of the time could function.⁷³ The Sanskrit Vedāntic texts that were vernacularized in this period include the eleventh/twelfth-century Sanskrit allegorical drama *Prabodha Candrodāya* (*The Moonrise of Realization*), which extolled Banaras as a place for not only seeking liberation (*moksha*)—as the Hindu traditions believe—but also as a place for gaining discrimination (*vivek*). It is in the city of Banaras that the *Upaniṣads* are studied. By contemplating the knowledge of these texts, the attachment (*moha*) is destroyed. Take, for example, how Jaswant Singh, the king of Marwar, praises Banaras in his *Prabodh Nāṭak* (drama of enlightenment), a Brajbhāṣā prose and poetic adaptation of the *Prabodha Candrodāya*:

जाकैं देखत दुख मिटैं उपजै आनंद निति।
खैंचि लेत है चित्त कौं, सिवनगरी यह सति ॥⁷⁴

Seeing it, sorrow is erased, and joy arises constantly,
The one that undoubtedly attracts the heart that is the city of Shiva.

Jaswant Singh's use of Vedāntic themes shows that, in addition to being widespread among the Sanskrit Pandits of Banaras, Vedānta philosophy was gaining prominence in the discourse of Mughal kingship—as shown by Munis Faruqi and Supriya Gandhi in the case of Dara Shikoh.⁷⁵ Additionally, it was finding relevance in the models of Rajput kingship in North India. With the rising status of Vedānta, the Brajbhāṣā courtly *kāvya* (poetics) tradition presented their patron kings with the title of an enlightened individual. With such epithets, the kings were now presented as those who bring together various religious traditions or transcend them. Take, for example, how the Maratha king Shivaji's court poet, Bhūṣaṇ Tripāṭhī, presents the king with the epithet of *jñānī* in his *śivraj bhūṣaṇ* (Ornaments for King śivājī, 1673):

चाहत निर्गुण सगुण कौं ज्ञानवंत की बान।
प्रकट करत निर्गुण सगुण सिवा निवाजे दान ॥⁷⁶

Loving both the *nirguṇa* and *saguṇa* [forms of the godhead] is the nature of
an enlightened one,
Revealing who is virtuous and who is not, Shivaji then bestows charity.

Using the art of the pun, the text 'adorns' Shivaji with several epithets/ornaments, '*bhūṣaṇ*', as its title suggests. The particular *bhakti* modes described in

⁷³ The success of the Pandits of Banaras is most noted in the case of Kavindrācārya Sarswatī, an Advaitin, Sanskrit, and Brajbhāṣā poet and expert in the *dhruvad* tradition. Kavindrācārya wrote panegyric verses for the Mughal emperor Shahjahan (r. 1628–1658) and Prince Dara Shikoh and was considered a prominent intellectual by the Mughal elite circles. See Chundavat (1958); Busch (2015: 274–7); Truschke (2017: 50–51).

⁷⁴ Mīśra (1972: 103, *Jaswant Singh Granthāvalī*, *Prabodh Nāṭak*, v. 10).

⁷⁵ See Gandhi (2020) for Persian works on Vedānta themes in the seventeenth century. See Faruqi (2014) for the Mughal prince Dara Shukoh's interests in the translations of Vedānta texts and the question of imperial succession.

⁷⁶ Mīśra (1994: 26, *Bhūṣaṇ granthāvalī*, v. 145).

the first line of the verse above (*nirguṇ* and *saguṇ*) are taken literally in the second line by saying: *after* seeing who is good and who is bad, *then* Shivaji bestows charity (on the good people). The verse suggests that the true virtue of being a *jñānī* is actually exhibited by kings like Shivaji.

There is evidence that some *bhakti* communities, by the seventeenth century, show a trend of both participating in the Vedānta-related discourses and going to Banaras for training. The Marathi poet-saint Eknāth (d. 1599), who was well-positioned in the Brahman migration pattern from northern Deccan to Banaras, set an example of going to Banaras.⁷⁷ The *nirguṇ bhakti* sects like the Dādū Panth and Niranjanī Sampradāya became increasingly involved with Vedānta learning both by translating Vedānta works and by giving the philosophy a place in their poetic anthologies.⁷⁸ The Dādū Panthīs started participating in Vedānta-related intellectual discourses in order to bestow high philosophical ideals on their community and devotional practices. It is no coincidence that one of the three major Brajbhāṣā adaptations of the Sanskrit drama *Prabodha Candrodāya* was authored by Jangopāl, the author of Dādū's hagiography discussed in the first section of the article. The other two major adaptations were from the Brajbhāṣā court poet Keśavdās (fl. sixteenth century) and the Marwar king Jaswant Singh.

In his Brajbhāṣā rendering, known as the *moha vivek granth* or *moha vivek yuddh*, Jangopāl first claims Dādū's philosophy to be representative of *nirguṇ bhakti* and then goes on to tell the allegorical story of the war between the armies of discrimination/discretion (*viveka*) and attachment/delusion (*moha*), as depicted in the Sanskrit drama.⁷⁹ The success of Jangopāl's text, in comparison to the courtly adaptations, lies in its fame among the Jain intellectuals circles of Agra, who not only named Jangopāl's poem as their source of inspiration but reshaped the text according to Jain beliefs.⁸⁰ There is a debate about the possibility of attributing the Jain version of *moha viveka yoddh* to the merchant Banārasidās—author of the famous autobiography *Ardhakathānaka* (*A Half Story*, 1641 CE). Jangopāl's Brajbhāṣā rendering of the *Prabodha Candrodāya*, however, was not exceptional in terms of the Dādū Panthīs' engagement with Vedānta. From the first decade of the seventeenth century, a few Dādū Panthīs went to Banaras to study and compose scholarly Brajbhāṣā works on Vedānta. The tradition of Dādū Panthīs going to Banaras would only flourish in the coming centuries. Before we proceed to discuss the content of the works of Banaras-trained Dādū Panthīs, we should first situate them within the archive of land deeds and hagiographies.

