Garland of Devotees: Nābhādās' *Bhaktamāl* and Modern Hinduism

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ABSTRACT

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James P. Hare

This dissertation explores the *Bhaktamāl* and its subsequent tradition. Nābhādās' late sixteenth- or early seventeenth-century collection of hagiographies praises the qualities of hundreds of devotees and thereby sets the boundaries of a devotional community that far exceeds the sectarian context in which its author wrote. By closely considering the *Bhaktamāl*, its commentaries, manuscripts, and print editions, this thesis traces crucial aspects of the development of modern Hinduism from the early seventeenth century until the beginning of the twentieth. Priyādās completed the first major commentary on the *Bhaktamāl* in 1712, approximately a century after Nābhādās composed his garland. Priyādās presents a conception of the Vaishnava community that differs significantly from Nābhādās'. After Priyādās, the *Bhaktamāl* tradition continued to develop through a thriving manuscript culture, and the *Bhaktamāl* became a popular text. During the nineteenth century, the *Bhaktamāl* shaped British understandings of Indian society and played a central role in traditionalist articulations of modern Hinduism. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the concerted efforts of "Sītārāmśaraṇ" Bhagvān Prasād "Rūpkalā" and George Abraham Grierson helped to create a sense of fixity within the *Bhaktamāl* tradition. Since the time of its composition, the *Bhaktamāl* has remained a prominent locus of dispute over the boundaries and logic of the broad-based devotional community that we now know as Hinduism.

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Chapter One: Introduction

भक्त भक्ति भगवंत गुरु चतुर नाम वपु एक ।
इनके पद बंदन करत नासै विघन अनेक ।।

Devotee and Devotion, God and Guru: four names for a single body.
Praising their feet eliminates many obstacles.
- Nābhādās[1]

Introduction

Nābhādās' *Bhaktamāl* opens with the verses quoted above. This passage asserts that there is no distinction between the *bhakta*s or devotees, bhakti or loving devotion, God who is worthy of devotion, and the gurus who have transmitted this devotion from one generation to the next since its divine origin in the ancient past. It is through the praise of each of these four that one can navigate the waters of samsara and achieve liberation from rebirth, but of these four, it is the humble devotees who are indispensable. Praising them, one pays homage to the other three. The *Bhaktamāl* is a devotional work, but this devotion is directed primarily to the devotees themselves. Through the *Bhaktamāl*, Nābhādās has expressed his love for these devoted servants of God and their gurus.

It is difficult to imagine a more suitable individual for such a task. There is little that can be said with certainty about pre-modern Hindi poets, but tradition tells us that Nābhādās was a blind orphan, born in the late sixteenth century. He was rescued and granted sight by the famous sadhus Kīlhadās and Agradās, who brought him to their ashram, where he took up the service of the sadhus. Nābhādās devoted his life to the loving fulfillment of this

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1 1:1-2 Nābhādās, "Dvitīy Khaṇḍ (Sampādan)," in *Bhaktamāl: Pāṭhānuśīlan evam Vivecan*, ed. Narendra Jhā (Patna: Anupam Prakāśan, 1978), 1.

subordinate role, and his guru, Agradās, ordered him to sing in praise of the *bhakta*s. Carrying out this order, Nābhādās composed his *Bhaktamāl*.[2]

Bhaktamāl means "Garland of Devotees," and it is an appropriate title for this poem. In this work, Nābhādās has strung together praise for hundreds of devotees. The *Bhaktamāl* is an expansive and inclusive document. Nābhādās praises gods and humans, kings and servants, men and women, Brahmins and Shudras, devotees from previous cosmic ages and his contemporaries. For Nābhādās, bhakti transcends all these categories. The *Bhaktamāl* is expansive in scope but terse in expression. Nābhādās' paeans to individual *bhakta*s are single, telegraphic stanzas, and he often does little more than list a devotee's name. Nābhādās does not tell us much about the *bhakta*s he celebrates, but his compact language seems to suggest more complete, narrative biographies.[3] These suggestions were picked up by the *Bhaktamāl*'s first and most influential commentator, Priyādās, who expands many of Nābhādās' cameos into narrative, episodic biographies of the *bhakta*s.[4]

The *Bhaktamāl* proposes a new kind of religious community. As I argue in chapter two, Nābhādās imagines a community, united by bhakti, which is not bound by region, sect, gender, social status, or even time. It is not so much that Nābhādās challenges these boundaries as he disregards them. Nābhādās does not, for example, seek to overturn royal authority, caste, or patriarchal family structures, but these worldly institutions seem to have little place in his vision of what ultimately matters: loving devotion for God and God's servants.

By the late nineteenth century, a conception of modern Hinduism would emerge

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2 See chapter two for a detailed consideration of the evidence for Nābhādās' biography.

3 Chapter two includes a more complete description of the *Bhaktamāl*.

4 See chapter three for more on Priyādās and his *Bhaktamāl* commentary, the *Bhaktirasabodhinī*.

bearing remarkable similarities to Nābhādās' community of *bhakta*s. Figures such as Bhāratendu Hariścandra presented a Hinduism that was defined by bhakti, rooted in Vaishnavism, supra-sectarian, and trans-regional. The *Bhaktamāl* was an important ingredient in this formation, but for the most part, it has not been acknowledged as such.[5] Recent scholarship has demonstrated how an unequal negotiation between India's British rulers and the elite among its colonized subjects resulted in this notion of modern Hinduism. Placing the *Bhaktamāl* into our understanding of the emergence of modern Hinduism will help us to acknowledge continuity between colonial modernity and precolonial tradition. In the centuries preceding colonial rule, Hinduism was already on a trajectory of consolidation, and the *Bhaktamāl* tradition constitutes one significant thread in this consolidation.

This dissertation considers the *Bhaktamāl* and its subsequent tradition, including commentaries, manuscripts, and print editions. In so doing, it traces crucial aspects of the development of modern Hinduism from the early seventeenth century until the beginning of the twentieth century. Since the time of its composition, the *Bhaktamāl* has become a prominent locus of dispute over the boundaries and logic of the broad-based devotional community that we now know as Hinduism.

In this introduction, I attempt to place this exploration of the *Bhaktamāl* tradition in a broader intellectual context. Following a brief exploration of the *Bhaktamāl*'s possible predecessors and the literary genre inspired by this text, I consider to what extent Hinduism can be said to have existed prior to the colonial encounter and the subsequent changes which took place during the nineteenth century. I then discuss the role that literature has played in the imagining of South Asian religious communities and conclude with an overview of the

5 See chapter five for a consideration of Bhāratendu Hariścandra and the *Bhaktamāl* tradition in the nineteenth century.

remainder of the dissertation. Nābhādās imagined into being a large and inclusive community united by bhakti. His *Bhaktamāl* became a platform for debates over the boundaries and logic of this community and eventually served as an important source for articulations of modern Hinduism.

Nābhādās and His Precursors

In its supra-sectarian and geographic scope, the *Bhaktamāl* brings together an unprecedented range of devotees, but it is not the first text to assemble a canon of exemplary *bhakta*s. In a paper presented at the South Asia Conference in Madison, Jon Keune proposes that texts like the *Bhaktamāl* belong to a distinct literary genre, "collective hagiography." He considers four examples of this genre, two of which could be seen as precursors of the *Bhaktamāl*: the *Periya Purāṇam* and the *Basava Purāṇa*.[6] These texts share much in common with the *Bhaktamāl*. They each articulate the boundaries of a religious community, but neither of them imagines a community as expansive as the *Bhaktamāl*'s.

The mid-twelfth century *Periya Purāṇam* ("Great Purāṇa") or *Tiruttoṇṭar Purāṇam* ("Purāṇa of the Holy Servants") contains accounts of the Tamil Shaiva poets known as the *nāyaṉmār*.[7] The *Periya Purāṇam* "is the culmination of the Tamil Saivite tradition of sacred poetry. As the final book of the canon, Cekkilar's "Great History" truly completes the textual tradition: it represents the tradition as self-consciously reflecting upon itself, affirming its values, interpreting them for itself."[8] In the *Periya Purāṇam*, Cēkkiḻār narrates the lives of all

6 He also considers the *Bhaktamāl* itself and the *Bhaktivijay*, a mid-eighteenth-century Marathi text, which I discuss below. Jon Keune, "Making Myth and Making It Available" (presented at the 36th Conference on South Asia, Madison, WI, October 2007).

7 Indira Viswanathan Peterson, "Lives of the Wandering Singers: Pilgrimage and Poetry in Tamil Śaivite Hagiography," *History of Religions* 22, no. 4 (May 1, 1983): 339.

8 Ibid., 340-341.

sixty-three canonical *nāyaṉmār* poets, "elucidating the essential significance of the life of each saint as a model of devotion to Śiva."[9] Indira Peterson argues that what is unique about these Tamil saints is "their precise and specific commemoration of particular places as the overarching metaphor for their experience of their god."[10] Anne Monius notes that many studies of the *Periya Purāṇam* have read it in light of later Shaiva Siddhanta tradition, but she argues " that Cēkkiḻār's text offers a unique theological vision of Śiva that would prove to have a lingering impact on the Tamil Śaiva tradition in the centuries following Cēkkiḻār." In his selective use of earlier images of Shiva, Cēkkiḻār crafts "a theology of Śiva as heroic father and warrior-lord that departs significantly from earlier poetic visions of the deity as playful lover, charming mendicant, and devoted spouse." This contribution to Tamil Shaiva theology "has thus far been little noticed." Monius reads this narrative work in order to draw "significant theological conclusions."[11] In the *Periya Purāṇam*, Shiva is "loving, caring, yet also a warrior – stripped of *eros*, infused with a sense of *vīra* (literally "the heroic"), capable of great feats of martial prowess, and yet also carefully tending to his community of earthly devotees."[12] The *Periya Purāṇam*, then, is concerned with establishing and defining a community, but this community is far more limited in geographic scope than the one imagined in the *Bhaktamāl*. This Tamil collection roots each devotee to a particular place, sanctifying a regional geography. While the *Bhaktamāl* certainly reflects its north Indian origins, it reaches out across South Asia to assemble its community of devotees, as we shall see.

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9 Ibid., 341.

10 Ibid., 358.

11 Anne E. Monius, "Śiva as Heroic Father: Theology and Hagiography in Medieval South India," *The Harvard Theological Review* 97, no. 2 (April 1, 2004): 167-168.

12 Ibid., 188.

The *Basava Purāṇa* is another possible precursor for the *Bhaktamāl*. This thirteenth-century Telugu text by Somanātha Pālkuriki tells of the life of Basava, founder of the Vīraśaiva tradition, and almost 100 of his followers.[13] While the *Bhaktamāl* certainly reflects its origins among the Rāmānandīs of Galtā, it is not a sectarian work in the same sense as the *Basava Purāṇa*, which celebrates the followers of a particular teacher. As the *Periya Purāṇam* and the *Basava Purāṇa* demonstrate, the *Bhaktamāl* is not the first Hindu text to celebrate the lives of devotees in order to assemble a canonical community. It differs from its earlier, southern predecessors, though, in that its community is far more expansive in its boundaries than the community imagined by these earlier collective hagiographies.[14]

The Bhaktamāl Genre

In addition to these precursors, the *Bhaktamāl* has its imitators. This dissertation traces the *Bhaktamāl* tradition according to a deliberately narrow conception of this tradition. I limit my analysis to Nābhādās' *Bhaktamāl*, its commentaries, sub-commentaries, and other direct engagements with this text. In addition to this already expansive commentarial tradition, Nābhādās also initiated a new *Bhaktamāl* genre. Later writers have crafted independent texts modeled on the *Bhaktamāl*. A detailed consideration of the *Bhaktamāl* genre is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but I pause here to note some of its contours.

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13 Keune, "Making Myth and Making It Available"; Palakuriki Somanatha, *Śiva's Warriors: The Basava Purāṇa of Pālkuriki Somanātha* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1990).

14 Other texts that should be considered as possible predecessors to the *Bhaktamāl* include the *Divyasūricaritam* and the *Guruparamparāprabhāvam*. The twelfth-century Sanskrit *Divyasurīcaritam* relates the stories of the twelve Tamil Vaishnava Āḻvār saints and "of the the Ācāryas up to Rāmānuja." The fourteenth-century Tamil *Guruparamparāprabhāvam* "traces the teachers of Śrī Vaiṣṇavism from the Āḻvārs to the earlier represntatives of the Teṉkaḷai branch of the movement," acknowledging the *Divyasūricaritam* as a source. Friedhelm Hardy, "The Śrīvaiṣṇava Hagiography of Parakāla," in *The Indian narrative: perspectives and patterns*, ed. C. Shackle and Rupert Snell (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1992), 84-85. Like the *Bhaktamāl*, these collections celebrate the teachers of the Śrī Sampradāy, but they are more narrowly focused than the *Bhaktamāl*, lacking its broad inclusiveness.

Rāghavdās composed a Bhaktamāl modeled on Nābhādās' either in the mid-seventeenth century or the early eighteenth.[15] John Stratton Hawley notes that Rāghavdās follows Nābhādās in foregrounding "the four-*sampradāy* scheme" and that "he depicts it as providing the key to religious order in the *kali yug*. "[16] Interestingly, Rāghavdās goes beyond this formulation, making "separate lists of *sannyāsīs* and *nāths* as part of the bhakti repertoire of the *kali* age," and introducing a new "four-part scheme" called the *cār panth*. These four *panth*s are *nirguṇī* in nature, as opposed to the *saguṇī* four-*sampradāy*s and are depicted as having been founded later than the four *sampradāy*s. Rāghavdās shows a debt to Nābhādās but moves far beyond the model provided by his Bhaktamāl.[17]

Mahīpati, in his eighteenth-century Marathi collection the *Bhaktavijay* ("The Victory of the *Bhaktas*"), explicitly credits Nābhādās as a source. The *Bhaktavijay* is one of four hagiographic collections by Mahīpati and apparently the most popular of these. In nearly 10,000 verses, Mahīpati, affiliated with the Vārkarī pilgrimage tradition, tells the stories of almost 300 Maharashtrian and north Indian *bhakta*s.[18] He "is considered the authoritative biographer of the Varkari *sants* and other sacred figures."[19] Mahīpati describes *bhakta*s from a variety of traditions but always through a Vaishnava lens. Most of the *bhakta*s he celebrates are

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15 See chapter three or John Stratton Hawley, "The Four Sampradays--and other Foursomes" (presented at the Tenth International Bhakti Conference: Early Modern Literatures in North India, Miercurea Ciuc, Romania, July 22, 2009).Rāghavdās and Caturdās, *Bhaktamāl of Rāghavdās*, ed. Agarcand Nāhṭā (Jodhpur: Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute, 1965).

16 I consider Nābhādās' understanding of the four *sampradāys* in chapter two.

17 Hawley, "The Four Sampradays--and other Foursomes," 12-19.

18 Keune, "Making Myth and Making It Available."

19 "The Varkaris are *vaiṣṇava*, Hindu worshippers of Vishnu or Krishna, who venerate the deity Vitthal (Viṭhṭhaḷ). Namdev is considered a foundational figure of the Varkari religious sect, which forms the largest religious tradition in the immediate region [near Pandharpur, Maharashtra], as well as one of the oldest." Christian Lee Novetzke, *Religion and Public Memory: A Cultural History of Saint Namdev in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 1.

placed in "the Marāṭhī-speaking Deccan region," but he also describes *bhakta*s from the north, borrowing openly from Nābhādās.[20]

In an unpublished paper, Francesca Orsini and Stefano Pellò have explored the use of Persian within the domain of bhakti. A portion of their paper discusses *Bhaktamāl*s in Persian, particularly Ram Soni's *Bhagat Mālā*, written in Ghazni in 1682 CE. This *Bhagat Mālā* celebrates forty *bhakta*s. Like Nābhādās, Ram Soni primarily praises these figures, telling us little about their lives or ideas.[21] Orsini and Pellò position this text within the *tazkira* genre as well as within the *Bhaktamāl* genre. Like *Bhaktamāl*s, *tazkira*s, which originated in Persian at the end of the twelfth century, are concerned with canonization, and Ram Soni's *Bhagat Mālā* brings these *bhakta*s into a canon of Persian saints and familiarizes them in a new cultural context through the conventions and tropes of Persian poetry.[22] This dissertation traces the *Bhaktamāl*'s influence in a somewhat circumscribed fashion, but as these few texts indicate, Nābhādās' influence has reached far beyond the narrowly conceived *Bhaktamāl* textual tradition.

Hinduism before Colonialism

The *Bhaktamāl* imagines a broad, inclusive community united by bhakti, which would come to serve as an important ingredient in the articulation of modern Hinduism. Would it be going too far to describe Nābhādās' vision as Hinduism? Is it possible to speak of Hinduism prior to European colonial rule? Hindus alone did not create this category. They responded to the actions and reactions of other communities. The British administrative, military, and

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20 Jon Keune, "Where the Saints Are Gathered," n.d., 26-27.

21 Orsini and Pellò's work on this text so far is preliminary, and it is unclear if Ram Soni followed Nābhādās in anything more than a generic sense.

22 Francesca Orsini and Stefano Pellò, "Bhakti in Persian" (Unpublished Paper, October 2010).

missionary role in the consolidation of Hinduism is impossible to ignore, but it does not follow that Hinduism as such is entirely a product of the nineteenth century. If Hinduism can be said to have existed prior to British domination, some argue, then the arrival of Islam in South Asia may have served as a catalyst for its emergence. Hindus may not have conceived as something as broad and abstract as Hinduism prior to the encounter with colonial modernity, but it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Islam and Muslims played an important role in shaping Hindu religion and Indic culture.[23]

Any discussion of Hinduism prior to the colonial period has an anachronistic quality to it. The first known use of the term "Hinduism" was by the missionary Charles Grant in 1787,[24] and Ram Mohan Roy used the term in 1816,[25] a usage which may reflect missionary influence.[26] The use of the term Hinduism to describe Hindu beliefs and practices as a systematic whole did not become widespread until well into the nineteenth century, but is this a matter of a new term being coined to describe an already existing whole? Can a text like the *Bhaktamāl* be taken as evidence that Hindus conceived of themselves as a coherent collective long before the colonial period?

For David Lorenzen, "a Hindu religion theologically and devotionally grounded in texts

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23 See Will Sweetman, "'Hinduism' and the History of 'Religion'," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 15, no. 4 (2003); Romila Thapar, "Imagined Religious Communities? Ancient History and the Modern Search for a Hindu Identity," *Modern Asian Studies* 23, no. 2 (1989): 209-231; Cynthia Talbot, "Inscribing the Other, Inscribing the Self: Hindu-Muslim Identities in Pre-colonial India," in *India's Islamic Traditions*, ed. Richard Eaton (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003).

24 Geoffrey A. Oddie, "Constructing 'Hinduism': The Impact of the Protestant Missionary Movement on Hindu Self-Understanding," in *Christians and Missionaries in India*, ed. Robert Eric Frykenberg (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2003), 156-7.

25 Brian K. Pennington, *Was Hinduism Invented? Britons, Indians, and the Colonial Construction of Religion* (Oxford University Press, 2005), 60.

26 Geoffrey A. Oddie, "Review of Was Hinduism Invented? Britons, Indians, and Colonial Construction of Religion by Brian K. Pennington," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 66, no. 3 (August 2007): 863-866.

such as the *Bhagavad-gita*, the Puranas, and philosophical commentaries on the six *darśanas* gradually acquired a much sharper self-conscious identity through the rivalry between Muslims and Hindus in the period between 1200 and 1500, and was firmly established long before 1800."[27] Lorenzen cites vernacular Hindu literature, particularly "texts composed by the popular religious poet-singers of North India, most of them members of non-Brahmin castes," to demonstrate that this "literature does precisely what Sanskrit literature refuses to do: it establishes a Hindu religious identity through a process of mutual self-definition with a contrasting Muslim Other." It is through this engagement with an Other that Hindus gained "an active recognition of what the different Hindu sects and schools hold in common."[28] For Lorenzen, Hinduism developed a new self-consciousness during the medieval period, despite "family resemblance" to earlier traditions, but no one invented it; it arose through a complex interaction between various communities, beliefs, and practices.[29]

Much of the power of Lorenzen's argument comes from his critique of those who claim the British "invented" Hinduism, and his insistence that Hinduism is not something that was invented is welcome and necessary. Hinduism, like other complex phenomena, is emergent. Various traditions came together in response to particular circumstances. The first catalyst for this consolidation, Lorenzen argues, was rivalry with Muslims, but colonial rule also brought about a transformation of Hinduism, as Lorenzen acknowledges. As we will see in chapter five, during the colonial period a new insistence on the shared elements of Hinduism developed. These elements are not new in themselves, but the insistence that they collectively delineate

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27 David N. Lorenzen, "Who Invented Hinduism?," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41, no. 4 (1999): 631.

28 Ibid., 648.

29 Ibid., 655.

the boundaries of all true Hindu religiosity is something new in the late nineteenth century. The *bhakta*s discussed by Lorenzen may express a sense of shared Hindu religiosity, but this sense would become more defined and systematized when exposed to the British catalyst. Tracing the *Bhaktamāl* tradition from the early seventeenth century to the early twentieth will enable us to gain a greater feel for this transformation.

The Consolidation of Hinduism

One way to describe this transformation is as a consolidation. To say that there was a consolidation of Hinduism in the nineteenth century and that this consolidation was, to a large degree, a product of the colonial context is not to say that the British invented Hinduism. The British contributed a political and administrative framework that did much to make an articulation of Hindus as an undivided bloc compelling, and they produced Orientalist scholarship that partially shaped Hindu self-understanding, but Hindus, particularly the emerging middle class, took up these and other ingredients and shaped a new understanding of Hinduism.

One of the most nuanced treatments of the consolidation of Hinduism, and the one which has most shaped my thinking on the subject, is Vasudha Dalmia's *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions*. This work explores the intertwined strands of religious, linguistic, and political consolidation that shaped modern Hindusim, Hindi as a national language, and Indian nationalism during the late nineteenth century. Dalmia's book focuses on the figure of Bhāratendu Hariścandra (1850-1885), the Banarasi writer, intellectual, journalist, and publisher. For Dalmia, Hariścandra and his cohort are among the central figures in the consolidation of Hinduism. Dalmia presents Hariścandra as a traditionalist, arguing that

advocates of traditionalism, rather than reformists like Ram Mohan Roy, defined what it would mean to be a Hindu in the twentieth century.[30]

Traditionalists have oftentimes been overlooked in studies of nineteenth-century Hinduism since they claim not to be doing anything new. Unlike reformists in the Arya Samaj and Brahmo Samaj, who accepted only the Vedas as authoritative, traditionalists look to both *śruti* and *smṛti* for guidance. My use of the term "consolidation" follows from Dalmia's description of nineteenth-century modernization. She uses this term, rather than the more common "renaissance," to describe the societal shifts of this period. Hariścandra and his interlocutors wove together three strands to craft a fabric of nationalist tradition: direct access to precolonial tradition,[31] ancient texts mediated through Orientalists, and British administrative and missionary activity. Dalmia does not simply see the modern Indian idiom – which she calls the "third idiom" – as the combination of the Western and the indigenous Indian idioms. Rather, the traditional idiom was itself constructed during this period. The traditionalist response, Dalmia insists, needs to be contextualized and not taken for granted.[32]

The combine Hindi-Hindu-Hindustan is a product of this period. For Dalmia, this slogan stands for the linguistic, religious, and political consolidation of the late nineteenth century. These three strands cannot be entirely separated, but they structure Dalmia's approach. Linguistic consolidation took the form of Hindi as the national language. British perception initiated a process which led to a split in Hindustani, their term for the vernacular of north India, into Hindi and Urdu as the national languages of the Hindus and Muslims. Once this

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30 I consider Dalmia's consideration of Hariścandra in much greater detail in chapter five. Vasudha Dalmia, *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions: Bhartendu Harischandra and Nineteenth-century Banaras* (Delhi: Oxford, 1997).

31 Including the *Bhaktamāl*.

32 Dalmia, *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions: Bhartendu Harischandra and Nineteenth-century Banaras*, 1-20.

dichotomy was established, its origins were forgotten. For Hindi, this forgetting helped to establish it as an "independent language." Separated from Muslim culture and Perso-arabic script, Hindi was then able to link itself to Braj Bhāṣā and Avadhi poetry, establishing an historicized Hindu lineage for itself.[33] This Hinduness indicated the religious meaning of the term but also elided into its earlier geographic and composite meanings, eventually serving as "the identity marker of the nation." With Hindi as the national language, an accompanying corpus of national literature needed to be created. Several steps were required: classical, Sanskrit literature needed to be recovered; the intervening Muslim literature needed to be cleared away to make room for the new; and modern education needed to engage with this national tradition in order to craft a national literature.[34] "Hindu," in Hariścandra's periodicals and elsewhere, stood for all Indians, Muslims included, but Hindu national culture was expressed through a Hindi literature which reflected the more narrowly religious definition of this term.[35]

The work of Dalmia and others who have explored the nineteenth-century consolidation of Hinduism is in many ways the starting point for this dissertation.[36] Dalmia provides a detailed account of a particular moment of consolidation, but by tracing the *Bhaktamāl* tradition from its inception, we can identify a consolidating trend prior to the presence of European influence. A detailed study of this tradition may help us to see more

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33 As a Braj Bhāṣā text, the *Bhaktamāl* falls within this retrospective lineage.

34 Dalmia, *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions: Bhartendu Harischandra and Nineteenth-century Banaras*, 146-223.

35 Ibid., 336-337.

36 See Christopher King, *One Language, Two Scripts: The Hindi Movement in Nineteenth Century North India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999); Pennington, *Was Hinduism Invented? Britons, Indians, and the Colonial Construction of Religion*; Peter van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters: Religion and Modernity in India and Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

clearly how Hindu traditions were transformed during the colonial period.

Imagined Religious Communities

The simultaneous and interrelated consolidations of Hindi as the national language of India and Hinduism as the one true religion of the Hindus illustrates the intimate connection between literary cultures and religious communities. A primary argument of this dissertation is that Nābhādās imagined into being a new type of religious community and that the tradition which cohered around this text has been preoccupied with defining the logic and boundaries of this community. In positing an imagined religious community, I am drawing, loosely, on the work of Benedict Anderson, whose classic *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* explores the origins of personal and cultural feelings of belonging to a nation. For Anderson, nations are imagined not because they are false or fabricated but because in even the smallest of nations it is impossible for any member to know most of his or her compatriots. Print-capitalism, particularly in the forms of the newspaper and the novel, was central to the imagining of the nation.[37] Print did play a role in shaping the religious community imagined by Nābhādās, but as this dissertation argues, literary forms and transmission preceding print set the boundaries of this community long before the arrival of mass printing in north India.[38]

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37 My understanding of community follows Anderson, for whom all communities, not just nations, are imagined: "[The nation] is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.[...] In fact, all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined.[...] [The nation] is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship." Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 6-7.

38 Heidi Pauwels also draws on Anderson to discuss the role of hagiography in "religious community formation." Heidi Pauwels, "Hagiography and Community Formation: The Case of a Lost Community of Sixteenth-Century

The relationship between religious communities and literary cultures in South Asia has not been uncontested. Sheldon Pollock has critiqued the position that the development of vernacular literatures follows from the development of new religious communities.[39] Such a correction is necessary. Religion is too often presented as an essential and obscurantist characteristic of India that marks it off as the Other of a progressive and secular West. In order to understand the development of "literary cultures in history," we need to turn away from an understanding that roots these cultures in entirely devotional or theological contexts.[40] We should also, however, be careful not to overextend Pollock's critique. Religious communities are oftentimes closely connected to literary cultures. Pollock's critique, as I understand it, demands a detailed exploration of the relationship between literature and religion. Such an exploration will, at times, lead us almost entirely away from religious concerns. At other times, though, we will find a more complicated situation where literary works serve to define an

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Vrindavan," *The Journal of Hindu Studies* (3, 2010). Pauwels distinguishes her approach from Anderson's, noting that "sixteenth-century Indian religious communities" are not imagined in the same fashion as nations. While Anderson emphasizes the nation as "a profoundly new way of 'imagining'" following on the adoption of print-capitalism and leading to "the loss of a 'conception of temporality in which cosmology and history were indistinguishable,'" Pauwels emphasizes that for the religious community she studies in this article, "its construing in an ahistorical perspective, mixing cosmology and history" is typical. Ibid., 34 n. 1.

39 Pollock also critiques understandings of manuscript and print culture in South Asia that reiterate understandings drawn entirely from the study of print in Europe. I will return to this topic in chapters four and five. Sheldon Pollock, "Literary Culture and Manuscript Culture in Precolonial India," in *Literary Cultures and the Material Book*, ed. Simon Eliot and Andrew Nash (London: The British Library, 2007), 77-94.

40 My understanding of the definition of "literature" follows Pollock, who reads Terry Eagleton in conjunction with M.M. Bakhtin: "What is crucial for historical literary scholarship is not the fact that the literary is a functional rather than an ontological category, comprising something people do with a text rather than something a text truly and everlastingly is, but the fact that people are constantly induced to do whatever that something is, and to do it variously because 'every specific situation is historical.' However pluralistic we wish to be, however generous and accommodating (or nonchalant and lax) in our embrace of things textual, we ignore a crucial dimension of the history of the literary if we ignore the history of what people have taken the literary to be. The key question thus becomes not whether to define or not define, but how to make the history of definition a central part of our history of the literary. Definitions of the literary in cultures such as those of South Asia can include everything from the sophisticated and powerfully articulated theorizations found in Persian, Sanskrit, and Tamil, among other traditions, to the entirely practical but no less historically meaningful judgments of anthologizers, commentators, and performers." Sheldon Pollock, "Introduction," in *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, ed. Sheldon Pollock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 9-10.

imagined religious community. In the case of the *Bhaktamāl* tradition, it does not make sense to draw a sharp distinction between devotional and courtly literary cultures. As we shall see, royal patronage is a key issue within this tradition. Monius' *Imagining a Place for Buddhism*[41] illustrates the role that literary works sometimes play in establishing a community that could be called religious while Muzaffar Alam's and Pollock's contributions to *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia* demonstrate how a literary culture can provide a space separate from sectarian communities.[42] There are times when it is useful to draw a clear distinction between literary and religious culture. In the case of the *Bhaktamāl* tradition, however, literary and religious matters are inextricably intertwined.

Monius demonstrates the role of literary texts in imagining a place for a religious community. Her *Imagining a Place for Buddhism* explores the only two surviving pre-modern Tamil Buddhist texts, one a narrative, the other a grammar and its commentary. Monius demonstrates that these texts, which seem to bear little or no relationship with each other, are concerned with carving out a niche for Buddhism in South India and beyond. The narrative text marks out the geography of South India as distinctly Buddhist while the grammatical commentary quotes from a wide variety of non-Buddhist Tamil texts. Such a work connects Buddhism intimately to Tamil literary culture and marks out a space for Buddhism within this culture.[43] The development of Tamil cannot be said to be a result of the introduction of Buddhism to South India, but the scant remains of a Buddhist Tamil literary culture

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41 Anne E. Monius, *Imagining a Place for Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

42 Muzaffar Alam, "The Culture and Politics of Persian in Precolonial Hindustan," in *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, ed. Sheldon Pollock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 131-198; Sheldon Pollock, "Sanskrit Literary Culture from the Inside Out," in *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, ed. Sheldon Pollock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 39-130.

43 Monius, *Imagining a Place for Buddhism*.

demonstrate the role that literary texts can play in defining a religious community.

Other scholars emphasize linguistic communities in which sectarian identities are secondary to cosmopolitan concerns. Alam argues that such was the case in South Asian Persian literary culture from 1200 to 1800 CE. Persian served not as a marker of religious community but gained a central, quasi-global role due to its connection with political power. When the British colonial state unceremoniously removed Persian from any role in governance in 1835, Persian's role a non-sectarian, cosmopolitan language evaporated.[44] Pollock demonstrates how Sanskrit fulfilled a similar function at an earlier time. He argues that writers chose Sanskrit specifically when they had something "global" and cosmopolitan to say. This literary culture died when Sanskrit writers stopped innovating and merely repeated what had come before. This death, Pollock emphasizes, was not due to loss of patronage following the rise of Muslim rulers. Rather, Sanskrit died due to longterm cultural changes, including a shift in the ethos of regional courts and a rise in vernacular consciousness.[45]

This dissertation addresses how a particular literary text, the *Bhaktamāl*, played a central role in constituting a religious community. This community is defined by a shared feeling of belonging. The affective bonds between *bhakta*s – and between *bhakta*s and God – hold together a community that is too geographically and temporally widespread to allow interaction between its far-flung members. It is in this sense that Nābhādās' bhakti community is imagined, first by Nābhādās and later by performers, commentators, and others who imagine themselves to be part of this community and who, sometimes, disagree about who is part of this community and why.

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44 Alam, "The Culture and Politics of Persian in Precolonial Hindustan."

45 Pollock, "Sanskrit Literary Culture from the Inside Out."

Chapter Outline

Through its collection of paeans to hundreds of devotees, the *Bhaktamāl* presents a vision of a broad and inclusive community of devotees. Chapter two considers Nābhādās' original text. We know very little about the author – or perhaps authors – of the *Bhaktamāl*. We are not even certain of the author's name. Tradition remembers it as Nābhā-ju or Nābhādās, but the author of the text – or at least part of the text – calls himself Nārāyaṇdās. As we will see at several points throughout the dissertation, later commentators have attempted to fill out Nābhādās' biography in ways that reflect their concerns more than the historical circumstances of Nābhādās. As is appropriate for such a humble figure, Nābhādās tells us far more about what he thought of other *bhakta*s than about himself. These brief biographies allow us to discern Nābhādās' views on such issues as the importance of one's guru, the role of poets, caste, family, and royal authority. Each of these topics concerns the contours of the bhakti community assembled in this text by Nābhādās. For Nābhādās, bhakti is the only matter of ultimate concern. Human relations defined in other terms are, at best, of secondary concern.

My third chapter considers the first major commentary on the *Bhaktamāl*, Priyādās' *Bhaktirasabodhinī*. The *Bhaktirasabodhinī* is not a commentary in the classical Sanskrit sense. It does not clarify the grammar or explain the meaning of particular passages.[46] Rather, it expands upon the *Bhaktamāl*. Where Nābhādās celebrates and describes the qualities of devotees, Priyādās narrates their lives. The expansive and narrative qualities of Priyādās' commentary allow him to present a modified vision of the bhakti community. Like Nābhādās, Priyādās imagines a broad community united by bhakti, but the internal logic of Priyādās'

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46 Cf. Gary A. Tubb and Emery R. Boose, *Scholastic Sanskrit: A Manual for Students* (New York: American Institute of Buddhist Studies, 2007).

community is different. His vision seems more conservative, with greater roles granted to caste, royal authority, and sects or orders. On a literary level, Nābhādās' verse is compact and allusive while Priyādās' narratives are open-ended and descriptive. On a religious level, Priyādās shares Nābhādās' inclusive vision but seeks to discipline its more transgressive implications.

After Priyādās, the *Bhaktamāl* became a popular text and spread across north India. Chapter four explores the generation and transmission of *Bhaktamāl* manuscripts. Manuscripts copied during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries nearly always include Priyādās' commentary along with Nābhādās' original text. Priyādās' influence on the *Bhaktamāl* tradition is undeniable. In many ways, he could be considered the central figure in this tradition, overshadowing even Nābhādās. The *Bhaktamāl* appealed across boundaries of sect and order, attracting scribes and commentators from a variety of mostly Vaishnava orders.

By the nineteenth century, this manuscript tradition was well established, and the arrival of print did not bring about a sudden transformation. I consider the impact of colonialism and print technology on the *Bhaktamāl* tradition in chapter five. Early printed editions seem to be a straightforward continuation of the manuscript tradition; they even look like manuscripts. These editions increased the quantity of texts available, but there does not seem to be much in the way of qualitative change in the texts themselves. Indian publishers eventually brought out editions of the text with exegeses and what would now be recognized as the standard apparatus of printed books, bringing the *Bhaktamāl* into new contexts, but this transformation was gradual. British scholar-administrators also published selections from the *Bhaktamāl* and drew on this text in their research. They found the *Bhaktamāl* to be a practical guide to the religious communities of north India. Partly in response to these and other

Orientalist representations of Hindu society, Bhāratendu Hariścandra and his contemporaries articulated an understanding of modern Hinduism that recapitulated Nābhādās' imagined devotional community.

By the first decade of the twentieth century, a sense of fixity emerged in this tradition. In the final substantive chapter, I explore "Sītārāmśaraṇ" Bhagvān Prasād "Rūpkalā's" (1840-1932) and George Abraham Grierson's (1851-1941) engagements with the *Bhaktamāl*. These two figures, separated by the racial and national divides of the British Empire but united by a shared sense of devotional religiosity, created compelling exegetical commentaries that allowed new readerships to engage with the *Bhaktamāl*. Rūpkalā, much like a twentieth-century Priyādās, attempted to bring order to a relatively chaotic terrain. He created an edition of the *Bhaktamāl*, which would come to be recognized as standard, accompanied by a commentary, which incorporated multiple interpretations without explicitly adjudicating between them. Such an approach could be read as an endorsement of a broadly inclusive Hinduism, which contains room for a variety of doctrinal opinions. Grierson began the first English-language commentary on the *Bhaktamāl* in a series of articles in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*. These articles served as an endorsement of Rūpkalā's edition and commentary while advancing an agenda of sympathy and love across the internal boundaries of Empire.

This thesis concludes with a consideration of my research's implications for the study of religion in South Asia more generally. The devotional community imagined by Nābhādās and his successors is an important predecessor for modern Hinduism. This dissertation's excavation of the *Bhaktamāl* tradition has implications for our understanding of pre-colonial Hindu religiosity and of the emergence of modern Hinduism in the late nineteenth century. Through close attention to a single literary and religious thread spanning the colonial divide,

we can gain a more complete understanding of the continuities and disruptions around this transition as well as of other continuities and disruptions unrelated to this divide.

Chapter Two: Nābhādās' *Bhaktamāl*

श्री गुरु अग्रदेव आज्ञा दई भक्तन कौ जसु गाय ।
भवसागर के तरन कौ, नाहिन आन उपाय ।।

Guru Agradev gave the order: sing of the *bhaktas'* glory.
There is no other way to cross the ocean of existence.
- Nābhādās[1]

Introduction

The *Bhaktamāl* tradition began during the first quarter of the seventeenth century with Nābhādās' *mūl*, or original, text.[2] This chapter considers this terse text within, insofar as is possible, its original context, beginning with an overview of the scholarly literature on the *Bhaktamāl*. Despite extensive citations of the *Bhaktamāl*, only a handful of studies have considered the work as a whole. I then attempt to situate the *Bhaktamāl* within its social context. This will not be an easy task as there has been remarkably little consensus concerning the *Bhaktamāl*'s author, date, or place of composition. Fortunately two relatively recent studies have helped to clarify these issues. I then try to provide an overview of Nābhādās' text as well as a reading of this work. My analysis focuses on Nābhādās' vision of a broadly inclusive suprasectarian and transregional community united by bhakti. In particular, I focus on Nābhādās' treatment of caste, the sect or order, family, and kingship. The *Bhaktamāl* describes the past in order to construct a community in the present. As we shall see in subsequent chapters, this imagined bhakti community is central to the *Bhaktamāl* tradition.

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1 4:1-2 Nābhādās, "Bhaktamāl," VS Nineteenth Century , 1, 3341 (2), Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute - Jaipur.

