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Siddhānt Paṭal: A Foundation Text of Rāmānandī ‘Yogic Asceticism’

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Religious Studies

by

Hunter John Hill

December 2025

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The Thesis of Hunter John Hill is approved:

Committee Chairperson

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Dedication

To the wonderful women in my life, who have supported me at my lowest, for it is their strength that inspires me to reach for the stars.

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Introduction

Despite being regularly cited as perhaps the largest and most consequential traditional order of *sādhus* in India, the Rāmānandī *sampradāy* has received relatively little scholarly attention. The Rāmānandīs trace their lineage to the 14th-15th century Vaiṣṇava saint Rāmānand, who is said to have broken from the Śrī *sampradāy* of Rāmānuja and founded his own sect centered in Varanasi, amassing around a dozen prominent disciples. While Rāmānandī religiosity is generally centered around devotion (*bhakti*) to the divine couple Sītā-Rām (i.e., Rāmcandra, the protagonist of the *Rāmāyaṇa* narrative, and his wife Sītā), Peter van der Veer argues that understanding them exclusively as a ‘*bhakti* sect’ “hinders the correct interpretation of the present nature of this group and its internal divisions, as well of its evolution over time.”¹ Indeed, tracing the origins, development, and current state of the Rāmānandī *sampradāy* leads one down a rich and variegated path, incorporating practices and principles from multiple spiritual disciplines.

Historically, the primary subdivision amongst Rāmānandīs was between two major branches representing two differing interpretations of Rāmānand’s teachings - the *tapasī śākhā* (ascetic branch) and *rasik śākhā* (aesthetic branch). Hagiographical literature indicates that Kṛṣṇadās Payahārī, the purported grand-disciple of Rāmānand, founded the ascetic branch of the *sampradāy* in the 16th century. Kṛṣṇadās and his disciplic lineage are remembered as both great *bhaktas* (devotees) and accomplished *yogīs*, combining devotion to a formless (*nirguṇ*) Rām with practices of bodily

¹ Van der Veer 1987: 680.

asceticism. Establishment of the *rasik śākhā* is credited to Agradās, a disciple of Kṛṣṇadās. Drawing influence from Eastern Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* traditions, it is centered on aesthetic devotion to Rām with qualities (*saguṇ*), emphasizing idol worship (*mūrti pūjā*) and an emotional connection to Sītā-Rām. A similar typology is observable in contemporary times, with scholars identifying the two primary Rāmānandī subgroups as *rasiks* (aesthetic devotees) and *tyāgīs* (ascetic renouncers), the latter of which survive as a collection of itinerant lineages whose teachings and practices are an integrated mélange of *bhakti*, yoga, and *tapasyā* (asceticism).

A text which perhaps reflects the teachings and lifestyle of the *tyāgīs* better than any other - and which will be the subject of this study - is *Siddhānt Paṭal*, a collection of sixty-five *mantras* written predominantly in an archaic form of Hindi that are recited by *tyāgīs* as an ordinary part of their ritual life and daily activities. *Siddhānt Paṭal* reflects the lifestyle and teachings of the *tyāgīs*, as it presents Rām devotion in the practical and theoretical framework of ascetic yoga and “contain[s] detailed instructions on every aspect of physical purity.”² Traditionally attributed to Rāmānand, *Siddhānt Paṭal* is historically linked with the practices and perspective of the *tapasī śākhā*, and has been implicated in debates surrounding who Rāmānand was, the nature of his teachings, the types of compositions he may have written, and the history of the *sampradāy* that formed in his name. Especially at issue has been the yogic nature of its contents, particularly what Rāmānand’s advocacy of yoga would mean for how we view him as a religious teacher. This issue of whether or not Rāmānand propagated a form of yogic teaching, and

² Mallinson 2005: 114.

its broader implications for determining his historical character and the nature of the Rāmānandī *sampradāy*, will be covered in two major sections of this work (see “Connection with the Nāth *Yogīs*?” and “Svāmī Rāmānand Controversy: *Ācārya* or *Avadhūt*?” below).

For decades, there has been a general scholarly consensus that yoga (derived from the Nāth tradition) was one of the primary influences - along with Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* - on the development of *sant* spirituality in North India, particularly the teachings of those *bhakti* poets commonly labeled as ‘*nirguṇī sants*’ (e.g., Rāmānand, Kabīr, Nāmdev, Ravidās, Dādū Dayal, Nānak, etc.).³ James Mallinson relates that:

The *nirguṇa bhakti* movement propounded by the Sants spread across North India between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries and had a profound effect on asceticism. All four orders [the Daśanāmīs, Nāths, Udāsīs, and Rāmānandīs] worship the divine as without attributes (*nirguṇa*) in the manner of the Sants. They advocate *bhakti* and the repetition of the name of God as the best, and sometimes the only, means of liberation. Gorakhnāthīs, Udāsīs and Dasnāmīs are much given to the shouting of *alakh* (Sanskrit, *alakṣya*), “imperceptible,” a word often used to describe the divine in *nirguṇa* poetry. The *Siddhānt Paṭal*, a Tyāgī ritual handbook in Hindī, is full of *nirguṇa* terms.⁴ In its opening verse the divine is described as the *alakh puruṣ*.⁵

As we will have the chance to explore in this work, many of these so-called “*nirguṇa* terms” were adopted and adapted by the *sants* from that very Nāth system of yoga from which they drew inspiration, and the “*nirguṇa* terms” that Mallinson observes throughout the text of *Siddhānt Paṭal* reflect this derivation. The same can be said of other ‘Hindī’

³ “In the case of the Naths, there is a clear continuity of attitudes and themes, and the general scholarly consensus is that the Sants represent a synthesis of Vaishnava *bhakti* and elements from the tradition of the Naths” (Schomer 1987: 8).

⁴ This accords with Burghart’s observation that “the vocabulary is directly related to or derivative from the *nirgun* school of Hindi poetry” (Burghart 1980: 22).

⁵ Mallinson 2005: 116 n.8.

works attributed to Rāmānand, leading many to identify a ‘yogic influence’ (particularly from the Nāths) in his teachings that is a microcosm of ‘*nirguṇ bhakti*’ as a whole. Others are more skeptical of such yogic features in his work, attributing them to later developments in the Rāmānandī *sampradāy* - such as the establishment of the *tapasī śākhā* - which perhaps came about due to influences from local Nāth *yogīs*.⁶ The differences of opinion on this issue are quite relevant to a historical analysis of *Siddhānt Paṭal*, and - as such - will be discussed at length in this work.

That said, this work has three primary objectives: 1) to establish the current scholarly understanding of the provenance, contents, and usage of *Siddhānt Paṭal*, and where gaps exist in that understanding, so that a path may be charted for future investigations into the text and its origins, influences, transmission history, etc., 2) to speak to broader issues surrounding the text that may be addressed by further study of *Siddhānt Paṭal* and the rest of Rāmānand’s Hindi oeuvre, particularly whether he was influenced by the Nāth *yogīs* and what his spiritual ideology was, and 3) to identify the scholarly significance of *Siddhānt Paṭal* when it comes to research on the Rāmānandī *sampradāy*, as well as on South Asian traditions of yoga and asceticism more broadly.

Few references to - and even fewer quotations and translations from - *Siddhānt Paṭal* exist in both Hindi- and English-language scholarship. Indeed, even research into the ascetic branch of Rāmānandīs is limited to a select few scholars. On the one hand, this is surprising, given the Rāmānandīs’ prominence and ubiquity in North India as its largest monastic order; however, on the other, it may be understandable given the precipitous

⁶ E.g., Śrīvāstava 1957: 204.

decline in numbers of members committed to an ascetic lifestyle.⁷ Regardless, I argue that the study of Rāmānandī ascetics - and especially of texts like *Siddhānt Paṭal*, which reflect the quotidian observances and practicalities of the ascetic lifestyle - can give us a unique insight into the lived and embodied context of yoga and asceticism in South Asia. Further, Rāmānandī ascetics are an extremely important part of several related (sometimes overlapping and interlinking) stories of religion in South Asia, e.g., the rise and spread of Rām *bhakti*, the formation and character of ascetic *sampradāys*, the intersection of yoga, *bhakti*, and asceticism, and the practice of yoga (particularly in traditional ascetic lineages), some of which have become relevant to the lives of individuals and cultures across the globe.

⁷ Lamb 2006: 180-181.

Provenance

Due to the fact that *Siddhānt Paṭal* has not been studied in much depth, the current scholarly understanding of its provenance is quite minimal, and largely based on speculation, surface-level linguistic analysis, and small pieces of internal evidence. As noted above, it has traditionally been attributed to Rāmānand; the text’s own colophon attests to this fact.⁸ However, scholars have long questioned - and indeed rejected - this attribution, assigning its composition instead to the ascetics of the *tapasī śākhā*.

Badrīnārāyaṇ Śrīvāstav is perhaps the earliest of these scholars, basing his conclusion partially on internal evidence, namely the third-person references to Rāmānand found throughout the text, the appellation of “*guru*” before his name, and the mention of the names of Kabīr and his son Kamāl.⁹ He even goes as far as to suggest that the author of the text may have been not just any *tapasī*, but a certain Kṣemdās,¹⁰ a name which shows up in *Siddhānt Paṭal*’s opening composition. Citing Nābhādās’s *Bhaktmāl*, he identifies one Khemdās (≈Kṣemdās) as a disciple of Kṛṣṇadās Payahārī’s disciple Ṭīlā. Given the popularity of yoga in Kṛṣṇadās’s lineage, Śrīvāstav deems it not unreasonable to think that Kṣemdās could have authored *Siddhānt Paṭal*, and may even have included the name of Rāmānand to elevate the importance of his text.¹¹ Others do not go as far. Pinuccia Caracchi, for example, simply ascribes the text to the *tapasī śākhā*, further emphasizing that they - after all - are the only Rāmānandīs that seem to support its attribution to

⁸ *Siddhānt Paṭal*: 46; Paṇḍey 1991: 1007.

⁹ Śrīvāstav 1957: 130-132.

¹⁰ Śrīvāstav 1957: 132.

¹¹ Śrīvāstav 1957: 132.

Rāmānand.¹² She looks to the style and content for evidence of the *tapasī śākhā*'s hand in its composition. Stylistically, she describes it as 'disordered and chaotic' and 'decidedly popular', resembling more of a nursery rhyme or a folk tale than a doctrinal work - which its title suggests¹³ - and content-wise as mostly consisting of "yogic or mystical experiences, exhortations and practical instructions related to *sādhana*, and above all the explanation, transmission, and practice of *mantras*."¹⁴

If the attribution of *Siddhānt Paṭal* is still quite uncertain, even less is known about its date of composition. Richard Burghart, whose opinion is shared by other recent scholars,¹⁵ places the compilation of the text between the 17th and 18th centuries,¹⁶ though he acknowledges that "I have not seen any manuscripts of this text, nor do I know at what time these *mantras* were compiled under the title of the *Siddhānt Paṭal*."¹⁷ With the lack of any evidence or further analysis presented, this appears to be nothing more than a guess. As I have found in my own research (see the "Manuscripts" section below), all of the known and dated manuscripts of *Siddhānt Paṭal* were written in the late 19th century, but this doesn't necessarily give us any better of a clue as to its original date of composition, given the oral nature of transmission and the lack of in-depth research into the text and its history. As far as I know, no scholar aside from Burghart has attempted to procure any manuscripts for their research on *Siddhānt Paṭal*, let alone locate any manuscripts that may be held by individual Rāmānandīs or their institutions.