The *Bhaktamāl* of Rāghavdās narrates the life events of two disciples of Dādū, Sundardās and Nārāyaṇdās (seventeenth century). The *Bhaktamāl* precisely notes that Sundardās's knowledge of Vedānta was learned while in

⁷⁷ Keune (2015).

⁷⁸ See Williams (2014: 214–67) for the poet-saints of Niranjanī Sampradāya and their involvement with Vedānta, Puranas, and poetics.

⁷⁹ For Jangopāl's *moha viveka yuddh*, see Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute, Jaipur (hereafter RORI), Vidhyabhushan Collection, MSS: 14, 34, 67, 74 and 90.

⁸⁰ Agrawal (1962: 265–78) discusses the engagement of Agra-based Jain circles with Jangopāl's text. Cort (2013: 10–11) discusses the debates about the possibility of attributing the Jain version of *moha viveka yuddh* to the merchant Banārasidās.

Banaras.⁸¹ Sundardās spent almost two decades in Banaras and returned to Rajasthan in 1625. A satirical couplet attributed to Sundardās mentions Nārāyaṇdās accompanying him during their study in Banaras:

पढ़े थे बाराणसी, कियो विरावे वास ।
भूँच देश में रम रहे, भले नारायणदास ॥⁸²

[You] studied in Banaras, [now] residing at the [village] Virāvā,
Remained engrossed in the desert region, well done, Nārāyaṇdās!

Sundardās mentions Marwar's desert geography in his other verses on the region. He mostly lived in Fatehpur-Shekhawati, which is linguistically a Marwari-speaking area but politically a semi-autonomous region of its own. Sundardās's companion Nārāyaṇdās, on the other hand, was based in the Marwar kingdom. The abovementioned couplet and other examples suggest that both Sundardās and Nārāyaṇdās kept visiting each other. Evidence of possible interactions between the two is also found in a record of donations at Sundardās's monastery in Fatehpur-Shekhawati.⁸³ It is this Nārāyaṇdās, a Dādū Panthī of landholding pastoral community origin, who was honoured by King Jaswant Singh, as Rāghavdās's *Bhaktamāl* mentions:

नारायण दूधाधारी घड़सी गुर पाय भारी, राजा जसवंत असवारी भेजी आइये।⁸⁴

Narayan, subsisting on milk, had Gharsīdās as a mighty guru,
King Jaswant invited [him], sending conveyance.

The above hagiographic description of Nārāyaṇdās is corroborated by the courtly records of Jodhpur. A special edict mentions that Jaswant Singh gave a land grant to Nārāyaṇdās to build a monastery, together with five tax-free farms, a public watering place, and a well for public use in the village of Cāmpāsar, north of Jodhpur. These deeds were issued while the king was in Aurangabad and Ahmedabad in 1667 and 1671 respectively. Relevant portions from the courtly register are given here with translations:

[1]

॥ वैसाख सुद 14 सोमवार—1840 मुकाम गढ़ जोधपुर ॥

स्वरूप श्री राजराजेश्वर महाराजाधिराज महाराजा श्री विजयसिंघजी महाराज कुंवार श्री जालम सिंघजी वचनात ।

तथा गाँव चांपासर में दादूपंथी हरिदास नैवलराम रे अस्तल नै खेत पाँच डोहली रा नै पोहर पाणी री पीछ पोहर एक री

तिणरो महाराजा जी श्री अजीत सिंघजी रो परवानो संवत 1765 रा आषाढ़ वद 14 री मिति रो है जिण वर हुकम हमे पण दीया है

सो उणा दादूपंथियाँ रा चेला मनीराम ने चेतनदास पाया करसी.

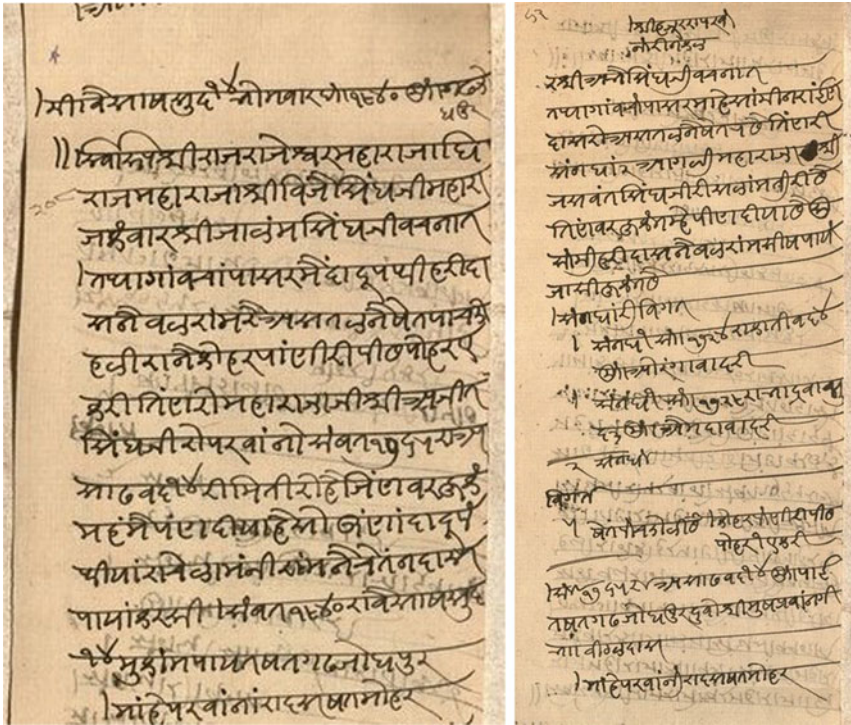
On Monday, the fourteenth of the light-half of the lunar month Vaiśākḥ, at the fort location of Jodhpur. From the order of himself Shri Jalam Singhji, the son