2 See below for a discussion of the *Bhaktamāl*'s date, place of composition, and authorship.

Previous Scholarship

Scholars have long recognized the *Bhaktamāl*'s significance, and there has been no shortage of references to this text. Much of this scholarship, however, has focused on the individual *bhakta*s praised by Nābhādās and has neglected to consider the overall logic of the *Bhaktamāl*. The *Bhaktamāl* has been mined as an information source, but the nature of this information has remained largely unexamined. The *Bhaktamāl* has not had the scholarly attention due to a work of its influence. There are exceptions to this history of neglect, however, and two relatively recent studies – by Narendra Jhā and Vijay Pinch – have done much to clarify our understandings of the *Bhaktamāl* and its author.

Some scholars have expressed disdain for the *Bhaktamāl* even as they have relied on this text for data. H.H. Wilson represents a stark and early example of this mode. He dismissed the *Bhaktamāl* as "little more than a catalogue" and then proceeded to use it in exactly this manner.[3] Later scholars have not necessarily accepted Wilson's analysis, but they have oftentimes treated the text in a similar fashion, highlighting descriptions of particular *bhakta*s without pausing to consider the context of these descriptions.

There are understandable reasons for this imbalance in *Bhaktamāl* scholarship. The structure of the *Bhaktamāl* encourages such readings. Most of the *Bhaktamāl* consists of independent stanzas praising individual *bhakta*s. Relationships between these saints are not always apparent. Each of the blossoms on this garland may be admired on its own, so it is no surprise that many observers have chosen to do exactly this. Moreover, the *Bhaktamāl*'s well-attested difficulty stands as an obstacle to accessing the entirety of this garland. Nābhādās is a terse and allusive author. Without a guide, it is all too easy to become lost within his compact

3 For a full discussion of Wilson and other early scholarship on the *Bhaktamāl*, see chapter five.

verses.

Despite these obstacles, for over a century there has been a trickle of scholarship that has sought to understand the *Bhaktamāl* as a whole. Between 1903 and 1909, Rūpkalā produced an erudite devotional edition of the text, accompanied by his own exegesis. A single-volume edition of this text, first published in Lucknow in 1913, has become the standard edition of the *Bhaktamāl* and remains in print.[4] Grierson published his "Gleanings from the Bhakta-Mala" in 1909 and 1910 as a series of articles in *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic S*ociety.[5] Grierson's 'Gleanings' may be regarded as the beginnings of an English-language commentary on the *Bhaktamāl*, and later editions of Rūpkalā's book list it as such.[6]

Grierson brought the *Bhaktamāl* to Western scholarly attention, but the half century following the publication of his "Gleanings" would see no continuation of his efforts. Gilbert Pollet resumed the study of the *Bhaktamāl* with an unpublished 1963 dissertation at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London. The bulk of Pollet's dissertation consists of a critical edition and annotated translation of the first ninety-five stanzas of the *Bhaktamāl*, based on four manuscripts and four printed editions found in London at the time. Pollet describes these manuscripts, arranges them according to genealogical relations, and collates them into a critical edition. Pollet's annotated translation is the first attempt to translate and systematically comment upon the *Bhaktamāl* in a European language. Pollet endeavors to identify the Sanskrit sources Nābhādās must have relied on for the first twenty-seven verses

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4 "Sītārāmśaran" Bhagvān Prasād "Rūpkalā", *Śrī Bhaktamāl* (Lucknow: Tej Kumār Book Depot (Private) Ltd., 2001).

5 George A. Grierson, "Gleanings from the Bhakta-Mala," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1909): 607-644; George A. Grierson, "Gleanings from the Bhakta-Mala," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1910): 87-109; George A. Grierson, "Gleanings from the Bhakta-Mala," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1910): 269-306.

6 I consider Rūpkalā's and Grierson's engagements with the *Bhaktamāl* in chapter six.

and to excavate "the enigmatic legends" referenced in the remainder. Finally, Pollet provides a glossary and analyzes the grammatical structure of Nābhādās' Braj Bhāṣā.[7] It is unfortunate that Pollet did not complete and publish his critical edition and translation of the Nābhādās's text, as such a work would fill a major scholarly lacuna.

A scholarly translation of the *Bhaktamāl* remains a desideratum, but two important studies provide a starting point for any consideration of the *Bhaktamāl*.[8] Taken together, Narendra Jhā's *Bhaktamāl: Pāṭhānuśīlan evam Vivecan* and Vijay Pinch's "History, Devotion and the Search for Nābhādās of Galta" offer a clear edition and cogent analysis of Nābhādās' text. In 1978, Narendra Jhā published the most comprehensive modern study of Nābhādās' text. Jhā positions the *Bhaktamāl* within its religious and literary contexts. He provides an account of the *Bhaktamāl*'s subject matter and discusses the commentarial traditions stemming from this text. He situates Nābhādās' work within biography (*jīvanī sāhitya*) as a literary genre and in relation to bhakti. Jhā considers the formal aspects of Nābhādās' poetry and provides an account of manuscripts and previous print editions of the *Bhaktamāl*.[9] Finally, Jhā has compiled a scholarly edition of Nābhādās' *mūl* text.[10] Vijay Pinch adds a compelling analysis to Jhā's nearly encyclopedic study. Pinch's 1999 article focuses on the figure of Nābhādās and highlights the potential benefits of an in-depth study of the *Bhaktamāl*. In contrast to most previous studies, Pinch looks at the logic of the text as a whole, which assembles "a literary corpus (māla or

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7 Gilbert Pollet, "Studies in the Bhakta Mâla of Nâbhâ Dâsa," 1963, 3.

8 Rūpkalā lists an English *Bhaktamāl* by Bhānupratāp Tivārī of Canār, 1908 CE (VS 1965), but nothing is known about this work. "Rūpkalā", *Śrī Bhaktamāl*, 35.

9 Narendra Jhā, "Pratham Khaṇḍ (Vivecan)," in *Bhaktamāl: Pāṭhānuśīlan evam Vivecan*, ed. Narendra Jhā (Patna: Anupam Prakāśan, 1978), i-xv, 1-251.

10 Nābhādās, "Dvitīy Khaṇḍ (Sampādan)."

garland)[11] for the benefit of future generations."[12] Together, these studies provide an important starting point for my research, and I have many occasions to cite them and consider their treatment of particular issues in this chapter and throughout the dissertation.

Nābhādās: person, place, and time

One of Jhā's major contributions has been to present a careful account of earlier scholarship on the *Bhaktamāl* and its author, drawn from Hindi as well as from European languages. Tradition identifies the author of the *Bhaktamāl* as Nābhādās of Galtā, but earlier scholars have not agreed on the identity of the author – or authors – of the *Bhaktamāl*. Jhā and Pinch have each closely considered the figure of Nābhādās, and Pinch, especially, has explored the *Bhaktamāl*'s social context, particularly the institutional context of the Galtā ashram.

Authorship

Jhā attempts to sort out contentious issues concerning the *Bhaktamāl*'s authorship. Even the most basic facts concerning the *Bhaktamāl* have evaded scholarly consensus. The question of who composed this work has been one of the most fundamental points of disagreement. Scholars have attributed the *Bhaktamāl* to one, two, or even three separate authors. The leading position in this dispute is that Nābhādās was the sole author of the *Bhaktamāl*. Numerous

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11 Rupert Snell reads the significance of "*mālā*" differently. For Snell, each "cameo" of an individual *bhakta* is but one *puṣpā* on a garland. Each of these flowers is an equally important constituent of something that achieves more than the sum of its parts." The *mālā* image causes issues of chronology to lose significance, the *mālā* "being a perfect image for the circularity -- and hence ultimate insignificance -- of time itself." Personal Communication, July 2008. Snell's reading is poetic and accurate. On one level, Nābhādās does insist upon circularity of time, but, as I argue below, bhakti, for Nābhādās, is transmitted across generations in linear time. A cosmological notion of time as circular does not erase an awareness of linear time, even if it does make linear time relative.

12 Vijay Pinch, "History, Devotion and the Search for Nabhadas of Galta," in *Invoking the Past: The Uses of History in South Asia*, ed. Daud Ali, SOAS Studies on South Asia: Understandings and Perspectives (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 368.

scholars, including Rāmcandra Śukla and Hazārī Prasād Dvivedī, have advocated this position, but they have not generally considered the possibility of multiple authors or questioned Nābhādās' role as sole author. Advocates of dual authorship, including the nineteenth-century French Orientalist Garcin de Tassy, Wilson, and Grierson, argue that Nābhādās composed the *mūl* text and that another individual named Nārāyandās expanded upon and edited Nābhādās' work. Others, notably Kiśorī Lāl Gupta, argue that in addition to Nārāyandās' and Nābhādās' contributions, their guru Agradās also composed portions of the *Bhaktamāl*. Specifically, Gupta believes that Agradās wrote the 24 *chappay*s that deal with the first three *yug*s, noting the apparent presence of Agradās' *chāp*, or signature, in several verses.[13]

Jhā argues that claims for multiple authors of the *Bhaktamāl* do not hold up: a single individual, known both as Nābhādās and Nārāyandās, composed the *Bhaktamāl*. The easiest position to dismiss, Jhā states, is the identification of three separate authors. Advocates of this position hold that Nābhādās and Nārāyandās were two separate individuals and that Agradās wrote a section of the text, bookended by two mentions of his name in the text. Jhā acknowledges that the *Bhaktamāl* does mention Agradās by name but argues that these instances should not be interpreted as *chāp*s or signatures but rather as acknowledgments of the author's guru. Such acknowledgments of faith in one's guru are far from unusual during this period, and Priyādās noted Nābhādās' particular devotion to his guru. In the opening verses of the *Bhaktamāl*, Nābhādās writes that Agradās instructed him to sing in praise of the devotees,[14] and the very first line of the *Bhaktamāl* establishes the equivalence of guru and

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13 Jhā, "Pratham Khaṇḍ (Vivecan)," 4-12.

14 "श्री अग्रदेव आज्ञा दई भक्तन कौ जसु गाय । भव सागर के तरन कौ नाहिन आन उपाय ।।" 4:1-2 Nābhādās, "Dvitīy Khaṇḍ (Sampādan)," 1.

God.[15] Each mention of Agradās in the *Bhaktamāl* serves to recall and honor Nābhādās' guru, not to identify authorship.[16]

The claim that the *Bhaktamāl* has two authors does not fare any better in Jhā's analysis, but here the grounds for confusion are more pronounced. The author of the *Bhaktamāl* does not identify himself as Nābhādās but rather as Nārāyandās, in the final verse. It is Priyādās, the influential first commentator on the *Bhaktamāl*, who refers to Nābhādās as the sole author of the *Bhaktamāl*. Priyādās, however, also praises Nārāyandās as the composer of the *Bhaktamāl*, which Jhā takes as evidence that Priyādās understood Nārāyandās to be a pseudonym (*upanām*) of Nābhādās. Priyādās' interpretation has been generally accepted by later commentaries.[17]

While tradition has accepted the *Bhaktamāl* as a single-authored text, modern accounts, noted above, have raised doubts and suggested that Nābhādās and Nārāyandās were two separate individuals, but Jhā is not convinced.[18] Jhā treats Gupta's case as most worthy of refutation. Gupta identifies Nābhādās and Nārāyandās as guru-brothers on the basis of one of Nābhādās' *Aṣṭayām*s, included in the Nāgarī Pracāraṇī Sabhā's Khoj Report.[19] In this *Aṣṭayām*, the author, referring to himself as "Nābhā," remembers "Agradev" as his guru.[20] In another line,

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15 "भक्त भक्ति भगवंत गुरु, चतुर्नाम वपु एक ।" 1:1 Ibid.

16 Jhā, "Pratham Khaṇḍ (Vivecan)," 13-14.

17 Ibid., 17-20.

18 Pinch also notes the "considerable speculation in the last two centuries over the true identity of the author, or the possibility of multiple authorship," but he seems to accept the single-author position: "Generally, however, Priyadas's identification is taken to be conclusive." Vijay Pinch, "History, Devotion and the Search for Nabhadas of Galta," 383.

19 Jhā cites the source as the 1923 Nāgarīpracāriṇī Sabhā Khoj Report, page 299. I have not been able to locate this volume, but the abridged version of the Khoj Reports indicates that an *Aṣṭayām* attributed to Nābhādās is described on page 289 of the 1923 volume. *Hastalikhit Hiṅdī Pustakoṁ kā Saṁkṣipta Vivaraṇ*, vol. 1 (Kāśī: Nāgarīpracāriṇī Sabhā, 1964), 494.

20 "नाभा श्री गुरु दास, सहचर अग्र कृपाल को । विहरत सकल विलास, जगत विदित सिय सहचरी ।" Quoted in Jhā, "Pratham Khaṇḍ (Vivecan)," 15.

the author seems to refer to another disciple named Nārāyandās, but Jhā convincingly argues that these apparently separate lines are actually the same line, modified and transposed during scribal transmission.[21] This *Aṣṭayām* does not provide sufficient evidence to establish Nābhādās and Nārāyandās as distinct individuals.[22] Jhā then turns to the original text in order to strengthen his position. The author of the *Bhaktamāl* devotes a stanza to praising the disciples of Agradās, but he does not mention either Nābhādās or Nārāyandās.[23] If these two names denote a single individual – the author of the text – then such an omission makes sense, but if they are different people, Jhā argues, such an omission would be surprising and require explanation.[24]

Gupta's and Jhā's arguments are both weak. Jhā demonstrates that Gupta does not provide sufficient evidence to establish that Nābhādās and Nārāyandās are separate individuals, but Jhā's attempt to prove that they are not distinct also falls short. The *Bhaktamāl* may be expansive, but it is not comprehensive. The failure to list a disciple cannot be taken as clear evidence that such a disciple did not exist. As we will see below, the author of the *Bhaktamāl* does not tell us much about himself, but he does give his name as Nārāyandās. Priyādās has much more to say about the author of the *Bhaktamāl*, whom he calls Nābhādās, as we will see in the next chapter. Priyādās is hardly a contemporary source, though, so his account cannot be taken as authoritative. Still, Priyādās only identifies a single author for the

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21 "सहचर श्री गुरुदेव के नाम नारायणदास, जगत प्रचुर सिय सहचरी विहरत सकल विलास ।" Quoted in Ibid.

22 Ibid., 15-16.

23 "श्री अग्र अनुग्रह तें भये शिष्य सबै धर्म की धुजा । जंगी प्रसिद्ध प्रयाग विनोदी पूरन बनबारी । नरसिंह भल भगवान दिवाकर दृढ़ व्रतधारी ।। कोमल ह्रदै किशोर जगत जगन्नाथ सलूधौ । औरौ अनुग उदार खेम खीची धरमधीर लघु उघौ ।। त्रिविधि तापमोचन सबै सौरभ प्रभु जिनसिर भुजा । श्री अग्र अनुग्रह तें भये शिष्य सबै धर्म की धुजा ।।" 142:1-6 Nābhādās, "Dvitīy Khaṇḍ (Sampādan)," 52.

24 Jhā, "Pratham Khaṇḍ (Vivecan)," 16-17.

Bhaktamāl, and as we shall see in chapter four, subsequent commentators have accepted Priyādās' account. In the absence of strong evidence either way, there is not much basis to overturn the traditional identification of Nābhādās – also known as Nārāyandās – as the sole author of the *Bhaktamāl*, and I refer to the author of the *Bhaktamāl* by this name throughout this dissertation. To some degree, this is simply a convenience; "Nābhādās" serves as a placeholder for the author or authors of the *Bhaktamāl*.

Birth Date

Since it cannot be established with any certainty that the *Bhaktamāl* had a single author, it is unsurprising that not very much can be confidently said about his life. Jhā notes the deep and general difficulties involved in establishing the biographies of pre-modern Hindi authors. Nābhādās is no exception. Since we have no contemporary accounts of his life, any biography would, by necessity, be based on inference. Despite the dearth of reliable information, several scholars have made conjectures as to Nābhādās' date of birth. Jhā sorts through these conjectures, but the closest we have to a contemporary account is Priyādās'.[25] Priyādās writes that the king of Amer, Mānsingh (r. 1589-1614 CE), came to Agradās for *darśan.*[26] This meeting would have taken place sometime around VS 1646 (1589 CE), when Mānsingh assumed the throne. Since by this time, Nābhā's fame had not yet spread, Jhā speculates that Nābhādās was only a boy during the reign of Mānsingh. Jhā guesses that Nābhā must have been about sixteen years old in VS 1646 and therefore places his approximate date of birth in VS 1630 (1573 CE).[27] This approximation is speculative at best. Jhā's logic is plausible, if far from airtight, and

25 Ibid., 20-22.

26 132:1-4 "Rūpkalā", *Śrī Bhaktamāl*, 314.

27 Jhā, "Pratham Khaṇḍ (Vivecan)," 22.

it relies on Priyādās' account, not on a contemporary source.

Birthplace

Nābhādās' birthplace remains even less certain than his date of birth. Some scholars, including Grierson and Pratāp Singh, have given Nābhādās southern origins. The traditional account of Nābhādās' early life, as is found in Priyādās, tells us that Nābhā was born blind, abandoned in the forest, and then discovered by Agradās and Kīlhadās.[28] Jhā argues that this account indicates that Nābhādās was probably born in Rajasthan since these events take place near Galtā. Priyādās does not mention Nābhādās' birthplace, but Bālakrām, an eighteenth-century Rāmānandī sub-commentator,[29] places Nābhādās' birthplace in Marusthal (Marwar?), which Jhā interprets as probably synonymous with Rajasthan.[30] Jhā may be right to place Nābhādās' birthplace in Rajasthan, but the evidence here is very thin. There is simply no way to establish with any certainty where Nābhādās was born.

Parents and Caste

The identity of Nābhādās' parents and his caste are as mysterious as his birthplace. Traditional accounts tell us that Nābhādās' parents abandoned him in the forest during a time of famine, an incident that leaves the identity of his parents completely unknowable.[31] Nābhādās' caste, then, can only be guessed. Nonetheless, his caste has long been a matter of scholarly debate. Priyādās describes the author of the *Bhaktamāl* as a member of the lineage of

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28 I consider Priyādās' account of Nābhādās' early life in chapter three. 12:1-13:4 "Rūpkalā", *Śrī Bhaktamāl*, 43 ,46.

29 For more on Bālakrām and other sub-commentators, see chapter four.

30 Jhā, “Pratham Khaṇḍ (Vivecan),” 22-23.

31 Priyādās is the first to provide such an account. 12:1-4 "Rūpkalā", *Śrī Bhaktamāl*, 43.

Hanuman (*Hanumān vamś*), but he never defines what he means by this term.[32] Jhā quotes Rūpkalā at length on the definition of *Hanumān vamś.* While others have interpreted this term as meaning a type of Brahmin, Kṣatriya, or Ḍom, Rūpkalā gives the term a miraculous twist, and explains that Nābhādās was born from a drop of Hanuman's sweat.[33] Jhā attempts to settle on a more mundane meaning and argues that the most convincing interpretation of this term is as a synonym for Ḍom. Priyādās' commentary contains internal evidence for this interpretation. Nābhādās describes the *bhakta* Lākhā-jī as a Vānar vamśī,[34] which Priyādās glosses as Ḍom.[35] Given this reading, it seems clear that Priyādās means Ḍom when he says *Hanumān vamś*, but the meaning of Ḍom in early eighteenth-century north India is not a settled matter. Rūpkalā and other nineteenth-century writers have asserted that in early modern Rajasthan, Ḍoms were musicians and singers, not scavengers, and had a higher status than is supposed today.[36] Such assertions are rooted in nineteenth-century anxieties rather than seventeenth-century concerns.[37]

Jhā's response to this issue reflects a late twentieth-century mindset and presents an ideal vision of the ashram in which caste plays no role. Jhā argues that whatever the meaning of *Hanumān vamś* and whatever the status of Ḍoms in seventeenth-century Rahasthan, any

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32 12:1-4 Ibid.

33 I consider Rūpkalā's account in detail in chapter six.

34 101:1-6 Nābhādās, "Dvitīy Khaṇḍ (Sampādan)," 37.

35 422:1-4 "Rūpkalā", *Śrī Bhaktamāl*, 668-669.

36 Jhā, "Pratham Khaṇḍ (Vivecan)," 25-26.

37 I consider Rūpkalā's discussion of Nābhādās' caste in more detail in chapter six. Pinch has noted that while Rūpkalā was relatively unconcerned with caste restrictions, the Rāmānandī context of his day distinguished between "pure" and "impure" *śudras*. Welcoming "pure" *śudras* into the order implied the existence of "impure," excluded *śudras.* William R. Pinch, *Peasants and Monks in British India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft22900465/.

discussion of Nābhādās' caste suffers from inherent flaws. Since even in traditional accounts do not report the identity of Nābhādās' parents, his caste is unknowable. Since Nābhādās' spent his entire life, from the age of five, within the ashram, his connection with his birth *jāti* is severed. Jhā asserts that Nābhādās' contemporaries would have regarded him according to his monastic status without consideration of caste.[38]

Jhā is correct to note that Nābhādās' caste is unknowable. As with virtually every detail about Nābhādās' life, his caste and parents are unrecorded in contemporary sources. Jhā goes too far, however, in arguing that any discussion of his caste is meaningless. Jhā's argument that, for Priyādās, *Hanumān vamśī* is a synonym for Ḍom is convincing. Whatever else Ḍom may have meant to Priyādās, it signified a subordinate status, which carried over into the Galtā ashram. Pinch emphasizes Nābhādās' lowly status at Galtā. Pinch observes that, in Priyādās' telling, Nābhādās was not a full-fledged sadhu but rather a lowly *bhakta* whose role was to serve the sadhus. Pinch argues that acknowledging Nābhādās' subordinate position is key for understanding the *Bhaktamāl*: "Nabhadas articulated a broadly conceived Vaiṣṇava catholicism that extended beyond the confines of the monastic sanctuary without undermining the importance of and need for that sanctuary."[39] An idealized portrait of the *sampradāy* as a social space where caste does not apply fails to reflect change over time in the Rāmānandī order. The Rāmānandīs were, and are, notable for their diversity, and Rāmānand is oftentimes portrayed as the leader of a social revolution in Hinduism.[40] The particular manner in which this

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38 Jhā, "Pratham Khaṇḍ (Vivecan)," 25-26.

39 Vijay Pinch, "History, Devotion and the Search for Nabhadas of Galta," 369.

40 Richard Burghart observes that there is very little information concerning the historical Rāmānand and argues that *guru-paramparā* lineages, which trace the founding of the Rāmānandī *sampradāy* to Rāmānand – such as the one found in the *Bhaktamāl* – reflect later attempts to retroactively install him as a founder. Richard Burghart, "The Founding of the Ramanandi Sect," *Ethnohistory* 25, no. 2 (Spring 1978): 121-139. Pinch agrees that the association of Rāmānand with Kabīr and other *sant*s who challenge caste is a product of later

sampradāy managed its diversity, however, needs to be historicized. Whatever role the teachings of Rāmānand played in shaping the social arrangements of his seventeenth-century followers, actual practices shifted in response to internal debates and outside pressures.

Childhood

There are no contemporary accounts of Nābhādās' childhood. Nābhādās reveals nothing about his early life. Priyādās provides the earliest account,[41] which I consider in chapter three. According to this account, Nābhādās was born blind, without eyes. When he was five years old, there was a famine, and his mother abandoned him in the woods. Kīlha and Agra saw the child from the path and rescued him. Kīlha sprinkled water from his water pot in the boy's eyes and gave him vision. Out of mercy, they took him back to Galtā. Kīlha ordered Agra to give Nābhādās the initiatory mantra, and in Galtā he took up service to the sadhus.[42] This account has been generally accepted by tradition,[43] but its historicity is unverifiable.

Adult Life

Nābhādās' adult life is nearly as obscure to us as his childhood. Jhā attempts to piece together Nābhādās' life in Galtā from a variety of sources, none of which are contemporary to Nābhādās. The only detail about Nābhādās' life that can be accepted with any confidence is, as

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times and not historical fact. William R. Pinch, *Peasants and Monks in British India*. Purushottam Agrawal argues that there is no good reason to reject the medieval consensus on Rāmānand, which holds that he flourished in the fifteenth century, was a guru to Kabīr and others, and advanced a "non-caste Hinduism." Later developments within the *sampradāy* that bears his name led to the attribution to Rāmānand of a fourteenth-century floruit, a claim which has been repeated by modern scholars. Purushottam Agrawal, "In Search of Ramanand: The Guru of Kabir and Others," in *Ancient to Modern: Religion, Power, and Community in India*, ed. Ishita Banerjee-Dube and Saurabh Dube (Oxford University Press, 2009), 135-170.

41 Jhā, "Pratham Khaṇḍ (Vivecan)," 26.

42 12:1-13:4 "Rūpkalā", *Śrī Bhaktamāl*, 43, 46.

43 Jhā, "Pratham Khaṇḍ (Vivecan)," 27.

we will see below, that Agradev, his guru, ordered him to sing of the glory of the *bhaktas*, since this fact is recorded in the *Bhaktamāl* itself, the closest Nābhādās ever comes to autobiography. Jhā's composite account fills in more details about Nābhādās' life in the monastery. Nābhādās embraced his service to the sadhus of Galtā and relished eating their leftover food. Agradās gave this abandoned child the name Nābhādās, and upon his initiation as a Vaishnava, Nābhādās took on the name Nārāyandās.[44] Jhā writes that when Kīlhadās took over the *gaddī* of Galtā, Agradās left for Raivāsa, where he established his own *gaddī*, taking several of his disciples, including Nābhādās, with him. Nābhādās spent the rest of his life in Raivāsa and composed the *Bhaktamāl* there. An episode related by Priyādās communicates the depth of devotion Nābhādās is said to have held for the devotees. Nābhādās was serving his guru, who was immersed in *sādhanā*. One of Agradās' other disciples, who was traveling by ship, became endangered and thought of his guru. Nābhādās became aware of his guru-brother's difficulty and, with a single swipe of his fan, redirected the ship out of harm's way. It was upon learning of this miraculous feat that Agradās directed his disciple to compose a work in praise of the devotees.[45] Nābhādās may have reached institutional prominence as well. According to some accounts, Nābhādās became the abbot of Raivāsa following the death of his guru.[46]

This elevation of Nābhādās' status, however, seems to be posthumous. Nābhādās' position in the ashram was humble, at least according to Priyādās' account. Pinch takes the "hagiographical gymnastics" of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century commentators, which attempt to establish Nābhādās' elevated social status, as near confirmation "of that individual's

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44 Ibid., 28-29.

45 10:1-11:4 "Rūpkalā", *Śrī Bhaktamāl*, 41-42.

46 Jhā, "Pratham Khaṇḍ (Vivecan)," 29.

low, indeed untouchable, status."[47] Pinch notes that Nābhādās did not, according to Priyādās' account, seem to enjoy commensality at Galtā. He was not a sadhu but rather a "servant-devotee" of the sadhus. Pinch emphasizes this distinction: "In other words, he was living the life of a bhakta, a devotee, rather than a sādhu, a monastic disciple."[48] For Pinch, Nābhā's position as a *bhakta* rather than a sadhu is central to understanding the *Bhaktamāl*:

> This returns us, finally, to Priyadas's first assertion, namely, that Agradas ordered his charge to discourse on the virtues of the sādhus (v. 11) -- a command that runs counter to Nabhadas's own words (v. 4;), namely, that Agradas commanded him to 'sing the glory of the bhaktas'. Priyadas's recasting of the original command of Agradas suggests that Nabhadas's efforts to highlight the importance of sants and bhaktas of all castes from beyond the formal confines of Vaiṣṇava monasticism, and to enlist them, rhetorically if not actually, in the history and future of a newly constituted Vaiṣṇava community of believers, were no longer acceptable doctrinal strategies by 1712.[49]

Pinch argues that Nābhādās sought to establish a religious community beyond the boundaries of the monastic order and that Priyādās worked against the implications of this project. I agree with these insightful arguments and will return to them below and in chapter three.

Date of Death

As with life, so too with death. The date of Nābhādās' death is uncertain and cannot be established with any confidence. Some scholars have stated that Nābhādās lived to be over 100 years old. Rāmcandra Śukla writes that he died long after Tulasīdās. The Miśra brothers place his date of death at around VS 1720 (1663 CE), and Kiśorī Lāl Goswāmī says that he died in VS 1719 (1662 CE). Priyādās reports that Nābhādās instructed him to write a commentary on the *Bhaktamāl*, so these late dates for Nābhādās' death represent an attempt to make this claim

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47 Vijay Pinch, "History, Devotion and the Search for Nabhadas of Galta," 387.

48 Ibid., 388.

49 Ibid.

plausible. As we shall see in the next chapter, Priyādās received his orders from the *voice* of Nābhādās, an encounter for which Nābhādās' physical presence was unnecessary. Jhā guesses that Nābhādās died in approximately VS 1700 (1643 CE). According to Jhā's estimates, Nābhādās would have been about seventy years old at the time of death.[50] Jhā's estimate seems reasonable, but there is no reason to accept it with any confidence.

Guru and Spiritual Lineage

One fact about Nābhādās' life that we can state with confidence is that Agradās was Nābhādās' guru.[51] There is a scholarly consensus on this point.[52] I have noted above that Priyādās writes that Agradās gave the initiatory mantra to Nābhādās, and more significantly, that Nābhādās clearly identifies Nābhādās as his guru.[53] While there is little doubt that Agradās was Nābhādās' guru, the question of Agradās and his disciple's spiritual lineage is less certain. Traditional accounts of Agradās' guru *paramparā*, such as the one found in the *Bhaktamāl*, begin this *paramparā* with Rāmānuja (1019-1117 CE), who is identified as the founding *ācārya* of one of

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50 Jhā, "Pratham Khaṇḍ (Vivecan)," 29-30.

51 Agradās is also known as Agradev or Agra-alī. Nābhādās refers to his guru both as Agradev and as Agradās. 4:1-2, 40:1-6 Nābhādās, "Dvitīy Khaṇḍ (Sampādan)," 1, 15. Priyādās refers to him as Agradās and as Agar. 10:1-4, 12:1-4 "Rūpkalā", *Śrī Bhaktamāl*, 41, 43. Nābhādās reports that Agradās was a disciple of Kṛṣṇadās Payahārī, in the lineage of Rāmānand. 40:1-6 Nābhādās, "Dvitīy Khaṇḍ (Sampādan)," 15. I return to the topic of Agradās and his guru below.

52 Jhā, "Pratham Khaṇḍ (Vivecan)," 30. Agradās is considered to be the founder of the Rām Rasik branch of the Rāmānandī *sampradāy*. His *chāp*, or poetic signature, was Agra-alī. Philip Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 314-315. I consider Nābhādās' treatment of his own spiritual lineage below. For more on Agradās and the Rām Rasik tradition see Bhagavatī Prasāda Siṁha, *Rāmabhaktī meṁ rasika sampradāya*, Rasika granthamālā (Balarāmapura: Avadha-Sāhitya-Mandira, 1957). and Ronald Stuart McGregor, "The Dhyān-mañjarī of Agradās," in *Bhakti in Current Research: 1979-1982. Proceedings of the Second International Conference on Early Devotional Literature in New Indo-Aryan Languages, St. Augustin, 19-21 March 1982*, ed. Monika Thiel-Horstmann (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1983), 237-44.

53 "श्री गुरु अग्रदेव आज्ञा दई भक्तन को जसु गाय ।" 4:1-2 Nābhādās, "Dvitīy Khaṇḍ (Sampādan)," 1.

the four principal Vaishnava *sampradāy*s.[54] He is identified as a disciple of the sage Yāmun.[55] According to this account, Rāghavānand, a spiritual descendant of Rāmānuja, brought this tradition to the North and eventually established himself in Banaras, where he gave initiation to Rāmānand. Nābhādās notes that Rāghavānand established bhakti without regard for *varnāśram,*[56] something for which his famous disciple is also well known. Jhā notes that Rāmānand is remembered as a revolutionary personality who promoted the people's language rather than Sanskrit and who composed poetry related to contemporary circumstances.[57]

Nābhādās attributes twelve primary disciples to Rāmānand, along with other less notable followers.[58] Anantānand was one of Rāmānand's prominent disciples, and Kṛṣṇadās Payahārī was a disciple of Anantānand.[59] Anantadās, another grand-disciple of Kṛṣṇadās, provides an identical lineage in his *Pīpā-paracāī.*[60] He earned the name Payahārī due to his practice of living exclusively on milk.[61] Horstmann observes that Payahārī's "name suggests

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54 28:1-2 Ibid., 10.

55 29:1-6 Ibid., 10-11.

56 34:1-6 Ibid., 12-13.

57 Jhā, "Pratham Khaṇḍ (Vivecan)," 30-31. As noted above, Agrawal supports the traditional view of Rāmānand as a vernacular poet, fierce critic of caste, and guru to Kabīr and other heterodox *sants*. During the early twentieth century, "radical" Rāmānandīs sought to sever all ties between their *sampradāy* and Rāmānuja's more orthodox and generally higher status followers in the South. These radical Rāmānandīs produced Sanskrit manuscripts establishing Rāmānand as a liberal but orthodox preceptor (*ācārya*) in his own right. Agrawal convincingly argues that these manuscripts are apocryphal or even forged. Sanskrit tradition took no notice of Rāmānand. The historical Rāmānand is the one found in Hindi sources. Agrawal asserts that there is no reason to reject the "medieval consensus" on Rāmānand, as found in the *Bhaktamāl* and elsewhere. I agree with Agrawal that the Sanskrit Rāmānand is a modern invention, but I hesitate to endorse the medieval consensus on Rāmānand as historically accurate. In the absence of solid evidence, though, there is no reason to reject this account out of hand, either. Agrawal, "In Search of Ramanand: The Guru of Kabir and Others."

58 35:1-6 Nābhādās, "Dvitīy Khaṇḍ (Sampādan)," 13.

59 36:1-6 Ibid.

60 35:26-27 Anantadās, *The Hagiographies of Anantadās: The Bhakti Poets of North India* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2000), 276.

61 Jhā, "Pratham Khaṇḍ (Vivecan)," 31-33.

that he (or the guru who selected this name for him) worshipped Krsna," which accords with the foregrounding of "motives and religious sensibility adopted from the devotion to Krsna" taking place by this time among Ram *bhakta*s. Moreover, as the syncretic worship at Galtā illustrates, "the ritualistic tradition of the Pancaratra... shared by the Vaisnava sects" brought Ram and Krishna bhakti into harmony.[62] Kṛṣṇadās was a Dahima Brahmin as well as a yogi. Horstmann notes that this caste, also known as Dayma or Dadhici, is fairly common in Rajasthan. Nābhādās celebrates Kṛṣṇadās for, in Horstmann's words, "his honesty and his willingness to sacrifice himself for the sake of other creatures and in keeping with the laws of hospitality." In this, he is an epigone of Dadhici, "the forefather of his caste," who "made his own body impenetrable by means of severe austerities. When the gods waged war against the demons at a time when their weapons had been swallowed by Vrtra, he gave them his bones so that they could make weapons out of these."[63] It is through Kṛṣṇadās Payahāri that the Rāmānandīs of Galtā maintain their traditional connection to Rāmānand and, through him, to Rāmānuja.[64] Payahārī brought two deities with him, each represented by a *śālagrām*: Sītārāmjī,[65] which would become "one of the four deities that protected, secured and legitimised the

62 Monika Horstmann, "The Rāmānandīs of Galtā (Jaipur, Rajasthan)," in *Multiple Histories: Culture and Society in the Study of Rajasthan*, ed. Lawrence A. Babb, Varsha Joshi, and Michael Meister (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2002), 151-152.

63 Horstmann, "The Rāmānandīs of Galtā (Jaipur, Rajasthan)," 152; 37:1-6 Nābhādās, "Dvitīy Khaṇḍ (Sampādan)," 13-14.

64 Horstmann reports that she has not found "Rāmānandī" used as a self-designation prior to the 1730s. Horstmann, "The Rāmānandīs of Galtā (Jaipur, Rajasthan)," 145.

65 "Sītārāmjī is one of the four deities that protected, secured and legitimised the Kachavāhā rulers. The deity is to this day housed in the Sītārāmdvārā within the precincts of the City Palace of Jaipur. The other deities are Jamvāī Mātājī (in Jamvā Rāmgaṛh), Śilādevī (in the palace of Āmber) and Govinddevjī (in the complex of the City Palace of Jaipur). This state of affairs has prevailed for a long time. Chronologically, Jamvāī Mātājī came first, in the 11th century; Sītārāmjī was brought by the Rāmānandī Kṛṣṇadev Payohārī, who settled in Galtā in the 16th century; Śilādevījī was brought to Āmer by Rājā Mānsingh I in the 16th century, and Govinddevjī, a Kachavāhā family deity, whose caretakers are the Mādhva-Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas of Vrindaban, entered the state cult within the territory of Āmer-Jaipur proper in the beginning of the 18th century when it had left Vrindaban after about two hundred years of Kachavāhā patronage at that place." Ibid.

Kachavāhā rulers", and Nṛsiṁha.[66] Payahārī is remembered as the first Rāmānandī *mahant* of Galtā. He is said to have established his seat during the reign of Mahārāja Pṛthvirāj (r. 1503-1527 CE). According to this account, Pṛthvirāj was a follower of Tārānāth, a Kanphata yogi who lived at "'Jogī kī Tekarī' in the Galtā hills."[67] Miracle-filled accounts report that Payahārī defeated Tārānāth and ousted the Nāthpanthīs who had occupied the site.[68]

According to Nābhādās, the foremost of Payahārī's twenty-three disciples – or at least the first ones listed – were Kīlhadās and Agradās.[69] Nābhādās describes Kīlhadās as an accomplished yogi.[70] He is remembered as the successor of Kṛṣṇadās Payahārī.[71] Nābhādās lists his guru Agradās as second only to Kīlhadās among Payahārī's disciples. Nothing is known about Agradās' early life. According to sectarian sources, he was born in a village in the Amer kingdom during the second half of the sixteenth century and became a follower of Kṛṣṇadās Payahārī as a child. These sources report that Agradās lived in Galtā for many years until, after his guru's death, he went to Raivāsa, along with his disciple Nābhādās, and established his own *gaddī*.[72] Nābhādās does not provide any particular details about Agradās' natural life. According to the stanza that Nābhādās devotes to his guru, Agradās remained constantly engaged in the

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66 Ibid., 145-148.

67 The *Bhaktamāl* is the oldest written source, and it does not give the yogi's name. Ibid., 147.

68 There are no contemporary accounts of Kṛṣṇadās Payahārī. His earliest biography is found in the *Bhaktamāl*. Horstmann, "The Rāmānandīs of Galtā (Jaipur, Rajasthan)," 146-148; Ch. 37 Nābhādās, "Dvitīy Khaṇḍ (Sampādan)," 13-14. Three works are attributed to Kṛṣṇadās Payahārī: *Brahmagīta*, *Prematattva Nirupan*, and *Jugalman Carit*. Bhāgavati Prasād Singh, author of *Rām Bhakti meṅ Rasik Sampradāy*, has not, however, been able to acquire these texts and has therefore concluded that our knowledge of Payahārī's views comes entirely from sectarian sources and tradition. Jhā, "Pratham Khaṇḍ (Vivecan)," 31-33.

69 38:1-6 Nābhādās, "Dvitīy Khaṇḍ (Sampādan)," 14.