¹² Caracchi 2017: 138.

¹³ Caracchi 2017: 139.

¹⁴ Caracchi 2017: 139.

¹⁵ E.g., Mallinson 2011: 4.

¹⁶ Burghart 1978: 526-527.

¹⁷ Burghart 1980: 22.

Traditionally, *mantras* (such as those contained in *Siddhānt Paṭal*) are passed down orally from *guru* to disciple and would only be shared after the disciple had taken the requisite initiation and dedicated their life to the ascetic lifestyle. While such *mantras* are typically kept well-guarded within initiatory lineages and only shared orally with initiated disciples as a way of preserving their sanctity and correct usage, they are often later written down by followers as an act of preservation, a memorizational aid, etc. This is the case with oral literature in general, such as the poetry of the *sants*, which (while being a public form not confined to initiatory tradition) was originally only recited orally by the *sants* themselves, but which their followers developed an interest in preserving in written form.¹⁸ This situation makes it notoriously difficult to pin down the dating and attribution of such compositions, for beyond determining when a manuscript was written, one must judge the authenticity of the composition itself, whether it was composed by the author to whom it is attributed or (for example) one of their followers, from when the composition itself might originate (as it almost certainly predates its having been written down), etc. Then there is the emic-etic issue; insiders belonging to a particular tradition may preserve an understanding of a text's provenance that does not accord with the scholar's historical, literary, and/or linguistic analysis. For these reasons, any determination of *Siddhānt Paṭal*'s provenance should, at the current moment, be taken with a grain of salt.

¹⁸ For more on the development of written traditions of vernacular *bhakti* poetry in North India, see Williams 2024.

As an additional note, on the topic of the transmission of *Siddhānt Paṭal*'s *mantras*, Burghart explains that:

The Great Renouncer novice in theory learns the *mantra* from his doctrinal *guru* rather than from the book; the book serves primarily as an aid in memorization. If, however, the novice should try to learn the *mantras* independently of his *guru*, it is doubtful that the novice would understand either the meaning of the *mantras* or the way in which the *mantras* are to be recited. The *mantras* can only be understood if one knows the key to the esoteric meaning of the words and it is the doctrinal *guru* who holds the key.¹⁹

In addition to giving some hints as to how the *mantras* were likely transmitted before (and indeed after) being committed to writing, this passage highlights the esoteric nature of their content. As we shall see below, the particular sort of enigmatic language that *Siddhānt Paṭal* makes use of is hallmark of the Nāth *yogīs*' vernacular compositions, and much of its coded lexicon consists of terms and concepts which are common in, and likely derive from, the Nāth yogic system.

¹⁹ Burghart 1980: 23.

Usage and Contents

Asceticism is the predominant theme of *Siddhānt Paṭal* and, as is also clear from attempts to identify its provenance, it has typically been associated with the Rāmānandī *tapasī śākhā* and the modern-day *tyāgīs*. Śrīvāstava, for example, lists *Siddhānt Paṭal* among the ‘small *granth*s’ used by the *tapasī śākhā*,²⁰ along with *Rām Rakṣā Stotra* and *Yog Cintāmaṇi*, two other compositions attributed to Rāmānand which also display yogic and ascetic features. He says there are many such ‘small *granth*s’ used by the ‘sub-branches’ of the Rāmānandī *sampradāy*. By listing these separately and secondarily to other major texts used by the Rāmānandīs, and identifying them with specific branches, he seems to be suggesting that they are more ‘sectarian’ in nature and - by extension - especially in the case of texts attributed to Rāmānand, more likely to be spurious in their attribution. Writing in the late 1970s, Burghart notes that the contents of *Siddhānt Paṭal* “are still recited today in the itinerant monasteries of the sect,”²¹ by which he means the *khālsās* and *jamāts* of the various surviving *tyāgī* orders. However, he notes that of the sixty-five *mantras* contained in the text, “less than half are known by Great Renouncers today and...only about ten are actively used by the Great Renouncers whom I met in the Nepalese Tarāi.”²² Over time, many of the *mantras* seem to have been forgotten, perhaps due to a decline in numbers of Rāmānandī ascetics, disruption of lineages, or the existence of printed versions available as reference. Regardless, most of the ritual

²⁰ Śrīvāstava 1957: 67-68.

²¹ Burghart 1978: 526-527.

²² Burghart 1980: 23.

features found in *Siddhānt Paṭal* seem to have been upheld by the *tyāgīs*, some of which we will have occasion to explore in outlining its contents.

The contents of *Siddhānt Paṭal*, as found in the version of the text published by Paṃkaj Prakāśan in Mathura, are as follows:

1. *śrī guru rāmānand svāmī kī pañc mātrā* (“five measures of *guru Rāmānand*”)
2. *āsan mantra* (“seat/posture *mantra*”)
3. *kañṭhī hīrā mantra* (“diamond necklace *mantra*”)
4. *kuṃcī mantra* (“key *mantra*”)
5. *cīpiyā mantra* (“fire tongs *mantra*”)
6. *bāghambar mṛgchālā mantra* (“tiger skin and deerskin *mantra*”)
7. *śrī vairāgya ābhūṣaṇ mantra* (“dispassion/detachment paraphernalia *mantra*”)
8. *śrī dhāraṇ mantra* (“concentration *mantra*”)
9. *chūṃchī mantra* (“emptiness/void *mantra*”)
10. *alphī mantra* (“cloak *mantra*”)²³
11. *sanakādik mantra* (“Sanak, etc. [i.e. the mind-born sons of Brahmā] *mantra*”)
12. *dviṭīy kuṃcī mantra* (“second key *mantra*”)
13. *niraṃjan tārak mantra* (“undefiled savior *mantra*”)
14. *kāyā dhām kṣetra* (“sacred abode of the body”)
15. *siṃdūr caṛhāvan mantra* (“red powder application *mantra*”)
16. *vairāgya bīj mantra* (“dispassion seed *mantra*”)
17. *amar bīj mantra* (“immortality seed *mantra*”)
18. *brahm tārak mantra* (“savior Brahm[ā] *mantra*”)
19. *yajñōpavīt mantra* (“sacred thread *mantra*”)
20. *jaṭā mantra* (“matted locks *mantra*”)
21. *bhartharī bhikṣā mantra* (“Bhartṛhari alms *mantra*”)
22. *kāmdhenu mantra* (“wish-fulfilling cow *mantra*”)
23. *sūriyā kāmdhenu mantra* (“hero wish-fulfilling cow *mantra*”)
24. *cūlā citāvan mantra* (“stove awakening *mantra*”)
25. *jānakī jugal bhaṇḍār mantra* (“Jānakī [i.e., Sītā] couple treasure-house/feast *mantra*”)
26. *lakṣmī mantra* (“[Goddess] Lakṣmī *mantra*”)
27. *bhaṇḍār mantra* (“feast *mantra*”)
28. *tilak mantra* (“forehead mark *mantra*”)
29. *prasādī mantra* (“sacred offering *mantra*”)
30. *bhāgvatī mantra* (“[mālā] necklace *mantra*”)
31. *kurlā mantra* (“[mouth] rinse *mantra*”)
32. *hīrā mantra* (“diamond *mantra*”)

²³ According to Mallinson, “Today’s Naths...and other ascetics, in particular those that practice *haṭhayoga*,...sometimes wear a long cotton cloak with holes for the arms, known as an *alphī*” (2022: 84).

33. *dvitīy hīrā mantra* (“second diamond *mantra*”)
34. *yajñopavīt dhāraṇ mantra* (“sacred thread wearing *mantra*”)
35. *yajñopavīt lakṣaṇ* (“characteristics of the sacred thread”)
36. *yajñopavīt caṛhāvan mantra* (“wrapping the sacred thread [around the ear] *mantra*”)
37. *yajñopavīt śuddhi mantra* (“sacred thread purification *mantra*”)
38. *bāghambar citā mṛgchālā mantra* (“laying out the tiger skin and/or deerskin *mantra*”)
39. *dhūnī pānī mantra* (“sacred fire and water *mantra*”)
40. *pañc dhūnī mantra* (“five sacred fires *mantra*”)
41. *sapt dhūnī mantra* (“seven sacred fires *mantra*”)
42. *dhūnī pradakṣiṇā mantra* (“sacred fire circumambulation *mantra*”)
43. *dvitīy pañc dhūnī mantra* (“second five sacred fires *mantra*”)
44. *svāhā mantra* (“oblation *mantra*”)
45. *śaṁkh bīj mantra* (“conch seed *mantra*”)
46. *dvitīy cīpiyā mantra* (“second fire tongs *mantra*”)
47. *vairāg bīj mantra* (“dispassion seed *mantra*”)
48. *bhasma gāyatrī mantra* (“sacred ash seed *mantra*”)
49. *bhasma gāyatrī mantra* [2] (“sacred ash seed *mantra* [2]”)
50. *vibhūti palṭan mantra* (“sacred ash reversal *mantra*”)
51. *laṁgoṭī ārband mantra* (“loincloth and waistcloth *mantra*”)
52. *kalaṁgī kapālī aṁcalā bīj mantra* (“tuft, head, and turban seed *mantra*”)
53. *jholī mantra* (“sādhū’s bag *mantra*”)
54. *annapūrṇā bīj mantra* (“Goddess of food seed *mantra*”)
55. *saṁpradāy mantra* (“tradition *mantra*”)
56. *tulsī bīj mantra* (“Tulsī seed *mantra*”)
57. *tumbā bīj mantra* (“[gourd] water pot seed *mantra*”)
58. *kaṇṭhārī mantra* (“wooden bowl *mantra*”)
59. *śrī guru bīj mantra* (“venerable guru seed *mantra*”)
60. *śrī rām bīj mantra* (“venerable Rām seed *mantra*”)
61. *śrī viṣṇu vairāg bīj mantra* (“venerable Viṣṇu dispassion seed *mantra*”)
62. *mṛttikā mantra* (“clay [dentifrice?] *mantra*”)
63. *gudā prakṣālay mantra* (“bowel cleansing *mantra*”)
64. *gudā śuddhi mantra* (“bowel purification *mantra*”)
65. *vān saṁjyā mantra* (“bed of thorns *mantra*”)

Linguistically, the *mantras* are written in a mixture of Old Hindi and Sanskrit, with the vast majority of them in Hindi and scattered passages - and occasionally full *mantras* - in Sanskrit. In terms of content, the *mantras* are clearly meant to accompany a ritualistic, ascetic lifestyle. They may be loosely divided into three major categories: those dealing

with 1) ritual paraphernalia, 2) important figures and deities, and 3) ritual practices and concepts.