⁸¹ 'At the age of eleven [Sundardās] abandoned home and the land. Having gone to Banaras, [he] heard the Vedānta and Purāna': Rāghavdās (1965, *Bhaktamāl*, v. 421).

⁸² Nārāyaṇdās (1978–9: 281, *Śrīdādūpanth Paricay*, Book 2) and Śarmā (1937: 84).

⁸³ Nārāyaṇdās was a third-generation disciple of Dādū Dayāl and was a direct disciple of Gharsīdās. Śarmā (1937, Vol. 1: 27–8) notes that two of Gharsīdās's disciples' tombs were built at Sundardās's monastery in Fatehpur-Shekhawati in 1639 (vs 1696) and 1668 (vs 1725).

⁸⁴ Rāghavdās (1965, *Bhaktamāl*, v. 515).



Figures 1 and 2. *Khāś rukkā* –I (Special edict–I), pp. 208–209. Source: Courtesy of the Mehrangarh Museum Trust, Jodhpur (hereafter MMT).

of the lord of the kings the great monarch Shri Vijay Singhji. And in the village Cāmpāsar where lies Dādū Panthī Haridās and Nevalrām’s abode, five tax-free farms of irrigated land with one public watering place including a well for public use. An edict regarding these places was issued by King Ajit Singhji in 1708 (vs 1765) on the fourteenth of the dark-half of the month of Aṣāṛh. Based on that donation an order is given even now that these places will be held by the posterity of the Dādū Panthī’s disciples Manīrām and Cetandās.

[2]

श्री हजूर रा परवाना री नकल
 श्री अभिसिंहजी वचनात
 तथा गाँव चांपासर माहे स्वामी नारायणदास रो अस्तल नै खेत 5 छै
 तिण री संनधां २ आगली महाराजा श्री जसवंतसिंहजी री सलामती री छै
 तिण वर हुकम म्हे पिण दीया छै सु स्वामी हरिदास नैवलराम सीख पाया जासी हुकम छै
 संनधां री विगत
 सनद 1, संवत 1724 रा काती वद 4 मुकाम ओसंगाबाद री
 सनद 1, 1728 रा भद्रवा सुद तीज
 मुकाम अमेदाबाद री 2 संनधां
 विगत 5 खेत पाँच पीछ डोली छै पोहर पाणी री, पीछ पोहर एक री'

A copy of the edict of his highness. From the order of Shri Abhay Singhji
And in the village Cāmpāsar where there is the abode of Swami Nārāyaṇdās
with five farms

For those [farms] there are two earlier deeds which were issued under the
protection of King Jaswant Singhji.

Based on that donation an order is issued even now that these places will be
given to Swami Haridās and Nevalrām.

A description of two deeds:

Deed 1, 1667 (vs 1724) on the fourth of dark-half of the month Kārtik from
Aurangabad.

Deed 1, 1671 (vs 1728) on the third of light-half of the month Bhādrapad from
Ahmedabad's two deeds.

Record of five tax-free farms of irrigated land with one public watering place
and a well for public use.

The edict notes that the land grant that Jaswant Singh gave to Nārāyaṇdās was first recorded in 1708 in a notification during the time of King Ajit Singh. While issuing the notification about the Dādū Panthīs' rights on the same land, Ajit Singh relied on the written deeds from the time of his father Jaswant Singh.⁸⁵ When we read the *Bhaktamāl* description, which was written in 1660, alongside the courtly edicts issued to Nārāyaṇdās by Jaswant Singh a few years later in 1667 and 1671, we see that the interactions between the *sant* and the king went on for a longer period. Notably, the support that was initially established by Jaswant Singh forms a long history of patronage of Dādū Panthī individuals by this Rajput state. As the edict shows, later kings of Jodhpur, namely Ajit Singh, Abhay Singh, and Vijay Singh, all accepted Jaswant Singh's earlier deed and recognized the rights of the contemporaneous Dādū Panthīs to the monastery.⁸⁶ This is, of course, just one early example of several land grants, concessions, and donations that the Dādū Panthīs received from Marwar kings, particularly in the eighteenth century. This courtly patronage played a big role in establishing the Dādū Panth in Marwar, thereby forming the influential presence that the sect enjoyed until the late nineteenth century.⁸⁷

The patronage networks of the Dādū Panth in Marwar show that, in addition to the warrior ascetics among the Dādū Panthīs, several individuals and their respective institutions received handsome financial support in Marwar throughout the eighteenth century. As evidenced by the land grants of Jaswant Singh to Nārāyaṇdās, future kings followed that example. Abhay

⁸⁵ Due to the fact that these edicts are apparently affirmations of earlier grants, there is more work to be done on the documentation and archival documents regarding royal support of the Dādū Panthīs in Marwar.