70 Horstmann, "The Rāmānandīs of Galtā (Jaipur, Rajasthan)," 155; Ch. 39 Nābhādās, "Dvitīy Khaṇḍ (Sampādan)," 14.

71 Horstmann, "The Rāmānandīs of Galtā (Jaipur, Rajasthan)," 155.

72 Jhā, "Pratham Khaṇḍ (Vivecan)," 33-35.

worship of Sita and Ram. He established and cultivated a renowned garden. Due to the grace of Kṛṣṇadās Payahārī, he received the blessing of Ram bhakti, and he continuously repeated the name of God, even while working.[73] *Bhakta*s of the Rasik Sampradāy continue to follow Agradās' example by keeping small gardens and joining to their names horticultural words such as *bāg*, *kuṅj*, *nikuṅj*, *bāṭikā*, and *van*.[74]

Horstmann notes the "impressive catholicity" that the Rāmānandīs showed by the time of Agradās and Nābhādās. Agradās was "the propagator of the Rāmrasiksampradāy, the Rāmānandī order that practices *mādhurya bhakti*, an erotically tuned kind of devotion."[75] Initiates in the *rasik* tradition take on the role of one of Sita's or Ram's companions, and Agradās took on the role of one of Sita's *sākhīs*, or female companions, for his performance of bhakti. Four known works are attributed to Agradās: *Dhyānmaṅjarī*, *Kuṅḍaliyā*, *Rāmāṣṭayām*, and *Rām Jyonār*. Sectarian sources also attribute other works to Agradās, including the *Agra Sāgar* and the *Padāvalī*. *Agra Sāgar* has been lost, but a few lines of the *Padāvalī* have been preserved in manuscript.[76] In the *Dhyānmaṅjarī*, his best known work, Agradās demonstrates an extensive engagement with contemporary devotional poetry, providing evidence for the open and versatile "religious atmosphere of Galtā in the mid-16th century."[77]

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73 49:1-6 Nābhādās, "Dvitīy Khaṇḍ (Sampādan)," 14-15.

74 Jhā, "Pratham Khaṇḍ (Vivecan)," 34.

75 Horstmann, "The Rāmānandīs of Galtā (Jaipur, Rajasthan)," 152-153. Agradās is remembered as the founder of the *rasik*, or connoisseur tradition. His reputation seems to follow mainly from his *Dhyānmaṅjarī*, which provides a detailed description of and guide to meditation on the heavenly city of Ayodhya and the divine couple, Sita and Ram. For more on the *Rāmrasik* tradition, see Philip Lutgendorf, "The Secret Life of Ramcandra of Ayodhya," in *Many Ramayanas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia*, ed. Paula Richman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991). or Siṁha, *Rāmabhaktī meṁ rasika sampradāya.* For an overview of the *Dhyānmaṅjarī*, including Gauḍīyā influence on this text, see McGregor, "The Dhyān-mañjarī of Agradās."

76 Jhā, "Pratham Khaṇḍ (Vivecan)," 35-36.

77 Horstmann, "The Rāmānandīs of Galtā (Jaipur, Rajasthan)," 152-153.

Nābhādās positions himself in a lineage that, through Rāmānuja, connects him to bhakti's ultimately divine source. It is difficult to accept even the portion of this lineage that occurs in historical time as factually reliable. Richard Burghart has considered several lineages of Rāmānand's disciples, including the one found in the *Bhaktamāl*, and concluded that these lineages represent Rāmānandī sectarian reinterpretations of the past. They are efforts to propagate the sect, not to record its history. According to Burghart, Rāmānand did not found the *sampradāy* which bears his name. Rather, his followers did.[78] Burghart notes that there is a strange inversion found in the *Bhaktamāl* and in Priyādās' commentary: they provide far more information about Rāmānand's disciples than they do about Rāmānand himself. There is an extraordinary paucity of information about Rāmānand.[79] Burghart observes that Rāmānand's position in the *Bhaktamāl* is ambiguous. He is included in the lineage of Rāmānuja, but "he is attributed twelve disciples as if he had founded his own sect. Moreover, these twelve disciples include Twice Born Hindus, servants, untouchables, and women in contravention of the social practices of the Sri sect who are said to have recruited only Twice Born male Hindus into their sect in upper India."[80] Subsequent genealogies would remove this ambiguity, however, and posit Rāmānand as the founder of a sect, independent of Rāmānuja's Śrī *sampradāy* and purified of "certain impure spiritual descendants."[81] Horstmann agrees with Burghart as to the state of the Rāmānandīs of Galtā during this period: they attempted to "encompass both the Vaiṣṇava orthodoxy and the heterodox movements represented by some of the great *sant*s whom Nābhā boldly classified as disciples of Rāmānand, just as Anantdās did. To Nābhādās, Kṛṣṇadās

78 Burghart, "The Founding of the Ramanandi Sect."

79 Ibid., 124-125.

80 Ibid., 130.

81 Ibid., 136.

personified this harmonising of the various Vaiṣṇava tenets."[82] The spiritual lineage offered by Nābhādās does not necessarily reflect historical fact; rather, it reflects his understanding of his sectarian position. Nābhādās places Rāmānand and his descendants within the Śrī Sampradāy, albeit somewhat ambiguously.[83] In later years, many Rāmānandīs would come to understand their *sampradāy* as utterly distinct from Rāmānuja's, and Nābhādās' ambiguity would become a point of conflict.[84]

Other Compositions

The *Bhaktamāl* is by far Nābhādās' best known work and the composition upon which his reputation as a poet rests, but two *Aṣṭayām*s or *Aṣṭakāl Carit*s have also been attributed to him. *Aṣṭayām* refers to the eight (*aṣṭa*) three-hour periods (*yām*), which make up a day, and these works describe Ram's activities during a single day. One of these works is in Braj Bhāṣā prose while the other is in verse. Nābhādās followed the example of his guru and wrote these works in *mādhurya bhāv*, the sweet mode of devotion.[85] Jhā also presents two previously unpublished *pads* – devotional verses – with Nābhau or Nābhā as the *chāp*, which he reproduces.[86]

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82 Horstmann, "The Rāmānandīs of Galtā (Jaipur, Rajasthan)," 153.

83 For a defense of the traditional, vernacular portrait of Rāmānand, see Agrawal, "In Search of Ramanand: The Guru of Kabir and Others."

84 William R. Pinch, *Peasants and Monks in British India*, np.

85 The verse *Aṣṭayām* has been published from Ayodhya, and much of this work has been presented in Bhuvaneśvar Miśra Mādhav's *Rām Bhakti meṅ Madhur Upāsanā*. Rāmcandra Śukla provides excerpts from the prose *Aṣṭayām*, but Jhā reports that he was unable to locate any copies of this work. Jhā, "Pratham Khaṇḍ (Vivecan)," 37-39.

86 Jhā found each of these pads in the Rajastahan Oriental Research Institute, Jodhpur, and believes them to be authored by Nābhādās. Ibid., 39-40.

To summarize, the author of the *Bhaktamāl* remains almost unknowable, except through the words of the *Bhaktamāl* itself. The author of the *Bhaktamāl* identifies himself as Nārāyandās. Tradition holds Nārāyandās to be the same individual as Nābhādās, but the evidence for or against such a distinction is weak. I follow the traditional practice of referring to the author of the *Bhaktamāl* as Nābhādās, but there is not enough evidence to confidently assert a single author theory, or a two or three author theory for that matter. Since we cannot even be sure that the *Bhaktamāl* had a single author, it is unsurprising that very little can be known about this person. The dates of his life, his birthplace, his parentage, his caste, and the other circumstances of his life are uncertain. The *Bhaktamāl* does identify its author's guru's name: Agra, which associates him with the Rāmānandīs of Galtā. Priyādās and later commentators have much to say about Nābhādās, but the historical Nābhādās is an almost unknown figure. While we know very little about the life of Nābhādās, we know quite a bit about what he thought about bhakti, thanks to the *Bhaktamāl*, the topic to which we now turn.

The Text of the *Bhaktamāl*

Date of the Bhaktamāl

As with nearly all aspects of Nābhādās' life, opinion is divided as to the date of the *Bhaktamāl*'s composition, but the text itself provides some clues. Gilbert Pollet observes that the *Bhaktamāl* praises Harivaṁś Gusāīṅ,[87] who flourished around 1585 CE and that Nābhādās refers to Vallabh, a disciple of Nārāyaṇ Bhaṭṭ, as a contemporary.[88] Pollet explains that this Vallabh could not have flourished before c. 1595 CE, but Jhā considers this verse an

87 85:1-6 Nābhādās, "Dvitīy Khaṇḍ (Sampādan)," 31-32.

88 88:1-6 "Rūpkalā", *Śrī Bhaktamāl*, 590-591.

interpolation.[89] Jhā states that the *Bhaktamāl* could not have been written prior to 1585 CE (VS 1642), since it mentions Giridhar, Viṭṭhalnāth's son and successor, and Viṭṭhalnāth died in 1585 CE.[90] The *Bhaktamāl* mentions Tulasīdās as a contemporary.[91] If we accept Tulasīdās' date of death as 1623 CE [92] then the *Bhaktamāl* would have to have been written before this date.[93] This evidence establishes the date of the *Bhaktamāl*'s composition as roughly between 1585 and 1623 CE, but Jhā reminds us that even this range is little more than a best guess. The *Bhaktamāl* is a large and complex work that may have taken many years to complete. Some sections may have been completed long before others. If this is the case, then some portions of the *Bhaktamāl* may have been completed after the death of Tulasīdās.[94]

Overview of the Text

As its title aptly indicates, the *Bhaktamāl* is a garland (*mālā*) threaded from descriptions of and praise for hundreds of devotees (*bhakta*). Nābhādās was by no means the first to praise the qualities of exemplary devotees, but he marks a departure from earlier north Indian hagiographical tradition in that he assembles his brief biographies into a distinct literary composition.[95] Inclusivity is among the most conspicuous features of this garland. These

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89 Appendix Kha. Nābhādās, "Dvitīy Khaṇḍ (Sampādan)," 69.

90 Jhā, "Pratham Khaṇḍ (Vivecan)," 40-1.

91 122:1-6 Nābhādās, "Dvitīy Khaṇḍ (Sampādan)," 45.

92 "The *Gautamacandrikā* [...] concludes by mentioning Tulasī's death in Saṃvat 1680 (AD 1623) at the age of 80 years, and that his ashes were consigned to the holy Ganges. The year of his [Tulasīdās'] death has been generally accepted, and there is a traditional couplet, on the lips of the people to this day, which tells its date. This couplet is known from several variants in which the year is constant but the actual day is given differently." F.R. Allchin, "Introduction," in *Kavitāvalī* (New York: A.S. Barnes and Company, Inc., 1964), 43.

93 Pollet, "Studies in the Bhakta Mâla of Nâbhâ Dâsa," 11-13.

94 Jhā, "Pratham Khaṇḍ (Vivecan)," 45.

95 Vijay Pinch, "History, Devotion and the Search for Nabhadas of Galta," 368.

*bhakta*s include various manifestations and avatars of God. They include poets who sang praises to God in a variety languages, and they include devotees who worshiped God according to several different paths. They include men and women and people from all social strata. They come from throughout South Asia and from each of the four *yug*s.[96] The *Bhaktamāl* gives central importance to the devotees themselves. Nābhā believed that in order to reach God, it is necessary to sing the praise of the *bhakta*s and that God intervened in the world in order to propagate devotion and support God's devotees. The first verse of the *Bhaktamāl* strongly states this theme, admitting no distinction between *Bhagvān* and *bhakta*:[97]

> Devotee and Devotion, God and Guru: four names for a single body.
> Praising their feet eliminates many obstacles.[98]

In his *Bhaktamāl*, Nābhādās mentions approximately 800 *bhakta*s.[99] Despite their remarkable diversity, each of these individuals participates in bhakti. As we will see below, for Nābhādās, bhakti is the only proper basis for human society.

Structure and Organization

At first glance, the *Bhaktamāl* is exactly what it describes itself as: a *mālā* or garland. Each *bhakta* is a flower on the garland, and each flower is equally significant, contributing to a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. A garland is circular, and questions of chronology are ultimately insignificant.[100] There is much to be said for this view of the

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96 However, it should be noted that most of the *bhakta*s praised by Nābhādās do come from north India during the Kaliyug.

97 Jhā, "Pratham Khaṇḍ (Vivecan)," 53.

98 "भक्त भक्ति भगवंत गुरु चतुर नाम वपु एक । इनके पद बंदन करत नासै विघन अनेक ।।" 1:1-2 Nābhādās, "Dvitīy Khaṇḍ (Sampādan)," 1.

99 Jhā, "Pratham Khaṇḍ (Vivecan)," xi.

100 I thank Rupert Snell for this insightful description.

Bhaktamāl. Nābhādās' stanzas can be read as independent compositions, and together they present a bhakti which transcends all social distinctions, *yug*s, and even the division between human and divine. Nābhādās has constructed a garland of devotees where each blossom is as essential as the next. This metaphor ultimately structures the text and should not be forgotten.

While Nābhā's garland may bind *bhakta*s together across all boundaries that would keep them apart, the *Bhaktamāl* does not lack internal organization. The basic divisions of the text are marked metrically. The first four stanzas are *dohā* couplets, which inaugurate and introduce the *Bhaktamāl*.[101] The next twenty-five stanzas are in *chappay* meter. Twenty-four of these celebrate *bhakta*s from the ages preceding our own degraded Kaliyug, and the twenty-fifth *chappay* praises the founders of the four *sampradāy*s, the Vaishnava orders primarily responsible for spreading bhakti in this otherwise degenerate age.[102] The twenty-eighth stanza is the only intermediate *dohā*. It lists the four *sampradāy*s founded by the *ācārya*s described in the preceding stanza.[103] This stanza introduces the main portion of the text. The next 153 stanzas are in *chappay* meter and praise the *bhakta*s of Kaliyug.[104] Nābhādās returns to the *dohā* meter only at the conclusion of the text. The final twelve stanzas, all *dohā* couplets, close the *Bhaktamāl* and advise readers to follow the path of *bhakti*.[105]

Metrical shifts in the *Bhaktamāl* thus set apart introductory and concluding sections while marking a clear distinction between devotees from recent times and those from the mythological past. The basic division within the *Bhaktamāl* rests upon this distinction. These

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101 1:1-4:2 Nābhādās, "Dvitīy Khaṇḍ (Sampādan)," 1.

102 5:1-27:6 Ibid., 2-10.

103 28:1-2 Ibid., 10.

104 29:1-181:6 Ibid., 10-65.

105 182:1-193:6 Ibid., 66-67.

categories correspond closely to the distinction between the degraded present of Kaliyug and the glorious past of the previous three ages, but the distinction here is mainly epistemological rather than ontological. The first section addresses *bhakta*s whose lives are recorded in the Purāṇas and other sacred books while the second section praises the qualities of devotees remembered from more recent times[106] – a distinction between the past as remembered and immediate, and the distant, recorded past. This division is indicated in the text, but Nābhādās does not belabor it by any means. Along with the medial *dohā*, Nābhādās uses the term "Kaliyug" in the twenty-seventh stanza, which immediately precedes this *dohā*. He does not, however, use any particular term to refer to the *yug*s of the *bhakta*s mentioned in stanzas five through twenty-six. It is in stanza twenty-seven that we first encounter the name of an historical person, and from this point on, identifiable, named devotees praised by Nābhādās belong mainly to the twelfth through seventeenth centuries CE.[107] Manuscripts do not use headings to divide the text, but printed editions do. Rūpkalā, for example, explicitly marks the first section following the introduction as an account of the *bhakta*s of the S*atya, Tretā*, and *Dvāpara Yug*s and the remainder of the text as the "*Kaliyug bhaktāvalī.*"[108]

Introductory Stanzas

The opening four stanzas provide an auspicious beginning for the text. Since they, along with the other *dohā*s in the text, do not praise *bhakta*s, they are, in a sense, not part of the *Bhaktamāl*. If the *chappay*s serve as flowers of praise for the *bhakta*s then perhaps the *dohā*s are

106 Jhā, "Pratham Khaṇḍ (Vivecan)," 56-57.

107 R.D. Gupta, "Studies in the Bhaktirasa-bodhinī of Priyā Dāsa" (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of London, 1967), 30.

108 Ibid., 31.

the thread with holds the garland together. The *Bhaktamāl*'s basic structure may not be conspicuous, but it is essential to the meaning of the work as a whole. The opening couplet summarizes the *Bhaktamāl*'s central message of radical spiritual equality. I have already quoted it above, but it is worth repeating:

> Devotee and Devotion, God and Guru: four names for a single body.
> Praising their feet eliminates many obstacles.[109]

There is no distinction between the *bhakta*, bhakti, *Bhagvaṅt*, and the guru. They all share a single essence, and to honor one of them is to honor them all. It is traditional to invoke Ganesh, the lord of obstacles and beginnings, at the outset of any new undertaking, and Nābhādās does this in a somewhat oblique and clever fashion. *Vighan anek*, translated above as "many obstacles," homophonically evokes Vighneś, the lord of obstacles, one of Ganesh's many names.[110]

The next three couplets continue to extol the virtues of praising the *bhakta*s:

> Whatever other auspicious things you may think of, these are unparalleled:
> They who sing of the glory of God's people [*harijan*] have the auspicious form of God's people.
>
> All the saints [*santan*] have determined it; it has been churned into scripture, legends, and history:
> Show devotion to only two beautiful things: God and the servants of God [*haridās*].
>
> Guru Agradev gave the order: sing of the *bhakta*s' glory.
> There is no other way to cross the ocean of existence.[111]

The *Bhaktamāl* opens with a statement of the lack of difference between *bhakta*, bhakti, God and

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109 1:1-2 Nābhādās, "Dvitīy Khaṇḍ (Sampādan)," 1.

110 Thanks to Tyler Williams for suggesting this reading.

111 "मंगल आदि विचारि रह्यौ वस्तुन अवर अनूप । हरिजन कौ जसु गावतें हरिजन मंगल रूप ।।२।। सब संतन निर्णय कियौ मथि श्रुति पुराण इतिहास । भजिबे कौ द्वैही सुघर कै हरि कै हरिदास ।।३।। श्री गुरु अग्रदेव आज्ञा दई भक्तन कौ जसु गाय । भवसागर के तरन कौ, नाहिन आन उपाय ।।४।।" 2:1-4:2 Nābhādās, "Dvitīy Khaṇḍ (Sampādan)," 1.

guru then quickly turns to a celebration of devotion to the *bhakta*s. Serving God, especially through song, is one of only two worthwhile activities, but it is even greater to serve those who serve God. Praising God's servants is Nābhādās' task in the *Bhaktamāl*, a task he has taken up at the order of his guru.

Bhakta*s from Previous Ages*

Following these introductory couplets, Nābhādās begins the first major section of the *Bhaktamāl,* which praises devotees from the first three ages. In this section, Nābhā's stanzas almost always describe groups of *bhakta*s, rather than individuals. In the *Bhaktamāl*, Nābhādās has three distinct manners for praising devotees. Most *bhakta*s are listed as part of a group and do not receive their own stanza. Some *bhakta*s are praised individually. They receive their own *chappay*. Overall, fewer *bhakta*s receive this level of attention, but this form of praise takes up the great majority of the text. Most of the devotees named in the *Bhaktamāl* receive little more than a mention, but the *Bhaktamāl* is dominated by stanzas praising one particular *bhakta* at a time. Only a handful of *bhakta*s – Rāmānuja, Rūp and Sanātan Goswāmī, and Kṛṣṇadās Payahārī — receive more than a single *chappay*.[112]

Several stanzas in this section do not praise *bhakta*s *per se*. The first *chappay* describes God's twenty-four avatars.[113] The following stanza praises Ram's feet and describes their twenty-two distinctive marks, which support all the *sants*.[114] The garland of devotees properly begins in the seventh stanza, which celebrates the twelve original *bhakta*s.[115] This stanza

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112 Jhā, "Pratham Khaṇḍ (Vivecan)," 54-55.

113 5:1-6 Nābhādās, "Dvitīy Khaṇḍ (Sampādan)," 2.

114 6:1-6 Ibid.

115 7:1-6 Ibid., 2-3.

provides the ultimate, divine foundation of the four *sampradāy*s of the Kaliyug. The seventeenth stanza lists eighteen Purāṇas, reserving pride of place for the *Bhāgavat Purāṇa*.[116]

With these exceptions, stanzas seven through twenty-six praise the *bhakta*s of the first three *yug*s. The seventh stanza introduces the twelve original *bhakta*s:

> By their grace and merit [*puni*], understand these twelve *bhakta*s to be chief:
> Brahmā [Vidhi], Nārad, Shiva [Śaṅkar], Sanak and the others, Kapildev, the royal sage [*munibhūp*],[117]
> Prahlād [Naraharidās], Janak, Bhīṣma, Bali, Śuk the sage, and Yama [Dharmasvarūp].[118]
> Whoever sings of the glory of these intimate followers of Hari,
> obtains, by hearing and speaking of them, blessings from beginning to end.
> Know the tale of Ajāmil to be the determination of the highest dharma in this world.
> By their grace and merit, understand these twelve *bhakta*s to be chief.[119]

These twelve are foremost among the *bhakta*s. They are central to the propagation of bhakti even in our own Kaliyug. With the exception of Rāmānuja, who is in the lineage of Lakṣmī, each of the founders of the four *sampradāy*s is in the lineage of one of these twelve.

The next nine stanzas each celebrate a group of *bhakta*s from prior to the Kaliyug. Nābhādās praises various groups of *bhakta*s, including the attendants (*pārṣad*) of Nārāyaṇ, the beloved of Hari (*harivallabh*), those who have crossed over Hari's *māyā*, Nimi and nine major yogis (*yogeśvarā*), the founders of ninefold bhakti, those who are proof of the taste of the *ras* of

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116 17:1-6 Ibid., 6.

117 Jhā lists *Manubhūp* or *Manabhūp* (King Manu) as a variant in three manuscripts. Ibid., 2.

118 There has been disagreement over whether the twelfth *bhakta* in this stanza is Yama or Ajāmil. Rūpkalā originally listed Ajāmil as the twelfth, which Pollet attributes to the misdirection of earlier commentators. Rūpkalā later corrected himself, and Grierson follows this interpretation. Pollet argues that *mahābhakta*s should teach and spread bhakti. In the story of Ajāmil, to which I return in chapter six, it is Yama who teaches his followers, the demons, which people are *bhakta*s and should therefore be spared. Pollet, "Studies in the Bhakta Mâla of Nâbhâ Dâsa," 250-251.

119 "इनकी कृपा और पुनि समुझै द्वादश भक्त प्रधान । विधि नारद शंकर सनकादिक कपिलदेव मुनोभुप । नरहरि दास जनक भीष्म बलि शुकमुनि धर्मस्वरूप ।। अंतरंग अनुचर हरि जू के जो इनकौ यश गावै । आदि अंत लौं मंगल तिनको स्रोता वक्ता पावै ।। अजामेल प्रसंग इह निर्णय परम धर्म के जान । इनकी कृपा और पुनि समुझै द्वादश भक्त प्रधान ।।" 7:1-6 Nābhādās, "Dvitīy Khaṇḍ (Sampādan)," 2-3.

Hari's *prasād*, and those who meditate on the Four-Armed One (Vishnu). In these stanzas, Nābhādās generally takes refuge in or praises the dust of the feet of these *bhakta*s.[120]

The seventeenth stanza praises Purāṇas, not *bhakta*s:

> The seventeen Purāṇas are means and end. Their fruit is the *Bhāgavata.*
> The Brahma, Viṣṇu, Śiva, Liṅga, Paḍma, and Skanda are expansive.
> The Vāman, Mīna, Varāha, Agni, and Kūrama are generous.
> The Maruḍa, Nāradī, Bhaviṣya, and Brahma Vaivarta purify when heard.
> The Mārkaṇḍe and Brahmāṇḍ: light grows from these various stories.
> The highest dharma is told by this mouth – truly part of the four-versed Vedas.
> The seventeen Purāṇas are means and end. Their fruit is the *Bhāgavata.*[121]

For Nābhādās, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is first among the Purāṇas and equal to the Vedas.

The Purāṇas, especially the *Bhāgavata*, serve as Nābhādās' source for the following nine verses, which continue his praise for the *bhakta*s of the first three ages.[122] These are the eighteen *bhakta*s who pronounce *smṛti,* including Manu and Yajñavalkya*;* the ministers (*saciv*) of Ram; the companions of Ram, such as Sugrīv, Hanumān, and Jāmbavān; the nine Nandas, sons of Parjanya, the great Braj cowherd (*gop*); the cowherds, young and old, men and women; the *bhakta*s of the seven islands (*saptadvīp*), especially the nine regions of Madhyadvīp or Jambūdvīp; the *bhakta*s of the White Island (*Svetdvīp*); and the serpents who guard Hari's abode.[123]

In a sense, these twenty-six stanzas are all introductory. They are atypical of the bulk of the *Bhaktamāl.* The remainder of the *Bhaktamāl*, with the exception of the concluding *dohā*s,

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120 8:1-16:6 Ibid., 3-6.

121 "साधन साध्य सत्रह पुराण फलरूपी श्री भागवत । ब्रह्म विष्णु शिव लिंग पड्म स्कन्द विस्तारा । वामन मीन वराह अग्नि कूरम उदारा ।। मरुड़ नारदी भविष्य ब्रह्म वैवर्त श्रवणशुचि ।। मार्कण्डे ब्रह्माण्ड कथानाना उपजै रुचि ।। परमधर्म श्रीमुख कथित चतुःश्लोकी निगम सत । साधन साध्य सत्रह पुराण फलरूपी श्री भागवत ।।" 17:1-6 Ibid., 6.

122 Pollet, "Studies in the Bhakta Mâla of Nâbhâ Dâsa," 158-167.

123 17:1-26:6 Nābhādās, "Dvitīy Khaṇḍ (Sampādan)," 6-10.

praises the *bhakta*s of our own degraded age. Nābhādās' main task is the celebration of these individuals and groups who preserve, protect, and spread bhakti in the Kaliyug. For the most part, the *Bhaktamāl* praises individual *bhakta*s one at a time, but in the case of these early *bhakta*s, Nābhādās praises groups of devotees, never individuals. Nābhādās mentions the *bhakta*s of the first three ages not so much to celebrate them in themselves but to provide a link between bhakti's divine origins and its propagation in the Kaliyug. As we saw above, three of the four *sampradāy*s, which serve as the backbone of Vaishnavism in our own age, have their origins in the twelve original *bhakta*s. The Śrī Sampradāy has even more exalted origins, with a spiritual lineage beginning with Śrī or Lakṣmi, the consort of Vishnu.

Bhakta*s from the Kaliyug*

Stanzas twenty-seven to forty-seven introduce the four *sampradāy*s through praise for the founders and their major disciples.[124] The *Bhaktamāl*'s twenty-seventh stanza provides the link between bhakti's divine origins among the *bhakta*s of the first three ages and bhakti's continued presence in the Kaliyug. This stanza introduces the founders of the four *sampradāy*s:

> Just as Hari has taken on his first twenty-four bodies, so he has revealed himself in four forms in Kaliyug:
> The beneficent Rāmānuja, a store of nectar and wishing tree (*kalpa-taru*) on earth;
> Viṣṇu Swāmī, a boat crossing the ocean of existence (*sindhu saṁsār);*
> Madhva Acārya, a cloud which irrigates the desert with the lake of bhakti;
> Nimbāditya, a sun which brings greenery (*juhariyā*) to caves of ignorance.[125]
> By birth and by karma these unprecedented *sampradāy*s of the divine (*bhāgavat*) Dharma have been established.
> Just as Hari has taken on his first twenty-four bodies, so he has revealed himself in four

124 Pollet divides the first ninety-five stanzas of the *Bhaktamāl* into basic categories. The opening couplets are the "Scope of the Bhakta Mâla." The next major section is "Bhaktas and bhakti sources in the past ages," which I have described above. This section, which is the only one clearly marked in the text, is followed by "The four major bhakti systems," "Bhakti virtues illustrated," "Worshippers of Râma," and "Worshippers of Kṛṣṇa (and Râdhâ)." Pollet, "Studies in the Bhakta Mâla of Nâbhâ Dâsa," 143.

125 I am paraphrasing Pollet's translation of this line. Ibid., 168.

forms in Kaliyug.[126]

During previous ages, Vishnu came to earth through twenty-four avatars, but in our age, he makes his presence felt through these four *acāryas* and the *sampradāy*s they founded.

The next stanza is a *dohā* couplet, the only one in the *Bhaktamāl* that is not part of the introduction or conclusion. It makes explicit the connection between the four *acāryas* and the original, divine founders of their lineages: "Rāmānuja shines forth from the footsteps of Lakshmi; Viṣṇu Swāmī from the Enemy of the Three Cities [Shiva]; Nimbāditya from Sanak and the others; the Honey-maker [Madhva Acārya] from the four-faced guru [Brahma]."[127] As I have already mentioned, Rāmānuja falls in the lineage of Lakshmi while the other three *acārya*s are in lineages that begin with the twelve original *bhakta*s. All four *sampradāy*s have divine origins, but the Śrī Sampradāy's origins are the most exalted.

Stanzas twenty-nine through forty are dedicated to Rāmānuja and the *sampradāy* he founded, culminating in Agradās, Nābhādās' own guru. I have already considered much of this material above in the discussion of Nābhādās' guru and *guru-paramparā*. Nābhādās devotes two stanzas to Rāmānuja, one of very few occasions in which he does so. The first of these stanzas traces Rāmānuja's spiritual lineage, beginning with Lakshmi:

> The crown jewel of *sampradāy*s is Sindhujā's (Lakshmi's). It constitutes the canopy of bhakti:
> Viṣuk Sen, who was a great sage; Saṭhkop, who emerged by his own merit;
> Bopadev, who rescued the butter that is the lost Bhāgavata Purāṇa;
> The auspicious sage Śrī Nāth; Puṇḍarī Kākṣ of the highest, pure fame;
> Rām Miśra, a heap of *ras*; Parāṁkus, whose brilliance is obvious;

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126 "चौबीस प्रथम हरि बपु धरे त्यौं चतुर्व्यूह कलियुग प्रगट । श्री रामानुज उदार सुधानिधि अवानि कल्पतरु । विष्णुस्वामि बोहिथ सिन्धु संसार पार करु ।। मध्वाचारज मेघभक्ति सर ऊसर भरिया । निम्बादित आदित्य कुहर अज्ञान जुहरिया ।। जनम करम भागवत धरम संप्रदाय थापी अघट । चौबीस प्रथम हरि बपु धरे त्यौं चतुर्व्यूह कलियुग प्रगट ।।" 27:1-6 Nābhādās, "Dvitīy Khaṇḍ (Sampādan)," 10.

127 "रमापतिधति रामानुज राजै विष्णुस्वामि त्रिपुरारि । निंबादित सनकादिका मधुकर गुरुमुख चारि ।।" 28:1-2 Ibid.

The sage Yāmun; and Rāmānuja, the rising sun who removes darkness.
The crown jewel of *sampradāy*s is Sindhujā's. It constitutes the canopy of bhakti.[128]

Rāmānuja's lineage and the Śrī Sampradāy begins, appropriately enough, with Śrī. The following stanza praises Rāmānuja's teaching:

Through teaching, the thousand-headed one tried to save the world.
Having climbed the main gate, he pronounced the mantra in a loud voice.
The sleeping people awoke. Seventy-two listened:
There were this many distinct paths of the divine guru.
Kuratārak, his first disciple, made an auspicious body of bhakti.
No one else is equal to Rāmānuja, defender of the wretched and ocean of compassion.
Through teaching, the thousand-headed one tried to save the world.[129]

Rāmānuja is remembered as a great teacher and the initiator of seventy-two distinct paths.

The next verse celebrates the four *mahants* – Śrutiprajñā, Śrutidev, Śrutidhāmā, and Śruti-udadhi – fellow disciples of Rāmānuja who, like the elephants of the four directions, support the world of bhakti.[130] Nābhādās then praises Rāmānuja's son-in-law, Lālācārya,[131] and his disciple, Pād Padma.[132] The following stanza links Rāmānuja to Rāmānand:

The glory of Rāmānuja's path spread through the world like nectar.
Devācārya and Hariyānand, second in greatness.
His [disciple], Rāghavānand gave honor to the *bhakta*s.
He took the earth into the shelter of his wings and settled in Kāśī.
He strengthened the bhakti of the four classes (*varan*) and stages of life (*āśram).*
His [disciple] Rāmānand appeared. The world's auspiciousness took form in him.

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128 "सम्प्रदाय शिरोमणि सिन्धुजा रच्यो भक्ति वितान । विषुक सेन मुनिवर्य्य सुपुनि सठकोप प्रनीता । बोपदेव भागवत लुप्त उधर्यो नवनीता ।। मंगलमुनि श्रीनाथ पुण्डरी काक्ष परम विसद जस । राममिश्र रसरासि प्रकट परताप परांकुस ।। यामुन मुनि रामानुज रिमिर हरन उदयभान । सम्प्रदाय शिरोमणि सिन्धुजा रच्यो भक्ति वितान ।।" 29:1-6 Ibid., 10-11.

129 "सहस आस्य उपदेश करि जगत उधारण जतन कियो । गोपुर ह्वै आरूढ़ उच्च स्वर मन्त्र उचारयो । सूते नर परे जागि बहतर श्रवणनि धार्यो ।। तितनेई गुरुदेव पधति भईं न्यारी न्यारी । कुरतारक शिष्य प्रथम भक्ति वपु मंगल कारी ।। कृपणपाल करुण समुद्र रामानुज सम नहिं बियो । सहस आस्य उपदेश करि जगात उधारण जतन कियो ।।" 30:1-6 Ibid., 11.

130 31:1-6 Ibid.

131 32:1-6 Ibid., 12.

132 33:1-6 Ibid.

The glory of Rāmānuja's path spread through the world like nectar.[133]

As scholars have repeatedly noted, Nābhādās' description of Rāmānand is glancing, but he devotes much attention to his disciples. Stanza thirty-five lists Rāmānand's primary disciples:

> Rāmānand, like Raghunāth (Ram), fashioned a second bridge[134] for crossing the world.
> Anantānand, Kabīr, Sukhā, Surasurā, Padmāvati, Narahari,
> Pīpā, Bhāvānand, Raidās, Dhan, Sen, and Surasari are the defenders.
> Other disciples and their disciples – each one woke up another.
> The world's good fortune, the foundation, the bliss of all, the mine of ten-fold [bhakti].
> Taking form in many ages, he has carried the reverent to the opposite shore.
> Rāmānand, like Raghunāth, fashioned a second bridge for crossing the world.[135]

The next several stanzas trace the lineage linking Nābhādās and his guru to Rāmānand. Nābhādās praises Anantānand;[136] Kṛṣṇadās Paihārī;[137] and Kṛṣṇadās Paihārī's disciples,[138] especially Kīlha[139] and Agradās.[140]

Stanzas twenty-seven through forty, then, provide Nābhādās' own lineage, linking him to Rāmānuja and, through him, to Śrī. In stanza forty-one, Nābhādās shifts gears and celebrates Śaṅkarācārya as a protector of dharma in the Kaliyug.[141] This stanza and the six which follow it

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133 "श्रीरामानुज पद्धति प्रताप अवनि अमृत ह्वै अनुसर्यो । देवाचारज द्वितीय महामहिमा हरियानंद । तस्य राघवानन्द भए भक्तन को मानंद ।। पत्राचलंब पृथिवी करि व काशी स्थाई । चारि वरन आश्रम सबही को भक्ति दृढ़ाई ।। तिनके रामानन्द प्रगट विश्वमंगल जिहि वपु धर्यो । श्री रामानुज पद्धति प्रताप अवनि अमृत ह्वै अनुसर्यो ।।" 34:1-6 Ibid., 12-13.

134 The first bridge is the one made by Ram.

135 "श्री रामानन्द रघुनाथ ज्यों दुतिय सेतु जग तरन कियो । अनन्तानन्द कबीर सुखा सुरसुरा पद्मावति नरहरि । पीपा भावानन्द रैदास धना सेन सुरसरि किय धरहरि ।। औरो शिष्य प्रशिष्य एक ते एक उजागर । विश्व मंगल आधार सर्वानन्द दशधा के आगर ।। बहुत काल बपुधारि कै प्रणत जनन कौं पार दियो । श्री रामानन्द रघुनाथ ज्यों दुतिय सेतु जग तरन कियो ।।" 35:1-6 Nābhādās, "Dvitīy Khaṇḍ (Sampādan)," 13.

136 36:1-6 Ibid.

137 37:1-6 Ibid., 13-14.

138 38:1-6 Ibid., 14.

139 39:1-6 Ibid.

140 40:1-6 Ibid., 14-15.

141 41:1-6 Ibid., 15.

do not seem to reflect any particular organizing principle, except that they all describe poets and philosophers.[142] Stanza forty-two describes Nāmdev, and stanza forty-three praises Jayadeva as the king of poets.[143] Nābhādās dedicates stanzas forty-four, forty-five, and forty-six to Śrīdhar, Bilvamaṅgal, and Viṣṇupurī, respectively.[144] Stanza forty-seven celebrates members of the Viṣṇusvāmī *Sampradāy*, including Jñāndev, Nāmdev, Trilocan, and Vallabhācārya.[145]

Pollet classifies stanzas forty-eight through fifty-seven as "Bhakti virtues illustrated." Stanza forty-eight gives three examples of love (*prem*), followed by "[f]our examples of faith," "[e]xamples of zeal and respect," "[s]ix truth-speaking bhaktas," "[f]our examples of divine protection," "[f]our miraculous events," "[a] brâhmaṇa and his wife," "[a] devout king," "[a] king's secret devotion," and "[a] teacher and his disciples."[146]

Stanzas fifty-eight through sixty-eight celebrate members of the Śrī Sampradāy.[147] The first nine of these stanzas praise *bhakta*s who were identified in stanza thirty-five as disciples of Rāmānand: Raidās, Kabīr, Pīpā, Dhanā, Sen, Sukhānand, Surasurānand, Surasarī, and Narahariyānand.[148] The final two stanzas in this section describe Padmanābh, who was noted as a disciple of Kṛṣṇadās Payahārī in stanza thirty-eight, and Tatvā and Jīvā, southern members of

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142 Pollet groups stanzas twenty-seven through forty-seven (according to Jhā's numbering) together as the "founders and their disciples." Several but not all of the *bhakta*s named is stanzas forty-one through forty-seven fit this description. Pollet, "Studies in the Bhakta Mâla of Nâbhâ Dâsa," 143.

143 42:1-43:6 Nābhādās, "Dvitīy Khaṇḍ (Sampādan)," 15-16.

144 44:1-46:6 Ibid., 16-17.

145 47:1-6 Ibid., 17.

146 I am following Jhā's numbering. Pollet, "Studies in the Bhakta Mâla of Nâbhâ Dâsa," 188-197; Ch. 58-57 Nābhādās, "Dvitīy Khaṇḍ (Sampādan)," 17-21.

147 Pollet refers to these *bhakta*s as "[w]orshippers of Râma." Pollet, "Studies in the Bhakta Mâla of Nâbhâ Dâsa," 198-208.

148 58:1-60:6 Nābhādās, "Dvitīy Khaṇḍ (Sampādan)," 21-22.

the Śrī Sampradāy (*padmā paddhati*).[149]

With two exceptions, stanzas sixty-nine through eighty-eight praise devotees of Krishna.[150] These Krishna *bhakta*s are Mādhavdās, Ragunāth Gusāīṅ, Nityānand and Kṛṣṇa Caitanya, Sūrdās, Paramānand, Harivyās, Divākar, Viṭṭhalnāth Gusāīṅ, Bālakṛṣṇa, Bhīṣma Bhaṭṭ's sons Barddhamān and Gaṅgal, Viṭṭhaldās, Harirām Haṭhīle, Kamalākarabhaṭṭ, Nārāyaṇabhaṭṭ, Rūp and Sanātan Goswāmī, Hit Harivaṁś, Haridās Rasik, Harivamś's disciple Vyās, and Jīv Gusāīṅ.[151] The two exceptions are Rām *bhakta*s: Divākar and Ṣem Gusāīṅ.[152]

The next twelve stanzas celebrate groups of *bhakta*s, rather than individual devotees. These stanzas oftentimes say very little about the groups and almost nothing about the individuals named. Indeed, these passages can seem like simple lists of *bhakta*s. Little seems to unite these saints besides their shared devotion. Nābhādās stresses their importance in the Kaliyug and praises those who serve bhakti and the *bhakta*s in particular. Many of these groups are defined by fairly general words of praise, such as those who have helped others across the ocean of existence;[153] those who, devoted to the goals of others, are like the wish fulfilling cow (*kāmadhenu*) in the Kaliyug;[154] the protectors of the *bhakta*s, like the elephants who guard the

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149 67:1-68:6 Ibid., 25-26.