According to Burghart, previous scholars studying the use of ritual paraphernalia in ascetic traditions:

...have examined the ornaments of various Hindu and Buddhist ascetics as a means of marking inter-sectarian and intra-sectarian boundaries, but *the intrinsic purpose for which ascetics wear such ornaments remains poorly understood by persons outside these religious traditions*.²⁴

I argue that this not only applies to the so-called ‘ornaments’ of ascetic renouncers, but to their practices, their conceptualization of deities, and even their understanding of - and reasons for - renunciation in general. Indeed, on this last point, Burghart himself elsewhere emphasizes the value of the ascetic’s perspective vis-à-vis renunciation, arguing that “the non-ascetic’s point of view,” which is commonly overrepresented in scholarly works due to their privileging of the ‘Brāhmaṇical’ perspective²⁵ “is different from that of the ascetic and by itself cannot serve as an adequate framework for the analysis of renunciation.”²⁶ Part of *Siddhānt Paṭal*’s unique scholarly value is in its emic presentation of the Rāmānandī ascetic perspective, as it can help provide a proper framework for analyzing the particular sort of renunciation undertaken by *tyāgīs*.

Burghart, who undertook ethnographic research mostly with the more ‘extreme’ ascetics of the Rāmānandī order, the *mahātyāgīs* (or, ‘great renouncers’), states that “the ornaments of the Great Renouncers do not serve merely as insignia; many (but not all) of

²⁴ Burghart 1991: 107. My emphasis.

²⁵ See Burghart 1983.

²⁶ Burghart 1983: 636.

the ornaments are *icons*²⁷ which figure directly in the ascetic's spiritual discipline,"²⁸ defining an 'icon' as "an ornament which participates in the reality which it represents."²⁹ He argues that, more than being mere sectarian markers, these icons are efficacious in impelling the *tyāgī* along "the path of renunciation leading to the desireless state in which the embodied soul is reunited with the Invisible Spirit."³⁰ In order to be effective in spiritual practice, however, a ritual item must be purified or 'awakened', with a physical substance and/or a *mantra*. For example, the wooden bowl many *tyāgīs* use to eat out of is made ritually pure by rinsing it out with water and reciting the *kaṇṭhārī mantra*.³¹ The importance and efficacy of the consecrating *mantra* accompanying certain items and practices is sometimes attested in the *mantras* themselves. Examples include the *cūlā citāvan mantra*, which promises that "such a *yogī* who recites the *mantra* and awakens the stove obtains the highest state,"³² and the *bhasma gāyatrī mantra*, which similarly promises that "such a *yogī* who recites the *mantra* and applies the ashes obtains the highest state," but also warns that "one who applies the ashes without the *mantra* sinks to unfathomable depths; their body falls and they go to the city of death."³³ Therefore, one important function of these *mantras* is to ritually purify the item to make it suitable and effective for use in the *tyāgī*'s ritual life. But is not merely the *mantra*, and the ascetic's recitation of it, that make the item effective in his goal of union with the Absolute; in

²⁷ My emphasis.

²⁸ Burghart 1991: 110.

²⁹ Burghart 1991: 110.

³⁰ Burghart 1991: 109.

³¹ Gross 1992: 408-409.

³² *Siddhānt Pāṭal*: 21.

³³ *Siddhānt Pāṭal*: 37-38.

‘awakening’ item, the ascetic is bringing about its participation in a tradition originally ‘set in motion’ by important divine or semidivine figures. For example, the ascetics’ fire tongs are said to have been put into motion by Rām and Lakṣmaṇ; in this spiritual dimension, those very fire tongs are even said to pay obeisance (*daṇḍavat*) to the divine *satguru*.³⁴ In this way, the ascetic “make[s] the ornament in the form of the prototype given by the Invisible Spirit and then awaken[s] the ornament to its power as a representation or manifestation of the Invisible Spirit.”³⁵

As alluded to above, and attested in the *bhasma gāyatrī mantra*, this principle of mantric consecration applies not only to ritual paraphernalia, but (seemingly) to all ritual and spiritual activities of the *tyāgīs*. Such *mantras* are recited to ensure ritual purity in all of one’s actions as an ascetic practitioner, invoking, calling upon, and/or making offerings to deities (and other figures, such as one’s *guru*) to receive their blessings while also taking steps to ensure one’s physical body and space is pure. Robert Gross argues that, for *sādhus* in general, “external ritual purification and internal spiritual purification...are conceptually linked,” and that this observation is “significant in approaching the *sādhus*’ ritual world.”³⁶ In other words, outward physical and ritual purity are seen to lead to, or help one attain, inward mental and spiritual purity. Therefore, since *Siddhānt Paṭal* is related to various aspects of ritual life, beliefs regarding the origins and significance of certain ritual items and practices, the invocation of various divinities, and important ritual activities, it can provide us with more insight

³⁴ *Siddhānt Paṭal*: 9.

³⁵ Burghart 1991: 110.

³⁶ Gross 1992: 299.

into the precise nature of *sādhus*' (specifically, *tyāgīs*') methods of navigating and aligning the external and internal realms and preparing to receive divine grace.³⁷

The *kaṇṭhī hīrā mantra* may serve as an interesting and representative example of the function of Rāmānandī ritual paraphernalia. The “diamond necklace” referenced in *kaṇṭhī hīrā mantra* is a cotton (or *munjā* grass) thread upon which is strung a single *tulasī* wood bead and which is worn around the neck of all initiated *tyāgīs*. This *kaṇṭhī*, or necklace, is referred to by *tyāgīs* as *hīrā* (“diamond”). Gross explains that, for *tyāgīs*, the *kaṇṭhī hīrā*:

possesses extreme sanctity and assumes a great deal of importance in their ritual system: the large *tulasī* bead represents the Divine Mother, *Sītā*, and by placing Her power close to the body, the *kaṇṭhī* gives protection [from adversity] and accidents; it controls and purifies the throat cakra allowing only sweet words to be spoken; it is treated as a deity, and a bit of food is always offered to it before any meal; and if the thread breaks, a *Tyāgī* must not talk, eat, drink, or sleep until the *kaṇṭhī* is retied around his neck.³⁸

This explanation shows that, in some ways, for the aniconic *tyāgīs*,³⁹ ritual objects function similarly to the *mūrtipūjak*'s idol. Indeed, this would accord well with Burghart's observation of “a triadic relationship” in the context of their use of such ritual paraphernalia, “comprising the Invisible Spirit, the ornament, and the ‘awakener’.”⁴⁰ In this relationship, he argues, there are certain themes akin to temple iconography, “or as

³⁷ Since the ultimate spiritual goal for Rāmānandīs is eternal service of the divine (i.e., the divine couple *Sītārām*), and receiving divine grace (*prasād*) is instrumental in achieving this goal, they see bodily practices as a preparation to receive such grace, rather than as a guarantee of spiritual success or attainment (see e.g., Mallinson 2005: 114-115).

³⁸ Gross 1992: 376.

³⁹ “*Tyāgīs* do not worship anthropomorphic images of Rāma but use [*śāligrāms*], black ammonite stones from the Gaṇḍakī River in Nepal” (Mallinson 2005: 116 n.8). For Vaiṣṇavas, the *śāligrām* generally represents the aniconic form of Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇ.

⁴⁰ Burghart 1991: 113.

the Great Renouncers would say, ‘the body of an ascetic is a moving temple’.”⁴¹ If the ascetic’s body is a temple, might we also say that his adornments are the image of the deity, whose spirit is ‘installed’ within through the process of ‘awakening’? At the very least, we can see how the ritual consecration and adornment of the *kaṇṭhī hīrā* is linked to spiritual benefits, such as Sītā’s protection.

Some *mantras*, through their reference to particular sorts of paraphernalia, also suggest links to the broader ascetic culture in which the Rāmānandīs have no doubt been steeped since their inception. One such example is the *siṅgī*, an item strongly associated with the Nāth *sampradāy* and referenced three times in *Siddhānt Paṭal*: in *śrī rāmānand pañcmātrā*⁴², *alphī mantra*, and *kāmdhenu mantra*. Mallinson refers to the *siṅgī* as the “sine qua non of a Nath yogi,”⁴³ remarking that they are worn by all Nāth ascetics.⁴⁴ In premodern times, as depicted in Mughal miniatures from the 16th and 17th centuries, Nāths were known to wear animal horns (perhaps antelopes’) on short strings around their necks;⁴⁵ these were likely their original ‘*siṅgīs*’. Today, *siṅgīs* are considerably smaller, resembling more of a tiny whistle (which “can be made of a variety of materials, from gold to plastic”) strung around a black woolen thread (*selī* or *janeū*) along with “a *rudrākṣa* seed, and a flat ring [*pāvitrī*] made of metal, wood, or bone.”⁴⁶ Mallinson also notes that, although *siṅgīs* are overwhelmingly associated with Nāths, members of other

⁴¹ Burghart 1991: 113.

⁴² Another quite interesting item referenced in this composition in the *gorakh dhandā*, a sort of yogic puzzle consisting of “a rod strung through a series of intricately connected rings,” the object of which is “to get the rings on and off the rod” (Mallinson 2022: 85 n.58).

⁴³ Mallinson 2022: 83.

⁴⁴ Mallinson 2011: 11.

⁴⁵ Mallinson 2011: 11.

⁴⁶ Mallinson 2011: 11.

ascetic traditions - such as the Daśanāmī Saṃnyāsīs - have also been observed wearing *siṅgīs*. In relation to the Rāmānandīs in particular, Mallinson's Rāmānandī *tyāgī guru* - Śrī Rām Bālak Dās - informed him that the *siṅgī* mentioned in *Siddhānt Paṭal* actually refers to "tiger's claws when worn in pairs as an ornament on a Rāmānandī's *jaṭā* or dreadlocks."⁴⁷ While there is no reason to doubt what he relates about there being a Rāmānandī tradition of adorning *jaṭā* with tiger claws referred to '*siṅgī*', when looking at the context of its usage in *Siddhānt Paṭal*, it seems more likely that '*siṅgī*' is referring to the horn necklace associated with the Nāths and other ascetics.