⁸⁶ Besides these three kings, the *khās rukkā parwānā bahī* no. 9, MMT, records that King Man Singh further granted the Dādū Panthīs rights to the same monastery in 1835 (v. 1892).

⁸⁷ Pemārām (2014: 136–60). The records *khās rukkā* nos. 1, 6, 9 and *sanad parwānā* nos. 1, 5, 6, 8, 25, 58, 61, 80 as well as *paṭṭā bahī* no. 4, MMT, give details of the tax concessions, land grants, and recognition given to various Dādū Panthī individuals from the reign of Jaswant Singh I to the early twentieth century.

Singh (r. 1724–1749) not only renewed contemporaneous Dādū Panthīs' rights over Nārāyaṇdās's monastery but also gave protection to *mahant* Kṛṣṇadev who fled from the Dādū Panthī centre in Naraina to avoid pressures from the Jaipur king Sawai Jai Singh's statecraft policies.⁸⁸ Kṛṣṇadev lived in Merta (a major town of the Marwar kingdom) for many years. Court chronicles note that the Dādū Panthīs' place in Merta was one of the prominent religious locations in the town, and King Abhay Singh awarded land grants to it:

दादूपंथी साद बेजपार री जायगा आधी माहाराजा श्री अभैसिंघजी रै राज में दीवी⁸⁹

Half of the property of the Dādū Panthī saint was given during the reign of King Abhai Singh.

Several court edicts of Marwar show an increase in patronage of the Dādū Panthīs in the region during the mid-eighteenth century. It was in Vijay Singh's reign (1752–93) that the Dādū Panthīs built their first monastery in the city of Jodhpur.⁹⁰ The kings Vijay Singh and Bhim Singh (r. 1793–1803) are noteworthy for having given immense support and recognition to the Dādū Panthīs in the sub-districts of Nagaur and Merta.⁹¹ Dādū Panthī individuals were given one rupee from each village in Merta.⁹² Because of this royal patronage, the centre in Merta rose in importance to become second only to the Dādū Panthīs' main shrine in Naraina.⁹³ Man Singh helped the Dādū Panthīs with their temple-building project in 1827–8 in Naraina.⁹⁴ The Dādū Panthīs enjoyed high power in Marwar at least until the late nineteenth century, as noted in the Hindi Census Report of Marwar in 1891:

There is such a high level of honor (*kurab*) of the [Dādū Panthī] *mahants* of Naraina in Jaipur and Jodhpur. They only come with an invitation sending special notifications (*khās rukkā*). Chieftains (*sardār*) and ministers (*diwān*)

⁸⁸ For Sawai Jaisingh policies, see Horstmann (2011). Nārāyaṇdās (1978–9: 85, *Śrīdādūpanth Paricay*, Book 1). Jaipur's Sawai Jaisingh's self-fashioning as an ideal Hindu king and saviour of the cosmic order (*varṇāśrama dharma*) compelled the Krishna devotee *bhakti* communities, which had migrated to his region, to establish their orthodox credentials. Sawai Jaisingh's policies also inspired changes in the Dādū Panth, as their main shrine was not far from Jaipur. The disarmament of the warrior ascetics and requirement to live a married life were a few of the many demands that Sawai Jaisingh put forward to the religious communities. Dādū Panthī *mahants* were living as celibates for quite a number of decades before these developments took place. Therefore, the then *mahant* Kṛṣṇadev, not ready to accept the pressures, had to leave Naraina for the neighbouring kingdom Marwar.

⁸⁹ See the appendix (*parīśiṣṭ*) of Naiṅsī's *Mārwār rā paragnā rī vigat*, Part 2: 436 in Singh (1969). The *khyāt* and *vigat* writing was an ever-growing tradition in Marwar after Naiṅsī and a few later *khyāts* and *vigat* are now published in the same volume as Naiṅsī.

⁹⁰ *Report Mardumśumārī Rāj, Mārwār, 1891* (2010): 293.

⁹¹ For Merta, see *khās rukkā* no. 1, MMT. For Nagaur, see *sanad-parwānā bahī* no. 30, MMT.

⁹² *Khās rukkā* no. 1, MMT.

⁹³ Merta and Nagaur have a Dādū Panthī tradition flourishing to this day, with their centre at *Poh Dhām* (the temple of Poh) located on Merta to Nagaur Road.