150 Pollet includes stanza eighty-nine (according to Jhā's numbering), "Vṛndâvana bhaktas," in the category "Worshippers of Kṛṣṇa (and Râdhâ), which is accurate enough as far as it goes, but I group it with the following stanzas, which all celebrate categories of *bhakta*s rather than individuals. Stanza eighty-nine is the penultimate passage considered by Pollet in his dissertation. The final stanza in Pollet's dissertation praises Rasik Murāri, but this stanza is not found in early manuscripts or Jhā's critical edition. Pollet, "Studies in the Bhakta Mâla of Nâbhâ Dâsa," 233-234.

151 69:1-74:6, 76:1-78:6, 80:1-88:6 Nābhādās, "Dvitīy Khaṇḍ (Sampādan)," 26-33.

152 75:1-6, 79:1-6 Ibid., 28-30.

153 90:1-6 Ibid., 33.

154 92:1-6 Ibid., 34.

four directions (*diggaj*);[155] and those who serve the servants (*dāsani ke dās*).[156] Nābhādās praises groups of *bhakta*s defined geographically as well: residents of Vrindavan,[157] those who perform *sevā* in Badrināth, Orissa, and Dvārikā,[158] and those who have lived or are living in the Mathurā region.[159] He also singles out poets[160] and young women (*jubatījan*)[161] for praise. These twelve stanzas name many *bhakta*s, but they do little more than list their names.

With two exceptions, the next thirty-eight stanzas each celebrate an individual *bhakta*. I do not see any common denominator for the first six *bhakta*s: Lākhā, Narasī Mehatā, Divdās' son Jasodhar, Janagopāl, Mādhavdās, and Aṅgad.[162] This lack of a unifying theme is hardly surprising. Independent stanzas celebrating individual *bhakta*s are characteristic of the *Bhaktamāl*. Many more such stanzas will be noted below.

The following nine stanzas celebrate *bhakta*s from royal families. The first of these stanzas celebrates Caturbhuj, king of Karaulī and the second praises Mīrābāī.[163] Nābhādās then praises Pṛthvīrāj, the Kachavāhā king of Āmer and Kṛṣṇadās Payahārī's patron. The following stanza lists kings who respected the *bhakta*s. Nābhādās then praises several members of a Rāṭhaur royal family: Khemālaratna, his son Rāmarayan, Rāmarayan's wife, Rāmarayan's son

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155 94:1-6 Ibid., 35.

156 99:1-6 Ibid., 36.

157 89:1-6 Ibid., 33.

158 95:1-6 Ibid., 35.

159 97:1-6 Ibid., 36.

160 96:1-6 Ibid., 35.

161 98:1-6 Ibid., 36.

162 101:1-106:6 Ibid., 37-39.

163 107:1-108:6 Ibid., 39-40.

Kiśorsiṁh, and Khemālratna's grandson.[164] The celebration of such figures reflects the importance of royal patronage for Nābhādās and the Rāmānandī community in Galtā, a topic to which I will return.

The next eight stanzas describe eight individual and apparently unrelated *bhakta*s: a disciple of Hitharivaṁś named Caturbhuj, Kṛṣṇadās Cālak, Saṅtdās, Sūrdās Madanmohan, Katyāyinī, Munāridās, Tulasīdās, and Māndās.[165]

Stanzas 124 and 125 praise two descendants of Vallabhācārya, the founder of the Puṣṭī Mārg, who is not himself included. These are Giridhar and Gokulanāth, both sons of Viṭṭhalnāth and grandsons of Vallabh. While Vallabh does not receive his own entry in the *Bhaktamāl*,[166] his significance is confirmed in these stanzas, which each begin, "In the lineage of Śrī Vallabh-jī...."[167] Nābhādās may not devote a stanza to Vallabh, but he clearly acknowledges the importance of his *sampradāy*.

With one exception, the following thirteen stanzas each praise a single *bhakta*, who are connected, it seems, only in their diversity. Nābhādās praises the poet Banvārīdās; Nārāyaṇ Miśra; Rāghavdās; Bāvam; Paraśurām, who spread bhakti to wild areas (*jaṅgalī deś*); and Gadādharbhaṭṭ.[168] He praises a group of singers and bards who have taken refuge in Hari's

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164 109:1-115:6 Ibid., 40-42. Rūpkalā reports that it is contested whether stanza 115 (according to Jhā's numbering) describes Prince Kiśorasiṁh or a grandson of Khemālaratna Rāṭhaur named Haridās. "Rūpkalā", *Śrī Bhaktamāl*, 738.

165 116:1-123:6 Nābhādās, "Dvitīy Khaṇḍ (Sampādan)," 42-45.

166 Some *Bhaktamāl* manuscripts do include a *chappay* on Vallabh, but Jhā considers it to be an interpolation. Jhā reproduces this stanza in appendix 'kha.' of his critical edition. Ibid., 70. Rūpkalā includes this stanza in his edition. "Rūpkalā", *Śrī Bhaktamāl*, 590-591.

167 "श्री बल्लभ जू के बंस में" 124:1-125:6 Nābhādās, "Dvitīy Khaṇḍ (Sampādan)," 45-46.

168 126:1-131:6 Ibid., 46-48.

feet.[169] He celebrates Pṛthvīrāj, a king who was also a king of poets (*kavirāj*) in "both languages" (*ubhai bhāṣā*).[170] Nābhādās also names Sīvāṁ; Ratnāvatī, Pṛthvīrāj of Āmer's wife; Jaggannāth Pārīṣ; Mathurādās; and the dancer Nārāyaṇdās.[171]

The next five stanzas each describe a group of *bhakta*s. Nābhādās praises those who tell of Gopāl's limitless qualities; those who have turned away from *saṁsār;* beggars; his guru Agradās' disciples; and Ṭīlā along with his disciple Lāhā and their followers.[172] Nābhādās devotes the next five stanzas to individual *bhakta*s: Kānhar, Nīvā, Tūṁvar Bhagavān, Jasvant, and Haridās.[173] Stanza 149 praises Gopālbhakta and Viṣṇudās, who were joined together as twins by the carrying the weight of bhakti.[174]

Nābhādās then describes the disciples of Kīlha, the guru-brother of Agradās,[175] followed by ten stanzas praising individual *bhakta*s: Nāthbhaṭṭ, Karamaitī, Khaṅgasen Kāyasth, Gaṅgāvāl, Sotī, Lāldās, Mādhav Gvāl, Agradās' disciple Prayāgdās, Premnidhi, and Rāghavdās Dūblau.[176] Two stanzas praising groups of *bhakta*s follow. The first celebrates those who serve the servants of God, and the second praises women with weak bodies who, through discipline (*sādhan*) became strong in devotion to Hari.[177] The next seven stanzas each describe one or two *bhakta*s: Kānhardās, Keśavalaṭerā and Paraśurām, Kevalarām, Āsakaran, Harivaṁś, Kalyān, and

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169 132:1-6 Ibid., 48.

170 133:1-6 Ibid.

171 134:1-138:6 Ibid., 49-50.

172 139:1-143:6 Ibid., 51-52.

173 144:1-148:6 Ibid., 53-54.

174 149:1-6 Ibid., 54.

175 150:1-6 Ibid., 55.

176 151:1-160:6 Ibid., 55-58.

177 161:1-162:6 Ibid., 59.

Bīṭhaldās.[178] The next stanza praises *bhakta*s made by God in order to honor the devotees.[179] Stanzas 171 and 172 praise Haridās and Kṛṣṇadās.[180] The following stanza names sanyasis who nurture the highest religion (*paramdharma*),[181] and stanzas 174-178 conclude the *Bhaktamāl* proper by describing Dvārakādās, Pūrṅa, Lakṣmaṇbhaṭṭ, Kṛṣṇadās Payahārī, and Devī Gopālī.[182]

Three *chappay*s begin the conclusion of the text by praising God and God's servants:

The poets wonder: of whom among the great shall we speak?
Some say the world is large. It is a foundation on which to begin.
Śeṣa carries the world on his head, but Shiva made him his ornament.
Shiva's seat is Mt. Kailāś, but Rāvaṇa carried it away in his arms.
Vāli defeated Rāvaṇa, but Ram punished Vāli with an arrow.
Agra says, in the three worlds they who hold Hari to their chests are great.
The poets wonder: of whom among the great shall we speak?[183]

Hari's glory is his servants' love just as the servants' glory is Hari's love.
This unprecedented mutual affection endures throughout the four ages.
With his own mouth, the Dark One sings of his followers' excellence.
The entire world knows of this expansive passion and love.
Upon entering a city, the servants of Ram praise his glory.
Agra says, by describing the qualities of these followers, one gains the strength of Sītā's Husband.
Hari's glory is his servants' love just as the servants' glory is Hari's love.[184]

Hearing of the saints' excellence, do not feel any surprise.
Durvāsā dwells with each servant of the Dark One who speaks of Hari.

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178 163:1-169:6 Ibid., 59-61.

179 170:1-6 Ibid., 62.

180 171:1-172:6 Ibid.

181 173:1-6 Ibid., 63.

182 174:1-178:6 Ibid., 63-64.

183 "कविजन करत बिचार बड़ौ काउ काहि भनिज्जै । कोउ कहै अवनी बड़ी जगत आधार फनिज्जै । सो धारीसिर सेस, सेस भूषण शिव कीनौं ।। शिव आसन कैलास भुजा भरि रावन लीनौ । रावन जीत्यौ बालि, बालि राघौ सायक दंड़े ।। अगर कहै त्रैलोक में हरि उर धरें तेई बड़े । कविजन करत बिचार बड़ौ काउ काहि भनिज्जै ।।" 179:1-6 Ibid., 65.

184 "हरि सुजस प्रीति हरिदास कैं त्यौं भावै हरिदास जस । नेह परसपर अघट निबहि चारों जुग आयौ । अनुचर कौ उत्कर्ष स्याम अपने मुख गायौ ।। ओतप्रोत अनुराग प्रीति सबही जग जानैं । पुर प्रवेश रघुवीर भृत्य कीरति जु बखानैं ।। अगर अनुग गुन बरनते सीतापति तिहि होई बस । हरि सुजस प्रीति हरिदास कैं त्यौं भावै हरिदास जस ।।" 180:1-6 Ibid.

There are witnesses: Dhruv, the elephant, Prahlād, and the Śabarī woman who gave the fruit to Rām.
At the coronation, Kṛṣṇa washed feet and consumed leftovers.
He drove away the Pāṅḍavs' enemies. When poison was given, he transformed it into pleasure.
I have introduced the special ones of Kaliyug. Become a believer and hold them in your consciousness.
Hearing of the saints' excellence, do not feel any surprise.[185]

The *Bhaktamāl* then concludes with twelve *dohā* couplets. These *dohā*s echo the themes set out in the opening couplets, celebrating bhakti and the *bhakta*s, God and the gurus. These couplets insist on the propriety and necessity of praising Hari's *bhakta*s. Nābhādās begins by describing the benefits of praising the devotees:

The plants and trees are watered. Each limb receives nourishment.
Describing the qualities of those who came before, all feel satisfied.[186]

How many *bhakta*s are there in the world? Of whom is it proper to speak?
A sparrow may have enough faith that it can hold the ocean in its stomach.[187]

The auspicious manifestation of all Vaishnavas has bottomless qualities, whether short or tall.
Do not regard fully describing it as a crime.[188]

A fruit's splendor is gained from the tree, a tree's splendor from its fruit.
So it is with the fame of guru and disciple. No one comes between them.[189]

The *bhakta*s of the four ages, it is the dust of their feet

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185 "उत्कर्ष सुनत संतनि कौ अचरज कोऊ जिनि करौ । दुर्वासा प्रति स्यामदास बसता हरिभाषी । ध्रुव गज पुनि प्रह्लाद, राम शबरी फल साखी ।। साजसूय यदुनाथ चरण धोय जूंठ उठाई । पांडव बिपति निवारि, दियौ विष विषया पाई ।। कलि विशेष परचौ प्रगट आस्तीक ह्वै चित धरौ । उत्कर्ष सुनत संतनि कौ अचरज कोऊ जिनि करौ ।।" 181:1-6 Ibid.

186 "पादप पेड़हि सींचित पावै अंग अंग पोष । पूरबजा गुन वरनते सब मानियो संतोष ।।" 182:1-2 Ibid., 66.

187 "भक्त जिते भूलोक मैं कथे कौन पै जायं । समुद्र पान श्रद्धा करै कहं चिरिया पेट समायं ।।" 183:1-2 Ibid.

188 "श्री मूरति सब वैष्णव लघु दीरघ गुननि अगाध । आगे-पीछे बरन ते जिनि मानौ अपराध ।।" 184:1-2 Ibid.

189 "फल की सोभा लाभ तरु तरु सोभा फल होइ । गुरु शिष्य की कीर्ति महि अंतर नाहिन कोइ ।।" 185:1-2 Ibid.

That I will keep on my head. It is my most precious thing.[190]

The world, fame, and well-being arise. These three destroy asceticism.
From describing the qualities of Hari's people, Hari dwells unshakably in one's heart.[191]

If while describing the qualities of Hari's people (*harijan*), a malicious person comes,
Then there shall be great pain here and there, and the next world shall be destroyed.[192]

One who hopes to reach Hari should sing the qualities of Hari's people.
Otherwise, good deeds will be like parched grain. Birth after birth will be regretted.[193]

The final four *dohā*s shift from insisting on the general praise of the devotees to celebrating the particular paeans assembled in this text:

If one collects this garland of devotees and encourages its telling and hearing,
Then the Lord will love him as a son seated in Hari's lap.[194]

Even in the glorious Vaishnava community (*acyut kul*), there are occasions in which the mind becomes fixated.
They should certainly share the good deeds of their bhakti.[195]

Whosoever recites this garland of devotion will acquire leftovers.
I have made my mind's essence two indivisible parts. It has been made into rocks.[196]

Some have the strength of sacrifice or yoga. Some have hope in lineage or the fruits of their actions.
This garland of the *bhaktas'* names and Agra dwell in the heart of Narāyandās.[197]

Nābhādās – or Narāyandās as he calls himself – spends the great bulk of the *Bhaktamāl* praising

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190 "चारि जुगन मैं जे भगत, तिनके पद की धूरि । सर्बसु सिर धरि राखिहौं मेरो जीवन मूरि ।।" 186:1-2 Ibid.

191 "जग कीरति मंगल उदैं तीनो ताप नसायं । हरिजन को गुण वरनते हरि हृदि अटल बसायं ।।" 187:1-2 Ibid.

192 "हरिजन को गुण बरन ते जो करै असूया आय । इहां उदर बढ़ै विथा औ परलोक नसाय ।।" 188:1-2 Ibid.

193 "जौ हरि प्राप्ति की आस है तौ हरिजन गुन गाय । नतरु सुकृत भुं जे बीज ज्यों जनम जनम पछिताय ।।" 189:1-2 Ibid.

194 "भक्त दाम संग्रह करै, कथन स्त्रवन अनुमोद । सो प्रभु प्रभु कौं प्यारौ पुत्र ज्यौं बैठे हरि की गोद ।।" 190:1-2 Ibid., 67.

195 "अच्युत कुल जस यक बेरहूं, जाकी मति अनुरागि । उनकी भक्ति सुकृत को निहचै होय विभागि ।।" 191:1-2 Ibid.

196 "भक्तिदाम जिन जिन कथी तिनकी जूंठनि पाय । मों मतिसार अक्षर द्वै, कीनौं सिलौ बनाय ।।" 192:1-2 Ibid.

197 "काहू के बल जग्य जोग कौ कुल करनी की आस । भक्तनाम माला अगर उर बसौ नरायनदास ।।" 193:1-2 Ibid.

individual *bhakta*s, but he concludes by praising the assembled *bhakta*s. Here we see Nābhādās' vision of a community uniting Hari and his people made plain. For Nābhādās, it is the *acyut kul* – the eternal family or community – or the *harijan* – the people of Hari – which is of paramount importance.

It is clear, then, that the bulk of the *Bhaktamāl* is concerned with praising the devotees of our own Kaliyug. It is the present age that truly occupies Nābhādās' attention. Only twenty-two *chappay*s are devoted to *bhakta*s from the ancient past, while the remaining 176 *chappay*s praise relatively recent devotees.[198] While the first section of the *Bhaktamāl* collectively praises hundreds of *bhakta*s from the first three ages, the second section describes 123 *bhakta*s from the present age with an entire *chappay* and, in the remaining thirty-one verses, collectively mentions approximately 400 devotees.[199]

The *bhakta*s assembled here reflect the catholicity of Nābhādās' vision for the community. The *bhakta*s are best remembered for their role in spreading bhakti. The gurus who have transmitted bhakti from its divine origins to the present are central, as are the poets who have sung the glory of God. Spreading bhakti is repeatedly celebrated. Nābhādās does not seem to be concerned with whether this expansion of devotion takes place through transmission from guru to disciple, the exemplary lives of devotees, or the singing of *bhajan*s.[200]

Insofar as Nābhādās considers previous ages, he focuses on connections between the present and the ancient past. The guru-*śiṣya paramparā* is the central means of determining legitimacy, and several lineages—the *catuḥ-sampradāy*—may be traced back to an ancient,

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198 Nābhādās, "Dvitīy Khaṇḍ (Sampādan)."

199 Jhā, "Pratham Khaṇḍ (Vivecan)," 56.

200 On the importance of musicians and poets to the Bhaktamāl see John Stratton Hawley, "The Music in Faith and Morality," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 52, no. 2 (June 1984): 243-262.

divine source. The *sampradāy* thus plays a fundamental role in the community of bhakti, but this community is by no means limited to the *sampradāy*. Nābhādās' broad and inclusive vision is the *Bhaktamāl*'s most striking feature, and in some cases, the divine source for a *bhakta*'s authority may be found entirely within the present age. Among many other examples, the poet-saint Mīrā is not positioned within a particular lineage. Her status as a devotee is confirmed by her unwavering devotion to Krishna and his divine interventions to protect her from the enemies of bhakti. Nābhādās celebrates Mīrā for giving up public propriety and the chains of family life in order to worship Krishna (*loklāj kul-śṛṁkhalā taji mīrā giridhar bhajī*).[201] As we shall see below in the case of Kabīr, even *bhakta*s who are explicitly placed within Nābhādās' own *sampradāy* are praised for their antinomian tendencies.

The *Bhaktamāl* is indeed a garland that threads together independent stanzas in praise of devotees or groups of devotees. Within this garland, however, there is an internal organization. This organization establishes four Vaishnava *sampradāy*s as central to the transmission of bhakti from divine origins in earlier ages to our own degraded age.[202] Transmission of bhakti is of central concern to Nābhādās. As such, the *sampradāy* structure, which enables this transmission, is crucial. There are, however, other ways in which bhakti spreads. Divinely inspired poets are prominent in the *Bhaktamāl* and, as we shall see, Nābhādās sees no need to subordinate poet saints to sectarian lineages. The *sampradāy* facilitates bhakti, but the community of *bhakta*s is not limited by the *sampradāy*.

The *Bhaktamāl*'s Imagined Community

While a consideration of the overall structure of the *Bhaktamāl* helps to reveal some of

201 108:1-6 Nābhādās, "Dvitīy Khaṇḍ (Sampādan)," 40.

202 Although, Nābhādās only provides a complete lineage for the Śrī Sampradāy.

Nābhādās' broad themes, the content of this garland is mostly found in its flowers, not in the strings that tie them together. In this section I consider several of the biographies collected in the *Bhaktamāl*. I briefly consider biographical literature in early modern India and the *Bhaktamāl*'s status as a historical source. I then turn to the particulars of some of Nābhādās' biographical verses. These verses provide insight into Nābhādās' conception of a bhakti community. Nābhādās rejects the social stratification of *varṇāśram* dharma. He insists on the central but not exclusive role of the *sampradāy* and he insists on the supremacy of bhakti over all other social arrangements, particularly family, caste, and kingship.

History in the Bhaktamāl

As we saw above, Nābhādās divides the *Bhaktamāl* into two major sections. One considers the first three idealized ages, and the second describes *bhakta*s from our own flawed age. Pinch observes that this "bifurcation" is "reminiscent of the historical vision evinced in the itihāsa-purāṇa tradition, which served to link ruling families to the great, and godly, kṣatriya lineages of the bygone epic world," but that Nābhādās' approach differs from the *itihāsa-purāṇa* tradition in that he mostly praises the humble and powerless.[203] Pinch explains, "Nabhadas's object was to demonstrate that great worldly power is as nothing without the complete and utter abnegation of the self to the guru and, more importantly, God. For Nabhadas, then, bhakti moved the individual beyond historical time as evoked in the itihāsa-purāṇa tradition because it afforded a direct and immediate access to God and even endowed the bhakta with godlike qualities."[204] Pinch links this celebration of lowly *bhakta*s to Nābhādās' "primary socio-religious agenda:" "to make room in the orthoprax Ramanandi order for the

203 Vijay Pinch, "History, Devotion and the Search for Nabhadas of Galta," 375-376.

204 Ibid., 376.

increasingly popular group of 'truth-tellers' who thrived outside the order and who we have come to know simply as sants—a process that involved for Nabhadas the re-imagination of the core institution of sectarian Vaiṣṇavism, the sampraday."[205] Nābhādās praises historical figures in order to imagine a new kind of religious community.

The *Bhaktamāl* does not serve as a reliable source of historical information about its subjects. Nābhādās writes about these figures only as *bhakta*s. Even when writing about recent, historical devotees, Nābhādās describes them only from a religious perspective; he does not provide full accounts of their lives. As such, the *Bhaktamāl* largely lacks factual or historical content. The terse nature of Nābhādās' style also accounts for the paucity of historical data. Even when Nābhādās devotes entire independent *chappay*s to the more prominent devotees, there is hardly enough space in which to describe an entire life. Nonetheless, in these verses, Nābhādās is able to present several distinguishing characteristics of these *bhakta*s. Most *bhakta*s mentioned in the *Bhaktamāl*, however, do not receive even this much attention. They are described only as members of a group. In these verses, a single characteristic distinguishes several devotees. We learn little more than the names of these devotees. We do not get a sense of their personalities or discover any particular information about their lives. Nābhādās does not even mention the names of some *bhakta*s but merely provides descriptions. In many of these cases, even Priyādās remains silent as to these devotees' identities.[206]

Nābhādās' form is certainly terse, and his intent was not to communicate historical facts. Nonetheless, there is some historical information in the *Bhaktamāl*. At times, Nābhādās mentions the place where a *bhakta* lived or the names of a devotee's parents. He sometimes

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205 Ibid., 378-379.

206 Jhā, "Pratham Khaṇḍ (Vivecan)," 93-95.

mentions a *bhakta*'s *sampradāy* or the name of a guru or disciple. In some cases, Nābhādās mentions particular events from a *bhakta*'s life or the title of a poet's composition.[207] Nābhādās may be concerned with spiritual matters, but temporal details do find their way into his garland. I am not concerned here with the truth or falsehood of these details. Nābhādās sought to imagine a community united by bhakti. Nābhādās narrates lives in order to construct a community in the present. The *Bhaktamāl*'s value is not in the scant information it presents about certain historical individuals. It provides a window into the religious imagination of its creator.

In constructing a community in the present, Nābhādās imagines the past. Nābhādās sets the boundaries of a community united by bhakti by praising the exemplars of this community. Nābhādās focuses on the recent past, but he connects this "historical" time to previous "mythological" ages. In so doing, he frames an argument that legitimizes bhakti through its divine origins in the ancient past. Nābhādās presents the *sampradāy* as central to his bhakti-oriented community. It is through the institutional structure of the *sampradāy*, defined by loyalty to one's guru, that authority is passed down through the *guru-śiṣya paramparā*, or preceptor-disciple tradition – rooted in the mythological past. It is the *sampradāy* that carries bhakti across the ages from its divine origins to the compromised present, but Nābhādās' vision of bhakti does not limit itself to the walls of the monastery. His community explicitly includes multiple *sampradāy*s, which are each granted divine origins, as well as *bhakta*s who seem to be independent of any *sampradāy.*

Nābhādās' descriptions of miraculous events help to clarify his goals in composing the *Bhaktamāl*. The *Bhaktamāl* includes numerous miraculous stories. In the context of the present

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207 Ibid., 96-97.

age, Nābhā gives both miraculous and entirely "natural" stories. Such miracles demonstrate the greatness of bhakti. Gilbert Pollet, in his "The Mediaeval Vaiṣṇava Miracles As Recorded in the Hindi 'Bhakta Māla,'" considers the role of miracles (*acaraja*) in this work. Through careful attention to the incidents so labeled, Pollet elucidates the aspects of such events. These miracles usually concern Vishnu or one of his avatars. Human beings, however, occasionally effect miracles without apparent divine intervention. An invocation or confident utterance by the devotee often precedes the performance of a miracle, particularly in moments of distress, but miracles also demonstrate unrequested divine benevolence without immediate need. Miracles may demonstrate the intent of protecting a *bhakta*, spreading bhakti, or rewarding devotees for their virtues, especially *arcā*, "worship of divine images," and *sādhusevā*, "attendance on the saints." Some miracles do not interfere with the laws of nature, but others may "constitute an exception to the natural order of things." Pollet notes that miracles seem "to be but casually mentioned" in the *Bhaktamāl*, but by demonstrating the favor of God, they offer "eloquent proof ('*paraco*') that devotion ('bhakti') is regarded by Vishnu as the highest religion ('*parama dharma*')."[208]

The inclusion of miracles, as exceptions to the natural order of things, in the *Bhaktamāl* would lead many modern readers to doubt its reliability as a source of factual information about the past. Such doubt is reasonable. The *Bhaktamāl* must be understood within its own context. Nābhādās did not seek to provide a factually accurate record of the past. There is no reason to accept the reliability of Nābhādās's purely natural accounts while rejecting his supernatural accounts. Both types of accounts help us to understand Nābhādās and his context. Neither type of account provides an accurate record of devotees' historical lives.

208 Gilbert Pollet, "The Mediaevel Vaiṣṇava Miracles as Recorded in the Hindi 'Bhakta Māla'," *Le Muséon: Revue d'Études Orientales* 80 (1967): 475-487.

W.H. McLeod provides a useful model for reading early modern biographies in *Early Sikh Tradition*, his classic study of the *janam-sākhī*s, biographies of Guru Nanak. McLeod critiques previous historical uses of these biographies, which attempt to use them to discern historical information about Nānak. McLeod places these texts into their own historical context, the seventeenth-century Punjab, and employs them to expand understanding of this period. These documents reveal how the Sikh community conceived of Guru Nānak, and they allow us a view of the community that composed these accounts. This community, McLeod observes, was overwhelmingly rural and composed primarily of Khatrīs, with Jaṭs and members of artisan castes rounding out the Panth's membership. The struggle to define a collective identity is marked in these texts and can be seen in the establishment of separate centers for worship, known as *dharamsālās*, not yet *gurdwāras*. The *janam-sākhīs* also reveal aspects of practice in the early Sikh community, including congregational singing, the importance of *sevā* by caring for the needs of visiting sadhus, and repetition of the divine name. Other practices are conspicuous by their absence, namely those which would later mark off the Khālsā as a distinct group. McLeod also observes that the *janam-sākhīs* may have some value for understanding the history of the Punjab beyond the boundaries of the Nānak Panth as well as for Punjabi literary history.[209]

My approach is somewhat different from McLeod's. One could certainly read the *Bhaktamāl* to discover contemporaneous descriptions of early seventeenth century bhakti practices and community formation, but it is more fruitful to see it as a product of Nābhādās' religious and literary imagination. There is nothing inherently objectionable in mining the *Bhaktamāl*, or other early modern texts, for information about the time and place in which they

209 W.H. McLeod, *Early Sikh Tradition: A Study of the Janam Sākhīs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 249-269.

were composed, but to do so without pausing to understand the internal logic of the text or the objectives of its creator does a certain violence to the work.

Nābhādās praises exemplars of devotion and in so doing imagines a community defined by its shared commitment to bhakti. For Nābhādās, bhakti, though defined in Vaishnava terms, transcends fixed religious categories. Caste is no limit to sharing in bhakti, but obedience to the guru remains central. Indeed, the lineages of guru and disciple that define the organization of the *sampradāy* are one of the defining aspects of the community of bhakti.

Vaishnava Catholicity

In the *Bhaktamāl*, Nābhādās imagines a widely inclusive community of *bhakta*s. Pinch refers to this inclusiveness as "Vaiṣṇava catholicism," arguing that this text asserts the importance of *bhakta*s and *sant*s, as opposed to sadhus. Nābhādās welcomes women as well as men and dominant-caste as well as subordinate-caste people. In so doing, Pinch argues, Nābhādās, "crafted a language of and conceptual frame for supra-sectarian religious organisation that could accommodate both monastic and lay populations. In short, Nabhadas articulated a broadly conceived Vaiṣṇava catholicism that extended beyond the confines of the monastic sanctuary without undermining the importance of and need for that sanctuary."[210] For Pinch, the verses of the *Bhaktamāl* themselves demonstrate Nābhādās' Vaishnava catholicity. Not only does he include "untouchable, shudra, and female bhaktas as part of the inner circle of twelve disciple of Ramanand," he outlines a lineage of "Vaiṣṇava-dharma in the kaliyuga" that establishes Rāmānuja as "first among equals" rather than propounding an exclusive path to God.[211] The *sampradāy* founded by Rāmānuja offers the best path to God, but

210 Vijay Pinch, "History, Devotion and the Search for Nabhadas of Galta," 369.

211 Ibid., 395.

the other three orthodox *sampradāy*s are also valid. Even more significantly, Pinch interprets Nābhādās' biography of Rāghavānand, Rāmānand's purported guru, as marking a transformation "of Vaiṣṇavism from an exclusivist monastic order to a bhakti approach for broad (one might even describe it as 'mass') religious transformation."[212] Obedience to the guru and loyalty to the *sampradāy* may remain indispensable, but it is the devotees who make up the *sampradāy* and interpret the guru's message.[213]

Sampradāy

For Nābhādās, the *sampradāy* is central but not absolute. As we saw above, the *catuḥ-sampradāy* structure serves as the main framework for connecting bhakti in Kaliyug to its divine origins in the mythological past. For Nābhādās, the Śrī Sampradāy in particular offers the clearest and most highly praised path to God. Nābhādās' inclusiveness is not without distinctions. His own spiritual lineage – linking him to Lakshmi through Agradās, Rāmānand, and Rāmānuja – stands at the center, but Rāmānuja's *sampradāy* is but one of four Vaishnava orders that can claim divine sanction. More radically, though, Nābhādās is mainly concerned not with praising his own *sampradāy* – or even the four *sampradāy*s – but with celebrating *bhakta*s and *sant*s who may belong to no order at all. For Nābhādās, the structure of the *sampradāy* is central and perhaps even essential, but his community of devotees extends far beyond the boundaries established by this structure. The people of Hari are not limited to the *sampradāy*.

212 Ibid., 397.

213 Ibid.

Poets

For Nābhādās, the *sampradāy* is the central institutional structure for the spread of bhakti, but bhakti may also spread outside of the confines of the monastic order. Those who sing the praises of God or of God's people also expand bhakti's reach. Nābhādās celebrates the *sampradāy*, but he does not seem particularly concerned with placing *bhakta*s into the four-fold sectarian structure, which he describes. Bhakti spreads not only through guru-disciple transmission but also through song. The *sampradāy* and poets are not mutually exclusive. Kabīr and Raidās, for example, are included among the disciples of Rāmānand, but Nābhādās generally does not tell us the *sampradāy* or guru of the poets – or other *bhakta*s for the matter – whom he celebrates. It is loving devotion that matters, not lineage.

Not all those who sing the praises of God are called "poets" (*kavi*) by Nābhādās. For example, he celebrates the singers (*gāyak*) and bards (*cāraṇ*) who take refuge in Hari's feet.[214] In other instances, Nābhādās does not even mention that figures now remembered as poets composed poetry. In several cases, however, he does explicitly praise *bhakta*s as poets. Nābhādās describes Jayadeva, Sūrdās, and a king named Pṛthvīrāj as poets. He also praises a group of poets who "spread the fame of Hari in the world."[215]

In the case of Jayadeva, Nābhādās emphasizes this poet's power:

> Jayadeva, king of poets, a *cakravartī*: other poets respect him as the lord of several regions (*khaṇḍamaṇḍaleśvar*).
> The splendor of the *Gītagovinda* became abundant in the three worlds:
> An ocean of *Kokaśāstra*, of poetry, of the nine *ras*, and of the flavorful erotic sentiment.
> Gain familiarity with *aṣṭapadī* [the *Gītagovinda*], from this, wisdom will increase.
> Hearing it, Śrī Rādhā-ramaṇ is pleased. He definitely comes there.
> He is a group of lotuses in the form of a saint, the husband of Padmā, giver of happiness,

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214 132:1 Nābhādās, "Dvitīy Khaṇḍ (Sampādan)," 48.

215 96:1 Ibid., 35.

the sun.[216]

Jayadeva, king of poets, a cakravartī: other poets respect him as the lord of several regions.[217]

The line which both opens and closes this stanza celebrates Jayadeva not just as a king of poets (*kavinṛp*) but as a *cakravartī* and a *khaṇḍamaṇḍaleśvar.* For Nābhādās, Jayadeva is an imperial conqueror. The next four lines – the majority of the stanza – specify the reason for this greatness: the *Gītagovinda*. Nābhādās praises this poem as a masterpiece of *śṛṅgār ras* which will increase wisdom and which pleases Krishna himself, attracting him to wherever it is read. Only a single line in the interior of the stanza describes the saint himself, and it is relatively bland, if only in comparison to the praise given to his poem. We do learn a biographical fact about Jayadeva: his wife is named Padmā or Padmāvatī, as she is usually remembered.[218]

Jayadeva, then, is celebrated for his poetry. Poets, as a major force for the spread of bhakti, are a major ingredient in Nābhādās' bhakti community. The songs of the poets may be the most important means by which bhakti is spread beyond the institutionalized relationships of the *sampradāy*. Nābhādās celebrates Jayadeva – along with other poets – for their skillful expression of devotion. Nābhādās imagines a community of saints that is centered on but not limited to the *sampradāy*. Song is an important means for expanding this community and for holding it together. Nābhādās celebrates poets and other singers as crucial members of this

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216 Padmā here may be either the wife of Jayadeva or the consort of Vishnu. Jayadeva, for that matter, is also an epithet of Krishna, allowing for double interpretations both in this stanza and in the poetry of Jayadeva. See Barbara Stoler Miller, *Love Song of the Dark Lord, Jayadeva's Gītagovinda*, Translations from the Oriental Classics (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977).

217 "जयदेव कविनृप चक्कवै खंडमंडलेश्वर आनकवि । प्रचुर भयो तिहुलोक गीतगोविन्द उजागर । कोककाव्य नवरस सरस सिंगार को सागर ।। अष्टपदी अभ्यास करै तेहिं बुद्धि बढ़ावैं । श्री राधरमन प्रसन्न सुनन निश्चय तहं आवैं ।। संत सरोरुहखंड को पद्मापति सुखजनक रवि । जयदेव कविनृप चक्कवै खंडमंडलेश्वर आनकवि ।।" 43:1-6 Nābhādās, "Dvitīy Khaṇḍ (Sampādan)," 16.

218 And even this line may be read as descriptive of Rādhā-ramaṇ rather than Jayadeva.

community.

Caste

Nābhādās explicitly rejects the spiritual importance of caste, as can be seen in his stanzas in praise of Kabīr and Raidās. This critique does not necessarily extend to the social stratification represented by *jāti* and *varṇa*, but Nābhādās' rejection of *varṇāśramadharma* ideology could not be more clear. Nābhādās does not attack social institutions, but there is no place for caste in Nābhādās' understanding of bhakti.

Nābhādās' Kabīr is listed as a disciple of Rāmānand,[219] which places him in the lineage of Rāmānuja. Nābhādās notes that Rāmānand opened the door of bhakti to people of all castes and followed the example of his guru, Rāghavānand, in giving initiation to members of subordinate castes (*cāri baran āśram sabahī*).[220] Kabīr would have been a member of a subordinate caste. Nābhādās does not explicitly note Kabīr's *jāti,* but he does, in the first and last line of his *chappay* on Kabīr, state that "Kabīr had no respect for *varnāśram* or the six systems of philosophy." For Nābhādās, Kabīr was first and foremost a critic. The next two lines elaborate this point. Kabīr rejected dharma without devotion as non-dharma, and he demonstrated the uselessness of yoga, sacrifices, vows, and donations that are unaccompanied by *bhajan*.[221] Nābhādās' Kabīr transcends fixed religious categories. His compositions are proof (*pramān)* of both the Hindu and Muslim (*turak)* paths, and he shows no partiality. Rather, he

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219 35:1-6 Nābhādās, "Dvitīy Khaṇḍ (Sampādan)," 13.

220 34:1-6 Ibid., 12-13.

221 *Bhajan*, a present participle form of the same Sanskrit verbal root as 'bhakti,' usually refers simply to devotional songs and their performance. In this case, however, such an interpretation seems too narrow. *Bhajan* here may perhaps be read as active, loving devotion. It is the act of bhakti that Nābhādās' Kabīr emphasises. The singing of devotional songs may be counted as a central expression of bhakti religiosity, but Nābhādās seems here to refer to a wider understanding of *bhajan*.

speaks with love for all. In the penultimate line, Nābhādās insists upon Kabīr's steadfastness and humility.[222] The inclusion of Kabīr in the community of *bhakta*s by Nābhādās demonstrates his understanding, in general terms, of the nature of bhakti. It is not a narrow vision of devotion. Obedience to the guru is essential, but devotion to Krishna is as valid as devotion to Ram. Even Shaiva *bhakta*s are celebrated. Nābhādās, however, consistently places bhakti within a Vaishnava framework. For Nābhādās, the primary focus is always on the qualities of the *bhakta*s. By praising them – the historical actors of bhakti – he effectively praises bhakti, the guru, and God, all terms which Nābhādās regards as equivalent.[223]

Nābhādās writes in praise of the *bhakta*s, so his verses should be taken as celebration and not mere description. When Nābhādās says that Kabīr rejected *varṇāśram*, this should not be taken as a mere fact but as something worth celebrating. Within the bhakti community, distinction according to class (*varṇa*) or stage of life (*āśram*) has no place. Such an understanding is reinforced by Nābhā's words of praise for the poet and cobbler Raidās. Nābhādās does not explicitly mention Raidās' caste or profession, but the use of imagery taken from the work of cobblers alludes to his social position. The content of his teaching is reportedly orthodox and orthoprax (*sadācār sruti sāstr*). The succeeding lines emphasize Raidās' power of discernment and actively efface the line separating the spiritual from the physical. Nābhādās evokes the imagery of the goose (*haṁs*) that is capable of separating milk from water with its beak and reports that Raidās physically reached heaven (*paramagati ihi tan pāī*) due to the grace of God. As if the notion of a cobbler teaching the Vedas were not subversive enough

222 "कबीर कानि राखी नहीं वर्णाश्रम षड्दरसनी । भक्ति विमुख जो धर्म सो अधरम करि गायो ।। जोग जग्य ब्रतदान भजन बिनु तुच्छ दिखायो । हिन्दु - तुरक प्रमान रमैनी शब्दी साखी । पक्षपात नहिं वचन सबनी के हित की भाषी ।। आरूड़ दसा ह्वै जगत पर मुख देखी नाहिन अनी । कबीर कानि राखी नहीं वर्णाश्रम षड्दरसनी ।।" 59:1-6 Nābhādās, "Dvitīy Khaṇḍ (Sampādan)," 22.