While deities like Jānakī (Sītā), Annapūrnā, Brahmā, and Lakṣmī feature prominently in several of *Siddhānt Paṭal*'s *mantras*, *tulsī bīj mantra* is perhaps even more intriguing, for it appears to be in praise of Tulsīdās (c. 1532 – 1623), the famous Rām-worshipping saint and composer of *Rāmcaritmānas*, the 16th-century Avadhī version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* story noted for its tremendous popularity and wide disbursement, particularly in North India. The Rāmānandīs are chief among its reading public, for it functions as a central theological (and indeed practical) text for all branches of the *sampradāy*. There is a longstanding debate amongst South Asianists over whether Tulsīdās may have himself been a Rāmānandī. Daniela Bevilacqua considers it plausible to assume that Rāmānand's teachings may have had an influence on Tulsīdās' work.⁴⁸ There do indeed seem to be some striking similarities between Tulsīdās' thought and the beliefs of the Rāmānandīs, and Rāmānandīs clearly - at the very least, since the 18th

⁴⁷ Mallinson 2013: 81 n.20.

⁴⁸ Bevilacqua 2018: 74.

century - consider him to be one of their own.⁴⁹ A connection between Tulsī and the Rāmānandīs is attested in sources from that period, for Ramdas Lamb reports that, according to the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava Priyādās' *Bhaktirasbodhinī* (an 18th-century commentary on Nābhādās' *Bhaktmāl*):

Tulsīdās was rejected by his father after the death of his mother and was cared for by a poor woman until he was adopted by a wandering Rāmānandī *sādhū*, Naraharidās,⁵⁰ and raised in the tradition of Rām *bhakti*. The young Tulsīdās looked upon Naraharidās as both father and *guru*, and the depth of his respect for his teacher is reflected in his verses written in praise of and adulation for the *guru*.⁵¹

It is, of course, possible that these similarities could be explained by a potential mutual influence of one another, or the fact that they originally shared certain common sources of inspiration for their forms of Rām *bhakti* (such as *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*,⁵² *Agastyaśaṃhitā*,⁵³ etc.), but this does not rule out the possibility of Tulsīdās having been a Rāmānandī, especially considering the possibility of his having had a Rāmānandī *guru*. If *tulsī bīj mantra* is indeed in reference to Tulsīdās, it is an important piece of independent attestation to the Rāmānandīs' reverence - and perhaps claiming - of him.

⁴⁹ Bevilacqua 2018: 72-74.

⁵⁰ On the identification of Naraharidās, see Caracchi 2017: 168.

⁵¹ Lamb 2011.

⁵² "The *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* is the first known version of the Ram story to develop the perspective of Ram as the Absolute Brahman. It replaced Valmiki's as the Sanskrit version of the story that could be more easily appropriated by Ram *bhakti*...[and] provided Ram devotees with a specific theology on which to base their traditions. Further, it provided the platform from which Tulsidas could launch his own rendering of the story, expressing and elaborating a similar devotional theology in a vernacular tongue" (Lamb 2002: 32-33). "Brockington suggests that [*Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*] was either written or popularized during the time of Ramananda, the fifteenth-century founder of the Ramananda Sampradaya. The text makes reference to a community of Ram *bhaktas* who may have been the followers of Ramananda, and for whom this work likely became the central scripture" (Lamb 2002: 28).

⁵³ According to Hans Bakker, *Agastyaśaṃhitā* "occupies a central position among [texts of the "Rāma cult"] in view of its authoritative character for the authors of many other Rāmaite works[, and] especially since it has a canonical status for the Rāmānandī *saṃpradāya*, the only Rāmaite of the Vaiṣṇava sects" (1982: 106).

The third major category of *mantras* deal with ritual practices and concepts. A large number of them accompany the performance of basic ritual activities of the Rāmānandī ascetic. Some of these correspond to such mundane daily activities as defecating (*gudā prakṣālay mantra* and *gudā śuddhi mantra*), while others accompany extremely significant and physically grueling austerities like the *pañcagni tapas* (*pañc dhūnī mantra*), otherwise known as *dhūnī tap*, “in which the ascetic sits surrounded by smouldering cow-dung fires under the midday summer sun.”⁵⁴ Perhaps the most well-known and well-documented practice of the Rāmānandī *tyāgīs*, the *dhūnī tap* is “done during the four hottest months of the year” and:

consists of sitting in prayer or meditation surrounded by a set of small fires made of dried cow dung. The practice is to continue for approximately one hour daily during the hottest time of the day and is preceded by a bath and the covering of the body with *dhūnī* ashes.⁵⁵

“At the end of the practice,” Mallinson explains, *tyāgīs* “will perform a few Haṭha-yogic *āsanas*.”⁵⁶ *Dhūnī tap* is a serious commitment, as *tyāgīs* will typically carry out the practice in “an eighteen year course with six three year stages...from mid-February or so into June every year.”⁵⁷ The basic “ascetic practice of sitting under the sun surrounded by fires” may be evidence of the Rāmānandīs’ inheritance of a more ancient tradition of asceticism, for such a practice “is attested in textual and visual sources from before the Common Era.”⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Mallinson 2005: 108-109.

⁵⁵ Lamb 2005: 326.

⁵⁶ Mallinson 2005: 109.

⁵⁷ Mallinson 2016.

⁵⁸ Mallinson 2013.

Now that we have had the opportunity to explore some of the contents of the text itself, I would next like to address a couple of broader issues relevant to the study of *Siddhant Paṭal*, before discussing its manuscripts and continuing scholarly significance.

Connection with the Nāth Yogīs?

In a paradigmatic statement on its contents, Bevilacqua characterizes *Siddhānt Paṭal* as “a collection of yogic and mystic experiences, practical teachings of *sādhana* and explanations of mantras, which shows a fusion of Nāth *panth* teaching and Vaiṣṇava *dharma*.”⁵⁹ This observation reflects how most scholars have characterized the contents of *Siddhānt Paṭal*, as well as the teachings in Rāmānand’s Hindi oeuvre and of the *tapasī śākhā* in general: as an admixture of Nāth yoga and Vaiṣṇava *bhakti*.⁶⁰ Perhaps the most influential academic perspective on this topic has been P. D. Barthwal’s grand theory behind the origins of *nirguṇ bhakti*, which he considers to be the “harmonious blending of practically all that is good in the Indian spiritual thought.”⁶¹ For him, the foundation of *nirguṇ bhakti* lies in the synthesis of two spiritual currents with ancient roots and “more that eighteen centuries of separate development” which he classifies as 1) Aikāntic Dharma and 2) Buddhism. Aikāntic Dharma - or “the religion of single-minded devotion,”⁶² which purportedly dates as far back as the fourth century BCE - is traced by Barthwal from its supposed origins in the teachings of the *Upaniṣads* through the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, the schools of Vedānta, and eventually Vaiṣṇavism. Buddhism, on the other hand - according to Barthwal - became influenced by the yogic teachings of

⁵⁹ Bevilacqua 2018: 41.

⁶⁰ A notable exception to this is Bhagavatī Prasād Simḥ, who draws a distinction between Nāth yoga and Patañjali’s *aṣṭāṅga* yoga (when speaking of influences on Kṛṣṇadās Payahārī); this, however - as noted by Caracchi - still fails to account for Rāmānandīs’ usage of the *dhūnī*, the content of a work like *Siddhānt Paṭal*, which references many items of clothing and ornaments - and employs many technical terms - used by and associated with Nāth *yogīs*, and many common traits shared between the *tapasī śākhā* and the Nāth *panth* (Caracchi 2017: 186 n.34).

⁶¹ Barthwal 1978 (1936): xii.

⁶² Barthwal 1978 (1936): 195.

Patañjali's *Yogasūtra*, resulting in the formation of the *Yogācāra* school, from which developed *Vajrayāna*, eventually giving rise to the Gorakhnāthī school. These two separate trajectories, he claims - by the time of their interaction during the lifetime of Rāmānand - had developed into 1) Vaiṣṇavism and 2) Nāthism, respectively. Barthwal argues that Rāmānand's purported *guru*, Rāghavānand, appears to have belonged to such ilk of Vaiṣṇavas who "advocated the use of Yogic practices as a help to spiritual realization,"⁶³ and it is from him that Rāmānand "must have undoubtedly taken his lessons in yoga."⁶⁴ It was thus in the figure of Rāmānand that the two currents comingled, giving birth to the *nirguṇ* school (which would be further developed by Kabīr and the other disciples of Rāmānand).⁶⁵ In support of this theory, Barthwal cites the *Siddhānt Paṭal*'s *amar bīj mantra*, "in which [the] Vaiṣṇava Śāligrām is enthroned in the Yoga Trikuṭī."⁶⁶ This reference is quite significant, for not only does Barthwal tacitly affirm the attribution of *Siddhānt Paṭal* to Rāmānand, but it is one of the few direct pieces of primary evidence quoted in support of his thesis regarding Vaiṣṇava-Nāth synthesis.

While Barthwal's theory is clearly biased and grossly oversimplifies complex historical processes into linear trajectories, there are certain pieces of it that make his perspective at least somewhat historically compelling, such as his characterization of Rāghavānand. As recorded in Śrīsītārāmśaraṇ Bhagvānprasād Rūpkaḷā's *Bhaktisudhāsvād Tilak*,⁶⁷ a commentary on Nābhādās' *Bhaktmāl*, Rāmānandī tradition remembers

⁶³ Barthwal 1978 (1936): 196.

⁶⁴ Barthwal 1978 (1936): 197.

⁶⁵ Barthwal 1978 (1936): 197-198.

⁶⁶ Barthwal 1978 (1936): xiv n.1.

⁶⁷ On which, see Caracchi 2017: 37-47. I rely on her summary for my comments on Rāghavānand below.

Rāghavānand as having been knowledgeable in the techniques of yoga. According to one popular story, when Rāmānand (at the time known by his pre-initiate name, Rāmdatta) first presented himself before Rāghavānand, he sensed that death was imminent for Rāmdatta. In order to save his life, Rāghavānand bestowed upon him the six-syllable Rām *mantra* along with the other initiatory *saṃskāras*, as well as the name Rāmānand. In addition, he gave Rāmānand instruction in *prāṇāyāma* and other yoga practices, through which he was able to attain *samādhi* and escape death. What this tells us is that tradition remembers Rāghavānand to have been both Rāmānand's Rām *bhakti mantra/dīkṣā* (initiation) *guru*, as well as his yogic *sādhak* (practitioner) *guru*, prefiguring the two major orientations of Rāmānand's ideology. If there is any historical veracity to this, it would mean that yoga was perhaps one of the founding spiritual orientations of what would become the Rāmānandī *saṃpradāy*, having been introduced by Rāmānand himself.

However, opinions differ as to when yoga teachings were introduced into the Rāmānandī *saṃpradāy*, forming the basis of some disputes over the supposed influence of Nāth yoga on Rāmānand. While stating that a cursory look at the list of *mantras* in *Siddhānt Paṭal* reveals that it has been written with a view toward establishing a harmony between the Nāth *panth* and Vaiṣṇava *dharma*,⁶⁸ as mentioned above, Śrīvāstav does not accept the attribution of the text to Rāmānand.⁶⁹ He instead believes that yoga was introduced into the Rāmānandī *saṃpradāy* by Rāmānand's grand-disciple Kṛṣṇadās Payahārī (who, he says, likely received instruction in yoga *sāadhanā* from local Nāth

⁶⁸ Śrīvāstav 1957: 129.