⁹⁴ Nārāyaṇdās (1978–9: 155, *Śrīdādūpanth Paricay*, Book 1). This is with the donation of the marble of Makrana.

go all the way to the entrance of the capital-city (*rājdhānī*) to greet them. Even the kings (Maharaja Sahib) go to meet them in their camps.⁹⁵

The Vedānta of Sundardās and King Jaswant Singh

Sundardās's and Jaswant Singh's texts share themes in that they both describe the omnipresent supreme in purely *nirguṇ* devotional terms.⁹⁶ Jaswant Singh goes a step further, however, in not giving Vaiṣṇava devotion any significant place in his works on Vedānta. Therefore this section demonstrates that there is evidence for intellectual exchanges that happened between the Dādū Panthīs and the Marwar king. The works of Nārāyaṇdās, the *sant* who received land grants from Jaswant Singh, are unfortunately not well preserved, but one of his scholarly texts, the *brahmaṇḍa* (*Virtues of the Brahman*), shows that he composed poetry on philosophical topics such as Sāṃkhya.⁹⁷ The works of Sundardās, however, were circulated widely, and surprisingly were commissioned by the poet himself to be compiled into a single manuscript, completed in 1685 CE. This kind of care for writing and compiling one's own work is rarely observed among *sants*.⁹⁸ I have explored elsewhere Sundardās's engagements with the aesthetic tradition of Brajbhāṣā courtly poetry, of which Jaswant Singh is known to be a master.⁹⁹ A brief overview of Sundardās's corpus, however, is warranted to give an idea of how aesthetically skilful his poetry is. Sundardās is very critical of poetry that doesn't follow the rules of poetics, namely prosody and rhetorical theory, because he wants *sant* poetry to be pleasurable for both the 'assembly of poets' and for the connoisseurs (as well as for devotees). His 13 octaves—verse sets of eight or more lines—show not only his philosophical expositions on Vedānta, Sufism, and *bhakti* but also his multilingual talents. These octaves are written in a Brajbhāṣā template with registers of Purabi (eastern Hindi), Punjabi, Rekhta, Persian, and Sanskrit.¹⁰⁰ His shorter works include philosophical poetry on the 52 letters of the Nāgarī alphabet and riddles on literary conventions, and some allude to the practice of writing dictionaries. It would not be an exaggeration to call Sundardās one of the first and foremost poets of early modern Hindi who used many proverbs of various North Indian dialects and philosophical maxims of Sanskrit for didactic purposes. He not only

⁹⁵ Report *Mardumśumārī Rāj Mārwar*, 1891 (2010): 294.

⁹⁶ Compare, for example, Jaswant Singh's *anubhav-prakāś* with the *nirguṇ-upāsanā* (serving the *nirguṇ*) and *ātmānubhav* (knowing with experiencing) chapters (*ang*) in Sundardās's *savaiyā-granth* (collection of quatrains).

⁹⁷ Nārāyaṇdās (1978–9: 283–4, *Śrīdādūpanth Paricay*, Book 2). Sāṃkhya is a dualist philosophy which gives an evolutionary explanation of the empirical world and self, separating it from the ultimate self or pure consciousness.

⁹⁸ RORI, Vidhyabhushan Collection, MSS: 113. The colophon states that this manuscript was commissioned by Sundardās. This manuscript does not compile all of Sundardās's works. For example, a Ghazal/Gajal and some Rekhta poems that were attributed to Sundardās by Caturdās—the commentator of Rāghavdās's *Bhaktamāl*—do not appear in the manuscript.

⁹⁹ Rajpurohit (2021).

¹⁰⁰ See Horstmann (2014) for a translation and discussion on Sundardās's Persianized and Sufisque octaves.

presented himself as learned in the classical tradition of Sanskrit but also as conversant with the newly emerging Brajbhāṣā courtly poetry by composing in the style of extemporaneous compositions as well as complex pictorial poetry on theological topics.

A comparison of Sundardās's major scholarly works, the *Jñāna-Samudra* (*The Ocean of Knowledge*, 1653) and a collection of quatrains (*savaiyās*), with Jaswant Singh's key Advaita Vedānta work *Siddhānta-Sāra* (*Essence of Philosophies*) reveals their distinct positions on *bhakti* and Advaita Vedānta. Both Jaswant Singh and Sundardās predominantly used quatrain meters, which was a prominent style of courtly Brajbhāṣā poetry.¹⁰¹ Additionally, the fact that manuscripts of Jaswant Singh's texts on Vedānta are found in Dādū Panthī collections and that Sundardās's texts are preserved in the Jodhpur palace's manuscript collection—started by none other than Jaswant Singh himself—also confirms exchanges between these traditions and institutions that kept their works and memories alive.¹⁰² The Advaita theme is widely present in Jaswant Singh's less-studied and shorter texts. This is evident in his *Prabodh Nāṭak*, which is an adaptation of the eleventh/twelfth-century Sanskrit drama discussed earlier, the *Prabodha Candrodāya*. In this adapted Brajbhāṣā prose drama, all characters are translated according to the Sanskrit original, except for one major character: *viṣṇūbhakti* ('devotion to Vishnu'). Jaswant Singh translates *viṣṇūbhakti* simply as *āstikatā*, which is comparatively a more open-ended term meaning belief or piety. Jaswant Singh disregarded Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* and took a purely Advaita stand in his *Siddhānta-Sāra* as well. In this text, he presents each of the philosophies in a gradual progression, with Sāmkhya and yoga as subsidiary to Advaita Vedānta. Jaswant Singh describes a practitioner's gradual progression in Vedānta thoughts while integrating them with the four life stages (*aśrama*) of Hindus. Being less interested in presenting the intricacies of *bhakti* and yoga, Jaswant Singh rejects all of these philosophies, calling them 'mistaken' (*bhram*), and attempts to assert his uncompromising Advaita position:

भरम कयौं है ब्रह्म तैं ईश्वर भिन्न प्रकार ॥
निगुन सगुन ए मानि फिर भरम चल्यौ ब्यौहार ॥¹⁰³

By miscognition different types of Ishwara are created from the Brahman. Then considering them to be nirgun and sagun, worldly practices went on in illusion.