223 1:1-2 Ibid., 1.

of *varṇa* hierarchies, Nābhādās insists that Raidās explained the true meaning of caste (*jñāti*) and that his followers gave up their pride in class and stage of life (*varṇāśram*) to lay their heads at his feet.[224] Nābhādās' concern does not extend to a critique of social stratification. He does not have any time for human relationships not determined by bhakti, but his rejection of caste concerns spiritual matters, not social arrangements. However, in the context of bhakti – the only context that matters in the *Bhaktamāl* – there is no place for *varṇāśram* dharma.

Family

Caste is not the only form of social organization to be superseded and relativized by bhakti. Nābhādās' portrait of Mīrā presents the supremacy of bhakti over political authority and familial restraints. His opening line declares that she gave up the chains of public shame and family to worship Krishna (*giridhara*). She displayed in the Kaliyug a love for Krishna that equaled the Gopīs'. She sang of Krishna's fame and of her devotion without modesty or restraint. Nābhādās observes that such absolute devotion provoked opposition. Mīrā's enemies understand her devotion to be sinful, so they attempt to kill her. The saving power of devotion, however, proves greater than the strength of its opponents. Mīrā's enemies failed even to misplace a single hair on her head. When Mīrā drank poison, it became nectar.[225] A single minded devotion such as Mīrā's may provoke opposition, but bhakti, for Nābhādās, proves to be more powerful than its opponents. Nābhādās does not usually include narrative elements

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224 "संदेह ग्रंथि खंडन निपुन वानी विमल रैदास की । सदाचार स्रुति सास्त्र वचन अविरुध उचार्यो । नीर खीर बिबरन परम हंसनि उर धार्यो ।। भागवत कृपा प्रसाद परम गति इहि तन पाई । राजसिंहासन बैठि ज्ञाति परतीति दिखाई ।। वर्णाश्रम अभिमान तजि पदरज बंदे जास की । संदेह ग्रंथि खंडन निपुन वानी विमल रैदास की ।।" 58:1-6 Ibid., 21-22.

225 "लोकलाज कुल-शृंखला तजि मीरा गिरिधर भजी । सदृश गोपिका प्रेम प्रगट कलिजुगहिं दिखायौ । निर अंकुश अति निडर रसिक जसरसना गायौ ।। दुष्टन दोष विचारि मृत्यु को उद्दिम कीयौ । बार न बांकौ भयौ गरल अमृत ज्यों पीयौ ।। भक्ति निसान बजाय कै काहू ते नाहिन लजी । लोकलाज कुल-शृंखला तजि मीरा गिरिधर भजी ।।" 108:1-6 Ibid., 40.

from the lives of his *bhakta*s, but this verse is a rare exception. Mīrā's tribulations occur in a temporal context that tradition holds to be the royal household of her in-laws. Bhakti proves adequate to protect a young daughter-in-law against the attacks of her powerful in-laws.

Kingship

Along with the *sampradāy*, caste, and family, Nābhādās subordinates royal authority to bhakti. Nābhādās situates himself among the Rāmānandīs of Galtā, and the kings who matter most to him are the Kachavāhā rulers of Amer, the royal patrons of his community. Nābhādās establishes this connection in several stanzas, particularly those devoted to Kṛṣṇadās Payahārī, the founder of the Rāmānandī seat at Galtā, and Pṛthvīrāj, Kṛṣṇadās Payahārī's patron.[226] Significantly, Nābhādās makes no explicit connection between other leading Galtā Rāmānandīs, such as Kīlha and Agradās, and the rulers in Amer.[227] As we will see in chapter three, while Nābhādās remains silent about these connections, Priyādās emphasizes the relationships between the Kachavāhās and the Galtā Rāmānandīs.

Nābhādās situates Kṛṣṇadās Payahārī in the text as a disciple of Anantānand, who in turn is one of Rāmānand's chief disciples:

> Kṛṣṇadās, a great ascetic in the Kaliyug. He gave up food and drank milk.
> On whichever head he kept his hand, he did not reach under that one's hand.[228]
> He gave [his followers] the *pad* (verse or mantra) of nirvana. He made them fearless and freed them from sorrow.
> Possessing a mass of energy and the strength of devotion, [Kṛṣṇadās was] a great and celibate sage.
> World-conquering rajas and ranas served his lotus feet.

226 Nābhādās praises two kings named Pṛthvīrāj. Pṛthvīrāj of Amer is remembered as the disciple of Kṛṣṇadās Payahārī, and Pṛthvīrāj of Bikaner, mentioned above, is celebrated as a great poet.

227 My analysis here follows Pinch, who considers the relationship between the Kachavāhā rulers and the Galtā ashram as represented by both Nābhādās and Priyādās. I will consider Priyādās' treatment of these figures in chapter three. Vijay Pinch, "History, Devotion and the Search for Nabhadas of Galta," 389-390.

228 i.e. He did not accept offerings from his followers.

> He was the rising sun of a southern lineage. He pleased the lotus hearts of the *sants*.
> Kṛṣṇadās, a great ascetic in the Kaliyug. He gave up food and drank milk.[229]

Nābhādās celebrates Kṛṣṇadās Payahārī primarily as an ascetic. He did not accept offerings from his followers, but he led them to liberation. He developed great yogic powers, and the rulers of this world bowed down to him. He pleased the *sants*. Kṛṣṇadās acquired great powers and powerful followers, but for Nābhādās, his ends remained firmly otherworldly.

Nābhādās mentions Kṛṣṇadās Payahārī again much later in the text in his stanza on the Kachavāhā king Pṛthvīrāj:

> The Lord of Dvārikā gave *darśan* to [Pṛthvīrāj] Kūrma (Kachavāhā) while he remained in Amer.
> Kṛṣṇadās [Payahārī] gave him *upadeś* (the initiatory mantra) and caused him to know the highest essence.
> [Kṛṣṇadās] destroyed the darkness of his ignorance of the formless One who is with and without qualities.
> In Kacch, a voice [said that he was] without blemish like Gāṅgeya[230] and Yudhiṣṭara,
> Like Prahlād in his remembrance of Hari, and the bearer of the flag of Dharma in the world.
> Pṛthvīrāj's qualities were clear. [Kṛṣṇadās] adorned his body with the conch and discus.
> The Lord of Dvārikā gave *darśan* to Kūrma while he remained in Amer.[231]

Here we see a celebration of Pṛthvīrāj as a *bhakta* in his own right. He received *darśan* from Dvārikā without needing to leave his capital. Kṛṣṇadās initiated him into his order and provided him with religious education, bringing him experience of the Absolute. Nābhādās favorably compares Pṛthvīraj to great *bhakta*s of the first three ages, and he bears on his body

229 "निर्वेद अधिक कलि कृष्णदास अन परिहरि पय पान कियो । जाके सिर कर धर्यो तासु तरकरनहिं अड्डयो । अप्यो पद निर्वान सोक निर्भय करि छड्चो ।। तेजपुंज बलभजन महामुनि उरधरेता । सेवत चरणसरोज राय राना भुविजैता ।। दाहिमा वंश दनियर उदय संत कमल-हिय सुख दियो । निर्वेद अधिक कलि कृषणदास अन परिहरि पय पान कियो ।।" 37:1-6 Nābhādās, "Dvitīy Khaṇḍ (Sampādan)," 13-14.

230 That is to say Bhīṣma, son of Ganga, an important figure in the Mahabharata.

231 "आँवरि अछत कूरम को द्वारिकानाथ दरसन दियौ । श्री खृष्णदास उपदेस परम तत्व परचौ पायौ । निरगुन सगुन निरूप तिमिर अज्ञान नसायौ ।। काछ वाच निकलंक मनौ गांगेय युधिष्ठर । हरि सुमिरन प्रह्लाद धर्मध्वजधारी जगपर ।। पृथीराज परचौ प्रगट तन संख चक्र मंडित कियौ । आँवरि अछत कूरम को द्वारिकानाथ दरसन दियौ ।।" 109:1-6 Nābhādās, "Dvitīy Khaṇḍ (Sampādan)," 40.

tangible marks of Vaishnava devotion. Pṛthvīrāj may be a king and a key figure in establishing the Rāmānandīs at Galtā, but Nābhādās is not much concerned with these aspects of Pṛthvīrāj's life. For Nābhādās, Pṛthvīrāj is a loyal disciple of Kṛṣṇadās and a committed *bhakta.*

Pṛthvīrāj's powerful office is undoubtedly key in his inclusion in the *Bhaktamāl*, but he is not listed among the primary disciples of Kṛṣṇadās Payahārī:

> From the grace of Payahārī, his disciples all crossed [the ocean of samsara].
> Kīlhadev, Agradev, Kevaldās, Caraṇdās, and Vratahaṭhī Nārāyaṇ.
> Sūryyadās, Puruṣottamdās, Pṛthudās, and Tripurdās: engrossed in bhakti.
> Padmanābh, Gopāldās, Ṭekrām, Ṭīlā, and Gadādhardās.
> Devā, Hemdās, Kalyāṇdās, and Gaṅgā, a woman like the Ganga.[232]
> Viṣṇudās, Kānhardās, Raṅgārām. Cāṅdan, and Sabīrī: devotees of Govinda.[233]
> From the grace of Payahārī, his disciples all crossed [the ocean of samsara].[234]

Again, we see the assertion that Payahārī led his followers – *bhakta*s all – to liberation. For Nābhādās, Kṛṣṇadās' ability to provide a way across this ocean of samsara is clearly his most important quality.

The first disciples of Kṛṣṇadās Payahārī are Kīlhadev and Agradās. Nābhādās praises these sadhus next:

> Just as Death did not destroy Gāṅgeya, Time[235] does not have power over Kīlhadev.
> Day and night he kept Ram's feet in his thoughts.
> All beings bowed their heads to him. This hero apportioned the bliss of devotion.
> He established the Sāṅkhya and Yoga schools in his experience like an Amla fruit in the hand.
> He departed via the *Brahma-raṅdhra*. He took on Hari's body through the power of his actions.

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232 Rūpkalā glosses "gaṅgā gaṅgāsam nārī" as meaning either Gaṅgābāī, who is like the Ganga, or Gaṅgādās and his wife, who is similar to the Ganga. "Rūpkalā", *Śrī Bhaktamāl*, 308.

233 Rūpkalā also notes that, according to a Mahatma, "gobiṅdapar" can be taken as the name of one of Kṛṣṇadās Payahārī's disciples. Ibid.

234 "पैहारी परसाद तें शिष्य सबै भये पारकर । कील्ह अगर केवल चरण व्रतहठी नारायण । सूरज पुरुषों पृथू तिपुर हरि भक्ति परायन ।। पद्मनाभ गोपाल टेक टीला गदाधारी । देवा हेम कल्याण गंगा गंगा सम नारी ।। विष्णुदास कन्हड़ रंगा चांदन सबीरी गोविंद पर । पैहारी परदास तें शिष्य सबै भये पारकर ।।" 38:1-6 Nābhādās, "Dvitīy Khaṇḍ (Sampādan)," 14.

235 Or Death.

This son of Sumeradev was known throughout the world. His faultless fame spread across the earth.
Just as Death did not destroy Gāṅgeya, Time does not have power over Kīlhadev.[236]

Like his guru, Kīlha is renowned for his yogic powers. He has power over death. He is a devotee of Ram. All creation bows down to him. He has achieved union with God. He has become famous, but Nābhādās does not mention Kīlha as having any royal connections or as holding any positions of authority.

Nor does Nābhādās mention any relationship to earthly power in his praise of Agradās, his own guru:

Agradās did not spend time in vain, without devotion to Hari.
He took up the conduct of the *sant*s who had come before.
He performed *sevā,* remembrance [of the divine name], and meditation. He brought his consciousness to the feet of Rādhā.
He lovingly and constantly worked in his famous garden, which he made with his own hands.
On his tongue was the faultless name, like a rain cloud.
Kṛṣṇadās graced him with the gift of bhakti, unshakable in thought, word, and deed.
Agradās did not spend time in vain, without devotion to Hari.[237]

Agradās' commitment to Hari is constant. He follows the example of the saints who lived in earlier times. He is devoted to Rādhā.[238] He spends his time gardening and owes his bhakti to his guru. With Agradās, there is no mention of the yogic powers of Payahārī or Kīlha. He is a *bhakta* in every aspect of his life. Agra's guru and guru-brother may be yogis and *bhakta*s, but

236 "गांगेय मृत्यु नहीं, त्यों कील्ह करन नहिं कालवश । रामचरण चिंतवनि रहत निशि दिन लौ लागी । सर्वभूत शिरनिमित सूर भजनानन्द भागी ।। सांख्य योग मत सुदृढ़ कियो अनुभव हस्तामल । ब्रह्मरंध्र करि गौन भये हरिरन करनी बल ।। सुमेरदेव सुत जगविदित भू विस्तर्यो विमलयश । गांगेय मृत्यु गंज्यो नहीं, त्यों कील्ह करन नहिं कालवश ।।" 39:1-6 Nābhādās, "Dvitīy Khaṇḍ (Sampādan)," 14.

237 "श्री अग्रदास हरिभजन बिन काल वृथा नहिं बितयौ । सदाचार ज्यों सन्त प्राप्त जैसे करि आये । सेवा सुमिरन ध्यान चरणराधौ चित लाये ।। प्रसिध बाग सों प्रीति सुहथ कृत करत निरंतर । रसना निर्मल नाम मनहुं वर्षत धाराधर ।। श्री कृष्णदास कृपा करि भक्तिदत्त मनवच क्रमकरि अटल दियौ । श्री अग्रदास हरिभजन बिन काल वृथा नहिं बित्तयौ ।।" 40:1-6 Ibid., 14-15.

238 Rūpkalā's edition has "Rāghav" where Jhā's has "Rādhau," making him a devotee of Ram. "Rūpkalā", *Śrī Bhaktamāl*, 312.

for Nābhādās, bhakti is the highest path. Yoga, it seems, is not incompatible with bhakti, but bhakti alone is necessary and sufficient.

The stanza which follows Nābhādās' celebration of Pṛthvīrāj praises royals who do great honor to the *bhakta*s.[239] Nābhādās does celebrate those kings who respect and support the *bhakta*s, but he reserves his greatest praise for the *bhakta*s themselves. He praises some kings as *bhakta*s due to their devotion to God and to the people of God. Nābhādās celebrates Pṛthvīrāj as a great devotee but does not even mention if he was a generous patron. As with other social distinctions – caste, family, and even the monastic order – kingship loses its veneer in the *Bhaktamāl*. Nābhādās does not challenge royal authority, but he does make it clear that the only power which ultimately matters is the power of bhakti. Nābhādās values those kings who support bhakti, but it is their patronage and devotion he celebrates, not their royal authority.

Reading the *Bhaktamāl* not as catalog of unrelated facts about particular individuals but as an integrated literary work yields insights into the thought of Nābhādās and perhaps enhances the richness of our understanding of religious life in early seventeenth-century Rajasthan. Nābhādās' goal is not simply to communicate facts about the lives of devotees but to praise them for their devotion. Given such a goal, it is unsurprising that the boundaries between human and divine or natural and supernatural remain permeable in Nābhādās' world view. We may not learn much about historical individuals in the *Bhaktamāl*, but we do learn what traits he found admirable in these individuals. Even though he was a Vaishnava, Nābhādās did not much concern himself with policing correct doctrine. He, instead, celebrated obedience to one's guru. The centrality of this obedience provides the basis for bhakti centered

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239 "भक्तन कौ आदर अधिक राजवंश में इन कियौ ।" 110:1 Nābhādās, "Dvitīy Khaṇḍ (Sampādan)," 40.

on but not limited to the *sampradāy*. Nābhādās celebrated bhakti over all other social arrangements. The social stratification of class and caste, royal authority, and family position are all inferior to bhakti. Nābhādās does not exactly critique the social practices of his day so much as disregard them. For Nābhādās, it is only bhakti that matters.

Conclusion

An exploration of the religious and literary tradition begun by Nābhādās' *Bhaktamāl* must by necessity begin with a consideration of the tradition's originating text and its author. Not much can be known with any certainty about Nābhādās, so we are left with conjecture and later tradition in trying to establish even the most basic facts about his life. Despite this uncertainty about Nābhādās' life, we have a window into his thought through the *Bhaktamāl*. In this text, he crafts a garland of exemplars of bhakti. These exemplary devotees serve to define a broad community united by bhakti. This community crosses boundaries of region, language, gender, social status, and sect; yet, the *sampradāy* continues to provide a backbone to the bhakti community. Nābhādās celebrates the *bhakta*s and the supremacy of bhakti. For Nābhādās, bhakti is the only proper basis for human society. He rejects caste, kingship, and even family in favor of a community joining human society and the divine in bhakti.

In the following chapters, we will see how subsequent tradition has engaged with this central aspect of Nābhādās' vision. Priyādās, the subject of the next chapter and the *Bhaktamāl*'s first and most influential commentator, shared Nābhādās' commitment to a broad community based in bhakti, but he redefines the logic holding this community together in important ways. Nābhādās' notion of bhakti turns out to be a bit too inclusive for Priyādās, and this commentator finds ways to specify the boundaries of bhakti in a significantly more

restrictive way without, however, explicitly rejecting any aspect of the *Bhaktamāl*.

Chapter Three: Priyādās' *Bhaktirasabodhinī*

नाभाजू ने आज्ञा दई, लई धारि, टीका विस्तारि भक्तमाल की सूनाइयै ।

Nābhā-jū gave the order, and I accepted it: 'Recite an expansive commentary on the *Bhaktamāl.'*

- Priyādās[1]

Introduction

Approximately a century after the *Bhaktamāl*'s composition, Priyādās, a Gauṛīya Vaishnava living in Vrindavan, composed the earliest known commentary on this work. Priyādās' expansive and enormously influential work, entitled the *Bhaktirasabodhinī*, or *The Awakening of the Sentiment of Bhakti*, simultaneously elaborates upon and critiques Nābhādās' vision. In this commentary, Priyādās selectively explains and extrapolates from the verses of Nābhādās' *mūl* text. Priyādās' commentary has been, perhaps, as influential as Nābhādās' original. Subsequent manuscripts and print editions of the *Bhaktamāl* usually include this commentary, and the combined text is often referred to simply as the *Bhaktamāl.*[2]

This chapter considers Priyādās and his *Bhaktirasabodhinī*. Following a review of the scholarly literature on this work, I begin with a brief consideration of the commentator and the context in which he worked. I then summarize the contents of the commentary before considering the nature of Priyādās' engagement with Nābhādās' *mūl* text. As we shall see below, Priyādās shifts Nābhādās' focus from the devotees to God. He emphasizes the importance of the *sampradāy* and reduces the role of poets. He grants spiritual importance to

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1 1:2 "Rūpkalā", *Śrī Bhaktamāl*, 1.

2 Hawley, “The Music in Faith and Morality,” 251.

caste and increases the role of royal patrons. Priyādās' dispute with Nābhādās is largely implicit. He only claims for himself the humble role of commentator and never openly challenges Nābhādās. However, the transformations that he enacts are substantial. Priyādās establishes the *Bhaktamāl* as locus for debates over the nature of a broad community characterized by bhakti.

Previous Scholarship

The *Bhaktirasabodhinī* has received less critical attention than the *Bhaktamāl*. Some studies have treated this text as an extension of Nābhādās' work and have not clearly distinguished between original and commentary. Other studies have focused specifically on the *Bhaktirasabodhinī*, placing this work firmly within its sectarian context. Within the Western academy, only R.D. Gupta has devoted sustained scholarly attention to Priyādās and his commentary.

Hawley's "Morality beyond Morality" considers the *Bhaktamāl* and the *Bhaktirasabodhinī* as a combined text. Hawley's explicit subject is Nābhādās' *Bhaktamāl*, but he actually focuses primarily on Priyādās' commentary. In comparison to Nābhādās' terse and allusive verse, Priyādās' episodic narration is straightforward and attention grabbing. Hawley is hardly the first scholar to consider these texts without sharply distinguishing between them; indeed, as we will see in the next chapter, the *Bhaktamāl* tradition has not generally made this distinction. Hawley focuses on the two texts' treatment of dharma. These accounts of *bhakta*s' lives seem to reject the prescriptive morality of dharma, and indeed they do oftentimes explicitly dismiss the propositions of *varṇāśram* dharma. Texts such as the *Bhaktamāl*, however, encode "a more fundamental morality, which, if manifested with the naturalness that these saints evince,

would lead to right living in the absence of all code and precept."[3] Hawley considers Nābhādās' and Priyādās' portraits of three *bhakta*s – Mīrābāī, Narasī Mehtā, and Pīpādās – and argues that they each embody a particular saintly virtue. Mīrā defies the bounds of conventional modesty but exhibits a fearlessness in her devotion to Krishna that is well suited to her Rajput background.[4] Narasī shows extraordinary generosity even as he himself faces complete privation. In contrast to the ordinary economy of scarcity, Narasī exists in an economy of unending abundance and divine fellowship.[5] Pīpā and his wife Sītā live in a marriage that defies the standards of traditional dharma but demonstrates an ideal of service to the *satsang*, "God's society."[6] Bhakti is not amoral; rather, it sits on a higher ethical plane. Hawley explains, "Whereas worldly *dharma* establishes its ethical community by means of social differentiation and complementary function, bhakti does so by reuniting socially disparate elements in a common cause: the praise of God. This seemingly external referent does not so much cancel recognizably *dharmic* virtues, as it liberates them from the social codes and contexts to which they are usually subordinated."[7] In the *Bhaktamāl*, dharma is generally subordinated to bhakti; however, Vaishnava bhakti's vision of God as removing fear, being infinitely generous, and acting devotedly in the service of his devotees oftentimes leads to the adoption of these values by the community of worshipers.[8]

Other scholars have explored the *Bhaktirasabodhinī* within its sectarian context. Philip

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3 John Stratton Hawley, "Morality beyond Morality," in *Three Bhakti Voices* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 48-50.

4 Ibid., 51-55.

5 Ibid., 55-60.

6 Ibid., 60-62.

7 Ibid., 63.

8 Ibid., 69.

Lutgendorf's unpublished MA thesis positions the *Bhaktamāl* and the *Bhaktirasabodhinī* within a Gauṛīya Vaishnava context. He provides translations of the forty-four stanzas of the *Bhaktamāl* and its major commentary that describe Kṛṣṇa Caitanya and his immediate followers. Lutgendorf raises the issue of Caitanya's influence on bhakti among Hindi speakers as well as on the history of Hindi literature. Lutgendorf highlights the tension between specific regional movements and broader trans-regional ones. He presents Priyādās as a Hindi-speaking Gauṛīya Vaishnava who, despite his sectarian affiliation, shared in the eclectic spirit of Nābhādās' text. Lutgendorf argues that Priyādās was the product of a multi-ethnic and multilingual community centered in Vrindavan.[9]

Lutgendorf's thesis is relatively brief and focuses on a single section of the text. Gupta has conducted more sustained scholarship on the *Bhaktirasabodhinī*. His 1967 SOAS thesis serves as a companion to Gilbert Pollet's 1963 thesis on the *mūl* text. Like Pollet, Gupta introduces the text at hand, describes the available manuscripts, and provides a critical edition, translation, and notes on a portion of the text. Gupta attempts to identify Priyādās' sources and provides a glossary "with grammatical analysis and all the references for each word in the text."[10] He notes the surprising absence of any critical edition of either the *Bhaktamāl* or the *Bhaktirasabodhinī*, and notes that non-scholarly print editions are full of errors and usually based on Rūpkalā's monumental edition or on a single manuscript.[11] In the case of the *Bhaktamāl*, Jhā has since published a critical edition, but neither Gupta nor anyone else has yet completed a critical edition of Priyādās' commentary. Gupta notes that scholars of Hindi

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9 Philip Lutgendorf, "Kṛṣṇa Caitanya and His Companions as Presented in the Bhaktamāla of Nābhā Jī and the Bhaktirasabodhinī of Priyā Dāsa" (Unpublished MA paper, University of Chicago, 1981).

10 R.D. Gupta, "Studies in the Bhaktirasa-bodhinī of Priyā Dāsa," 4.

11 Ibid., 13-14.

literature have said very little about Priyādās except to note that he was a commentator on the *Bhaktamāl*. Gupta criticizes these histories for making numerous errors, in particular for misunderstanding Priyā as a contemporary of Nābhā.[12]

Gupta's 1968 article "The Bhaktirasabodhinī of Priyā Dāsa" is the clearest published account of this text. It is substantially identical to sections of Gupta's unpublished thesis and, like the thesis, is based primarily on a close consideration of the first 101 verses of Priyādās' commentary. In this brief article, Gupta explains the meaning of the title of the commentary, notes the date of completion, describes the meter and rhyme scheme, considers questions of interpolation, and outlines the structure of the *Bhaktirasabodhinī*'s first section.[13] I consider Gupta's conclusions below.

In his brief 1969 article, "Priyā Dās, Author of the Bhaktirasabodhinī," Gupta "attempts to throw some light on aspects" of Priyādās' life.[14] Not much is known about Priyādās, and the bulk of this article is taken up with considerations of the five works attributed to him, a topic to which I return below.

For citations of the *Bhaktirasabodhinī*, I follow Rūpkalā's text, taking Gupta's caveats, which I discuss below, into account. Rūpkalā's edition has become recognized as the standard. It is not a critical edition, but a critical edition of this commentary has not yet been published. As I have already noted, Gupta's unpublished PhD thesis includes a critical edition of Priyādās' first 101 stanzas, but even this work is based on a less-than-complete survey of early *Bhaktirasabodhinī* manuscripts. A critical edition of the *Bhaktirasabodhinī* would undoubtedly

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12 For a discussion of Nābhādās' and Priyādās' (lack of) contemporaneity, see below. Ibid., 42.

13 R.D. Gupta, "The Bhaktirasabodhinī of Priyā Dāsa," *Le Muséon* 81, no. 3 (1968): 547-62.

14 R.D. Gupta, "Priyā Dās, Author of the Bhaktirasabodhinī," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 32, no. 1 (1969): 57.

reveal interpolations and textual variants not identified by Gupta,[15] and such an edition could modify our understanding of this commentary. In the absence of such an edition, however, I rely on the most widely accepted and influential version of the text.

Like the *Bhaktamāl*, the *Bhaktirasabodhinī* has not received the scholarly attention due to a work of its significance. Scholars such as Hawley and Lutgendorf have dealt with portions of the text but have oftentimes treated this text and the *Bhaktamāl* as a single work. Priyādās sought to blur distinctions – or did not perceive distinctions – between his commentary and Nābhādās' text. Tradition has accepted Priyādās' assertion, but as I argue below, Priyādās' perspective differs significantly from Nābhā's. In attempting to understand the *Bhaktirasabodhinī* as an independent contribution to the *Bhaktamāl* tradition, the best support we have is the scholarship of R.D. Gupta, and even he never completed the critical edition and translation of this text, which he began as his PhD dissertation.

Priyādās' Life and Work

Not much was recorded about Priyādās' life, so the following account is, by necessity, a sketch. Priyādās left behind a larger literary legacy than Nābhādās and, helpfully, he dated his work, leaving us a somewhat firmer record, even if this record remains as incomplete as is to be expected with pre-colonial Hindi poets.

Date

It is impossible to make any definitive statement about the dates of Priyādās' birth or death, but we can date the *Bhaktirasabodhinī* with confidence. The date of the *Bhaktirasabodhinī* is uncontroversial. All complete manuscripts and printed editions examined by Gupta include

15 The interpolations identified by Gupta are described below.

kavitta 633:3, with only minor variations in spelling:

> *Saṃvata prasiddha dasa sāta sata unhattara,*
> *Phālaguna hī māsa badī saptamī bitāikai.*[16]
>
> The words *dasa sāta sata unhattara* represent the Vikrama year:
> *dasa* = 10, *sāta* =7, *sata* (*śata*) = 100, *unhattara* = 69
> 10 + 7 = 17 x 100 = 1700 + 69 = 1769
> Thus, on *Phālguna vadi saptam,* Saṃbat 1769, i.e. the seventh day of the dark half of the month of Phālguna (February-March), 1712 A.D., Priyā Dāsa completed the commentary.[17]

Priyādās dates another one of his four works, *Rasik Mohinī* to VS 1794 (1737 CE). On the basis of these two dates, P.D. Mītal estimates that Priyādās lived from VS 1730 (1673 CE) to VS 1800 (1743 CE), and Bābā Kṛṣṇa Dāsa, in the preface to *Priyā Dāsa jī kī graṃthāvalī*, states that Priyā was born sometime prior to VS 1740 (1683 CE).[18] These dates should be regarded as little more than guesses based on Priyādās' *floruit* during the early eighteenth century.

Gupta rejects the thesis that Priyādās and Nābhādās were contemporaries. This misconception follows from the opening *kavitta* of the *Bhaktirasabodhinī*: "At that time Nābhā-jū gave the order, and I accepted it: recite an expansive commentary on the *Bhaktamāl.*"[19] Gupta reports that the "author's statement has led many scholars astray:"

> Rādhā Kṛṣṇa Dās, for example, explicitly states that Nābhā Dās issued the command in person and that he lived long after v.s. 1700/A.D. 1643. Similarly, G.A. Grierson implies that Priyā Dās was a pupil and contemporary of Nābhā Dās. He further writes: 'As he (Priyā Dās) tells us in the introductory verses, he wrote it (the commentary) under the direct orders of Nābhā Dās.' Although aware of the considerable hiatus between the death of Nābhā Dās and the date of the commentary, nevertheless relying on Priyā Dās's statement in the opening verse of the commentary and a further statement in *kav.* 633.1, Grierson is

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16 Rūpkalā's edition includes this line with an insignificant variation in spelling: "संबत प्रसिद्ध दस सात सत उन्हत्तर फालगुन ही मास बदी सप्तमी बिताइकै।" 633:3 "Rūpkalā", *Śrī Bhaktamāl*, 934.

17 R.D. Gupta, "The Bhaktirasabodhinī of Priyā Dāsa," 549.

18 R.D. Gupta, "Studies in the Bhaktirasa-bodhinī of Priyā Dāsa," 43.

19 "ताही समय "नाभाजू" ने आज्ञा दई, लई धारि, टीका विस्तारि भक्तमाल की सुनाइयै।।" 1:2 "Rūpkalā", *Śrī Bhaktamāl*, 1. Translation based on Gupta's. R.D. Gupta, "Priyā Dās, Author of the Bhaktirasabodhinī," 64.

> convinced that the two poets were contemporaries. The Miśra brothers attempt to explain this away by stating that Priyā Dās composed his commentary long after receiving the command of Nābhā Dās.[20]

Gupta, however, dismisses these claims as improbable, considering the dates of composition.

He explains,

> Even if, for the sake of argument, one accepts the upper limit for the date of the *Bhaktamāla* as v.s. 1696/A.D. 1639, as has been suggested by S.Ś. Bhagavān Prasād and accepted by Grierson, then supposing that Priyā Dās was only 20 years old at the time he received Nābhā Dās's command, he would still have been 93 years old by the time he completed his commentary in A.D. 1712, for Nābhā Dās could not have ordered him to write the commentary before he himself had completed the *Bhaktamāla*. This means that Priyā Dās would have been 118 years old by the time he completed the *Rasikamohanī* (A.D. 1737), and if one accepts, as so many do, A.D. 1624 as the upper limit for the date of the *Bhaktamāla*, then a further 15 years have to be added to Priyā Dās's life-span, making a grand total of 133 years.[21]

Since such a life is impossible, Gupta seeks another explanation for Priyādās' assertion that Nābhādās himself ordered him to write this commentary:

> The text of *kav.* 1.6 reads: *jagai jaja māhi kahi vānī viramāiyai*. The phrase *vānī viramāiyai*, literally 'the voice ceased or was caused to cease,' confirms that it was a voice (*vānī = vāṇī*) which gave the command. The phrase, in the infinitive, *vāṇī viramānā* or its equivalent in modern Hindi *vāṇī rukanā,* means 'to be unable to speak,' and is not generally used in the sense of 'to stop speaking.' It may also connote, or imply, 'a physical disability,' or even as a euphemism, 'death.' Therefore, had Nābhā Dās been alive at the time when he gave the command, Priyā Dās would have been unlikely to use the phrase *vānī viramāiyai* to mean that Nābhā Dās stopped speaking. Moreover, the word *vāṇī* is also used in conjunct words, e.g. *ākāśavāṇī*, i.e. a celestial voice or a voice from heaven; *antarvāṇī,* i.e. inner voice or the voice of one's soul; and *bhaviṣyavāṇī,* i.e. prophecy of prediction. It is therefore probable that Priyā Dās was using *vānī* for *ākāśavāṇī* or *antarvāṇī,* to imply that the source of poetic inspiration for writing the commentary was either celestial or from within, and is not to be interpreted as the voice of a living contemporary.[22]

Priyādās claims that the voice of Nābhādās ordered him to write his commentary. It is unlikely that he and Nābhādās were contemporaries.

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20 Ibid.

21 Ibid., 64-65.

22 Ibid., 65.

Place

The place of Priyādās' birth is unknown, but he was closely associated with Vrindavan. Priyādās describes Vrindavan in each of his works, and most of *Rasikamohanī* is devoted to the glorification of Vrindavan. In *the Bhaktirasabodhinī*'s closing verses, Priyādās describes himself as the writer of the *Bhaktirasabodhinī*, a worshiper of Krishna, an inhabitant of Vrindavan, and a servant of Manohardās.[23] In his works, Priyādās makes several references to the Rādhā Ramaṇ temple, with which he seems to have been closely associated. P.D. Mītal states that Priyādās came to Vrindavan as a youth and was initiated into the Gauṛīya *sampradāy* by Manohardās. According to this account, he later made a pilgrimage to holy places and lived in the Galtā ashram for a time. Gupta, however, dismisses this account as "purely hypothetical, as there is no evidence for it,"[24] a position with which I concur.

Guru

Internal and external evidence establishes that Mahohardās was Priyādās' guru. In the opening verse of the *Bhaktirasabodhinī*, Priyādās uses the word *manaharan* to describe Caitanya, but it also refers, punningly, to Manohardās.[25] We do not know much about Manohardās' life. Bābā Kṛṣṇadās has published four of his works. He often uses the term "*Rādhikā-ramaṇ*" in his writing and was closely associated with the Rādhā-ramaṇ temple in Vrindavan.[26]

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23 R.D. Gupta, "Studies in the Bhaktirasa-bodhinī of Priyā Dāsa," 44.

24 Ibid., 45.

25 1:1 "Rūpkalā", *Śrī Bhaktamāl*, 1.

26 R.D. Gupta, "Studies in the Bhaktirasa-bodhinī of Priyā Dāsa," 60.

Other Works

Five works have been attributed to Priyādās: the *Bhaktirasabodhinī*, *Rasikamohanī*, *Ananyamodinī*, *Cāhabelī*, and *Bhaktasumiranī.* The authorship of *Bhaktasumiranī*, however, has been called into question. This work has also been attributed to a Cain Rāi.[27] Bābā Kṛṣṇadās "of Kusuma Sarovara, Govardhan, Mathurā" published Priyādās' other four works in 1950 CE as *Priyā Dāsa jī kī graṃthāvalī*. P.D. Mītal has also described these works, and three of them, along with other manuscripts, have been attributed to Priyādās in the Khoj Reports.[28] Several features of these texts indicate common authorship. The opening verse of each work is similar and each contains an invocation to Caitanya. In three of the works, the author expresses a his love for Vrindavan, and in each work, the author gives his name as Priyādās. While it is clear that Priyādās composed the *Bhaktirasabodhinī*, the other works may have been authored by a disciple who used his guru's name.[29]

Priyādās wrote only devotional poetry. In the *Bhaktirasabodhinī*, he gives equal importance to followers of Ram and Krishna, but in his other works, he never once mentions the name of Ram.[30] In the opening and concluding stanzas of the *Bhaktirasabodhinī*, he interprets bhakti in terms of devotion to Rādhā and Krishna,[31] and his praise for Caitanya in his *maṅgalācaraṇ*s indicates that he considered Caitanya to be a deity. He presents arguments in support of this belief in his commentary on the *Bhaktamāl*'s seventy-first stanza and shows

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27 R.D. Gupta, "Priyā Dās, Author of the Bhaktirasabodhinī," 58-61.

28 R.D. Gupta, "Studies in the Bhaktirasa-bodhinī of Priyā Dāsa," 55-60.

29 R.D. Gupta, "Priyā Dās, Author of the Bhaktirasabodhinī," 61-64.

30 R.D. Gupta, "Studies in the Bhaktirasa-bodhinī of Priyā Dāsa," 69.

31 Ibid., 71.

evidence of having absorbed Rūp Goswāmī's aesthetic theory.[32]

Other Evidence

The only external evidence about Priyādās' life comes from later commentaries, mainly Raghurāj Siṁha's *Rām-rasikāvalī* (VS 1921/1864 CE) and Pratāp Siṁha's *Bhakta-kalpadrum* (VS 1923/1866 CE).[33] Raghurāj Siṁha mentions two individuals named Priyādās. Later works seem to conflate these two figures and to apply facts from the second, later Priyādās to our earlier commentator. Pratāp Siṁha tells miraculous stories about Priyādās, which involve Priyādās giving *kathā*, or public readings, of the *Bhaktamāl*. These stories present Priyādās as a narrator of the *Bhaktamāl* and attest Priyādās' popularity. Gupta notes that these stories are uncorroborated and therefore slight in terms of historical value. He does conclude, however, that it "appears probable that in his later life Priyā Dāsa himself was a professional *kathāvācaka*, i.e. public narrator, of the Bhakta Māla."[34]

The suggestion that Priyādās was himself a public reciter of the *Bhaktamāl* is an intriguing one. The evidence for this claim is inconclusive, but the *Bhaktirasabodhinī* does seem to reflect a context of public performance. Certainly, the *Bhaktirasabodhinī* is well-suited for performance. It is composed in a musical meter and is filled with engaging stories. As many previous scholars have noted, the *Bhaktamāl* practically demands the kind of expansive commentary that Priyādās provides. Nābhādās' paeans are brief, sometimes to the point of being cryptic. Priyādās seems to use the *Bhaktamāl* as an *aide-de-mémoire.* Nābhā's words serve as hooks on which Priyādās can hang his narratives. Without contemporary evidence, it is

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32 Ibid., 77-78.

33 For a brief description of the *Bhaktakalpadrum* see chapter five.

34 R.D. Gupta, "Studies in the Bhaktirasa-bodhinī of Priyā Dāsa," 46-51.

difficult to say with any certainty that Priyādās was himself a *kathāvācak* of the *Bhaktamāl*, but his commentary was meant to be sung. Priyādās did not compose a work for private reflection; he wrote for public performance. It seems plausible that he was himself a reciter of the *Bhaktamāl,* but even if he was not, the *Bhaktirasabodhinī* would be exceptionally well-suited for recitation and song.