⁶⁹ Nor does he for *Rām Rakṣā Stotra* or *Yog Cintāmaṇi*, two other short, vernacular compositions with a yogic orientation that have been attributed to Rāmānand (Śrīvāstav 1957: 136).

panthīs in Rajputana)⁷⁰ and was taken forward by Kṛṣṇadās's disciple Kīlhdās and Kīlhdās' disciple Dvārakādās, leading to the establishment of the *tapasī śākhā* as a separate branch.⁷¹ This opinion derives partially from his estimation that there is no evidence to support the idea of Rāmānand's incorporation of Nāth-*panthī* yoga, claiming that he only worshipped the formless deity, *nirañjan*.⁷²

As referenced above, when we look at the language of the *mantras* contained in *Siddhānt Paṭal*, as well as in the other Hindi compositions attributed to Rāmānand, we encounter a cluster of terminology common to the esoteric lexicon of the Nāth *yogīs*. In *Gorakhbāñī*, the ultimate reality is said to be a mystery, and only a *yogī* who has received proper understanding and practical instruction from a *guru* can unlock it. Even the language used in the text reflects this, for it is coded in such a way that it almost necessarily requires a *guru* to make sense of. The *sant* traditions have also inherited this coded language. Scholars such as Barthwal⁷³ and Charlotte Vaudeville⁷⁴ have even compiled lists of esoteric terminology used by *sants* that relates to the Nāths' coded lexicon. Barthwal credits the usefulness of the Dādūpanthī Garībdās' *Anabhai Prabodh* in compiling his "Mystery Code" of '*nirguṇ*' symbols. In Winand Callewaert's study of this text - which he refers to as a "Key for Understanding Mystical Terminology" - he notes that, "[b]ecause of the abundant use of yogic terminology and of complicated metaphors, the reader of the *nirguṇa bhakti* literature is often at a loss as to the exact meaning of a

⁷⁰ Śrīvāstav 1957: 204.

⁷¹ Śrīvāstav 1957: 129.

⁷² Śrīvāstav 1957: 129. However, the term *nirañjan* itself has strong Nāth associations!

⁷³ Barthwal 1978 (1936): 270-272.

⁷⁴ Vaudeville 1957: xiv-xxiv.

particular verse or word.”⁷⁵ To aid in one’s navigation and understanding of *sant* poetry, Garībdās provides “in 141 couplets a series of synonyms for the most frequently occurring terms in Sant literature.”⁷⁶

While I have no pretenses of replicating Garībdās’ masterful work, the following is a modest list of technical terminology specifically associated with the Nāth spiritual system that is found in both *Siddhānt Paṭal* and *Gorakhbāṇī*, as well as in the ‘mystery codes’ compiled by the scholars mentioned above:

ajapā jap

Literally translating to ‘unrecited recitation’, *ajapā jap* is “one of the most characteristic features of the Nāth yogis’ practice.”⁷⁷ As Callewaert explains, in Nāth literature:

“remembering the Name”—*nām sumiraṇ*—and silent recitation of the Name is an important exercise in the service of God. Through the endless repetition, the Name loses its physical tone and takes the form of the supreme *śabda-brahman* in the heart of the devotee. Manifesting itself in the physical tone of the Name, the Supreme Being gradually introduces the devotee into its pure reality.⁷⁸

This ‘silent recitation’ refers to the sound of the in-breath and out-breath, which are ‘recited’ naturally when one inhales and exhales. While breathing, the sound ‘*haṃsa*’ is “constantly and involuntarily repeated - *ha* is uttered on the out-breath and *sa* on the in-breath - and when its components are reversed it becomes the Upaniṣadic dictum *so ’ham* (‘I am that’).”⁷⁹ The *ajapā jap* is “correlated with the famous Vedic [*gāyatrī*] *mantra*,” and its recitation is said to bestow liberation.⁸⁰ In *Siddhānt Paṭal*, the *ajapā jap* appears to

⁷⁵ Callewaert 2013: 17.

⁷⁶ Callewaert 2013: 17-18.

⁷⁷ Djurdjevic 2019: 41.

⁷⁸ Callewaert 2009: 46.

⁷⁹ Mallinson and Singleton 2017: 263.

⁸⁰ Djurdjevic 2019: 41.

be soteriologically efficacious, for it is stated in *prasādī mantra* that “the one who recites the *ajapā* knows the secret of divine grace.”⁸¹

anhad nād/sabd

The term *anhad nād* (Skt. *anāhata nāda*) literally translates to ‘unstruck sound’, and may be likened to the primordial sound of ‘om’ in that it has a singular, divine source, unlike ordinary sounds, which are created by two or more things being ‘struck’ together (e.g., clapping or beating a drum). In the vocabulary of the Nāths, *anhad nād* refers to “a subtle sound heard internally,”⁸² usually at the apex of yoga practice “at the moment when [the *yogī*] experiences a union with the Eternal.”⁸³ *Siddhānt Paṭal* twice repeats the statement “the *anhad nād* resounds at the *trikuṭī*,”⁸⁴ which is reminiscent of the yogic meditative experience.

avadhūt

Perhaps the most consequential term to discuss in this context, at least for our purposes in this study, is *avadhūt*. Referring to one who has “shaken off” worldly concerns, the word *avadhūt* (Skt. *avadhūta*) has long been used as a term for world-renouncing ascetics,⁸⁵ though in the medieval period, it came to be strongly associated with the Nāths. Indeed, it is frequently used as a term of address for the student-seeker in *Gorakhbāṇī* (as well as in the *bāṇī* of a plethora of *sants*, adopting its usage from the Nāths), and the final chapter of the c. 18th-century Nāth text *Siddhasiddhāntapaddhati* is dedicated to the

⁸¹ *Siddhānt Paṭal*: 24.

⁸² Djurdjevic 2019: 41.

⁸³ Callewaert 1978: 300.

⁸⁴ *Siddhānt Paṭal*: 16, 34.

⁸⁵ See Monier-Williams 1899: 100.

characteristics of the *avadhūta yogī*, which even up to the present in the Nāth *sampradāy* refers to the celibate, renunciate, non-householder *yogīs*.⁸⁶ By applying the appellation ‘*avadhūt*’ to Rāmānand’s name at the beginning of the text, along with listing out an array of well-known (Nāth-related) ascetic paraphernalia, the author of *Siddhānt Paṭal* seems to be situating him within the universe - and the role - of an ascetic *yogī*, particularly of the sort established by the Nāths. As we will have the opportunity to discuss below, intra-traditional and scholarly debates have raged for over a century regarding whether or not the historical Rāmānand was, in fact, such an *avadhūt*.

gagan maṇḍal

The *gagan maṇḍal*, or ‘circle/orb of the sky’, refers to the mystical location of meditation that the *yogī* ascends to as a result of their yogic practice. Associated with the highest *cakra* (i.e., the ‘crown cakra’, or *sahasrār* [lit. ‘thousand-petaled’]) and the *trikuṭī* (see below), it is the place where the *anhad nād* resounds and where the *yogī* can access the storehouse of *amṛt* (the ‘nectar of immortality’). It is the summit of yogic achievement, where the *yogī* merges with *nirañjan*, the supreme reality.

nav nāth and caurāsī siddh

In addition to the Nāth technical terms in this list, *Siddhānt Paṭal* makes reference directly to the ‘nine Nāths’ (*nav/nau nāth*) and ‘eighty-four *siddhas*’ (*caurāsī/cavrāsī siddh[an]*), always together as a pair. Lists of eighty-four *siddhas* (or *mahāsiddhas*) date back to medieval Tibetan Buddhist traditions and “include Ādinātha, Matsyendra,

⁸⁶ Bouillier 2016: 59.

Gorakṣa, Cauraṅgī, Jālandhara, Carpata, Kānhapa, and Bhartṛhari, all of whom appear in some or all of the later lists of the nine Nāths.”⁸⁷ As Mallinson describes, these *siddhas*:

were semidivine humans who had become perfected (*siddha*) as a result of their mastery of yoga, alchemy (*rasāyana*), and other esoteric means. They were renowned for their magical powers (*siddhis*) and, often, their antinomian behavior. All these features are attributed to the various nine Nāths associated with the Nāth Sampradāya.⁸⁸

The earliest known list of a group of ‘nine Nāths’, “to which today’s Nāth Sampradāya traces its origins,”⁸⁹ is found in the 15th-century *Navanāthacaritramu* by the Telugu poet Gaurana.⁹⁰ For Nāth yogīs today, the nine Nāths constitute an auspicious core upon which the existence of the *sampradāy* rests, and are the object of veneration. In *Siddhānt Paṭal*, references to the nine Nāths and eighty-four *siddhas* show up on six separate occasions in six separate *mantras*, namely: *śrī vairāgya ābhūṣaṇ mantra*, *sapt dhūnī mantra*, *dvitīy cīpiyā mantra*, *bhasma gāyatrī mantra*, *laṃgoṭī āṛband mantra*, and *tumbā bīj mantra*. Significantly, as this list indicates, the Nāths and *siddhas* are associated by the author of *Siddhānt Paṭal* with various ascetic ‘insignia’ that happen to be common amongst both Nāths and Rāmānandī *tapasīs*, i.e., the sacred fire (*dhūnī*), fire tongs (*cīpiyā*), ash from the sacred fire (*bhasma/vibhūti*), loincloth (*laṃgoṭī*), waistcloth (*āṛband*), and water pot (*tumbā*).

nirañjan

A significant theological term, *nirañjan*:

⁸⁷ Mallinson 2011: 3.

⁸⁸ Mallinson 2011: 3.

⁸⁹ Mallinson 2011: 3.

⁹⁰ See Jones 2018.

is the name for the Supreme Being, often used by both Gorakh and other representatives of the “*nirguṇ* school.” It literally means “without collyrium” or “without ointment,” and by inference, “without embellishment,” “pure.” Its name thus indicates that the highest reality is without, or rather beyond, describable qualities.⁹¹

trikuṭī/triveṇī

The *trikuṭī* or *triveṇī*, in yogic subtle physiology, is the place where the three primary energy channels (*nāḍī*) - *īḍā*, *piṅgalā*, and *suṣumnā* - meet, and is conceptually related to the *triveṇī saṅgam*, or the meeting point of the *gaṅgā*, *yamunā*, and (mythical) *sarasvatī* rivers in Allahabad. In *Siddhānt Paṭal*, the *trikuṭī/triveṇī* is the place where the *anhad nāḍ* resounds (*vairāgya bīj mantra*), where the (mystical) *śāligrām* resides (*amar bīj mantra*), and where Rām has placed his couch (*dhūnī pānī mantra*).