There is a pun in the three underlined words above, which aver that the supreme *brahmn* is true and other 'manifestations' are false or mere ignorance,

¹⁰¹ Sundardās's *savaiyā-granth* (collection of quatrains) and Jaswant Singh's *Anubhav-prakāś* (the light of realization) are both written in these forms.

¹⁰² For the Dādū Panthī's reading and preserving Jaswant Singh's texts, see Nārāyaṇdās (1978–9, Vol. 2: 278). For Sundardās's texts, see MSS: 248, 938 and 1392, MMT. Jaswant Singh is noted for his passion for preserving manuscripts and started the collection which later became the 'Pustak Prakash' (the light of books) housed at the Jodhpur fort museum.

¹⁰³ Miśra (1972: 171, *Siddhāntasāra*, v. 5).

that is, *bhram*. By negating Vaiṣṇava devotion and only validating Advaita thought, Jaswant Singh was also making a 'doctrinal' position. This agrees with the abstraction of the supreme truth rather than the absorption of all religious forms into a cosmic whole via embodied and ritual means which is the realm of Vaiṣṇava devotion. The above description is very much in harmony with the new culture of debate introduced at the Mughal court, as discussed in previous sections. Jaswant Singh's interests in Vedānta are concurrent with Dara Shukoh's positions on Vedānta whose claim for imperial succession Jaswant Singh supported. In the *Jñāna-Samudra*, on the other hand, Sundardās takes a great interest in describing *bhakti*, yoga, and Advaita Vedānta equally in order to abstract each of the knowledge systems. Sundardās uses Advaita Vedānta philosophy to reformulate earlier debates on *nirguṇ* versus *saguṇ* modes of devotion, where he stratifies various *bhakti* (s) such as the nine-fold (*navadhā*), and supreme love (*prema*) by placing the qualified non-dualist devotion (*parā-bhakti*) at the top. Under the wide umbrella of *jñāna* (gnosis) and overarching Advaita Vedānta, he asserts that *bhakti* and yoga (of contemplation) are also liberating theologies in their own right:

योग सिद्धांत सुनाइयो, अष्ट अंग संयुक्त ।
या साधन ब्रह्महि मिलै, तेऊ कहिये मुक्त ॥

[I have] narrated the theory of Yoga, integrated with its eight parts (*aṣṭa anga*),
Through this practice those who unite with the *Brahman*, are called liberated (*mukta*).¹⁰⁴

Non-dualist thought forms the central theme in Sundardās's corpus, and he self-identifies with the *jñānis* of the non-dualist sort. In his 'collection of quatrains', Sundardās integrates 'knowing with experience' (*ātmanubhava*) into his main philosophical position. By doing so, Sundardās not only juxtaposes his *nirguṇ* devotion to the Vedāntic idea of gnosis but also downplays the importance of the six philosophies.¹⁰⁵

Dādū Panthī networks expand among the bardic poets

The Dādū Panthīs successfully spread to Marwar the seventeenth-century literary culture which formed in Banaras, Fatehpur Sikri, and Amber, and which resonated with the new Mughal imperial paradigm. The ever-growing prominence of Vedānta reveals that this expansion was related to the spread of a new imperial culture as well as the predominance of abstract and intellectualized manifestations of religion over the felt and embodied forms of temple Hinduism. This state patronage intensified interactions among the Dādū

¹⁰⁴ Śarmā (1937, Vol. 1: 56, *Jñānasamudra*, v. 90).

¹⁰⁵ As he says in a verse 'Sundar says, the six-philosophies are debating with each other, but those who have the knowledge with experience never get carried away with such debates'. Ibid.: Vol. 2: *Savaiya Granth*, 28:18.

Panthīs and members of the Cāraṇ community, literary composers, and performers who are now referred to as ‘bards’ but were actually much more, being expert poets. By tracing Dādū Panthī networks in Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh through the literary community of the Cāraṇs, we can see that ornate courtly literature and Vedānta had sustained purchase in such exchanges. Examples of this change include the presence of Sundardās’s scholarly texts in the syllabus of the court poetry school of Bhuj, Gujarat, in the mid-eighteenth century and the Dādū Panthīs’ composition of hagiography in Marwari and their influential presence in the court of Bundi.

Michael Allen has studied a great example wherein the Bundi king invited the Dādū Panthī, Banaras-trained Advaitin Niścaldās (d. 1863) to his court.¹⁰⁶ Niścaldās’s Vedānta text *Vicār Sāgar* (*The Ocean of Inquiry*) was highly praised, including by the later monk Svami Vivekananda. What is of concern here, however, is the growing tradition and culture of exchange between Dādū Panthīs and courtly Cāraṇ poets, the well-honoured guides of Rajput kings. An example of this exchange is the multilingual poet and last great master of Marwari at the Bundi court, Suryamall Misan (1815–68), who precisely notes that he learned Advait Vedānta from a fellow Cāraṇ, Svarūpdās Dethā (d. 1863).¹⁰⁷ The latter was a Dādū Panthī *sant* in the disciple tradition of Rajab. At the beginning of his magnum opus, the *Vamsh Bhaskar* (*The Sun Clan, circa 1841–57*), Suryamall pays tribute to his mentor Svarūpdās in Sanskrit:

In brief, I was taught the treatise of Pantañjali together with the commentary of King Bhoja, the unassailable (*dustarkyā*) manual for poets by Mammaṭa, the shorter works of Advaita, and the science of categories (*tattva*) in Nyāya and Kaṇāda (*Vaiśeṣika*). I bow deeply (*bāḍham*) to that teacher of generous mind (*udāracetana*) who taught these to me—the Abode of Pure Form, Svarūpa.¹⁰⁸

This verse exemplifies the knowledge systems that were important for the training of a Dādū Panthī *sant* like Svarūpdās Dethā at this time. It is arguably the culmination of the process we see, beginning with the training of Sundardās mentioned in the previous sections of this article. This exchange between two intellectuals of the same caste background tells us the importance of the Cāraṇ community networks across regional courts.