Only the most basic facts about the life of the *Bhaktamāl*'s most influential commentator, then, can be stated with any certainty. The dates and place of his birth and death are unknown, but we can say with confidence that he completed his magnum opus in 1712 CE and lived in Vrindavan. His guru was named Manohardās, and both guru and disciple were followers of Kṛṣṇa Caitanya's Gauṛīya *sampradāy*. A couple other facts about Priyādās' life seem probable but uncertain. He may have composed the four other works attributed to him, or his disciples may have composed these works in his name. Priyādās may have been a *kathāvācak* of the *Bhaktamāl*. Later accounts attribute this role to him, and the text of the *Bhaktirasabodhinī* seems to have been composed with such a context in mind.

The *Bhaktirasabodhinī*

It may be the case that not much is known about Priyādās' life, but in his *Bhaktamāl* commentary, he has left us over 600 stanzas of devotional poetry. The *Bhaktirasabodhinī* is no simple exegesis. Priyādās "exercises considerable freedom in his role as a commentator."[35] He does not comment on every name mentioned by Nābhādās but selects only a few. He devotes considerably more space to each devotee he discusses than does Nābhādās.[36] As we shall see

35 Ibid., 38.

36 Ibid., 37-38.

below, Priyādās uses this freedom and selectivity to significantly alter Nābhādās' message.

Title

The title *Bhaktirasabodhinī* follows from the commentary's content. Gupta writes,

> *Bhaktirasa*, the first part of the title, is justified by the fact that Priyā Dāsa is writing devotional poetry, emphasising the role, function, and power of *bhakti* (devotion) in the life of each individual, and that *bhaktirasa* (the sentiment of devotion) is the only *rasa* expressed throughout his work. It is the awakening of *bhaktirasa* in the hearts of the readers at which Priyā Dāsa is aiming and therefore the second part of the title is formed by *bodhinī*. The word *bodhinī* (or *bodhini*, fr. Skt. √*budh* = 'to wake') means 'awakening, enlightening, causing to know or perceive.' Thus the title *Bhaktirasabodhinī* literally means 'awakening the sentiment of devotion'.[37]

Priyādās clearly announces the intention of his commentary in the title.

Interpolations

Gupta notes that the total number of verses in manuscripts and print editions varies due to incorrect numbering and, more significantly, interpolation. He argues that stanzas sixteen through nineteen, in Rūpkalā's numbering, which, along with stanza fifteen, describe the marks on Ram's feet, are interpolated. Rūpkalā himself notes that stanzas fifteen through nineteen are likely interpolations, but he includes them in his edition.[38] Gupta disagrees with Rūpkalā as to the authenticity of *kavitta* fifteen: "This verse is common to all the manuscripts mentioned above, and it is free from the types of mistakes found in the following four verses. The style and language of this verse are quite consistent with the other verses of the commentary, while this does not apply to the other four verses."[39] Rūpkalā's edition has 634

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37 R.D. Gupta, "The Bhaktirasabodhinī of Priyā Dāsa," 548.

38 Ibid., 551-552.

39 Ibid., 553.

stanzas. Gupta accepts 630 of these as authentic.[40] Gupta's judgement seems to be based on a close examination of the first 101 stanzas of the *Bhaktirasabodhinī* as found in manuscripts in England, so the possibility of other interpolations in the text should not be ruled out.

Meter

Priyādās composed his text in a single meter, *kavitta*.[41] Priyādās' use of this meter generally follows "the classical scheme" of the meter, but he does show some flexibility in terms of the placement of the caesura. "As regards rhyme," Gupta writes,

> most of the lines of the verses end with three rhyming syllables. This tends to limit the poet's freedom and causes a certain amount of repetition. For example, in the first 101 verses, bhījiye is repeated as a rhyme six times (vv. 22.8, 39.8, 41.2, 62.6, 69.6 and 100.2); likewise aī hai five times (vv. 5.6, 17.2, 61.8, 86.8 and 98.2); and pāyo hai four times (vv. 26.2, 28.8, 34.8 and 47.8). However, the kavitta is a musical metre and when the verses are recited or sung, this repetition does not detract from the pleasure of the poem. Although the Bhaktirasabodhinī is a commentary, the melodious rhythm and grace of the metre is maintained throughout.[42]

Structure

The *Bhaktirasabodhinī* may be a poetic composition in its own right, but it is a commentary rather than an independent work. As such, its structure follows that of the

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40 Gupta does, however, follow Rūpkalā's numbering scheme.

41 Gupta describes this meter: "The *kavitta* is also known as *ghanākṣarī* and *manaharaṇa*, and is one of the most popular metres in Braj Bhāṣā poetry. It is a *vṛtta* or *varṇika chanda*, i.e. each of its feet (*caraṇa* or *pāda*) is measured in syllables (*varṇas*), not in metrical instants (*mātrās*). It comes under the first of the three orders called *sama*, and belongs to its 27th genus named *daṇḍaka*. The *kavitta* consists of four lines, and each line divided into four feet (*caraṇas*) has thirty-one syllables: 8 + 8 + 8 + 7 = 31 syllables. The harmonic pause or caesura occurs after the 8th, 16th and 24th syllables, but is not marked by any sign. The *virāma* or full-pause occurs at the end of the 4th foot of each line, and is, generally, marked by two straight strokes (| |). As a rule, the 2nd and 4th feet, at the end of the 16th and 31st syllables, must coincide with the end of a complete word. As regards the caesura at the end of the 8th and the 24th syllables, however, considerable freedom is allowed and, quite often, the last syllable of the 1st or 3rd foot occurs at the beginning of a word belonging to the 2nd or 4th foot respectively. Of equal importance to the number of syllables and their grouping in the *kavitta* is rhyme. A single rhyming syllable is not considered sufficient." R.D. Gupta, "The Bhaktirasabodhinī of Priyā Dāsa," 550-551.

42 Ibid., 551.

Bhaktamāl. Gupta provides an outline of the structure of the *Bhaktirasabodhinī*. He divides the commentary into six sections. The first section, stanzas one through eight, "constitute the commentator's preface." The next five stanzas comment on Nābhādās' first four stanzas, the *Bhaktamāl*'s preface. Stanzas fourteen and fifteen comment on the *Bhaktamāl*'s stanzas five and six, which "comprise a eulogy of the 24 incarnations of Viṣṇu and the 22 marks on Rāma's two feet." The following eighty-six stanzas comment on *Bhaktamāl* stanzas seven to twenty-seven and "relate the stories of selected devotees of the first three ages." The largest section, 524 stanzas, comments on *Bhaktamāl* stanzas twenty-eight to 202, recounting "stories of selected devotees of the Kali age." The final five stanzas "form the conclusion of the commentary."[43] With the exception of the preface and the conclusion, each section of the *Bhaktirasabodhinī* comments on its respective section of the *Bhaktamāl*. Priyādās does not comment on the final twelve *dohā*s of the *Bhaktamāl*.[44] As is the case with the *mūl* text, Priyādās does not make the division of the text into two large sections explicit. This division is found in printed texts but not in manuscripts.[45]

Narrative

Gupta notes that Priyādās does not comment on every stanza or name mentioned by Nābhādās but selects only a few, devoting more space to each *bhakta* selected. Gupta notes that, "one of the most striking features of Priyā Dāsa as a poet is his keen and genuine interest in narrating a story. In contrast to Nābhādās, who either mentions names or draws brief sketches of the devotees, Priyā Dāsa picks out a devotee and relates his story in detail. Nābhā Dāsa is like

43 Ibid., 554.

44 R.D. Gupta, "Studies in the Bhaktirasa-bodhinī of Priyā Dāsa," 29-30.

45 Ibid., 30-31.

a sketch-artist who with a few lines presents different groups of devotees, or sometimes an individual one. But Priyā Dāsa, having chosen his favourite subject, paints a vivid portrait full of colour and life."[46] Gupta praises Priyādās' expressiveness even when he only devotes a single verse to a devotee. "These verses," he writes, "demonstrate that Priyā Dāsa is also capable of telling a story very pithily, when he chooses. Some of these trailer-like stories are as memorable as Priyā Dās's full-length feature films."[47] In the first section of the *Bhaktirasabodhinī*, the "focal point of each legend is *bhakti* (devotion), and each legend ends with a moral or preaching on the virtue and importance of *bhakti*. Thus, Priyā Dāsa uses these legends to awaken *bhaktirasa* or the sentiment of devotion. He is writing devotional poetry, but it is obviously the stories which he most enjoys narrating."[48]

Priyādās on Nābhādās

Priyādās' account of Nābhādās' early life demonstrates the focus on narrative in the *Bhaktirasabodhinī*. Priyādās' version is the earliest account of Nābhādās' childhood. Nābhādās does not tell us anything about his own life. In the *Bhaktamāl*'s fourth couplet, however, he provides a rare example of self-reference:

> Guru Agradās gave the order: sing the devotees' praise.
> There is no other way to cross the ocean of existence.[49]

Here, we simply learn that Nābhādās composed the *Bhaktamāl* at the prompting of his guru, but Priyādās elaborates with four *kavitta* verses. Priyādās tells how Agradās became aware of his

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46 R.D. Gupta, "The Bhaktirasabodhinī of Priyā Dāsa," 560-561.

47 R.D. Gupta, "Studies in the Bhaktirasa-bodhinī of Priyā Dāsa," 40.

48 R.D. Gupta, "The Bhaktirasabodhinī of Priyā Dāsa," 562.

49 "श्री गुरु अग्रदेव आज्ञा दई भक्तन कौ जसु गाय । भवसागर के तरन कौ, नाहिन आन उपाय ।।" 4:1-2 Nābhādās, "Dvitīy Khaṇḍ (Sampādan)," 1.

disciple's gift for praising the *bhaktas* and tells us that when Agradās ordered Nābhādās to write the *Bhaktamāl*, the humble disciple objected that praising Ram and Krishna was something he could do but praising the disciples was too great a task for him. Priyādās then backtracks to tell us of Nābhādās' childhood and how he came to be adopted by Agradās. During a time of famine, he reports, Agradās and Kīlhadās came across a blind infant, who had been abandoned in the forest. They took pity on the child, and Kīlhadās, sprinkling water from his personal water pot onto where the boy's eyes would have been, miraculously provided him with both earthly and divine vision.[50] It was this spiritual vision that would later enable Nābhādās to compose the *Bhaktamāl*. Kīlhadās and Agradās took the foundling back to Galtā, where he would become a disciple of Agradās and take up service to the sadhus. Priyādās tells us that he relished eating the leftover food from the monks' plates.[51]

Nābhādās' Order

Priyādās claims a direct connection to Nābhādās. In the first stanza of the *Bhaktirasabodhinī*, he explains that while he was engaged in meditating on the feet of Kṛṣṇa Caitanya, Nābhādās directed him to write this commentary: "At that time Nābhā-jū gave the order, and I accepted it: 'Recite an expansive commentary on the *Bhaktamāl*. Make it in *kavitta* meter that will be very beloved and famous throughout the world.' Having spoken, the voice departed."[52] Hardly one to disregard the voice of Nābhādās, Priyādās describes the results of his labor as the work of Nābhādās: "The greatness of the poetry was not from my own mouth.

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50 "Rūpkalā", *Śrī Bhaktamāl*, 43.

51 Ibid., 46.

52 "ताही समय "नाभाजू" ने आज्ञा दई, लई धारि, टीका विस्तारि भक्तमाल की सूनाइयै।। कीजिये कवित्त बंद छंद अति प्यारो लगै, जगै जगमांहि, कहि, वाणी बिरमाइयै।" 1:2-3 Ibid., 1.

What excellence there is in it, Nābhā-jū caused to be spoken."[53] Priyādās claims that his words are actually the words of Nābhādās. This claim is a humble one. Priyādās does not take credit for his own words but gives it to Nābhādās. The effect of this apparent humility, however, is to place his commentary on a level with the original. In one of the concluding *kavitta*s, Priyādās insists that his commentary is indistinguishable from the original: "Hearing the commentary and the original causes one to forget their names. Indivisible when spoken by a *rasik*, they enchant the world"[54] For Priyādās, the *Bhaktirasabodhinī* carries all the authority of the *Bhaktamāl* itself. Priyādās is no mere commentator but a medium for Nābhādās himself.

Contested Communities

Priyādās employs his freedom to more than stylistic ends. He imagines a bhakti community that is distinct from the one presented by Nābhādās. In this section, I argue that Priyādās accepts Nābhādās' overall frame even as he modifies its logic. Priyādās accepts but seeks to discipline and redefine the boundaries of Nābhādās' bhakti community. Priyādās shifts the focus from the *bhakta*s themselves to *Bhagavān*, the object of their devotion. The *sampradāy* becomes indispensable and maintains its authoritative positions through a close alliance with royal patrons. This emphasis on the monastic order and kings reduces the authority of poets within the bhakti community. In chapter two, we saw that Nābhādās imagines the ancient and recent past in order to construct a broad community in the present. In the following section, I demonstrate how Priyādās accepts Nābhādās' community but defines it through the ongoing presence of an imminent and embodied God, the centrality of religious institutions, and their

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53 "काव्य की बड़ाई निज मुख न भलाई होति नाभा जू कहाई" 2:3 Ibid., 3.

54 "टीका और मूल नाम भूल जात सुनै जब रसिक अनन्य मुख होत विश्वमोहनी ।।" 632:4 Ibid., 934.

ongoing relationship with royal patrons. This shift in the logic underlying the bhakti community has implications for the spiritual importance of caste. Priyādās does not simply offer an exegesis of the *Bhaktamāl*. He expands it and in so doing transforms its message.

Anantadās' Paracaīs

Much of my discussion of Priyādās' re-imagining of Nābhādās' bhakti community is based on Priyādās' accounts of Kabīr and Raidās. In both of these examples, Priyādās seems to have had an important source, the *Paracaī*s of Anantadās. Before I consider Priyādās' narratives of these two *sant*s, it is necessary to make note of these earlier hagiographies. Winand Callewaert introduces these texts:

> Some time before or around 1600 AD an ascetic of the Rāmānandī order in Rajasthan felt inspired to bring together in a poetic composition the different legends he had heard about the great Bhakta-s of his times. He most probably did not use ink or paper, but sang and composed as he recited, convinced that he earned great merit doing that. It is not unlikely that the story he himself sang a couple of years later was slightly different, because of a particular need or bias in an audience or because he had learnt something more in the meantime. But the purpose was always the same: to sing the praises of the saint and proclaim the supremacy of devotion (*bhakti*) to God (called Hari, or Rām).[55]

Anantadās probably composed his *paracaī*s at the end of the sixteenth century, but according to Callewaert, it is unlikely that he wrote them down. If Callewaert is correct then these *paracaī*s as originally sung by Anantadās are irrecoverable. Callewaert places the early manuscripts into the context of traveling singers who exercised their own "genius and creativity," causing "a headache and a challenge for the text critic who looks at manuscripts and tries to restore what Anantadās originally must have recited."[56]

Interestingly Anantadās' guru Vinodī was a guru-brother of Nābhādās. Lorenzen

55 Winand M. Callewaert, *The Hagiographies of Anantdās: The Bhakti Poets of North India* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2000), 1.

56 Ibid., 2.

provides institutional context:

> Ananta-das's guru Vinodi and Vinodi's own famous *gurubhāī* (spiritual brother) Nabha-das were both historically associated with the important Raivasa ashram of the Ramanandi order of sadhus located near the town of Sikar in Rajasthan. Sikar is situated about 110 kilometers to the northwest of Jaipur, traditionally an important center for the Dadu Panth, and only about sixty kilometers to the northeast of Didwana, the traditional center of the Niranjani Panth. The *gaddī* at Raivasa was first established by Vinodi's guru Agra-das. Vinodi followed Agra-das on the *gaddī* and was succeeded by Dhyan-das [B.P. Simha 1957:334, 352]. This shows that Ananta-das was a Ramanandi ascetic who must have spent at least some of his time at the Raivasa monastery.[57]

Significantly, Anantadās' *Paracaī*s were important texts for the Dādū and Niranjanī Panths.[58]

These hagiographies are didactic texts. Callewaert notes that Anantadās seems to be less interested in narrating the lives of *bhakta*s than in imparting a moral: "These hagiographies must have brought about sincere feelings of devotion in devotees, but they may perhaps also be called texts of subtle indoctrination."[59] David Lorenzen offers a detailed consideration of the "ideological messages" contained within the *Kabīr Paracaī*. For Lorenzen, legends of Kabīr generally reflect an ideology of resistance: "their primary intention is to protest against social discrimination and economic exploitation rather than any legitimation of existing institutions of domination. The Kabir legends manifest the ideology of the poor and

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57 David N. Lorenzen, *Kabir Legends and Ananta-das's Kabir Parachai*, SUNY series in Hindu studies (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 75.

58 Lorenzen identifies two recensions of the *Kabīr Paracaī*, associated with the Dadu and Niranjani Panth, respectively. For Lorenzen and his collaborators, neither recension is closer to the original. "Indeed, the traditional oral style of the composition suggests that no fixed original version may ever have existed." Ibid., xii. Lorenzen prefers the Niranjani recension and bases his critical edition and translation on this variation. Ibid., 74. Callewaert critiques Lorenzen's approach. He argues that the recensions identified by Lorenzen have "no stemmatic corroboration whatsoever." Callewaert, *The Hagiographies of Anantdās: The Bhakti Poets of North India*, 45. Callewaert argues that the ideological content of the relevant manuscripts is not adequate to divide them into recensions and observes that "there is no consistent pattern of variants, omissions and additions in the manuscripts published here that could justify such a distinction." Ibid., 46. Callewaert understands this *paracaī* to have been a living text in the early seventeenth century. He argues that the manuscripts reprinted in his volume are each "an independent product of oral transmission, not copied from another manuscript given here." Ibid., 46-47. For Callewaert, each recension of the *Kabīr Paracaī* serves as "a mirror for the ideological messages in the early seventeenth century; each recension trying to emphasize a particular point in the story about the great Kabir." Callewaert's edition seeks to make this mirror available. Ibid., 47.

59 Ibid., 2-3.

powerless, not the rich and powerful."[60] In most Kabīr legends, "a powerful political, economic, or religious figure" tests Kabīr, who invariably defeats all his challengers. In other legends, Kabīr is not a "would-be victim" but "a sort of trickster figure who initiates his own test of the politically and religiously powerful." A few legends, especially those recounting Kabīr's birth reveal his "innate, though hidden superiority. Lorenzen summarizes each of these themes as sharing "a fantasized revenge by the weak against the powerful, by the poor against the rich, by the scorned against the scorners."[61]

Lorenzen offers an overview or the *Kabīr Paracaī*:

> The *Kabir Parachai* of Ananta-das contains thirteen sections or chapters (*kaḍavak*) of about sixteen or seventeen verses each (fifteen or sixteen *chapāīs* plus one *dohā*). Insofar as he can, Ananta-das attempts to weave the legends into a continuous narrative. The narrative divisions between the legends do not always correspond to the section divisions. The following legends may be distinguished: (1) Kabir's initiation by Ramananda [section 1]; (2) God begs cloth [section 2]; (3) the Brahmans demand food [3.1-4.8]; (4) the prostitute. the *paṇḍā* and the king [4.9-6.6]; (5) Sikandar tests Kabir [6.14-9.10]; (6) the unexpected feast [9.11-10.11]; (7) the *apsarā* and Hari [10.12-12.16]; (8) Kabir's death at Magahar [13.2-13.10]. All these legends are retold in most of the major later collections of Kabir legends.[62]

Indeed, the *Bhaktirasabodhinī* "contains the same legends (including Kabir's initiation by Ramananda), no more and no less, in exactly the same order." Moreover, "many verbal similarities" between the relevant portions Priyādās' commentary and several of Anantadās' *Paracaīs* have been documented as well. "There seems to be little doubt that Ananta-das's *parachaīs* were the principal source used by Priya-das for his versions of the legends of Kabir and these other *sants*."[63] I will have occasion to return to several of these episodes below.

Priyādās also relies heavily on Anantadās for his account of Raidās. Callewaert has

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60 Lorenzen, *Kabir Legends and Ananta-das's Kabir Parachai*, 4-5.

61 Ibid., 6-8.

62 Ibid., 23.

63 Ibid., 42.

critically edited and translated this *paracaī*. The *Raidās Paracaī* begins by celebrating the greatness of Banaras and the name of Ram. The first episode describes the birth of Raidās. In his previous life, Raidās had been a Brahmin and disciple of Rāmānanda. He was born as a Camār as punishment for the sin of eating meat. The infant Raidās refused to drink his mother's milk until Rāmānanda arrived and initiated his former disciple.[64]

As Raidās grew, he grew in bhakti. His family forsook him and relegated him to the rear of their house. One day, Hari visited Raidās in the guise of a devotee. Hari gave his devotee a *pāras* stone, which can turn base metal into gold, but Raidās hid the stone in his thatch roof in order to avoid temptation. More than a year later, Hari returned and demanded to know why Raidās had not used the stone. Hari took the stone but came to Raidās in a dream. He told him that he has left him five gold coins and directed him to use them to sponsor worship among the devotees, which Raidās happily did.[65]

The extravagance of Raidās' worship angered the Brahmins, who tried to stop him. They questioned how such a lowly man can be allowed to take on such a role, but Raidās insisted that in bhakti there are no distinctions of high and low. Raidās devised a test. A *śāligrām* was brought out. Whoever was able to summon it would be recognized as the true devotee. The Brahmins spent more than a day reciting scripture and invoking the gods but without success. When Raidās' eyes became filled with tears, the *śāligrām* leaped into his lap.[66]

Five years later, Queen Jhālī of Chittor desired to be initiated, so she traveled to Banaras to seek either Kabīr or Raidās. She had misgivings about the austerity of Kabīr's devotion but

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64 1:1-16 Callewaert, *The Hagiographies of Anantdās: The Bhakti Poets of North India*, 307-308.

65 2:1-4:11 Ibid., 309-314.

66 4:12-6:20 Ibid., 314-320.

found Raidās' style more amenable and prostrated herself at his feet. When the Brahmins learned of her secret initiation, they became angry and confronted Raidās. Following the advice of Kabīr, a *śāligrām* was brought out. Hari spoke through the stone and declared Raidās to be his genuine devotee. The Brahmins left in shame.[67]

In the next episode, Raidās and Sen went to see Kabīr. The three devotees sang *bhajan*s together then went to sleep. Vishnu appeared to them in his four-armed form. Raidās fell at Hari's feet, but Kabīr remained fixated on the *nirguṇ* God. The devotees then debated the superiority of *saguṇ* and *nirguṇ* bhakti. Kabīr caused them to experience the *nirguṇ* Brahman, and they "confirmed their faith in Kabir as their guru." Anantadās says, "This is special about *nirguṇ* and *saguṇ*: one should not have dogmatic views about them. The *nirguṇ* does not waver or change, while the *saguṇ* Hari protects his devotees. It is as if *saguṇ* has the form of butter, and *nirguṇ* is the heated ghee."[68]

Raidās' meditation on the *nirguṇ* God caused Jhālī to develop a desire for her guru to visit her home. With the permission of Kabīr, Raidās departed for Chittor. The Brahmins of Chittor again felt slighted and demanded to be fed before the lowly Raidās. Raidās permitted his disciple Jhālī to feed the Brahmins first, but when they sat down to eat, Raidās took on multiple forms, so there was a Raidās sitting on all sides of each of them. They become ashamed and expressed their regret, "Hail Hail, the Lord is great, and so are his servants. Caste and family are nothing." The Brahmins prostrated themselves before Raidās and asked him to teach them how to be free. He told them the story of his previous life and pulled out a sacred thread from his body. He told them, "Devotion has made me pure in this world, without

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67 7:1-9:7 Ibid., 320-326.

68 9:7-16 Ibid., 326-327.

devotion the entire world is a Shudra. Caste and family have no importance doing devotion one crosses over the sea of rebirth." The Brahmins took him as their guru and threw away their sacred threads.[69]

Priyādās follows the broad outline of Anantadās' *paracaī*. With some differences, Priyādās tells of Raidās' birth and the intervention of Rāmānand. He recounts Raidās' exclusion by his family and Hari's gift of the *pāras* stone. Priyādās tells of the Brahmins' objections to Raidās, and Queen Jhālī's initiation. He describes Raidās' multiplication in Chittor, the hidden sacred thread, and the conversion of the Brahmins. Kabīr is not a figure in Priyādās' account of Raidās, and the episode where Kabīr teaches Raidās and Sen the path of *nirguṇ* bhakti is not included. Otherwise, the *Bhaktirasabodhinī*'s account of Raidās' life roughly follows Anantadās' *paracaī*. At times, there are significant differences in the details, however. I will discuss some of these differences below.

Priyādās' accounts of the lives of Kabīr and Raidās have antecedents in the hagiographies of Anantadās. Priyādās did not invent these accounts out of whole cloth, nor do I wish to suggest that he invented any of his hagiographies. Both Anantadās and Priyādās undoubtedly recorded the stories they knew. Anantadās seems to have been one of Priyādās' sources. Anantadās may have taken liberties in his accounts of *bhaktas*, and the manuscript record indicates that the wandering singers who spread his tales made these stories their own. Priyādās also exercised creativity. I argue here that he transformed Nābhādās' imagined bhakti community. He also, inevitably, altered the ideological force of Anantadās' legends.

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69 10:1-12:16 Ibid., 328-335.

Divinity

The most theologically significant transformation that Priyādās brings about is a shift in emphasis from the devotee to the object of devotion, God. Priyādās' portrayal of Kabīr as a *bhakta* who regularly benefits from God's direct, personal intervention is characteristic of this larger logic within Priyādās' commentary and demonstrates how Nābhādās and Priyādās most strikingly diverge in their understandings of bhakti. Throughout Priyādās' narrative of Kabīr's life, Hari personally intervenes on behalf of his *bhakta.*[70] Following his initiation by Rāmānand (discussed below), Kabīr continued to practice his occupation as a weaver, but even as Kabīr's body was engaged at the loom, his heart fluttered around Ram. Kabīr worked only as much as was necessary to provide subsistence for himself and his family.

Priyādās describes Hari's intervention in Kabīr's life as follows. One day, while he was standing at a stall in the market, a stranger approached Kabīr and asked for cloth to cover his naked body. Kabīr began to rip a piece of cloth in half, but the stranger asked him what good was half. Kabīr gave him the entire piece of cloth.[71] Since he had just given away his entire stock, Kabīr began to wonder what he was going to take home to his family. Rather than return home empty handed, he decided to hide in the market. His wife, son, and mother stayed at home and eagerly awaited his return. As they grew hungry, Hari witnessed their grief. Aware of the depth of Kabīr's devotion, Hari sent a cartload of provisions to his family. Even this divine generosity did not please Kabīr's mother. She worried that a government agent would punish

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70 There does not seem to be any clear distinction between Krishna and Ram in Priyādās' account of Kabīr's life. For example, Priyādās refers to Kabīr's divine interlocutor and assistant as Ram, 270:1 "Rūpkalā", *Śrī Bhaktamāl*, 483. Raghurāy, 272:2 Ibid., 484. and Hari. 280:3 Ibid., 490. I have chosen to refer to this figure as Hari in order to preserve this ambiguity.

71 Ibid., 483.

them for possessing this inexplicable wealth and made a commotion.[72]

Commenting on Anantadās' version of this story, Lorenzen notes that the "evident aim" of the legend in which Kabīr gives away his cloth "is to praise Kabir's extreme generosity. The motif of the poor but generous layman who gives away everything he has is common to much Hindu religious literature."[73] Kabīr Panthī commentators have gone to great lengths to explain Kabīr's decision to hide, which "*seems* to suggest that Kabir is very timid even cowardly." Lorenzen notes, however, that it is very unlikely that a text meant to praise Kabīr "would consciously include anything derogatory about Kabir. In any case, fearlessness is in fact one of Kabir's most notable virtues.[...] [T]he hiding motif of these two legends remains something of an enigma."[74]

Hari's divine intervention on behalf of Kabīr continued. Later, when Kabīr had not yet returned home, several people set out in search of him. When he finally returned, he heard about the miraculous arrival of the supplies and realized that this bonanza was the Lord's doing. He thanked Hari for his generosity, fed the assembled devotees, gave up weaving, and became a full-time devotee. The local Brahmins were furious. They upbraided Kabīr for using his newfound wealth to feed Shudras and not them. Kabīr objected that he had done nothing wrong to acquire this wealth. The local Brahmins, however, insisted that by respecting Shudras, Kabīr had disrespected them. They demanded that he offer them the equivalent of what he had offered the Shudras. Kabīr escaped by feigning that he needed to go to the market in order to gather supplies, but once he had gone, he anguished over how he could get out of

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72 Ibid.

73 Lorenzen, *Kabir Legends and Ananta-das's Kabir Parachai*, 27.

74 Emphasis in original. Ibid., 28.

his predicament. While Kabīr was hiding, though, Hari once again came to his rescue. He took on Kabīr's form and satisfied the Brahmins. They were pleased, and Kabīr's fame spread.[75]

Like the other episodes concerning Kabīr in the *Bhaktirasabodhinī*, this story is also found in Anantadās' *Paracaī*. Lorenzen notes, "This legend expresses quite clearly the social and religious antagonism between the followers of Kabir, the low-caste *sants* and *bhagats*, and the upper caste, orthodox Brahmans and sannyasis."[76] In addition to this social conflict, both Priyādās' and Anantadās' versions of these stories shift the focus from Kabīr to Hari, from devotee to God. Anantadās, however, keeps Kabīr in focus. After the episode in which Kabīr feeds the Brahmins, Anantadās exclaims a *dohā*: "Kabir is a true devotee. He appeared in Kashi. Whoever directs scorn against him will go to hell."[77] Priyādās' account concludes simply by noting that the Lord (*prabhu*) satisfied the Brahmins and that his devotee's fame spread.[78] The *Bhaktirasabodhinī*'s narrative of Kabīr's life is a lengthy one, and Hari intervenes on behalf of Kabīr on several other occasions, as he does throughout Priyādās' commentary.

Sampradāy

Nābhādās' and Priyādās' divergent treatments of Kabīr also serve to highlight their different conceptions of the role of the *sampradāy,* which is articulated alongside the shift in theological emphasis from *bhakta* to Bhagavān. Despite Nābhādās' inclusive vision, there can be little doubt that the *sampradāy* retained for him a central role in the community of devotees. Priyādās, however, places even more importance on the *sampradāy*, particularly his own

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75 "Rūpkalā", *Śrī Bhaktamāl*, 484-485.

76 Lorenzen, *Kabir Legends and Ananta-das's Kabir Parachai*, 29.

77 3:16 Ibid., 100.

78 273:4 "Rūpkalā", *Śrī Bhaktamāl*, 485.

sampradāy, than did Nābhādās. Priyādās places his own *sampradāy* in a position of utmost importance. Unlike Nābhādās, Priyādās begins his *Bhaktirasabodhinī* with words of praise for his own order's progenitor, Kṛṣṇa Caitanya.[79] Nābhādās opens his *mūl* text with more general words extolling the benefits of praising *bhaktas,* bhakti, the guru, and God, four names for a single essence.[80] He emphasizes the importance of *sampradāy* in general, and while he extols the Śrī Sampradāy above all others, he does not promote it to the exclusion of other orders.

This dynamic is expressed in the material on Kabīr. Both Nābhādās[81] and Priyādās[82] identify Kabīr as an immediate disciple of Rāmānand, but Priyādās sees the need to explain how a Muslim weaver came to be a disciple of such a prestigious guru. Priyādās recounts that a voice from the sky told Kabīr to take on the markings of the Rāmānandīs and to make Rāmānand his guru. Kabīr replied that Rāmānand will regard him as a "*mleccha*" and refuse to acknowledge him. The voice instructed Kabīr to wait until Rāmānand's daily visit to the bank of the Ganga for his morning bath and to lie down in his path. Kabīr followed these instructions, and Rāmānand inadvertently placed his foot on the hidden Kabīr, leading him to exclaim "Ram!" Kabīr took this utterance as an initiatory mantra and began to wear the necklace and to display the other distinctive marks that identify a member of the Rāmānandī community.[83] This behavior distressed Kabīr's mother and she began to make so much commotion that news of it reached Rāmānand himself. Rāmānand had Kabīr seized and brought before him. He erected a curtain and interrogated Kabīr from behind it. In response to

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79 Ibid., 1.

80 1:1 Nābhādās, "Dvitīy Khaṇḍ (Sampādan)," 1.

81 Ibid., 13.

82 "Rūpkalā", *Śrī Bhaktamāl*, 482.

83 Ibid., 480-481.

Rāmānand's questions, Kabīr asserted that the mantra of Ram's name is written in all the Tantras. Upon hearing this, Rāmānand recognized Kabīr's sincerity and removed the screen, accepting Kabīr as his disciple.[84]

This episode reflects Nābhādās' and Priyādās' divergent understandings of the role of the *sampradāy*. While Nābhādās straightforwardly includes Kabīr as a member of this *sampradāy*, Priyādās sees the need to qualify this inclusion: the historical constitution of the *sampradāy* in the present requires it. This verse has been interpreted as an attempt to "assert the validity of the guru-parampara discipleship of Kabir to Ramanand," but Pinch calls this interpretation into question and argues that, given Nābhādās' unqualified identification of Kabīr as a prominent disciple of Rāmānand, "perhaps it would be more apt to interpret this verse as an attempt by Priyadas to temper Nabhadas's original assertion."[85] Pinch gives the context for this reinterpretation as a 1712 CE meeting at Galtā, at which the militaristic Rāmānandī *akhāṛā*s are said to have been founded.[86] At this meeting, female, Shudra, and 'Untouchable' disciples of Rāmānand lost their status as legitimate preceptors of the tradition.[87] Whether or not this specific meeting took place, the early eighteenth century saw a shift in the status of women, Shudras, and "Untouchables" within the Rāmānandī *sampradāy*. This shift results from the increasing "orthodoxy" demanded by Jaisingh II. Māhārājā Savāī Jaisingh (r. 1700-1743) sought to enforce "his own vision of Hindu kingship" and to define and

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84 Ibid., 481-482.

85 Vijay Pinch, "History, Devotion and the Search for Nabhadas of Galta," 398.

86 I am not sure of Pinch's source for dating this meeting to 1712. Ibid., 381. He cites Burghart, "The Founding of the Ramanandi Sect," 121-139., but Burghart, relying on "Ramanandi sectarian sources" dates the meeting less specifically as having taken place at the "turn of the 18th century." Ibid., 130, 137. Horstmann reports that the traditional date for the founding of the Rāmānandī military organisation is c. 1734 CE. "The Rāmānandīs of Galtā (Jaipur, Rajasthan)," 168.

87 Burghart, "The Founding of the Ramanandi Sect," 130-131.

organize "Hindu religion, its institutions and representatives."[88] In this context, Priyādās' story should not be read as an elaborate attempt to incorporate Kabīr into the *sampradāy*. Rather, Priyādās seeks to qualify an inclusion that for Nābhādās had been straightforward. Priyādās presents the previous inclusion of a weaver among the disciples of Rāmānand as the exception rather than the norm, and does so in keeping with the shift in theological emphasis that operates overall in the text.

Lorenzen and Callewaert have seen this episode in the *Kabīr Paracaī* as a marker of ideological change. Lorenzen and Callewaert disagree on questions surrounding the early transmission of this text, but they both identify two recensions, one which (usually) includes this episode and one which does not. In Lorenzen's terms, the Niranjanī Panthī recension almost always includes this legend while the Dādū Panthī recension usually does not.[89] Callewaert does not accept Lorenzen's recensions, but he does divide manuscripts into those which include this section and those which do not.[90] This section seems to be a relatively late addition to the *Paracaī*: the events in this episode are not referred to elsewhere in the *Paracaī*; the manuscripts which include this episode vary from each other; Rāmānand's name is repeated nine times, but he is only mentioned one other time in the entire *Paracaī*.[91] Callewaert and Lorenzen both read this legend as an attempt to establish a connection between Kabīr and Rāmānand.[92] Lorenzen sees both Anantadās and Nābhādās as "favorably disposed toward the

88 Horstmann, "The Rāmānandīs of Galtā (Jaipur, Rajasthan)," 158-160.

89 Lorenzen, *Kabir Legends and Ananta-das's Kabir Parachai*, 23-24.

90 Callewaert, *The Hagiographies of Anantdās: The Bhakti Poets of North India*, 43.

91 Ibid., 48.

92 Callewaert observes that the *Paracaī* mentions Rāmānand as Kabīr's guru even if this episode is discarded, so the purpose of the episode would be to emphasize the connection. Ibid. Lorenzen reads the legend as "affirm[ing] a genealogical link between Ramananda and Kabir." Lorenzen, *Kabir Legends and Ananta-das's Kabir Parachai*, 25. Pinch, as we have seen, compellingly reads Priyādās' version of this legend as qualifying rather

more radical *sant* tradition" and as seeking "to counter the trend toward greater religious and social conservatism within the early Ramanandi Sampraday." Later versions of this legend, however, reverse these motives. According to Lorenzen, "Many Kabir Panthi authors evidently felt that they could Hinduize Kabir and neutralize some of his religious and social radicalism by making him a disciple of a supposedly orthodox Brahman guru."[93]

The shifting terrain of the *Kabīr Paracaī* seems to reflect the same shifting ideological terrain as can be seen between Nābhādās and Priyādās. The earliest singers of Anantadās' *Paracaī* seem, like Nābhādās, to have accepted Rāmānand as Kabīr's guru without need for explanation.[94] Later singers, however, added the dramatic account of Kabīr's initiation. Like Priyādās, they seem to have seen the need to explain how a weaver came to be prominent disciple of Rāmānand.

Kingship

In chapter two, we saw that Nābhādās celebrates those kings who support and respect the *bhakta*s but that he reserves his greatest respect for the devotees themselves. Kings are praised as *bhakta*s, but it is their devotion to God and God's people that matters. Nābhādās does not challenge royal authority, but he makes it clear that ultimately the only power which matters is the power of bhakti. For Priyādās, the authoritative *sampradāy* has a particularly close relationship to its royal patrons. The importance of this relationship can be seen in Priyādās' accounts of Kṛṣṇadās Payahārī, Kīlhadev, Agradās, and Pṛthvīrāj. As I have already

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than strengthening the connection between Rāmānand and Kabīr.

93 Ibid., 25-26.

94 As noted in chapter two, pre-modern references to Kabīr are unanimous in identifying Rāmānanda as his guru. See Agrawal, "In Search of Ramanand: The Guru of Kabir and Others."

noted, Nābhādās does celebrate the relationship between Kṛṣṇadās Payahārī and Pṛthvīrāj, but they are presented primarily as guru and disciple, not abbot and royal sponsor. In the case of other prominent Galtā Rāmānandīs – Kīlhadev and Agradās – the *Bhaktamāl* does not mention any royal connection.