I include this list simply to demonstrate what the majority of scholars have long agreed upon: that (so-called *nirguṇī*) *sants* like Rāmānand were strongly influenced by the Nāth system of yoga. Of course, as discussed above, scholars disagree as to the nature, extent, and timeline of Nāthyogic influence on Rāmānand and/or the Rāmānandīs; however, regardless of these disagreements, it must be acknowledged that, at least from some early date, the Nāth *yogīs* represent a major source of inspiration for Rāmānandī thought and practice, especially for what would become the *tapasī śākhā*. It should not come as a shock that this could apply to Rāmānand himself, especially given the broad agreement regarding Nāth yogic influence on the *sants*, including those traditionally regarded as his disciples. This observation has become a well-established fact in academic circles, and scholars have begun attempting to explain and situate this

⁹¹ Djurdjevic 2019: 54.

phenomenon historically, and in relation to other forms of yoga. Horstmann traces a historical transition from a t  ntric   aiva-rooted N  th culture and the *ha  hayoga* that developed from it (which represented an internalization of t  ntric ritual) to a N  th yoga more akin to the teachings of the *sants* and with more of a *bhakti* orientation (constituting an interior form of worship modeled on the t  ntric-yogic body),⁹² the latter of which she terms “N  thyogic bhakti.”⁹³ Tyler Williams similarly identifies “a distinctly vernacular, popular discourse of yoga as opposed to the more technically specific vocabulary of roughly contemporaneous Sanskrit works like the *Ha  hayogaprad  pik  *, *Yogab  ja*, *  ivasam  hit  *, and *Yogacint  mani*,”⁹⁴ while Caracchi, in the context of R  m  nand  s’ Hindi compositions, simply refers to the type of N  th-inspired teachings found therein as “lo yoga dei *sant*” (“the yoga of the *sants*”).⁹⁵

When it comes to N  th influence on the R  m  nand  s’ style of yoga, two contemporary scholars represent two major opposing viewpoints on the topic within the current scholarly discourse: Monika Horstmann and Patton Burchett. Horstmann strongly affirms the influence of the N  ths on R  m  nand   yoga. She characterizes K         Payah  r  , the founder of the *tapas       kh  *, as “a yogi whose yogic practice need not be imagined to have been totally different from that of the N  ths. After all, the N  ths were the fountainhead of yogic practice in north Indian *bhakti*.”⁹⁶ Indeed, on this last point, much of Horstmann’s recent work has focused - at least in part - on documenting the

⁹² See Horstmann 2019 and 2020.

⁹³ Horstmann 2019: 224.

⁹⁴ Williams 2014: 178-179.

⁹⁵ This phrase is found in the title of her 1999 book, *R  m  nanda e lo yoga dei sant* (see Caracchi 1999).

⁹⁶ Horstmann 2002: 152.

influence of Nāth yoga on the various *sant* traditions (particularly the Dādūpanth).

Burchett, on the other hand, takes a contrary position. Responding directly to Horstmann, he says that “despite scholarly claims to the contrary, [Nāths and Rāmānandīs] generally practiced quite different forms of yoga,” adding that “the Rāmānandīs’ religious sensibility was shaped by a *bhakti* attitude and approach to the Divine that was in marked contrast to the Nāth *yogīs*’ tantric perspective.”⁹⁷ He argues that, while “[i]n many ways, Galta Rāmānandīs like Payahārī, Kīlha, and Dvārkā shared much with the Nāth *yogīs*, from their liberal social attitudes to their ascetic, renunciatory lifestyle and appearance”⁹⁸:

when it came to yoga, the Nāths were usually doing something considerably more tantric and *siddhi* oriented than the Rāmānandīs and other ascetic lineages (like the Daśanāmīs), whose yogic practice fell more squarely within the liberation-oriented orthodox yoga tradition.⁹⁹

In my opinion, however, I think Burchett exaggerates and overemphasizes the differences between the two, glossing over the nuances that exist in both traditions. Not all Nāths emphasized *siddhis* and not all Rāmānandīs were opposed to tantra. Nāth yoga and Rāmānandī yoga are both similar and different in interesting and important ways; I believe future research should focus precisely on the ways in which they are similar and the ways in which they are different, examining the historical trajectories, interactions, and influences of and between the two traditions. Intertextual study between Nāth and Rāmānandī vernacular compositions could be a great - and almost entirely unexplored - avenue of investigation.

⁹⁷ Burchett 2019: 171.

⁹⁸ Burchett 2019: 193.

⁹⁹ Burchett 2019: 172.

While I generally agree with the majority of scholars who argue that the teachings ascribed to Rāmānand in texts like *Siddhānt Paṭal* contain a certain admixture of asceticism, (particularly Nāth) yoga, and *bhakti*, one must also make the observation that the blending of these three strands of thought and praxis (asceticism, yoga, and *bhakti*) is not exactly new to the Vaiṣṇavism of his era; in fact, it seems to have more or less been the historical norm. Mallinson refers to this phenomenon as “Vaiṣṇava yogic asceticism,” which he claims “dates back at least as far as the first centuries BCE,” specifically citing *Kaṭhopanīṣad* - “perhaps the earliest text to teach yoga named as such,” in which “the highest state is that of Viṣṇu,” - and the *Mahābhārata*, in which “Viṣṇu is the deity most commonly associated with yoga,”¹⁰⁰ and “the older practice of *tapas* and the discipline of yoga are often linked.”¹⁰¹ John Brockington observes that “by the late *Nārāyaṇīya*,” a portion of the *Mahābhārata*’s *Śāntiparvan* related to Nārāyaṇa (Viṣṇu), “*tapas* and yoga are both alike subordinated to *bhakti*, with Nārāyaṇa identifying himself as the goal of yoga proclaimed in yoga texts.”¹⁰² Mallinson says that the Rāmānandī *tyāgīs* are “natural heirs” to this ancient ascetic tradition of yoga.¹⁰³ The *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* (c. 500-1000 CE) also presents an interesting example, for:

Vaishnava yoga is the topic of a comprehensive discourse put in the mouth of the mythical sage Kapila in the third book... In this discourse yoga in the form of breath discipline and meditation, on the one hand, and *bhakti*, on the other, are related as means and end. Breath discipline leads to concentration of the mind on Krishna, whose features and attributes the devotee is taught to visualize within himself. The god thereby becomes interiorized.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Mallinson 2024: 19.

¹⁰¹ Brockington 2003: 17.

¹⁰² Brockington 2003: 17.

¹⁰³ Mallinson 2005: 113.

¹⁰⁴ Horstmann and Rajpurohit 2023: 7-8.

It is thus important that any study into the origins of Rāmānandī yoga explores these traditions of ‘Vaiṣṇava yogic asceticism’ - e.g., ancient *tapas* traditions, the Vaikhānasa and Pāñcarātra schools, early Rām *bhaktas*, and other potential Vaiṣṇava forerunners to the Rāmānandīs - along with the Śaiva traditions that have also obviously influenced them, especially the Nāths and (perhaps to a lesser extent) the Daśanāmīs.

Svāmī Rāmānand Controversy: *Ācārya* or *Avadhūt*

Related to the question of Nāth influence is the question of Rāmānand's 'authentic' teachings and personality. Differences in opinion persist to this day over his nature as a *guru*. These differences have largely hinged on the two quite different versions of Rāmānand reflected in the writings attributed to him in Sanskrit and Hindi, respectively, which scholars (such as Purushottam Agrawal) have taken to referring to as the 'Sanskrit Rāmānand' and the 'Hindi Rāmānand'. Rāmnāth Śarmā characterizes the divide as one between scholars who believe Rāmānand to have been a Vaiṣṇava *ācārya* preaching *saguṇ bhakti* (constituting the Sanskrit Rāmānand) on the one hand, and those who believe he was an *avadhūt* who practiced "yoga-integrated *nirguṇ bhakti*" (constituting the Hindi Rāmānand) on the other.¹⁰⁵ In essence, most scholars - until recent times - have doubted that Rāmānand could have been both a *saguṇī*, *śuddh* (pure) Brāhmaṇ *ācārya* and the yoga-influenced *nirguṇī* "guru of the *sants*," e.g., Kabīr and Ravidās, who were from a lower caste background. Thus, many have felt compelled to take a side on the issue of who the 'real', historical Rāmānand was: either *ācārya* or *avadhūt*. The term *ācārya*, literally meaning "one who knows/teaches proper conduct," in this context refers specifically to a teacher who is 'authorized' to establish their own school of thought and, thus, their own *sampradāy*. On the other hand, the term *avadhūt* - as has been discussed above - has a strongly ascetic connotation, and is heavily associated with the Nāth *yogīs*.

¹⁰⁵ Śarmā 1988-89: 138-139.

There are several factors which, over time, have introduced changes to the makeup and ideology of the Rāmānandī *sampradāy* and that may have contributed to some of the confusion surrounding the character of the historical Rāmānand, helping shape the different versions of him remembered and recorded in textual sources and by the separate *śākhās*. Van der Veer has put forward a theory of change that he characterizes as “the taming of the ascetic,” which posits that, over the course of its existence, there has been “a long process of sedentarisation” in the Rāmānandī *sampradāy* as a result of the expansion of Kṛṣṇa *bhakti*-influenced devotionism within the *rasik śākhā*. This style of devotionism was heavily associated with “the devotional worship of images in a localised temple cult,” a far cry from the aniconic, itinerant lifestyle of the early Rāmānandī *tapasīs*. The growth in numbers of these *mūrtipūjak sthāndhārīs* (idol-worshipping temple-dwellers) created a series of oppositions between the major segments of the *sampradāy*:

itinerant life versus sedentarised life; relative indifference to caste origin in...ascetic life versus importance of caste in temple worship; ascetic practices directed at attaining godhead within oneself versus devotional practices directed at the worship of god through external images in temples; celibacy as a method to contain heat and ascetic power versus celibacy as a way of devoting oneself completely to the worship of god.¹⁰⁶

Eventually, according to van der Veer, the *rasik* flavor of devotionism came to eclipse asceticism, and it is partially for this reason that *tapasīs* began to decline in numbers and become marginalized within the *sampradāy*. In other contexts, changes of this sort, such as the replacement of tantric or yogic terms in Kabīr’s poems with devotional ones (due

¹⁰⁶ Van der Veer 1987: 693.

to the influence of Kṛṣṇa *bhakti*), have been referred to as “bhaktification.”¹⁰⁷ If we presume that the earliest Rāmānandīs (potentially including Rāmānand himself) were ascetics, as van der Veer seems to imply, this process of ‘sedentarization’ or ‘bhaktification’ appears not only to have led to changes in the makeup of the *sampradāy* - from the predominance of “wild, free-moving ascetic[s]” to a preponderance of “temple-dwelling, law-abiding devotee[s]” - but, as we will see, in its conception of Rāmānand.