The growing contact between the Cāraṇ community and the Dādū Panth goes back to Dādū himself. During his visit to the Marwar region, Dursā Āṛhā—who is revered as one of the finest poets of Marwari and was greatly honoured by the kings of the Marwar, Mewar, and Sirohi states—is said to have met with Dādū.¹⁰⁹ In this interaction, Dādū confirms the Cāraṇ Dursā

¹⁰⁶ Allen (2017).

¹⁰⁷ Deval (2001: 16–25) and for Svarūpdās Dethā’s extensive introduction and Dādū Panthī background, see Nārāyaṇās (1978–9: 754–66, *Śrīdādūpanth Paricay*, Book-1).

¹⁰⁸ Deval (2007: 18, v. 65). I thank Donald Davis for translating this verse. Personal email communication, 3 April 2021.

¹⁰⁹ For Dādū’s interactions with Dursā Āṛhā, see Dādū’s hagiography, Callewaert (1988, DJLP 13:15–7). For Dursā Āṛhā’s introduction, see Menaria (2006: 114).

Āṛhā's firm devotion to the formless godhead (who resides within) rather than to incarnations of Vishnu which were becoming popular among bards at this time. Another interaction with Dursā Āṛhā that is famous in Dādū Panthī hagiography was that of Rajab, an expert poet and the foremost disciple of Dādū. In the *Bhaktamāl* of Rāghavdās, Rajab is said to have defeated Dursā Āṛhā in a literary feat, thus making Rajab a better poet than the accomplished local bard.¹¹⁰ Beyond hagiography, the Dādū Panthīs took an interest in the poetry of the Cāraṇs, including Dursā Āṛhā, as their poetry is evidently preserved in the Dādū Panthī manuscripts.¹¹¹ An interesting case of how the bardic community turned towards composing devotional poetry, in which the Dādū Panthīs were already outshining locals, is the poet-saint Brahmādās. Brahmādās was a Dādū Panthī who composed a *Bhagatmāl* (or rather six shorter ones) in Marwari during King Vijay Singh's reign in the eighteenth century.¹¹² With this *Bhagatmāl*(s), Brahmādās recontextualized the widely circulating Brajbhāṣā *Bhaktamāl* tradition, started by Rāmānandī Nābhādās (fl. 1600), for a Marwari literary milieu. Composed in one of the most difficult literary styles of bards (in *vayaṇ sagāi* alliteration), which was highly regarded among the bardic poets of Marwar, this *Bhagatmāl* gives considerable space to regional holy men and devotional communities. It also blends Vaiṣṇava traditions with *sant bhakti*.

The Cāraṇ caste was widespread in northwestern India. Two larger subgroups of Cāraṇs—those who had origins in Marwar and those who hailed from Kutch in Gujarat—were spread out in the states known today as Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan.¹¹³ Through the use of the shared literary idiom of Marwari, the Cāraṇ poets brought these regions together. A prominent example of this process was the Cāraṇ poet Hammīrdān Ratnu of Marwar, who became the mentor to Kutch's King Rao Desal (r. 1718–41). Networks of Cāraṇ poets like Hammīrdān Ratnu were arguably the reason why the Dādū Panthī Sundardās's poetry reached from Marwar to Kutch, Gujarat. The Kutch state's manuscript collection in Bhuj shows that Sundardās's *Jñāna-Samudra* was prepared for Rao Desal's own study, and his texts were included on the syllabus of the unique Brajbhāṣā poetry school run by the state.¹¹⁴ It is in the same bardic tradition in which Mangaldās (late nineteenth century), with his expertise in composing genealogies, presents the history of the warrior-ascetic branch of Dādū Panth.¹¹⁵ Foremost among those members of the Cāraṇ community trained by Dādū Panthī monks is actually Swarūpdās Dethā, mentioned above, who later became the

¹¹⁰ Rāghavdās (1965, *Bhaktamāl*, vv. 381–2).

¹¹¹ RORI, Vidhyabhushan Collection, MSS: 34.

¹¹² For an exchange between King Vijay Singh and Brahmādās, see *Bhagatmāl* of Brahmādās, Ujjwala (1997 [1959], editor's introduction).

¹¹³ *Report Mardumshumari rajmarwar, Mārwar, 1891* (2010): 334–49.

¹¹⁴ For the Brajbhāṣā school of Bhuj, see Mallison (2011). The Āinā Mahal (Mirror Palace) built by Rao Desal still preserves several manuscripts of Sundardās's works. During my visit to Bhuj in June 2016, I noticed that the manuscript collection has a handwritten catalogue and does not assign a manuscript a particular number.