Pinch considers the relevant passages from the *Bhaktirasabodhinī* in detail. The *kavitta*s on Kṛṣṇadās Payahārī tell of his refusal to accept a gift after granting *darśan* to an unnamed king, due to his singular "desire to serve Hari." Later, during a "feast for sādhus," the king's son eats some sweets that had fallen to the floor. Angered by his son eating "the sweets without offering them first to the deity," the king "drew his sword and was on the point of slaying the child." Kṛṣṇadās Payahārī prevented the killing, and the "young prince eventually became a great devotee and servant of the sādhus."[95]

Priyādās relates more stories about Payahārī in his commentary on the *chappay* praising Pṛthvīrāj. Pṛthvīraj intended to travel to Dvarika with his guru, but the prime minister intervened with Kṛṣṇadās and asked that the king not be allowed to go. Payahārī agreed, to the king's dismay. Pṛthvīrāj wanted to travel to Dvarika in order "to see Dvarikanath, bathe in the Gomti, and get his arm tattooed with the conch symbol," but Payahārī told him to do these things in Amer and traveled to Dvarika without him. The king regretted his decision to remain in Amer and became sleepless with anxiety. After several days, he fell asleep, and the voice of his guru came to him. Pṛthvīrāj "sprang up, ran towards the voice, and saw the Lord." This vision, "instructed him to concentrate on bathing in the Gomti. Suddenly he was bathing in the Gomti, upon which the Lord disappeared. The symbol of the conch was miraculously emblazoned on his body." Pṛthvīrāj's great devotion and its physical manifestation inspired

95 Vijay Pinch, "History, Devotion and the Search for Nabhadas of Galta," 391; 119:1-120:4 "Rūpkalā", *Śrī Bhaktamāl*, 303-304.

crowds, *sant*s, and *mahant*s to gather and show their admiration. Embarrassed by flattery, Pṛthvīrāj built a temple, "and all the world sang his glory."[96] The final *kavitta* in this section tells of a blind Brahmin who, at Shiva's prompting and despite Pṛthvīrāj's doubts, wiped his eyes with Pṛthvīrāj's dirty towel, restoring his sight.[97]

Priyādās' *kavitta* on Kīlhadev identifies him as "the son of Sumerdev, a *subadar* of the Mughal province of Gujarat, who himself, though a householder, was a great devotee of God." When his father died, Kīlhadev "was in Mathura with Raja Mansingh of Amer. Kilhdev saw his father ascending in the sky, stood up, did *pranām*, and said, 'it is good indeed.'" Mānsingh asked Kīlhadev to whom he was speaking, and Kīlhadev, despite reluctance to speak openly, told him what had happened. "Mansingh, doubtful, checked with people in Gujarat, who confirmed the story. He returned to Kilhdev, penitent, and abased himself before the great sage."[98]

Priyādās' *kavitta* on Agradās also connects him to Mānsingh. Mānsingh "visited Galta to pay homage to Agradas." He arrived there with his entourage while Agradās was working in his garden. "The guard bade the assembly wait at the gate while Mansingh entered the garden, but Agradas had already stepped out to dispose of some garbage." When Agradās saw the "assembled throng ensconced outside the garden gate," he sat down and "became absorbed in meditation. Nabhadas himself approached and prostrated himself before his guru, stood up, and [moved by the sight of Agradas steeped in meditation] his eyes filled with tears." Mānsingh

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96 Vijay Pinch, "History, Devotion and the Search for Nabhadas of Galta," 391-392; 481:1-484:4 "Rūpkalā", *Śrī Bhaktamāl*, 724-727.

97 Vijay Pinch, "History, Devotion and the Search for Nabhadas of Galta," 392; 485:1-4 "Rūpkalā", *Śrī Bhaktamāl*, 727.

98 Vijay Pinch, "History, Devotion and the Search for Nabhadas of Galta," 392; 121:1-4 "Rūpkalā", *Śrī Bhaktamāl*, 310.

returned and saw what was happening. He "felt sure that God had smiled upon them."[99]

Pinch explains the importance of these passages:

> The immediate historical significance of these verses is clear: Priyadas sought to confirm and extend the devotion of the royal dynasts at Amer to Vaiṣṇavism. While Nabhadas did this by alluding to the remembered relationship of Paihari Krishnadas and Prithviraj, Priyadas builds substantially on Nabhadas to include all the Galta sages and Nabhadas himself as figures of importance to the local ruling lineage. Particularly significant are the references to Maharaja Mansingh in the vignettes that describe both Kilhdev and Agradas, since Mansingh ensured, via his relationship with Akbar, the success of his lineage (and, not inconsequently, Vaishnavism) in Mughal India.[100]

Priyādās focuses on securing and developing royal support, but Nābhādās sees this patronage as but one component of his larger goal of advancing an expansive notion of religious community.[101] In keeping with the larger logic of Priyādās' text, the support to the *sampradāy* by devotee-kings was a central aspect of bhakti as lived in history, while Nābhādās praises the *bhaktas* themselves, on their own terms. For Nābhādās, the authority and prestige granted by a close relationship with the court is less of a concern.

Poets

In chapter two, we saw that Nābhādās celebrates poets as important members of his bhakti community. It is through the songs of the poets that bhakti spreads beyond the *sampradāy*. Nābhādās celebrates Jayadeva, for example, for his skillful expression of devotion. For Nābhādās, Jayadeva is a powerful figure, and poetry is the source of his power. Priyādās greatly expands Nābhādās' treatment of Jayadeva. As usual, Nābhādās dedicates a single *chappay* to Jayadeva. Priyādās has composed twenty *kavitta*s and provides an episodic account

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99 Bracketed text in original. Vijay Pinch, "History, Devotion and the Search for Nabhadas of Galta," 393; 123:1-4 (incorrectly numbered as 132)"Rūpkalā", *Śrī Bhaktamāl*, 314.

100 Vijay Pinch, "History, Devotion and the Search for Nabhadas of Galta," 393.

101 Ibid., 394.

of his life.

Priyādās' biography of Jayadeva begins in childhood. This “king of kings of poets” was born in Kindubilva village. *Śṛṅgār ras* grew in his heart. He went to live in the forest with only a tattered garment and a water pot. A Brahmin had a daughter. Jagannath told the Brahmin that Jayadeva was his own form and ordered the Brahmin to marry his daughter to Jayadeva.[102] The Brahmin took his daughter to Jayadeva, who explained that he was unsuitable, but the Brahmin explained that it was Jagannath's order.[103] The Brahmin told his daughter to remain with Jayadeva and departed angrily. Jayadeva tried to get out of the situation in which he found himself, but he realized then that he had a wife. He decided to build a house, and having done so, took up the *sevā* of Krishna. He then thought to write a book, the *Gītagovinda.*[104] While writing it, he was delighted to realize that the words exceeded his ability and that Krishna was writing through him.[105]

Already at this point in the narrative, rifts between Priyādās and Nābhādās are apparent. Nābhādās emphasizes Jayadeva as a poet, but Priyādās makes God the primary actor in the story. Jagannath ordered the Brahmin to marry his daughter to Jayadeva, so he did so despite Jayadeva's strenuous objections. The daughter's lack of agency hardly needs to be noted. Priyādās never even mentions her name. She does speak in Priyādās' telling, but only to say that she is helpless and wants nothing except what Jayadeva wants. Nābhādās focuses on the *Gītagovinda* more than on the figure of Jayadeva. So far Priyādās has reversed that equation, but the next few stanzas do celebrate the poem rather than the poet.

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102 144:1-4 "Rūpkalā", *Śrī Bhaktamāl*, 344.

103 145:1-4 Ibid., 345.

104 See Miller, *Love Song of the Dark Lord, Jayadeva's Gītagovinda*.

105 146:1-147:4 "Rūpkalā", *Śrī Bhaktamāl*, 346-347.

The pandit-king of Nīlācal Dhām had also written a book with the title *Gītagovinda*. He summoned the Brahmins and told them to make it famous by spreading it throughout the land. The Brahmins smiled and showed him Jayadeva's *Gītagovinda*. They decided to place both works in the Jagannath temple. Jagannath threw away the king's poem and wrapped Jayadeva's in a garland.[106] The king became angry and decided to drown himself in the ocean. He began to immerse himself, but the Lord ordered him not to uselessly waste his life.[107] In the *Bhaktamāl,* Nābhādās focuses consistently on the *bhaktas,* but here the focus remains fixed on Bhagavān, on God.

More episodes follow. While tending to a row of eggplants, a gardener's daughter sang a verse from the *Gītagovinda*, bringing Jagannath to her.[108] A Mughal heard Jayadeva's words being sung and fixed his mind on Krishna's form.[109] After narrating these episodes, though, Priyādās says that he has said all there is to say about the book and turns the focus back to Jayadeva himself. In an extended passage, Priyādās tells of Jayadeva's encounter with a group of *ṭhag*s. Jayadeva was going down the road with gold coins tied into his garment. He met these bandits and asked them where they were going. They replied, "wherever you are going." He realized what was going on and handed over all his money.[110] One of the *ṭhag*s still wanted to kill him, but another objected that he was handing over his wealth, so killing was unnecessary. Worried that he might recognize them later, they apparently compromised and decided to cut off his hands and feet and to throw him in a pit.

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106 148:1-4 Ibid., 349.

107 149:1-4 Ibid., 349-350.

108 150:1-4 Ibid., 350.

109 151:1-4 Ibid., 351-352.

110 152:1-4 Ibid., 352-353.

A king passed by and rescued Jayadeva. When he emerged from the pit, he was shining with the light of several moons.[111] The king realized his good fortune and tended to Jayadeva's wounds. He asked the *bhakta* to give him an order, and Jayadeva instructed him to do *sevā* for Hari's sadhus. The *ṭhag*s who attacked Jayadeva came to the court of the king disguised as *sant*s.[112] Jayadeva directed the king to serve them. The king gave them a feast, but they became extremely worried. They wanted to leave, but the king would not grant them permission. Jayadeva told the king to give them wealth, so he did so and then sent them off along with servants to protect them.[113]

Surprised by the exceptionally attentive *sevā,* the king's servants asked the disguised bandits what relationship they had to Jayadeva. They swore the servants to secrecy then told them that they, along with Jayadeva, used to be in the service of a king. They claimed that Jayadeva had committed some corrupt act, and they were ordered to kill him. Instead of killing him, though, they mercifully spared him and only cut off his hands and feet.[114] Their lie became apparent, however, when the earth opened up and swallowed them.

The servants, shocked, ran back to Jayadeva and told him what had happened. At that moment, his hands and feet returned. The servants told the king about the two miracles they had witnessed, so he came and placed his head on Jayadeva's feet, asking again and again how these events had transpired.[115] Jayadeva eventually relented and explained everything. He told the king to treat anyone wearing the garb of a *sant* as a true *sant*. Finally knowing Jayadeva's

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111 153:1-4 Ibid., 353.

112 154:1-4 Ibid., 354.

113 155:1-4 Ibid., 355.

114 156:1-4 Ibid., 356.

115 157:1-4 Ibid., 357.

true identity, the king asked him to stay and declared his kingdom henceforth to be country of love and devotion ("*prem-bhakti*").[116]

This tale is typical of the *Bhaktirasabodhinī*. A *bhakta* is attacked by wicked people but saved through miraculous divine intervention. A king witnesses a miracle, performed not by the *bhakta* but by God as proof of bhakti, and he himself becomes a *bhakta*. This *bhakta*-king spreads bhakti throughout his kingdom. The royal sponsors of bhakti are absolutely critical for Priyādās. Nābhādās certainly celebrates devotee-kings, as we have seen, but he does not give them nearly as central a role as Priyādās does.

The kingdom may have become a land of *prem-bhakti*, but it still contained wicked people, even within the king's own household. Jayadeva's wife was brought to the palace. She met with the queen, and they discussed *satī*. She explained to the queen that a true *satī* would not have her limbs cut off or leap into the funeral fire but would simply die at the same moment as her husband.[117] Jealous, the queen decided to test Jayadeva's wife. She told the king to take Jayadeva to the garden. The king realized that his wife was up to something wicked, but did as she requested anyway. The queen told Jayadeva's wife that her husband had died, and upon hearing the news, she immediately died. The king came and saw what had happened. He prepared a funeral pyre and was about to immolate himself when Jayadeva ran there to stop him.[118] Jayadeva sang a verse from the *Gītagovinda* and restored his wife to life.[119]

Jayadeva returned to his village. His ashram was eighteen *kos*[120] from the Ganga, but he

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116 158:1-4 Ibid., 358.

117 159:1-4 Ibid., 359.

118 161:1-4 Ibid., 360-361.

119 162:1-4 Ibid., 361.

120 Approximately thirty-six miles.

bathed there for as long as he was able. Even when his body became old, he did not give up this practice. Ganga, seeing his great love, told him one night not to make the trip but to meditate instead. Jayadeva was stubborn and did not obey, so Ganga said that she would come to him. He asked how he would know that it was her, and she told him that lotuses would bloom as proof. Everything happened just as she said it would.[121]

In Nābhādās' text, there are very few miraculous events mentioned, but for Priyādās, the divine is personally present and always ready to intervene. The *Gītagovinda* is praised here not for its celebration of Krishna and Radha but for its incantatory power to restore life. Ganga is willing to come to Jayadeva in his old age in order to spare him a long journey to her bank, but first she has to convince him to accept this intervention. Priyādās' life of Jayadeva begins and ends with moments where Jayadeva tries to assert his piety over the express will of a divine figure. In both cases, inevitably, it is Jayadeva whose will eventually bends.

Nābhādās' understanding of the authority of the poet is radically different than Priyādās'. Poets are a major ingredient in the community of *bhakta*s imagined by Nābhādās. They are a major force for spreading bhakti. Nābhādās' community is centered on the *sampradāy* without being limited to it. The songs of the poets may be the most important means by which bhakti is spread beyond these institutionalized relationships. Nābhādās celebrates poets for their skillful expression of devotion. The *sampradāy*, royal patronage, and traditional social roles matter more for Priyādās than for Nābhādās. Poetry matters less. For Priyādās, the poet's authority and even the poet's personality becomes weakened. Nābhādās celebrates poets as poets. Priyādās narrates their lives, but their poetry no longer seems to be crucial to his re-imagined community of *bhakta*s.

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121 163:1-4 "Rūpkalā", *Śrī Bhaktamāl*, 362.

Caste

The differing overall orientations of these texts clarify the two authors' conflicting positions on the issue of caste. We saw in chapter two that Nābhādās celebrates Kabīr for, among other things, rejecting *varṇa*, the traditional division of society into four classes. In Priyādās' commentary, however, Kabīr comes into conflict with the Brahmins, but this conflict is resolved to everyone's satisfaction due to the direct intervention of Hari. In his commentary on another section of the text, Priyādās grants *varṇa* a greater importance than Nābhādās allows. In their respective treatments of another fifteenth-century poet-saint, Raidās, the two hagiographers demonstrate their opposing conceptions of caste. Caste distinctions play no role in Nābhādās' imagined community of *bhaktas*. Priyādās, however, grants caste some spiritual importance.

We saw in chapter two that Nābhādās does not explicitly identify Raidās as a cobbler but alludes to his profession through carefully chosen imagery. Nābhādās' Raidās clearly rejects *varṇāśram* dharma, at least in the context of bhakti. Priyādās elaborates on Nābhādās' imagery and themes but undermines his message. He opens his passage with an episode, asserting that despite his low birth Raidās possesses the spiritual identity of a Brahmin. The episode begins in Raidās' previous life when he had been a disciple of Rāmānand. One day, Raidās carelessly fed his guru food that had been offered by a merchant. Rāmānand immediately realized what his student has done and cursed him to a low rebirth. Even as a newborn, Raidās recalled the glory of his former life and refused to be polluted by drinking even his own mother's milk. He telepathically (*nabhabānī*) summoned Rāmānand, who came and witnessed the suffering of Raidās' parents. He urged his former disciple to drink from his

mother's breast. The infant obeyed and forgot his previous lives.[122]

Anantadās' account of this legend is similar to Priyādās'. According to Anantadās, Raidās' sin in his previous life was the consumption of meat, and Rāmānanda initiated Raidās on the condition that his Shakta, Camār family would become devotees.[123] In addition to these relatively minor differences, Anantadās emphasizes the moral he wishes to impart to his listeners. While the infant Raidās is on the verge of death, Anantadās sings,

> Dying is better than living,
> for life without Hari is tasteless.
> The man who lives but has forgotten Hari,
> is like one who drinks poison and is punished by the god of death.
> Whether poor or wealthy,
> powerless or powerful,
> a fool or a wise man -
> a king or a beggar, nobody can cross the ocean of being without the grace of Hari.[124]

It is separation from Hari that led Raidās to despair and to take pleasure in death, not the memory of his previously pure existence. Anantadās insists on his main point in the final stanza of the section:

> In telling the birth story of Raidās
> even the Lord finds pleasure.
> The bonds of *karma* are severed:
> so sings the devotee, Ananta.[125]

Hari is all powerful, and devotion conquers even the laws of *karma* and of caste. For Anantadās, what is important is Raidās' devotion to God and to his guru; it does not matter whether he was a Brahmin or a Camār.

Priyādās alters the significance of Nābhādās' and Anantadās' hagiographies. Nābhādās'

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122 Ibid., 471-472.

123 1:2-16 Callewaert, *The Hagiographies of Anantdās: The Bhakti Poets of North India*, 307-308.

124 Callewaert's translation. 1:8-9 Ibid.

125 Callewaert's translation. 1:16 Ibid., 308.

words of praise for Raidās provide a hook on which Priyādās hangs this episode, but the commentary inverts the message of the *mūl* text. Nābhādās insists on the inseparability of Raidās' physical and spiritual being. Priyādās separates these two. By introducing an inner/outer dichotomy, he casts Raidās as a Brahmin in a cobbler's body. It thus becomes natural that Raidās would be a spiritual teacher. A cobbler who is a celebrated teacher undermines *varṇa* ideology, but if this cobbler is essentially a Brahmin, this role loses its subversive power. The imagery of the goose becomes inextricably attached to Raidās' refusal to drink his mother's milk. Raidās' power of discernment thus becomes closely linked to a caste-based distinction between purity and impurity.

For Priyādās, proper religiosity, which is focused exclusively on God and transmitted by the *sampradāy*, is embedded firmly within the existing social structure. Priyādās' vision of bhakti is thus socially conservative and is constructed out of a radically different understanding of the historical actor of bhakti. Bhakti is authorized by the *sampradāy*, which stands in close alliance with the ruler. The rules of the *sampradāy* provide the only legitimate expression of bhakti religiosity. Bhakti is expressed in a manner that reinforces *varṇāśram* dharma, an ideology that Nābhādās explicitly challenges in his praise for Kabīr. In Nābhādās' conception, bhakti is radically inclusive and thus potentially subversive. It is rooted in a mythological past but lived by diverse individuals in the present. Priyādās directs the appeal of this inclusiveness to ends that support rather than undermine legitimate social structures and that seek to discipline *bhaktas* within the norms of the *sampradāy*. The shift in theological orientation of his text allows this transformation of social attitudes.

In spite of important differences in their emphases, strong similarities remain between the visions of Nābhādās and his commentator. They both share a conception of a broad community constituted through a shared commitment to bhakti. By remembering past exemplars of devotion, both Nābhādās and Priyādās construct a community for the present and future. This community is larger than the *sampradāy*, but the monastic order continues to play a central role. Through attention to guru lineages, they link this present community back to divine origins in the mythic past. This shared understanding of a community united in loving devotion masks an important difference in perspective. While for Priyādās, the object of this devotion is always God, Nābhādās emphasizes the loving bonds among the devotees themselves. This divergence in theological emphasis is closely linked to the other differences between the texts, as discussed above.

Priyādās' Re-inscription of the *Bhaktamāl*

Later tradition largely accepts Priyādās' assertion that his commentary is indistinguishable from Nābhādās' own work. Even Rāmānandī commentaries, such as Rūpkalā's influential modern Hindi exegesis, take the combination of *Bhaktamāl* and *Bhaktirasabodhinī* as a single object of analysis.[126] Yet despite their similarities, rhetorical and otherwise, Priyādās and Nābhādās do not share identical agendas. As we have seen above, these two authors have very different ideas of what constitutes bhakti.

Why then did Priyādās decide to write a commentary on the *Bhaktamāl*? If Priyādās' perspective differed so substantially from Nābhādās', could he not have selected a more

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126 See chapter six.

appropriate text for his commentary? Did the popularity of the *Bhaktamāl* demand a response from a more, for Priyādās, orthodox perspective? Was Nābhādās' vision so compelling as to offer an ideal platform for Priyādās to present his differently imagined community? Did the *Bhaktamāl*, despite its heterodoxy, nonetheless suit Priyādās' particular sectarian ends? I will now briefly consider each of these possibilities.

Priyādās may have chosen to compose his commentary due to the popularity and influence of the *Bhaktamāl*. If the *Bhaktamāl* was a popular text prior to 1712 CE, though, it has not left much record of this popularity. I am aware of only six manuscripts of the *Bhaktamāl* that were copied prior to the composition of the *Bhaktirasabodhinī*.[127] This relative dearth of manuscripts is hardly an adequate basis to argue that the *Bhaktamāl* did not achieve independent popularity during the seventeenth century. If the *Bhaktamāl* thrived in performance, as one would expect, than it would have been recorded in the rough notebooks of humble sadhus, and these are not the sort of documents collected and preserved in the archives.[128] Early *bhaktamālī*s are hardly the only religious figures to pass through this vale of tears unremarked in the historical record.

Evidence for Nābhādās' influence, however, can be found in Rāghavdās' *Bhaktamāl*.[129] Rāghavdās probably composed this Dādū Panthī text in 1660 CE, but there are some difficulties determining the date. It may have been written in 1713 or 1720 CE. Rāghavdās acknowledges his debt to Nābhādās, and his work shows the influence of the earlier *Bhaktamāl*.[130] Even if we

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127 See chapter four.

128 Cf. Novetzke, *Religion and Public Memory: A Cultural History of Saint Namdev in India*; Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text*; Norman P. Ziegler, "The Seventeenth Century Chronicles of Mārvāṛa: A Study in the Evolution and Use of Oral Traditions in Western India," *History in Africa* 3 (1976): 127-153.

129 Rāghavdās and Caturdās, *Bhaktamāl of Rāghavdās*.

130 Hawley addresses the dating of this text: "Difficulties in interpreting the date contained in the text (saṃvat

accept the later dates, it is clear that the *Bhaktamāl* had spread well beyond its origins by the second decade of the eighteenth century, inspiring works in the Gauṛīya Sampradāy and the Dādū Panth. It is difficult to argue that the *Bhaktamāl* had achieved any significant popularity prior to Priyādās' *ṭīkā*, but it is equally difficult to deny that it had become an influential work.

Perhaps Nābhādās' message had an inherent charisma, which attracted Priyādās' attention. Even today, the appeal of Nābhādās' vision is hard to deny. Priyādās must have found Nābhādās' vision of the path of bhakti open to all to be compelling, and he must have found the enormous number of exemplary *bhakta*s praised by Nābhādās to be impressive. For all the shifts of logic and emphasis to be found in the *Bhaktirasabodhinī*, Priyādās does not alter the boundaries of the *Bhaktamāl*'s community of *bhakta*s. Priyādās may have seen a need to modify the conditions of inclusion in this *bhakti* community, but he does not reject the need for such a community.

Priyādās' greater insistence on the importance of the *sampradāy* may be related to political and religious changes in the Amer and Jaipur court. The Rāmānandīs established their

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satrahai sai satrahotarā) have led to a considerable discussion among scholars. There are three possibilities—V.S. 1717, 1770, and 1777 (corresponding to 1660, 1713, and 1720 C.E.). [...] Dalpat Rajpurohit has helpfully summarized the arguments that can be marshaled for the first of these options [...]. To this list must be added the important fact that only the June 30, 1660 date correlates with the day of the week (Saturday) and lunar timing (śukla pakṣ 3, āsāḍh) that appear as part of Rāghavdās's colophon, as given in the oldest manuscript at our disposal (scribed in 1804 C.E.), the one that serves as the basis for the edition by Agar Chand Nahta: Rāghavdās kṛt Bhaktamāl (Jodhpur: Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute, 1965). To Monika Horstmann goes the credit for pointing this out: "The Flow of Grace: Food and Feast in the Hagiography and History of the Dādūpanth," Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft 150:2 (2000), p. 515n9. There is, however, a major unsolved puzzle if we opt for the 1660 date. As Winand Callewaert observes, Rāghavdās mentions Guru Harkishan among Guru Nānak's successors (Nahta, ed., Rāghavdās kṛt Bhaktamāl, p. 176). Guru Harkishan did not take the throne until October, 1661. In regard to the two 18th-century dates it may perhaps be regarded as odd that Rāghavdās does not go on to list all ten of the Sikh gurus, since the last did not die until 1708. Other aspects of the text—e.g., the firm decision to regard Caitanya and the Gauḍīyas as members of the Madhva Sampradāy—seem to me to fit more comfortably with an 18th-century dating than the 17th-century possibility, but the calendrical alignment to which Monika Horstmann has drawn attention is hard to gainsay. On the other hand, however, Callewaert's arguments as to the plausibility of the date V.S. 1777 on strictly linguistic grounds are worth considering. In regard to all this, see Winand M. Callewaert, "Bhagatmāls and Parcaīs in Rajasthan," in W. M. Callewaert and Rupert Snell, eds., According to Tradition: Hagiographical Writing in India (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1994), p. 96; Callewaert, The Hagiographies of Anantadās, pp. 28-29. " Hawley, "The Four Sampradays--and other Foursomes," 14 n. 22.

seat in Galtā and "attained religious power" in Amer during the reign of Pṛthvīrāj (r. 1503-1527).[131] The Galtā Rāmānandīs seem to have reflected the *Bhaktamāl*'s inclusiveness and heterodoxy. Horstmann describes them as "a fold of Vaiṣṇavites who try to encompass both the Vaiṣṇava orthodoxy and the heterodox movements represented by some of the great *sants* whom Nābhā boldly classified as disciples of Rāmānand, just as Anantdās did."[132] By the early eighteenth century, however, such a position had fallen from royal favor: "Mahārājā Savāī Jaisingh (or, Jaisingh II; r. 1700-1743) wished to enforce his own vision of Hindu kingship and pursued in his state a project of defining and organising Hindu religion, its institutions and representatives. It had three main aspects which had to be kept in balance: (1) He revived and performed the ancient Vedic sacrifices; (2) he put the Hindu ritual on a Smārta Vaiṣṇava basis; and (3) he wanted fully to integrate the Vaiṣṇava bhakti orders into the system."[133] The Vaishnava *sampradāys,* then, had to establish their orthodox *bona fides* by demonstrating that they operated "in accordance with the tenets of the four established Vaiṣṇava orders."[134] Priyādās' insistence on the importance of sectarian and royal authority may reflect or be a response to this context.

Nābhādās' broad vision may have been compelling, but Priyādās may also have found the *Bhaktamāl* useful for more narrow sectarian ends. One might suppose that Priyādās sought firmly to establish Kṛṣṇa Caitanya in the Madhva *sampradāy* and thus to establish his own lineage's orthodoxy within the four *sampradāy* framework. If Nābhādās considers Kṛṣṇa Caitanya to be in the lineage of Madhva, however, he does not make it clear, nor does Priyādās.

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131 Horstmann, "The Rāmānandīs of Galtā (Jaipur, Rajasthan)," 147.

132 Ibid., 153.

133 Ibid., 159.

134 Ibid., 160.

Nābhādās does praise Kṛṣṇa Caitanya, his companions, and his followers. Kṛṣṇa Caitanya is noted as an avatar, along with Nityānanda.[135] Priyādās expands on this motif.[136] Priyādās does not, however, devote a disproportionate amount of attention to his own progenitors.[137] There is no crude sectarianism to be found here. If Priyādās found support in the *Bhaktamāl* for his own sectarian perspective, it was in a shared theological framework between Rām Rasiks and Gauṛīya Vaishnavas, not in the expression of particular doctrinal positions or historical facts.

It remains unclear, then, why Priyādās chose to write a commentary on the *Bhaktamāl*. Perhaps each of the above factors, or none of them, contributed to his decision. The *Bhaktamāl* had achieved a measure of influence. Perhaps Priyādās saw the need to channel this influence along more orthodox paths. The *Bhaktamāl* powerfully presents a vision of an expansive devotional community that Priyādās may have found irresistible. Nābhādās has fulsome words of praise for key figures in Priyādās' own *sampradāy*, but Priyādās does not seem to place too much emphasis on these particular stanzas.

Conclusion

Through the *Bhaktamāl* and its most influential commentary, then, we witness a debate over the boundaries of a religious community. In support of their positions, Nābhādās and Priyādās advance different visions of the logic of devotion and its objects. The tension I explore in this chapter, between Nābhādās and Priyādās can, in hindsight, be viewed as a debate over the boundaries and composition of what would later come to be called Hinduism. In the

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135 Nābhādās, "Dvitīy Khaṇḍ (Sampādan)," 26-27 (chappay 71).

136 "Rūpkalā", *Śrī Bhaktamāl*, 554-556 (kavitta 329-332).

137 For a discussion of Kṛṣṇa Caitanya and his followers in the *Bhaktamāl* and *Bhaktirasabodhinī* as well as a translation of the relevant stanzas, see Lutgendorf, "Kṛṣṇa Caitanya and His Companions as Presented in the Bhaktamāla of Nābhā Jī and the Bhaktirasabodhinī of Priyā Dāsa."

colonial context of the nineteenth century, this debate would become more prominent and well defined, but many of the ingredients were already present during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

The remaining chapters will demonstrate how the *Bhaktamāl* remained a site of disputation between varying conception of this broad religious community. Chapters four and five consider manuscripts and print editions of the *Bhaktamāl* and its commentaries, and chapter six explores Rūpkalā's and Grierson's engagements with this text. The appeal of Nābhādās' vision persisted long past the seventeenth century and has made the *Bhaktamāl* contested terrain for those who would elaborate or modify his conception of a widely inclusive community united in bhakti.

Chapter Four: The Manuscript Tradition

काव्य की बड़ाई निज मुख न भलाई होति नाभा जू कहाई ।।

The greatness of the poetry was not from my own mouth. Whatever excellence there is in it, Nābhā-jū caused to be spoken.

- Priyādās[1]

Introduction

In the preceding chapters we have seen how the *Bhaktamāl* became, within about a century of its composition, the site of a debate over the boundaries of religious community defined by bhakti. Inclusiveness is among the most conspicuous features of Nābhādās' text. The *bhakta*s whom Nābhādās praises include various manifestations and avatars of God. They include poets who sang praises to God in a number of languages, and they include devotees who worshiped God according to several different paths. They include men and women, and people from all social strata. They come from throughout South Asia and from the near present as well as from the mythological past. Nābhādās gives central importance to the devotees themselves. For Nābhādās, bhakti is the only proper basis for human society. He rejects caste, kingship, and even family in favor of a community joining human society and the divine in bhakti.

Priyādās' commentary interprets the *Bhaktamāl* from a more clearly defined sectarian perspective. Priyādās presents a conception of the Vaishnava community that differs sharply from Nābhādās' outlook. He shifts Nābhādās' focus from the devotees to God and emphasizes the importance of the *sampradāy*. He increases the role of royal patrons, and he grants spiritual

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1 2:3 "Rūpkalā", *Śrī Bhaktamāl*, 3.

importance to caste. Through the *Bhaktamāl* and its most influential commentary, we witness a debate over the boundaries of this religious community.

This chapter considers the transmission and reception of Nābhādās' *Bhaktamāl* during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. I begin by offering an overview of *Bhaktamāl* manuscripts. This overview permits several observations. The *Bhaktamāl* was a popular text with wide geographic reach. Its appeal was broadly Vaishnava and not limited to one or two *sampradāy*s. Priyādās serves as the central figure in this tradition; the entire *Bhaktamāl* tradition flows through him. The remainder of the chapter considers the implications of these observations.

Sources

Ram Das Gupta[2] and Gilbert Pollet[3] have each reviewed the *Bhaktmāl* and *Bhaktirasabodhinī* manuscripts available in England.[4] The most recent and complete account of these manuscripts is found in Pollet's "Eight Manuscripts of the Hindī Bhaktamāla in England."[5] Pollet notes that most manuscripts of the *Bhaktamāl* "are kept in Indian public or private libraries" but that these manuscripts have not yet been collated into a critical edition. Pollet explains that while awaiting such an edition, "it can prove useful to examine those mss which are available in the United Kingdom with a view to establishing their main resemblances

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2 R.D. Gupta, "Studies in the Bhaktirasa-bodhinī of Priyā Dāsa."

3 Pollet, "Studies in the Bhakta Mâla of Nâbhâ Dâsa."

4 Pollet and Gupta consider the *Bhaktamāl* and *Bhaktirasabodhinī*, respectively, but the manuscripts described by Pollet and Gupta all include both Nābhādās' *mūl* text along with Priyādās' commentary.

5 Gilbert Pollet, "Eight Manuscripts of the Hindī Bhaktamāla in England," *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 1 (1970): 203-222.

and discrepancies and to drawing a tentative stemma codicum."[6] The details of these eight manuscripts are noted below. Pollet does establish stemmas for these manuscripts based on "variant numberings"[7] and "variant readings"[8]. Based on these variants, Pollet concludes that "all eight mss ultimately spring from a common source."[9] None of these manuscripts, however, is particularly old. Pollet and Gupta were working with the manuscripts available to them, which represent only a sliver of the *Bhaktamāl*'s manuscript tradition.

In this respect, at least, Gupta's and Pollet's work has been superseded by Narendra Jhā's.[10] As part of the effort of composing his critical edition of Nābhādās' *mūl* text, Jhā surveys numerous manuscripts of the *Bhaktamāl* both with and without commentary. Jhā notes that the *Bhaktamāl* was an extremely popular text and that hundreds of *Bhaktamāl* manuscripts exist in north India.[11] Many of these manuscripts are housed in *sāmpradāyik* institutes and are unavailable to research scholars.[12] Jhā managed to see about fifty manuscripts. The oldest of these, dated VS 1699, is located in Jodhpur's Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute (RORI). Jhā divides *Bhaktamāl* manuscripts into three categories: the first type contains only the *mūl* text; the second type contains the *mūl* text alongside Priyādās' commentary; the third type contains the *mūl* text, Priyādās' commentary, and an *upaṭīkā* or *vyākhyā* sub-commentary by a third individual. Of the manuscripts described by Jhā, only six contain the *mūl* text without

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6 Ibid., 203.

7 Ibid., 219.

8 Ibid., 220.

9 Pollet, "Eight Manuscripts of the Hindī Bhaktamāla in England."

10 Jhā, "Pratham Khaṇḍ (Vivecan)."

11 Jhā complains that due to "arrogance, lack of generosity, or sectarian rivalry" many manuscripts are unavailable to researchers. Ibid., 181.

12 Ibid.

commentary. Jhā's critical edition is based entirely on these six manuscripts.[13] His decision to base his edition on these texts make sense. These are the earliest available manuscripts and the only ones which do not reflect Priyādās' considerable influence. Jhā is working with the earliest identifiable strata of the *Bhaktamāl* tradition.

A slightly more recent study of the *Bhaktamāl* tradition is Kailāśacandra Śarmā's *Bhaktamāl aur Hindī Kāvya meṁ Uskī Paramparā* ("The *Bhaktamāl* and Its tradition in Hindi Poetry").[14] Śarmā describes forty-six independent compositions, which he places within the *Bhaktamāl* literary tradition. His conditions for inclusion are not always clear, except that he limits his study to Hindi literature. Each of these works is in some way modeled on Nābhādās' *Bhaktamāl* and is in Hindi. Śarmā also describes twelve "commentaries and translations," including the *Bhaktirasabodhinī*. Actually, only one of these works is a translation;[15] the rest are commentaries. Two of these works are commentaries on *Bhaktamāl*s besides Nābhādās' and are therefore not considered here.[16] Three of these works date to the late-nineteenth century or later and thus fall outside the scope of this chapter, but there are five commentaries on Nābhādās' and Priyādās' texts dating to the mid-nineteenth century or earlier. Śarmā's helpful descriptions of these texts are incorporated into the description of manuscripts below.

My archival research focused on key sites in the *Bhaktamāl* tradition. As Jhā notes, the *Bhaktamāl* was an extremely popular text, and this popularity was widespread. It can seem that every archive contains multiple copies of this text. In order to limit a potentially endless search

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13 Ibid., 182.

14 Kailāśacandra Śarmā, *Bhaktamāl aur Hindī Kāvya meṁ Uskī Paramparā* (Delhi: Manthan, 1983).

15 Vṛndāvandās' *Bhaktanāmāvalī,* discussed below.

16 Caturdās' commentary on Rāghavdās' *Bhaktamāl* and Jānakī Rasik Śaraṇ's commentary on Jīvārām Yugalpriyā's *Rasik Prakāś Bhaktamāl*. Interestingly, Śarmā notes that these commentaries are also modeled on the *Bhaktirasabodhinī.* Śarmā, *Bhaktamāl aur Hindī Kāvya meṁ Uskī Paramparā*, 129-130, 135, 146.

for manuscripts, I decided to confine this search to several sites associated with the transmission of the *Bhaktamāl*: Jaipur, Vrindavan, Kolkata, and Avadh. Nābhādās was associated with the Galtā monastery near present-day Jaipur. Priyādās wrote his commentary in Vrindavan. The first printed *Bhaktamāl* was produced under the auspices of the College of Fort William in Calcutta. Rūpkalā compiled the "standard" edition of the *Bhaktamāl* in Ayodhya, which Naval Kishore published in Lucknow.[17] I also searched for manuscripts in archives in Jodhpur and Allahabad due to their significant collections. As will become apparent below, my focus was not, by any means, exclusive, and these sites were not equally productive. Jodhpur and Allahabad, in particular, host important archives for this project while Kolkata and Lucknow did not prove particularly fruitful.

Manuscripts

Jhā's division of *Bhaktamāl* manuscripts into three categories is useful. The earliest and rarest manuscripts include only Nābhādās' *mūl* text. The second category pairs Nābhādās' text with Priyādās' commentary. The third category contains the *mūl* text, Priyādās' commentary, and a sub-commentary by another author. Priyādās is the *Bhaktamāl*'s earliest known commentator, and all known subsequent commentators have taken the combined text of Priyādās and Nābhādās as their subject.

Nābhādās' Mūl *Text*

I know of six *Bhaktamāl* manuscripts that do not include Priyādās' commentary or show evidence of Priyādās' influence. One of these six manuscripts is found in the Sarveśvar

17 See chapter two for more on Nābhādās, chapter three for Priyādās, chapter five for early print editions of the *Bhaktamāl*, and chapter six for Rūpkalā.

Kāryālay of the Nimbārka Śodh Saṁsthān in Vrindavan. It is the sixth of 24 works bound together in a single collection. This copy of the *Bhaktamāl* is undated, but the 22nd work in this volume has a scribal colophon giving the date of completion as VS 1772 (1715 CE). All the works in this volume appear to have been written by a single scribe. Based on this evidence, Jhā estimates the date of this *Bhaktamāl* manuscript to be around VS 1770 (1713 CE).[18] This scribe seems to be a member of the Nimbārka Sampradāy from the Braj region. Jhā observes that most of the works in this collection are sectarian and that the manuscript reflects Braj, rather than Rajasthani, usage.[19]

RORI Udaipur houses a single manuscript of the *Bhaktamāl* without commentary. This manuscript is the first in a collection of thirteen works of *kāvya,* all apparently copied by a single scribe. A colophon indicates the date of completion to be VS 1724 (1667 CE).[20]

RORI Jodhpur houses four manuscripts of the *Bhaktamāl* without commentary. The first one described by Jhā is accompanied by the *dohās* of Janaturasī, copied by the same scribe. A colophon dates this *Bhaktamāl* to VS 1762 (1705 CE). Jhā notes the apparent influence of Rajasthani language in this manuscript.[21] The second manuscript in this archive is grouped with several other works: *Dādūdayāl kī Vāṇī*, *Kabīr kī Paracaī*, *Vaṣaṇā-jī ke Pad*, *Janagopāl-jī Racit Mohavivek,* and, immediately following the *Bhaktamāl*, *Prahlād Carit*, an unknown work attributed to Agradās. This *Bhaktamāl* manuscript is undated, but it immediately follows and was apparently written by the same scribe as *Mohavivek*, which has a colophon with the date VS 1724 (1667 CE). On this basis, Jhā estimates this manuscript to have been written in VS 1724

18 Jhā, "Pratham Khaṇḍ (Vivecan)," 200.

19 Ibid., 203.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid., 204-206.

or 1725 (1667 or 1668 CE).[22] The third manuscript in RORI Jodhpur is relatively recent and carries the date VS 1889 (1832 CE).[23] Finally, the oldest known manuscript of the *Bhaktamāl* is housed in this archive. It is the fifth work in a collection. According to the colophon, this text was completed in VS 1699 (1642 CE). Two preceding works in the collection, which were copied in a different hand, have the dates VS 1695 and 1697 (1638 and 1640 CE). Jhā notes orthographic peculiarities in this manuscript that show the influence of Rajasthani.[24] In addition to these six, Jhā notes that the 1909 Khoj Report of the Nāgarīpracāriṇī Sabhā lists a single manuscript of the *Bhaktamāl* without commentary, dated to VS 1770 (1713 CE) and located in the royal library of Neemrana, Rajasthan.[25]

In addition to those listed by Jhā, RORI Jodhpur houses another manuscript of the *Bhaktamāl* without commentary. The existence of this manuscript is first noted in the list of Hindi and Rajasthani manuscripts published by RORI in 1991.[26] This manuscript is incomplete and damaged. According to the colophon, a scribe named Nathāvat composed this text in Bikaner in VS 1780 (1723 CE). This *Bhaktamāl* is the first work in a bound volume, which includes other works copied by different hands[27] The Vrindavan Research Institute also houses three *Bhaktamāl*s without commentary. Each of these manuscripts, however, is undated, unsigned, and incomplete.[28]

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22 Ibid., 206.