Two other factors also contributed to changes in the *sampradāy*: colonialism and a desire to separate from the Rāmānujīs. Agrawal observes that with the onset of European colonization in the Subcontinent came an upheaval of South Asian society: traditional knowledge systems were replaced with ‘colonial modernity’, the actual relationship that existed between Sanskrit and vernacular languages was severed, and Sanskrit-literate Brāhmaṇs were cast as the supreme religious authorities; and opportunistic Brāhmaṇs were all too ready to adopt this new reality.¹⁰⁸ This initiated a process of what we may call ‘Sanskritization,’ in which these “official Brāhmaṇs” pushed Sanskrit texts as the sole authentic sources of the ‘Hindu’ tradition, with vernacular sources only being taken seriously if they translated or followed the Sanskrit ones.¹⁰⁹ At the time of Rāmānand, however, the reality was quite the opposite; the ‘New Indo-Aryan Languages’ were quickly becoming the lingua franca of *bhakti*, as figures like Rāmānand and Kabīr began to reject the supremacy of Brāhmaṇs and of the Sanskrit language in favor of communicating with their communities, their co-religionists, and even directly with Rām,

¹⁰⁷ Zhang 2019: 136.

¹⁰⁸ Agrawal 2009: 273.

¹⁰⁹ Agrawal 2009: 273.

in ‘common’ vernacular language. As Agrawal puts it, “they were making the language of public conduct the language also of supernatural experience, devotion [*bhakti*], and spiritual practice [*sādhana*].”¹¹⁰

If this was the case, what changed for the Rāmānandīs? How did Rāmānand change from a *guru* preaching the name of the divine in the language of the people to an *ācārya* who authored texts on proper Vaiṣṇava conduct in Sanskrit? Aside from the bhaktification and Sanskritization processes already noted above, a reformist movement began to arise within the *sampradāy* during the early 20th century that would reframe the historical positionality of the Rāmānandīs and recast the figure of Rāmānand as its founding *ācārya*. Led by Svāmī Bhagavaddās (1879-1977), who would later elevate his status by adding the title of ‘*ācārya*’ to his own name, going by Bhagavadācārya, this group of what Agrawal terms ‘radical’ Rāmānandīs made it their mission to sever any connections to the Rāmānujī *sampradāy*.

Historically, at least as far back as Nābhādās’ *Bhaktmāl*, it had always been believed that Rāmānand was originally a member of Rāmānuja’s *paramparā*, but had either been kicked out or split from it due to issues of commensality and ritual purity, as Rāmānand was more inclined to co-mingle across caste boundaries. As Caracchi notes, Rāmānand’s descent from Rāmānuja is attested in several historical sources, is preserved in the *guru-paramparās* of most historical Rāmānandī spiritual centers, and is supported by the overwhelming majority of scholars.¹¹¹ However, an anti-Rāmānujī sentiment

¹¹⁰ Agrawal 2009: 273.

¹¹¹ Caracchi 2017: 71-72.

began to develop amongst some Rāmānandīs in the beginning of the 20th century due to what they saw as mistreatment and disrespect; it is said that they were viewed and treated as inferior by the Rāmānujīs for their less strict upholding of rules surrounding ritual purity, emboldening them to - for example - refuse prostrating or accepting *prasād* at Rāmānandī temples, demand that Rāmānandīs show them deference and respect, and force Rāmānandīs to carry their *mahants*' palanquins at symbolically significant gatherings like the Kumbh Melā.¹¹² This motivated Bhagavaddās and his ilk to (self-admittedly) “change the *guru-paramparā*” to one in which there was “no connection between Ramanuja and Ramananda”¹¹³

Traditionally, in order for a religious teacher to be considered a proper *ācārya* (and thus be authorized to establish their own ‘sect’), especially within the Vedāntic schools of thought, they needed to have authored their own Sanskrit commentaries (*bhāṣya*) on the *Prasthānatrayī* (lit. the “three sources”), i.e., the *Brahma Sūtra* (otherwise known as the *Vedānta Sūtra*), the *Bhagavad Gītā*, and the *Upaniṣads*. So, to justify the independent existence of the Rāmānandī *sampradāy*, especially in an environment where - as noted above - Sanskrit was reinforced as the ‘proper’ language of ‘Hinduism’, the ‘radical’ Rāmānandīs set out on a mission to ‘discover’ both the Sanskrit works of Rāmānand - i.e., *Ānanda Bhāṣya* (a commentary on *Brahmasūtra*), *Gītā Bhāṣya*, *Upaniṣad Bhāṣya*, *Vaiṣṇavamātābjabhāskara*, and *Rāmārcanapaddhati* - and historical evidence that he was never part of Rāmānuja’s *paramparā*. Rather than a

¹¹² Agrawal 2018: 220-221; Bevilacqua 2018: 107-108.

¹¹³ Quoted in Agrawal 2018: 252.

‘discovery’, however, what appears to have taken place was forgery, alteration, and misattribution of sources. Despite having argued vehemently for their authenticity in the 1920s, in his 1958 autobiography, Bhagavadācārya admits that the *Bhāṣyas* were forgeries,¹¹⁴ the contents of *Vaiṣṇavamātābjabhāskara* had been altered, and *Rāmārcanapaddhati* was never composed by Rāmānand.¹¹⁵ What this essentially shows is that the Sanskrit Rāmānand, by and large, was a conscious invention by an ideologically-motivated faction of the Rāmānandīs in the 20th century, which the leader of that faction later regretfully admitted. Even with his (decades-late) admission, the damage had already been done. According to Agrawal, “the authenticity of the *Bhāṣya*, *Paddhati*, or *Bhāskara* hardly mattered now. Bhagvadacharya and his group had successfully metamorphosed ‘the wayward disciple of Ramanuji tradition’ into the ‘founder of an independent tradition, into an *ācārya* in his own right, an author of Sanskrit works’,” noting that “the transformation took place not only in the Ramanandi imagination but also in the imagination of academic scholars.” Indeed, the effect of this has been that, in general, “scholars seem to be more suspicious of the Hindi production [of Rāmānand] than of the Sanskrit [production].”¹¹⁶

To say that the Sanskrit Rāmānand was ‘invented’ is not to suggest that the Hindi Rāmānand and the historical Rāmānand are necessarily one and the same. Bevilacqua has suggested that Rāmānand propagated a “dual teaching,” and she uses this to explain the different teachings of the Sanskrit and Hindi Rāmānand, as well as the emergence of the

¹¹⁴ Bevilacqua 2018: 46, 58 n.33.

¹¹⁵ Agrawal 2018: 253-255.

¹¹⁶ Bevilacqua 2018: 47.

śākhās. Rather than viewing the different versions of Rāmānand simply as products of separate sectarian environments, she suggests that the historical Rāmānand:

likely recommended two types of teachings according to his disciples' attitude: one set of teachings that stressed ascetic practices for those disciples who had undertaken the renouncer path and one set that focused exclusively on devotion for those disciples who were still householders.¹¹⁷

Further, she posits that “many of Rāmānanda’s disciples likely practiced a mixed *sāadhanā* in which yoga and *saguṇa* and *nirguṇa* worship all intermingled,” a result of his attentiveness to the religious landscape of his time, which he navigated and “reinterpreted according to his perspective and personal beliefs.”¹¹⁸ While Bevilacqua’s theory is appealing, not least for its ability to explain the unified nature of the Rāmānandī *sampradāy* despite the variety in belief and practice that exists within it, as well as its ability to preserve the singularity of ‘Rāmānand’ as a figure, it is not without its flaws. Is it really plausible that Rāmānand taught two such seemingly distinct spiritual philosophies? Where is the historical evidence for her suggestions? Would it not be more likely that sectarian factors influenced the image of Rāmānand preserved by different segments of the *sampradāy*?

Rather than presuming that the historical Rāmānand himself propagated two distinct spiritual ideologies, perhaps it would be more plausible and more productive - from a scholarly point of view - to speak of two separate ‘Rāmānands’ as remembered and portrayed by different segments of his followers, in a similar manner to how Linda Hess speaks of Kabīr. In her work on his collections of poetry, Hess identifies two

¹¹⁷ Bevilacqua 2018: 200.

¹¹⁸ Bevilacqua 2018: 200.

distinct Kabīr ‘personalities’, one reflected in the ‘Western’ collections (i.e., in the Dādūpanthī *Pañc Vāñī* manuscripts of Rajasthan and the Sikh *Ādi Granth* manuscripts of Panjab) and another in the ‘Eastern collection’ (i.e., the Kabīrpanthī *Bījāk* of Eastern Uttar Pradesh and/or Bihar),¹¹⁹ the Western Kabīr being more *bhakti* oriented and the Eastern Kabīr more austere. If in the case of Kabīr, the difference between his personalities is in the emphasis, tone, vocabulary, and musicality of his compositions,¹²⁰ in the case of Rāmānand, the gap between his *ācārya* persona and his *avadhūt* persona is much wider, for not only do the teachings in his Sanskrit and Hindi oeuvre differ quite significantly, but they are written in different languages and represent a different type of saint and teacher entirely - one concerned with upholding proper, pure (*śuddh*) Vaiṣṇavism, and the other teaching a more common, yoga-inflected *bhakti* reflective of the popular devotion that was widespread in the broader North Indian environment of his period.

To be fair to Bevilacqua, she does acknowledge that the differences between the Sanskrit and Hindi Rāmānand “[reflect] the image of him that the *sampradāya*, or specific branches of the *sampradāya*, needed to project or wanted to portray,” as a way of supporting and promoting their own teachings, practices, and interpretations.¹²¹ It is also certainly the case, as John Stratton Hawley observes and Bevilacqua highlights, that “to think [of] *nirguṇa* and *saguṇa bhakti* as completely separate devotional traditions is a

¹¹⁹ Hess 1987. She also draws a more fine distinction between Kabīr in the *Pañc Vāñī* and Kabīr in the *Ādi Granth*.

¹²⁰ See Hess 1987.

¹²¹ Bevilacqua 2018: 40.

relatively new concept that crystallized in the mid-nineteenth century as a result of the gradual consolidation of religious communities,”¹²² and I agree that it would be misguided to hinge one’s entire argument as to the distinction between the Sanskrit and Hindi Rāmānand on a strict dichotomy between *nirguṇ* and *saguṇ bhakti*. My argument considers the differences between the two images of Rāmānand as a whole, not simply in how they conceive of Rām. It may also be the case that, as Bevilacqua has argued, we can further divide Rāmānand’s Hindi oeuvre itself into two sections, one that is “comparable for philosophy, doctrines, and practices to those of Sants” - which are “characterized by *nirguṇa bhakti* and [a] social stand, that rejects, sometimes more some other times less directly, the hierarchical social order of inherited castes,” as well as “the place given to the guru as mediator with God, the words of the guru, the repetition of the name of God, and the company of the saints” - and another that is “linked with the *tapasī śākhā*” and “includes influences from the Nāth *panth* and, in general, from the *haṭha* yoga tradition,” and which “may actually represent the numerous influences that yogic currents had on Rāmānanda.”