¹¹⁵ Miśra (1997: 202–4).

guru of kings in Sitamau and Ratlam in Madhya Pradesh. In addition to short texts on Vedānta themes, Swarūpdās Dethā composed the Rajasthani version of the epic *Mahabharata*—the *Pāṇḍav Yaśendu Candrikā* (*The Moonrise of Fame of the Pāṇḍavas*, 1839) which gained popularity in Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Madhya Pradesh.

This is not an exhaustive account, but the examples above do show that the Dādū Panth had a defining impact on the literary and religious culture of the Marwar region and beyond. Through this influence not only did major genres like *Bhaktamāl* take new shape in Marwari but the history of the sect's warrior branch itself was narrated in the regional tradition of martial narrative composition. The tradition of learning, as well as the engagements with elite cultural discussions started by Dādū Panthīs like Jangopāl and Sundardās, came full circle in the nineteenth century when the community built networks with the foremost court poets and intellectuals in Marwar.

Conclusion

Jack Hawley has convincingly argued that *bhakti*, of which the Dādū Panthīs were a part, should be understood in its plural manifestations instead of a singular unified 'movement' or *āndolan* as it is called in Indian languages. *Bhakti* traditions were individually constituted yet formed networks with each other by participating in a shared religiosity through music, hagiographic narratives, literary genres, and tropes in several languages over centuries.¹¹⁶ The long-held view that the *sants* worked in the realm of the public and were unconcerned with or mostly against political authority appear to be only fragmented understandings of *bhakti*.¹¹⁷ We now know that agents like Brahmans, courtly elites, pastoral communities, artisans, and merchant communities, among many others, developed the *bhakti* networks connecting religious locations and trade centres in the early modern era.¹¹⁸ The growth of the Dādū Panthī community over the course of three centuries fits this interpretation in terms of its spatial, caste, literary, and courtly networks. The example of the Dādū Panth outright contradicts the notion of those historians who presented the idea of the North Indian '*Nirgun School*' that *sants* like Kabīr were 'as a rule illiterate or very superficially read'.¹¹⁹

In the article we have discussed that the Dādū Panth was part of a major shift in the history of the *sant-bhakti* tradition as its identity was formed in engagement with the new Mughal-Rajput imperial model. The community also participated in the discourses of this new model that was marked by the concept of *sulh-i kull*. What is important in this imperial model is that all religious communities, large and small, old and new, engaged with the

¹¹⁶ Hawley (2015: 327–33).

¹¹⁷ Marxist critic Rāmvilās Śarmā (1949 [1944]: 89–101) proposed that the main struggle in the Mughal period was between the Mughal-Rajput feudal lords and the exploited peasants who were given voice in the poetry of the Rama devotee Tulsīdās.

¹¹⁸ Hawley (2015: 295–312).

¹¹⁹ Barthwal (1978: 30).

Mughal court in order to justify their existence and establish their legitimacy. This shows the new imperial rationality at work that encouraged all communities to rethink and articulate anew their religious identity with reference to one another and to the empire. This kind of ‘registering’ is manifested not only in hagiographical and other literary forms discussed in the article but also in the memories and rhetoric that the inscriptions of Dādū Panthī monastic centres present. Such discourse depicts Dādū’s disciples as existing side-by side with the Mughals and their noblemen or alongside Rajput *Mansabdārs* in their monastic centres of Rajasthan. The way in which the disciples are related to Dādū in such inscriptions displays a genealogical stability and empire-building order. Take, for example, this pillar inscription of Sundardās’s monastery in Fatehpur of Shekhawati:

Śrī Rām Rām, *Samvat* 1688

In 1631 (1688 vs) during the month of *kārtik*,

It was the 8th of the dark-half and the day was Wednesday.

Dādū’s disciple, the great *sant*, who can be superior to him,
Prāgdās conquered the world and obtained the supreme abode.

Delhi’s lord is Jahangir and his son Shahjahan is now ruling,
Daulat Khan is the king of Fatehpur, whose son is Tahar Khan,

Santdās adorns the groups of *sants* in every manner,

He had the assembly hall (*rāmśāl*) built where holy men live.¹²⁰

The inscription takes us back to the verse we read at the beginning of the article which showed a kind of ‘registering’ strategy on the part of Dādū and his disciple Rajab towards models of Mughal-Rajput ruling. The way in which the Dādū Panthīs relate to their guru equates with how noblemen relate to their emperor—that is, Dādū gives authority to his disciples, who take his message further, by creating a realm of spiritual rule. This was precisely the spirit in which Abu’l Fazl called the new era under Akbar the ‘caliphate of *tahqiq*’, that is, the empire of ‘verification’ and ‘realization’ of divine truth.¹²¹

First growing out from the Amber region and then developing their main centre in Naraina during the later years of Dādū’s lifetime, the seventeenth century saw Dādū’s disciples expand their networks in Banaras, Fatehpur Sikari, Amber, and Marwar. In later centuries, this expansion of networks also included the bardic court poets. This process demonstrates that the Dādū Panthīs’ expertise, which included everything from skill in major intellectual discourses and knowledge system like Vedānta to command over ornate literary tradition and high skills in *bhakti* homiletics, was a major factor in their ascendancy.

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¹²⁰ Miśra (2010: 124). There is a potential error in the date of the inscription as the Gregorian date conversion doesn’t agree that it was Wednesday when the inscription was written. I thank Norbert Peabody for pointing this out to me.

¹²¹ See Pye’s article in this special issue.

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