Whatever the case may be, more work certainly needs to be done in understanding the transmission and contents of Rāmānand’s attributed writings, and I ultimately agree with Bevilacqua that they “should be analyzed referring to their probable origin and their actual use, through a pragmatic approach that could help clarify the interpretations and manipulations of the original Rāmānanda’s teaching.”¹²³ It may be that we can never truly

¹²² Bevilacqua 2018: 40.

¹²³ Bevilacqua 2018: 40.

know who the historical Rāmānand was and what he really taught; perhaps - like Hess recommends in the case of Kabīr¹²⁴ - we must study his different ‘personalities’ as separate entities, and decide for ourselves who we believe the ‘real’ Rāmānand was, and to what extent such a question matters to us at all.

¹²⁴ “I have delineated two personalities that emerge from the western and eastern collections, and have shown how a proponent of each might defend him as the authentic Kabir. The reader may choose between them, or may decide that they represent two streams of tradition wherein the real Kabir is diffused like milk in water, unextractable except by some as yet unknown swan of scholarship or mystical insight. Finally I have suggested that the best way to approach the particularity of Kabir is by a study of his style, his peculiar modes of expression” (Hess 1987: 141).

Manuscripts

When asked by Dr. Winand Callewaert - in a question-and-answer session following his presentation on the “Secret Vocabularies of the ‘Great Renouncers’ of the Rāmānandī Sect” delivered at the International Middle Hindī Bhakti Conference held in April 1979 at the Katholieke Universiteit in Leuven - whether there were any manuscripts preserved by the itinerant *tyāgī* monasteries he visited, Burghart responded, curtly, “None whatsoever. They did, however, have printed texts of the *Siddhānt Paṭal* published by Ṭhākur Prasād and Sons of Benares and...Tulasī Dās’ *Rāmacaritamānas* published by Gītā Press of Gorakhpur.”¹²⁵ The presence of these two texts and no others is not exactly shocking; *Rāmacaritmānas* and *Siddhānt Paṭal* are perhaps their two most important texts for daily liturgical and ritual practice, and *tyāgīs*, after all, are not known for voluminous literary production, owing to their itinerant lifestyle and tendency to preserve teachings through oral transmission. What is perhaps noteworthy, though, is that they possessed *only* printed versions of these texts and no manuscripts. It is difficult to say whether Burghart was referring simply to the texts they carried with them while traveling in their itinerant bands, or that they possessed in general (in their *āśrams*, etc.). This is a relevant distinction, especially (for our purposes) in the context of *Siddhānt Paṭal*, given that written manuscripts of the text do exist in Indian collections.

In my preliminary research of published manuscript catalogues and reports, I have been able to locate entries for four manuscripts labeled as “*Siddhānt Paṭal*,” all of which seem to refer to our text attributed to Rāmānand:

¹²⁵ Burghart 1980: 33.

1. In a survey of manuscripts held at the Dūdhādhārī Maṭh in Raipur, Chhattisgarh undertaken by the Nāgarī Pracāriṇī Sabhā in 1966, an entry is reported for a manuscript of *Siddhānt Paṭal* dated to the year 1873 (V. S. 1930).¹²⁶ Other than an attribution to ‘Guru Rāmānand’, no other information is provided for the manuscript.
2. *A Catalogue of Hindi Manuscripts in the Vrindaban Research Institute*, published in 1979, provides a puzzling catalogue entry for a manuscript of *Siddhānt Paṭal*. Despite labeling the manuscript as “Complete,” its listed length is only one folio, with twelve lines per page and forty-eight letters per line. It is attributed to Rāmānand and contains no information on its age, only commenting that its condition is “Poor.”¹²⁷
3. In *Hastlikhit Hindī-Granth-Sūcī*, a complete manuscript of *Siddhānt Paṭal* in 33 folios is said to be held in the Nāgarīpracāriṇī Sabhā’s manuscript collection in Kashi.¹²⁸ The quoted colophon from the end of the manuscript dates it to 1885 (V. S. 1942).
4. The Hindi manuscript catalogue of the Shree Sanjay Sharma Museum and Research Institute in Jaipur contains an entry for a manuscript of *Siddhānt Paṭal* in 41 to 42 folios.¹²⁹ The scribe’s name is recorded as “Śrī Kṛṣṇa,” with a scribal date of 1898 (V. S. 1955).

¹²⁶ “Hastlikhit Hindī Granthom kī Khoj”: 36-37.

¹²⁷ Gupta and Gupta 1979: 38.

¹²⁸ Paṇḍey 1991: 1006-1007.

¹²⁹ Sharma 2001: 297.

None of the scholars whose writings on *Siddhānt Paṭal* I have analyzed in this work seem to have referenced or consulted any manuscript copies of the text in their work, instead relying on printed editions. Clearly, any in-depth historical and/or textual studies of *Siddhānt Paṭal* in the future will require further investigation of extant manuscripts and consultation of their contents to better understand its transmission history and potential origins. Beyond this, given the ‘secret’ and enigmatic nature of the language of its *mantras*, coupled with the lack of any known written commentarial material for understanding the text, communication with surviving *tyāgī* lineages will be another essential element of ‘cracking the code’ of *Siddhānt Paṭal*. Additionally, intertextual work with other ‘yogic’ works attributed to Rāmānand (i.e., *Rām Rakṣā Stotra*, *Yog Cintāmaṇī*, etc.) can certainly help clarify ambiguities that exist regarding the theological perspective reflected in the often terse *mantras* of *Siddhānt Paṭal*.

Scholarly Significance

In Śrīvāstav's estimation, even though he does not consider it to be an authentic work of Rāmānand, *Siddhānt Paṭal* still has a "remarkable and unique significance" due to its importance for the *tapasī śākhā* and its reflection of their basic principles, which - of course - he characterizes as a combination of Nāthpanthī yoga and Vaiṣṇava *bhakti*.¹³⁰ As we have seen, this perspective of Nāth-Vaiṣṇava synthesis was shared by several other 20th-century scholars. Not only may a text like *Siddhānt Paṭal* help in clarifying the various sources of Rāmānandī yoga and asceticism, but - as Richard Burghart argues - can be "useful in reconstructing the development of the Rāmānandī sect out of the various cross-currents of Hindu asceticism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries,"¹³¹ as well as being a key source for tracing connections and continuities between premodern *tapasīs* and contemporary *tyāgīs*. It also provides a conceptual and practical basis for understanding Rāmānandī yoga and asceticism, which may be augmented by the study of other premodern and modern texts and by the consultation of modern and contemporary ethnographic field data on Rāmānandī *tyāgīs*. To this end, field work amongst *tyāgī* lineages (*jamāts* and *khālsās*) in India will likely provide more insight into their teachings, while oral histories preserved in the collective memories of said lineages will no doubt also uncover vital information on their formation, perhaps helping fill some historical gaps in our understanding of their development. Additionally, our understanding of Rāmānandī ascetic history may be further augmented by the study

¹³⁰ Śrīvāstav 1957: 206.

¹³¹ Burghart 1980: 22.

of art historical material. Initial work has suggested that the study of Mughal miniature paintings could yield findings with the potential to revolutionize our understanding of the Rāmānandīs' place and development within the complex milieu of ascetic lineages in early modern South Asia.¹³²

From its beginnings, Yoga Studies has been based largely on the study of Sanskrit yoga manuals. These texts (particularly those of *haṭhayoga*) were produced for practitioners across the sectarian spectrum, with authors generally stressing that their yoga could be practiced by anyone, regardless of theological persuasion. This has meant that vernacular and sectarian yoga texts like *Siddhānt Paṭal* have not received as much scholarly attention. Coupled with Sanskrit having historically been a language reserved for the educated, upper-caste elite, it has also led to the underprivileging and marginalization of lower- and outcaste perspectives, teachings, and compositions on yoga, which are most often produced in the (trans-)local vernacular languages spoken by common people. Focus on the theologically-inclusive texts of *haṭhayoga* has also coincided with the relative neglect of texts written with avowed sectarian perspectives and used by ritual specialists belonging to particular initiatory traditions, which were the real lived and embodied context(s) of premodern yoga practice in South Asia, prior to its globalization. More serious and sustained study of texts like *Siddhānt Paṭal* - and others associated with the Rāmānandī *tapasī śākhā* - can help give Yoga Studies a broader scope and paint a more contextualized picture of premodern yoga traditions and communities.

¹³² See Mallinson 2012 and Mallinson 2013.

Conclusion

We might say that the Rāmānandī *tyāgīs* are at their own *triveṇī saṅgam*, as their religious practices and principles seem to represent the nexus of three primary spiritual currents: 1) the ancient ascetic tradition of South Asia, specifically the segment which Mallinson terms ‘Vaiṣṇava yogic asceticism’; 2) Rām *bhakti*, of the sort spurned on by the predecessors of Tulsīdās and Rāmānand and carried forward by these two great personalities and their followers; and 3) Nāth yoga, both in its *haṭhayogic* dimension and the form presented in Nāth vernacular literature (or, in Horstmann’s terms, both Nāthyoga and Nāthyogic *bhakti*), which went on to influence and inspire so many subsequent *sants* and *bhakti* poets, including Rāmānand himself.

While the nature of the connections between the two have been debated, the historical similarities between Nāth *yogīs* and Rāmānandī *tapasīs* (in terms of their paraphernalia, lifestyle, teachings, etc.) noted in this work signify, if nothing else, the need to take into account a shared culture of yoga and asceticism that developed from at least the late medieval to early modern period (and, in some ways, continues to this day), of which both traditions are a part. If we are to explore the ‘cross-currents’ that led to the development of today’s major ascetic *sampradāys* - such as the Nāths, Rāmānandīs, Daśanāmīs - we must study each tradition individually to momentarily loosen them from the tangled threads of their common culture and understand their unique contributions to the tapestry of South Asian asceticism.

In this work, I have sought to demonstrate that: 1) scholarly determinations of the provenance of *Siddhānt Paṭal* are mostly unsubstantiated speculations, meaning that its

dating and attribution are still up for debate, 2) the *mantras* of *Siddhānt Paṭal* can tell us quite a bit about the lifestyle and worldview of Rāmānandī ascetics and their historical relationship to other ascetic *sampradāys*, 3) what we may call Rāmānandī ‘yogic asceticism’ has strong connections to Nāth yoga, but other avenues of influence must also be explored to get a clearer sense of how it has been constructed, 4) more research needs to be done into the compositions attributed to Rāmānand to better understand their origins, transmission, and use, so as to construct a more accurate image of both the Rāmānandī *sampradāy* at different historical periods and of the enigmatic character of Rāmānand himself, sometimes a *sant*, sometimes an ‘*avadhūt yogī*’, sometimes an *ācārya*.

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