23 Ibid., 207.

24 Ibid., 212.

25 Ibid., 213.

26 *Rājasthānī-Hindī Granth-sūcī*, vol. 11 (Jodhpur: Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute, 1991).

27 Narāyaṇdās, "Bhaktamāl," n.d., 22132(1), Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute - Jodhpur.

28 Nābhādāsa, "Bhaktamāla," n.d., 4418-a, Vrindavan Research Institute; Nābhādāsa, "Bhaktamāla," n.d., 1870, Vrindavan Research Institute; "Bhaktamāla," n.d., 1867, Vrindavan Research Institute.

Mūl *Text with Priyādās' Commentary*

Unlike manuscripts that only include Nābhādās' *mūl* text, manuscripts that include Priyādās' commentary are plentiful. Hundreds of these manuscripts exist, and they are found throughout India, particularly in north India.[29] Jhā managed to examine about fifty manuscripts; all but six of these include Priyādās' commentary.[30]

The Vāraṇasey Saṁskṛt Viśvavidyālay holds three *Bhaktamāl* manuscripts. The first of these, according to the colophon, was copied in VS 1840 (1783 CE) by a scribe named Nandarām.[31] The second was completed in VS 1868 (1811 CE) by a member of the Rādhāvallabhī Sampradāy, and the third is incomplete, undated, and unsigned.[32]

Nine copies of the *Bhaktamāl* are found in the Hindī Sāhitya Sammelan in Allahabad. Most of these manuscripts are undated, incomplete, and unsigned. Two of them include sub-commentaries and are noted below. Otherwise, the only dated text was copied by an Agranārāyaṇ Dās in VS 1833 (1776 CE). Jhā notes that none of these manuscripts is very old or especially useful for his purposes.[33]

Jhā lists nine manuscripts from the Nāgarīpracāriṇī Sabhā in Banaras.[34] One of these contains a sub-commentary and is noted below. Three of these are undated and unsigned. One was copied by Paraśurāmadās in either VS 1804 or 1840 (1747 or 1783 CE). One, copied in VS 1860 (1803 CE), does not include Priyādās' commentary but includes the same stanzas found in

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29 Jhā, "Pratham Khaṇḍ (Vivecan)," 181.

30 Ibid., 182.

31 Ibid., 182-183.

32 Ibid., 183-184.

33 Ibid., 184-188.

34 Ibid., 188-190.

manuscripts that include this commentary, along with four pages of praise to Rādhā.[35] One manuscript was copied in VS 1873 (1816 CE), another in VS 1940 (1883 CE).[36] The oldest manuscript in this collection carries the date of VS 1776 (1719 CE), only seven years after Priyādās completed his commentary. Unfortunately, Jhā does not consider this manuscript particularly useful for his edition, so he does not include any particulars beyond the date.[37]

Jhā describes eight manuscripts with commentary located in Vrindavan. Three of these are located at the Hit Ashram. One of these was copied by a member of the Rādhāvallabhī Sampradāy in VS 1913 (1856 CE). Another is missing the final page and thus the name of the scribe and the date. The colophon of the third gives the date, VS 1782 (1725 CE), and identifies the patron.[38] Jhā mentions two manuscripts in the possession of an elderly *bhaktamālī*, Jagannāth Prasād. One is undated. The other is dated VS 1840 (1783 CE). Neither, according to Jhā, contains anything of note.[39] Three *Bhaktamāl*s with commentary are located at the Sarveśvar Kāryālay, part of the Nimbārka Śodh Saṁsthān. One of these, which serves as the basis of a published edition, was composed in VS 1899 (1842 CE). Another is dated VS 1887 (1830 CE) and contains a five-line "*Bhaktamāl Māhātmya*" by Vaiṣṇavdās. The third was written by a Rāmāśrayī *bhakta* in 1797 CE (VS 1854).[40]

Other manuscripts of the *Bhaktamāl* with commentary are found throughout north

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35 Nineteen stanzas are included in manuscripts that include the *Bhaktirasabodhinī* that are not found in earlier *mūl*-only manuscripts. Ibid., 201. This 1803 CE manuscript does not include Priyādās' commentary, but it does include these apparently interpolated stanzas. For this reason Jhā believes that this manuscript is descended from one that included Priyādās' commentary, and he groups it accordingly. Ibid., 189.

36 Actually listed as *śak saṁvat* 1940, but this date is in the future (2018 CE) and therefore must be a misprint.

37 Jhā, "Pratham Khaṇḍ (Vivecan)," 189.

38 Sujān Kuvaribāī, daughter of Anūp Siṅh Ibid., 191.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid., 192.

India. The Bihār Rāṣṭrabhāṣā Pariṣad in Patna has three manuscripts. Each of these manuscripts was copied by a Kabīr Panthī, and they are all relatively recent or undated. One, acquired from Rosaṛā (Darabhaṅgā), was copied in VS 1907 (1850 CE) by a scribe named Bhīṣmadās. Another, acquired from the Kabīr Panthī *maṭh* in Teghaṛā (Muṅger), was written in VS 1934 (1877 CE), and the third manuscript, which is incomplete and undated, opens with words of praise to Kabīr: "*Śrī Sadaguru Kabīr Sāhibāy namaḥa*."[41]

RORI Jaipur contains a single manuscript, copied in VS 1935 (1878 CE) by a member of the Rāmānuja Sampradāy.[42] RORI Udaipur, which houses the royal library of Mewar, has four *Bhaktamāl*s with commentary, including one, noted below, that includes a sub-commentary. One of these was copied by a member of the Rāmasnehī Sampradāy in VS 1859 (1802 CE). Another is undated and written by two different individuals. The third is dated VS 1789 (1732 CE) and includes several pictures.[43] Unfortunately, no one has yet published this early, illustrated manuscript. Jhā describes or lists twenty-one *Bhaktamāl* manuscripts with commentary found in RORI Jodhpur. Seven of these are undated. The others were copied in VS 1807 (1750 CE), VS 1819 (1762 CE), VS 1836 (1779 CE), VS 1840 (1783 CE), VS 1866 (1809 CE), VS 1867 (1810 CE, two manuscripts), VS 1870 (1813 CE), VS 1871 (1814 CE), VS 1880 (1823 CE), VS 1900 (1843 CE), VS 1903 (1846 CE), and VS 1925 (1868 CE). At least one of these manuscripts was written by a Kabīr Panthī, but in most cases, the identity of the scribe is unknown or unrecorded.[44]

A few manuscripts of the *Bhaktamāl* along with the *Bhaktirasabodhinī* are available

41 Ibid., 192-193.

42 Ibid., 193.

43 Ibid., 193-195.

44 Ibid., 195-196.

outside of India. Pollet describes eight such manuscripts kept in the United Kingdom. These manuscripts are found in the India Office Library and the British Museum Library – now both part of the British Library – as well as in the Bodleian Library.[45] These manuscripts serve as the basis for the dissertations and partial critical editions of the *Bhaktamāl* and *Bhaktirasabodhinī* by Pollet and R.D. Gupta, respectively. The first manuscript in the India Office Library is undated and was probably written in the nineteenth century CE. It is incomplete.[46] The second manuscript in the India Office Library includes a colophon that gives the date as VS 1869 (1812 CE) and identifies the scribe's name as Rāmdās Dās.[47] The final manuscript from the India Office Library is a complete text but gives neither the date nor the name of the scribe. It entered the India Office Library, according to the cover, on 9 February 1909, and carries the note "Say 100 to 150 years old." It is cataloged as belonging to the nineteenth century CE.[48] The manuscript in the British Museum Library does not mention either the scribe or the date. It probably dates to the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century CE.[49] The first of the four manuscripts in the Bodleian Library is dated VS 1858 (1801 CE) and was written by a scribe named Harirām.[50] The second Bodleian Library manuscript is dated VS 1877 (1820 CE).[51] The third manuscript in this library is neither signed nor dated, but appears to be from the first half of the nineteenth century CE.[52] The final manuscript in the Bodleian Library is dated *śak saṁvat* 1647 (1725 CE),

45 Pollet, "Eight Manuscripts of the Hindī Bhaktamāla in England," 203-204.

46 Ibid., 204.

47 Ibid., 204-205.

48 Ibid., 205.

49 Ibid., 205-206.

50 Ibid., 206.

51 Ibid., 206-207.

52 Ibid., 207.

but the *Catalogus Codicum* indicates that this manuscript was written after 1809 CE. The appearance of this manuscript also seems to confirm a later date. "Even so," Pollet writes, "we find here a valuable link with an early text tradition."[53]

There are many *Bhaktamāl* manuscripts that include Priyādās' commentary that are not mentioned by either Pollet or Jhā.[54] RORI Jaipur holds five such manuscripts. Four of these manuscripts are incomplete, unsigned, and undated.[55] The fifth manuscript is also incomplete, but it carries a colophon with the date VS 1826 (1769 CE) and the name of the scribe, Viṣṇudās.[56] RORI Jodhpur holds an additional three manuscripts of this type. One of these manuscripts was copied in VS 1838 (1781 CE) by a Suṅdardās.[57] Another was written in VS 1799 (1742 CE) by an individual named Jagganāth Kāyastha.[58] Another manuscript is cataloged as dating to VS 1780 (1723 CE), but the manuscript itself carries the date VS 1812 (1755 CE).[59] Two more manuscripts are housed in the Allahabad Museum. One of these was copied in VS 1830

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53 Ibid.

54 A comprehensive survey of *Bhaktamāl* manuscripts would be a gargantuan and necessarily always incomplete task. Some of these manuscripts have been collected or cataloged since Pollet and Jhā did their work, but both scholars acknowledge the incomplete nature of their accounts. Pollet's study is limited to manuscripts found in England. Jhā's search is much wider – and accounts for many more manuscripts – but he does not claim to have provided a full listing of all *Bhaktamāl* manuscripts in India. Similarly, this dissertation does not pretend to offer a comprehensive account of *Bhaktamāl* manuscripts.

55 Nābhādās and Priyādās, "Bhaktamāl 'Bhaktirasabodhinī' Ṭīkā," VS Twentieth Century , 3239, Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute - Jaipur; Nābhādās, "Bhaktamāl"; Nābhādās and Priyādās, "Bhaktamāl 'Bhaktiras Bodhinī' Ṭīkā Sahit," VS Nineteenth Century , 10702, Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute - Jaipur; Nābhādās and Priyādās, "Bhaktamāl 'Bhaktiras Bodhinī' Ṭīkā Sahit," VS Nineteenth Century , 9496, Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute - Jaipur.

56 Nābhādās and Priyādās, "Bhaktamāl 'Bhaktirasa Bodhinī' Ṭīkā Sahit," VS 1826, 11002, Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute - Jaipur.

57 Narāyaṇdās and Lāldās, "Bhaktamāl (Ṭīkā Ras Bodhanī)," VS 1838, 15924, Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute - Jodhpur.

58 Narāyaṇdās and Priyādās, "Bhaktamāl Saṭīk (Bhaktirasabodhinī)," VS 1799, 29482, Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute - Jodhpur.

59 Narāyaṇdās and Priyādās, "Bhaktamāl Saṭīk," n.d., 16313, Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute - Jodhpur.

(1773 CE) by Bāl Goviṅda Vaiṣṇav.[60] The other does not appear to have a signature or date. It was written in two hands, one neat and legible, the other rough and sloppy.[61] The Vrindavan Research Institute holds another seventeen manuscripts that fit into this category. Nine of these are incomplete, unsigned, and undated.[62] Another five are complete but unsigned and undated.[63] Two manuscripts are signed and dated: Bhagavānadās Vaiṣṇav's in VS 1810 (1753 CE)[64] and Sevākarāma Jośī Brāhmaṇa's in VS 1953 (1896 CE).[65] The remaining manuscript was composed in VS 1850 (1793 CE) and is unsigned[66].

Mūl *Text, Priyādās' Commentary, and Sub-commentary*

The third category of manuscripts includes Nābhādās' *mūl* text, Priyādās' commentary, and a sub-commentary by another author. These sub-commentators include Bālakrām, Vaiṣṇavadās, Lāldās, Sevahitdās, and Hulāsdās. Several sub-commentaries have also been written by unknown authors.

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60 Nābhādās, "Bhaktamāl Ṭīkā Sahit," n.d., 122, Allahabad Museum.

61 "Bhaktamāl Ṭīkā Sahit," n.d., 167, Allahabad Museum.

62 Priyādāsa, "Bhaktamāla," n.d., 17656, Vrindavan Research Institute; Nābhādās, "Bhaktamāla aṃśa," n.d., 11980, Vrindavan Research Institute; Nābhādāsa and Priyādāsa, "Bhaktamāla," n.d., 3683, Vrindavan Research Institute; Nābhādāsa and Priyādāsa, "Bhaktamāla," n.d., Vrindaban Research Institute; Nābhādāsa and Priyādāsa, "Bhaktamāla," n.d., 10621, Vrindavan Research Institute; Priyādāsa, "Bhaktamāla," n.d., 16333, Vrindavan Research Institute; "Bhaktamāla ṭikā," n.d., 7020, Vrindavan Research Institute; "Bhaktamāla ṭikā," n.d., 7030, Vrindavan Research Institute; Priyādāsa, "Bhaktamāla," VS 1849, 17750, Vrindavan Research Institute.

63 Nābhādāsa and Priyādāsa, "Bhaktamāla," n.d., 3934, Vrindavan Research Institute; Nābhādāsa and Priyādāsa, "Bhaktamāla," n.d., 4604, Vrindavan Research Institute; Nābhādāsa and Priyādāsa, "Bhaktamāla," n.d., 9066, Vrindavan Research Institute; Priyādāsa, "Bhaktamāla," n.d., 18761, Vrindavan Research Institute; "Bhaktamāla ke kavitta," n.d., 11064-c, Vrindavan Research Institute.

64 Nābhādāsa, Priyādāsa, and Bhagavāndāsa Vaiṣṇava (scribe), "Bhaktamāla," VS 1810, 3904, Vrindavan Research Institute.

65 Nābhādāsa, Priyādāsa, and Sevākarāma Jośī Brāhmaṇa (scribe), "Bhaktamāla," VS 1953, 4648, Vrindavan Research Institute.

66 Nābhādāsa and Priyādāsa, "Bhaktamāla," VS 1850, 4638, Vrindavan Research Institute.

There are several manuscripts which include a sub-commentary by an author named Bālakrām or Bālakdās. Śarmā describes a manuscript of Bālakrām's entitled *Bhaktamāl kī Bhaktadām Guṇacitraṇī Tīkā,* kept in the collection of Brajvallabhaśaraṇ of Śrīnikuṅj, Vrindavan. It is an expansive 480 pages. The author provides the date VS 1833 (1776 CE) and positions himself in the lineage of Rāmānand.[67] There is also a manuscript of this work in Rāmadvāra, Ajmer. It was copied by a Rāmanārāyaṇ Tolārām in VS 1930 (1873 CE). Each of these manuscripts contains Nābhādās' text within it. Bālakrām uses a wide variety of meters and a single stanza, near the end of the work, is in Sanksrit. This commentary expands upon the *Bhaktamāl*. The commentator elucidates the lives of nearly every *bhakta* in the *Bhaktamāl*, including those merely mentioned by Nābhādās. Bālakrām even describes the lives of *bhakta*s whom Priyādās does not describe in his commentary.[68] RORI Udaipur houses an undated copy of this text, identified with the title *Guṇadām-Citranī*.[69] RORI Jodhpur has two copies of this work. The first is an incomplete text from the nineteenth century VS (mid eighteenth to early nineteenth century CE), listed as the *Bhaktadām-Guṇacitranī* of Bālakdās.[70] Another manuscript dated VS 1932 (1875 CE) also includes this sub-commentary, attributed to Bālakrām and dated to VS 1800 (1743 CE).[71]

Vaiṣṇavdās' *Bhaktamāl Dṛṣṭānt* is a commentary on the combined texts of Nābhādās and Priyādās, like every *Bhaktamāl* commentary I have seen. The manuscript examined by Śarmā is

67 The line of descent is: Rāmānand, Kṛṣṇadās Payahārī, Santadās, Bālakadās, Ṣem, Prahlādadās, Miṣṭarām, Bālakarām.

68 Śarmā, *Bhaktamāl aur Hindī Kāvya meṁ Uskī Paramparā*, 125-127.

69 Jhā, "Pratham Khaṇḍ (Vivecan)," 194.

70 Bālakdās, "Bhaktamāl-Ṭīkā 'Bhaktadām-Guṇacitranī'," VS Nineteenth Century , 22733, Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute - Jodhpur.

71 Narāyaṇdās and Bālakrām, "Bhaktamāl Saṁjukti Ṭīkā," VS 1932, 14459, Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute - Jodhpur.

kept in M.S. Library, Baroda. Vaiṣṇavdās follows the order of the *Bhaktirasabodhinī*, and he comments on all but thirteen *bhaktas.*[72] Vaiṣṇavdās does not sharply distinguish between the two texts on which he comments. He groups them together under a single subheading, prior to his commentary. This work gives a date of VS 1842 (1785 CE), but the composition described by Śarmā, despite being written in Braj Bhāṣā seems to follow standard Khaṛī Bolī grammar and usage, which was not in use in 1785 CE.[73] The Hindī Sāhitya Sammelan also houses an incomplete and undated copy of this text.[74] RORI Jodhpur has a manuscript of this text dated VS 1864 (1807 CE). The scribe is identified as Sāhibdās. A note added to this text indicates that it is of Kabīr Panthī origin.[75]

Lāldās' *Bhaktamāl Saṭippaṇ* is another commentary on both Nābhādās and Priyādās. It is written in both Hindi and Sanksrit in *caupāī*, *kavitta*, and *dohā* meters. The manuscript considered by Śarmā was copied by a Veṇīdās in VS 1876 (1819 CE) and is held by RORI Jodhpur. The commentary is written on all four margins of the page; the combined text of Nābhādās and Priyādās is in the middle. In order to support his opinions, the commentator cites numerous *paurāṇik* texts.[76] Lāldās seeks to clarify the meaning of the original texts then presents these authoritative texts for proof and context. Śarmā is particularly interested in what the *Bhaktamāl* tradition can tell us about the lives of various *bhakta*s, so he seems disappointed to

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72 These are: Vibhīṣaṇ, Nimbāditya, Śrīraṅg, Sumerdev, Jñāndev, Rāmdās, Jassū Swāmī, Madhavdās, Viṭṭhalavipul, Govindaswāmī, Pratāparudragajapati, Sīṁvā, and Ratanābāī. I do not know what, if anything, these figures share in common.

73 Śarmā, *Bhaktamāl aur Hindī Kāvya meṁ Uskī Paramparā*, 127-129.

74 Jhā, "Pratham Khaṇḍ (Vivecan)," 185.

75 This manuscript was copied in a place called Kāṇuṇḍ, but I am not sure where that is. Narāyaṇdās, Priyādās, and Vaiṣṇavadās, "Bhaktamāl Saṭīk Saṭippaṇ (Bhaktirasabodhinī)," VS 1864, 36166, Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute - Jodhpur.

76 Śarmā lists: Skanda Purāṇa, Gītā, Jaina Purāṇa, Viṣṇu Purāṇa, Agni Purāṇa, Bhāgavata, and Vāmana Purāṇa.

report that the *Bhaktamāl Saṭippan* does not illuminate the lives of the *bhakta*s but, rather, praises their personalities.[77]

Sevāhitdās' *Bhaktamāl kī Vacanakā Ṭīkā* is a Braj Bhāṣā prose commentary on the combined text of Nābhādās and Priyādās that Śarmā somehow located in the Śrī Rādhāvallabh Maṅdir, Palace Road, Bāṁsavāṛā (Rajasthan). It was in the possession of the *pūjārī* at the time, Śrī Durlabharām jī Bhaṭṭa. The manuscript does not mention a scribe, but according to this *pūjārī*, it was copied by his father, Śrī Vallabharām Bhaṭṭa, a disciple of Sevāhitdās. Sevāhitdās wrote this commentary in VS 1912 (1855 CE) in Rājā Abhesiṁh jī Vaṁśīdhar Maṅdir in Ḍūṅgarpur (Giripur, Rājasthān). The commentator was a disciple of Goswamī Dayānidhi, a resident of Bāṁsavāṛā, and a Dabe Brāhmaṇ of the Nāgar jāti. Rājā Abhesiṁh called Sevāhitdās to Giripur to compose this commentary. While this commentary is in prose, it contains an introduction and a conclusion in verse, using a combination of *kavitta* and *dohā* meters. Sevāhitdās comments on all verses of the *Bhaktamāl*, even those ignored in the *Bhaktirasabodhinī*. He narrates many episodes from the lives of *bhakta*s that are not found in the *Bhaktirasabodhinī*.[78]

Hulāsdās also commented on the texts of Nābhādās and Priyādās. The Hindī Sāhitya Sammelan houses a huge manuscript of 1043 pages, copied by an individual named Bhagīrāth Kāyastha in VS 1921 (1864 CE). This manuscript includes the sub-commentary of Hulāsdās, who also provides a brief *Bhaktamāl Māhātmya*. This sub-commentary expands upon the text in extensive, analytical prose. This manuscript includes several stanzas not found elsewhere, along with commentary on these lines. Jhā speculates that Hulāsdās composed these verses

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77 Śarmā, *Bhaktamāl aur Hindī Kāvya meṁ Uskī Paramparā*, 131-132.

78 Ibid., 133-135.

himself.[79]

Not all sub-commentaries on the *Bhaktamāl* and *Bhaktirasabodhinī* have an identified author. A manuscript in the Nāgarīpracāriṇī Sabhā, copied by a scribe named Lakṣmaṇdās in VS 1844 (1787 CE), includes a commentary by an unknown commentator, which provides analysis in a variety of verse meters. Jhā is dismissive of this commentary as containing only supernatural stories.[80] A manuscript in RORI Jodhpur is cataloged as having been written in VS 1780 (1723 CE), although I am not sure why. Following a common format for sub-commentaries, it treats the text of Nābhādās and Priyādās visually as a single work and prints them together in the middle of the page, while the commentary, in slightly smaller lettering, runs along the top and bottom of the page.[81] I have seen two manuscripts with sub-commentaries in the Vrindavan Research Institute. One, dated to VS 1879 (1822 CE) includes an unidentified sub-commentary.[82] Another was copied by an individual named Nandarām Brāhmaṇ in VS 1881 (1824 CE). This manuscript was written in Vrindavan under the sponsorship of Vaiṣṇavavāsudev-ji.[83] There is also a relatively recent manuscript in the Allahabad Museum, dated VS 1929 (1872 CE), that includes a very extensive sub-commentary by an unidentified author.[84]

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79 Jhā, "Pratham Khaṇḍ (Vivecan)," 185-187.

80 Ibid., 188-189.

81 Narāyaṇdās and Priyādās, "Bhaktamāl Saṭīk," n.d., 16869, Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute - Jodhpur.

82 Priyādāsa, "Bhaktirasabodhinī," VS 1879, 4375, Vrindavan Research Institute.

83 Priyādāsa and Nandarāma Brāhmaṇa (scribe, commentator), "Bhaktirasabodhinī," VS 1881, 4242, Vrindavan Research Institute.

84 "Bhaktamāl Saṭīk," VS 1929, 618, Allahabad Museum.

Popularity and Regional Diffusion

The overview of *Bhaktamāl* manuscripts provided above permits several observations. The *Bhaktamāl* was a popular text during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This popularity was not local but is evident across north India. This popularity was not restricted to one or two *sampradāy*s; rather, several saw the *Bhaktamāl* as an important work, and Priyādās plays a crucial role in the transmission of the *Bhaktamāl* tradition. I expand on each of these observations below, beginning with the *Bhaktamāl*'s widespread popularity.

The popularity of the *Bhaktamāl* is evident in the number of manuscripts that survive. The preceding section refers to approximately 100 manuscripts that I have either seen or that are described in the secondary literature. This represents only a fraction of the total number of preserved manuscripts. As noted above, Jhā, in 1978, reported that hundreds of *Bhaktamāl* manuscripts exist throughout India but complained that many of these manuscripts are unavailable to researchers. Many more, surely, are in private hands or have been lost or destroyed.

This popularity is not limited to any particular locality. Today, these manuscripts can be found in archives across north India, as well as in England. Very few of these manuscripts report where they were copied, and in most cases, the archives have not recorded the origin of their manuscripts. When this information is available, I have reported it above. What little evidence there is indicates a wide distribution across north India, including Rajasthan, Braj, present-day Haryana, and Bihar.

The *Bhaktamāl*, then, received a wide distribution prior to the arrival of print in north India. Such diffusion should not be entirely surprising. Edward C. Dimock, Jr. and Tony K. Stewart describe manuscripts of Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja's *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* as spreading across a

wide geographic area with remarkable consistency. The holiness of this text for Gauṛīya Vaishnavas as well as the structure of the text itself made such consistency possible. Dimock and Stewart characterize the early scribal copies of the text as mass-produced and compare its power to unite a diverse community to the role attributed to the press by Benedict Anderson in defining the imagined community of the nation.[85] In the case of such a text, it is unsurprising that the consistency of print editions would largely continue to be maintained by a vigilant community.[86] A detailed treatment of textual drift in the *Bhaktamāl*'s manuscript tradition is beyond the scope of this study, but it is clear that the *Bhaktamāl* was not constrained in the same manner as the *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*. Nābhādās' text does not provide the same checks against interpolation as Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja's, and the *Bhaktamāl* does not play the same role as the *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* for a single *sampradāy*. Indeed, as we will see below, the *Bhaktamāl* has been claimed by a variety of *sampradāy*s.

The wide distribution of manuscripts in pre-colonial South Asia is not unusual. Sheldon Pollock argues that South Asian literary culture deliberately rejected the technology of printing. He coins the term "script-mercantilism" to discuss the robust world of pre-print publishing in South Asia. Citing a variety of examples, Pollock argues that this was a literary culture "for which an entirely adequate and appropriate technology had been developed and maintained for centuries." For Pollock, script-mercantilism has had a greater impact than print-capitalism in India.[87] The technology of print may not have represented as sharp a break in South Asia as in Europe. However, the case in Europe may not be as clear as is commonly

85 Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*; Edward C. Dimock and Tony K. Stewart, *Caitanya Caritāmṛta of Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja: A Translation and Commentary* (Cambridge, Mass: Dept. of Sanskrit and Indian Studies, Harvard University, 1999), 53.

86 Dimock and Stewart, *Caitanya Caritāmṛta of Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja*, 57.

87 Pollock, "Literary Culture and Manuscript Culture in Precolonial India," 85-91.

believed.[88]

Through which channels did the *Bhaktamāl* achieve this geographic diffusion? Two possibilities seem likely: sectarian structures and royal courts. In either of these cases, which are by no means mutually exclusive, diffusion would have happened through a literary culture that combined manuscripts and performance. The allusive style of the *Bhaktamāl* suggests that it would be an ideal text for recitation and exposition by a *kathāvācak*, and Priyādās himself is described in legend as *Bhaktamāl* reciter.[89] It seems clear that during the nineteenth century, at any rate, there was a tradition of *Bhaktamāl* recitation.[90] *Kathāvācak*s were not necessarily embedded in a *sāmpradāyik* context, but these these expository traditions considered alongside sectarian commentaries, considered below, indicate that the *Bhaktamāl* may have spread primarily through *sāmpradāyik* transmission.[91]

While such avenues of transmission seem likely, royal courts offer another possibility. Allison Busch has highlighted the role of Mughal imperial and sub-imperial courts in patronizing Braj Bhāṣā literature, particularly in the *rīti* mode.[92] Could the *Bhaktamāl* have been recited and copied in a courtly context? Nābhādās celebrates kings who are generous to *bhakta*s, and Priyādās praises royal patrons to an even greater degree. Priyādās also demonstrates an astute awareness of the Mughal context, for example portraying Akbar as a wise patron of bhakti.

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88 I consider the impact of print on the *Bhaktamāl* tradition in chapter five.

89 R.D. Gupta, "Priyā Dās, Author of the Bhaktirasabodhinī," 67-68.

90 Ibid., 67.

91 For more on *kathāvācak*s see Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text*, 113-247.

92 Allison Busch, "The Anxiety of Innovation: The Practice of Literary Science in the Hindi/Riti Tradition," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 24, no. 2 (2004): 45-59.

The archival evidence does not, unfortunately, allow us to trace the institutional channels of the *Bhaktamāl*'s diffusion with any confidence. A close and systematic examination of *Bhaktamāl* manuscripts may reveal some insights, but such a study is beyond the scope of this thesis. Certainly, copies of the *Bhaktamāl* have found their way into both sectarian and royal archives, but their path into these archives has not been recorded.

During the eighteenth century, the *Bhaktamāl* was a popular text over much of north India. It was by no means the only text to achieve such distribution. Indeed, such a capacity has been identified as characteristic of pre-colonial South Asian literary cultures. The avenues by which the *Bhaktamāl* achieved this popularity are unclear, but both sectarian formations and royal courts may have played a role.

Sectarian Diffusion

This geographic diversity is matched by diversity in terms of *sampradāy*. The *Bhaktamāl* and *Bhaktirasabodhinī* are Rāmānandī and Gauṛīya compositions, respectively, but in addition to these two communities, Rādhāvallabhīs, Nimbārkīs, Rāmasnehīs, Dādū Panthīs and Kabīr Panthīs all copied, commented on, or composed texts modeled on the *Bhaktamāl*. Again, the evidence here is limited since most manuscripts do not record the *sāmpradāyik* affiliation, or even the name, of the scribe. It is tempting to see the *Bhaktamāl*'s sectarian diffusion as the enactment of Nābhādās' vision of a supra-sectarian bhakti community, but as we will see below, the narrowly sectarian concerns of some of these texts complicate such an understanding.

The *Bhaktamāl* has largely remained within a Vaishnava context, but its appeal to Kabīr Panthīs and Dādū Panthīs challenges an understanding of the *Bhaktamāl* as a strictly Vaishnava text. The Kabīr Panth can be understood as Vaishnava only in the broadest possible sense.

Their Kabīr, who is known through the *Bījak*, does refer to Ram, but only to mean God in general, not the avatar of Vishnu and husband of Sita. He completely ignores Krishna, at least as a deity worthy of veneration.[93] Similarly, the Dādū Panth focuses its devotion on the guru and generally conceives of God in a *nirguṇ* manner.[94] The *Bhaktamāl* tradition spanned the divide between Vaishnava *sampradāys* and *sant panths*, suggesting, perhaps, that this distinction was not as strong as it has been understood to have been.[95]

Sāmpradāyik affiliation does not automatically lead to an obviously sectarian agenda. The commentaries described by Śarmā generally match the *Bhaktamāl* in terms of expansiveness and inclusiveness. Bālakrām, Vaiṣṇavdās, and Lāldās all partake of the *Bhaktamāl*'s ecumenical flavor. Śarmā notes that Sevāhitdās, despite his Rādhāvallabhī affiliation, betrays no sectarian bias.[96] Nābhādās' vision of a broad community united by bhakti seems alive and well in the manuscript tradition. Clearly, such a vision had an appeal beyond Nābhādās' particular *sampradāy.* Nābhādās was not alone in imagining this community.

While Nābhādās may have succeeded in planting the seeds of a united bhakti community, this vision did not remain unchallenged, even within the *Bhaktamāl* literary

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93 John Stratton Hawley, "The Received Kabir: Beginnings to Bly," in *Three Bhakti Voices* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 269-270. For more on the Kabīr Panth and the *Bījak* of Kabīr see Linda Beth Hess and Shukdev Singh, *The Bījak of Kabir* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

94 *Nirguṇ* (without attributes) refers to formless God while *saguṇ* (with attributes) refers to God with form. In early modern north India, this distinction was, at most, understood to be a genre distinction rather than a theological or ontological one. On the mixing of *nirguṇī* and *saguṇī bhajans* in early Dādu Panthī anthologies, see Dalpat Rajpurohit, "The Dadupanth and Sarvangi Literature" (presented at the Tenth International Bhakti Conference: Early Modern Literatures in North India, Miercurea Ciuc, Romania, July 22, 2009).

95 For a suggestion that the *nirguṇ/saguṇ* distinction is anachronistic when applied to early modern north Indian bhakti literature, see John Stratton Hawley, "The Nirguṇ/Saguṇ Distinction," in *Three Bhakti Voices* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 70-86. For an exploration of all this distinction developed in the literary historiography of north India, see Tyler Williams, "'Nirgun' and 'Sagun' in the Discourse of Literary Historiography" (presented at the Tenth International Bhakti Conference: Early Modern Literatures in North India, Miercurea Ciuc, Romania, July 22, 2009).

96 Śarmā, *Bhaktamāl aur Hindī Kāvya meṁ Uskī Paramparā*, 124-135.

tradition. In Vṛndāvandās' *Bhaktanāmāvalī* or *Vaiṣṇavavandanā*, we can see the *Bhaktamāl* tradition bridging boundaries of language while becoming narrowly sectarian. This work is fully bilingual. It was composed in Braj Bhāṣā, apparently for the benefit of the Vaishnava community of Vrindavan, and translated into Bengali. Śarmā describes this work even though he excludes all other translations from his study. This work is included, perhaps, due to its bilingual nature. This *Bhaktanāmāvalī* praises about seventy *bhakta*s. It contains 156 stanzas in sixteen pages. Twelve stanzas are in *soraṭhā* meter; the remaining 144 are *dohā*s. This work only mentions the names of *bhakta*s. It provides no information about their lives or literature. Vṛndāvandās did not provide a date for his *Bhaktanāmāvalī*. It was published in VS 2006 (1949 CE) by Bābā Kṛṣṇadās of Mathura. Bābā Kṛṣṇadās has published two other works by this author, *Premabhakticandrikā* and *Vilāp-kusumāṅjali*. He regards *Bhaktanāmāvalī* as Vṛndāvandās' final work. Śarmā cites Kṛṣṇadās on the date of this composition. On the basis of internal evidence, *Premabhakticandrikā* can be dated to VS 1813 (1756 CE) and *Vilāp-kusumāṅjali* to VS 1814 (1757 CE). It is reasonable, then, to accept VS 1814 (1757 CE) as an approximate date of composition for *Bhaktanāmāvalī*. This *Bhaktanāmāvalī* is a firmly sectarian work. It begins by praising Kṛṣṇa Caitanya and his descendants. It lacks the expansiveness and non-sectarian feel of Nābhādās' *Bhaktamāl* or even Priyādās' *Bhaktirasabodhinī*. Vṛndāvandās praises only Gauṛīya *bhakta*s and individuals associated with Caitanya during his lifetime, such as his parents and guru.[97] While Priyādās also praises Caitanya in his opening verse, he does not limit his praise to Gauṛīya figures or even focus on these *bhakta*s in particular. The main force of *Bhaktamāl* tradition may be to transcend sectarian divisions, but even such an inclusive vision is vulnerable to particularistic appropriation.

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97 Ibid., 124-125.

Should such a narrowly sectarian vision be considered part of the *Bhaktamāl* tradition at all? True, the *Bhaktanāmāvalī* praises a set of saints and has a generic relation to Nābhādās' text, but the *Bhaktamāl*'s uniqueness lies in part in its inclusiveness. Nābhādās did not simply compose a collection of hagiographies; he crafted a *mālā* which presents a unified vision. Does a text which limits itself to celebrating a particular *sampradāy* still fall within the bounds of the *Bhaktamāl* tradition? Perhaps, or perhaps not, but it does not take such a radical transformation to bring the *Bhaktamāl* in line with sectarian concerns. One technique to modify the boundaries of Nābhādās' *mālā* would be to add or substract *chappay*s. Jhā finds both of these phenomena in the manuscripts he collected for his critical edition.[98] A closer analysis of these manuscripts may reveal whether these excisions and interpolations reflect particular concerns.

There is a level on which it seems that Nābhādās' vision was triumphant: the *Bhaktamāl*'s charisma imagined into being a new kind of community that spanned the boundaries of diverse *sampradāy*s. On another level, however, it seems like the *Bhaktamāl* simply provides a new platform from which to launch the polemics of various *sampradāy*s. Both of these positions have much truth in them. The *Bhaktamāl* offers a powerful vision of an expansive devotional community. It also, from at least the time of its first commentary, provides a location for debates about the nature of this community. These debates constitute the *Bhaktamāl* tradition. Nābhādās' vision is powerful in itself, but his text has always served as a not-quite-blank slate for different conceptions of the community of *bhakta*s.

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98 Jhā, "Pratham Khaṇḍ (Vivecan)," 181-251.

The Role of Priyādās

Within this tradition, however, the central figure may not even be Nābhādās. The crucial role played by Priyādās in the *Bhaktamāl* tradition cannot be underestimated. Of the hundred or so texts surveyed above, all but seven include his commentary, and only one of these manuscripts was written after 1723 CE. Priyādās is the only individual to comment directly on Nābhādās' *mūl* text on its own. All known subsequent commentators take the combined text of the *Bhaktamāl* and the *Bhaktirasabodhinī* as the object of their analysis. The *Bhaktamāl* tradition seems unanimously to endorse Priyādās' claim that his commentary is indistinguishable from the *mūl* text. The entire stream of *Bhaktamāl* tradition flows through Priyādās, and he seems to be largely responsible for the popularity of this text.

Priyādās deliberately sought to blur the boundary between his words and Nābhādās'. As we saw in chapter three, Priyādās claims a direct connection to Nābhādās. He asserts that Nābhādās speaks through him and that not even a connoisseur can distinguish between their texts. Despite this claim of equivalence, Priyādās does not simply expand upon Nābhādās' message, he modifies it in several significant ways. As I noted in Chapter Three, scholars have oftentimes repeated this traditional understanding. The shadow cast by Priyādās is long. The failure to distinguish between the perspectives of Nābhādās and Priyādās has resulted in what Heidi Pauwels, following M.A. Bernstein, calls "backshadowing."[99] Nābhādās stands in multiple shadows. The first is cast by the eighteenth-century Priyādās, the second by twentieth-century scholars. In many ways, Nābhādās can be seen as an example of successful community building. Certainly, this dissertation argues that the *Bhaktamāl* tradition is central to the nineteenth-century consolidation of modern Hinduism, but it is precisely this success that may

99 Pauwels, "Hagiography and Community Formation," 4.

occlude our attempts at understanding Nābhādās on his own terms.

Priyādās succeeded in establishing himself as the central figure in the *Bhaktamāl* tradition. Priyādās makes no secret of the fact that he wishes those who hear his words to conflate these words with those of Nābhādās. Such a conflation helps to obscure Nābhādās' vision behind Priyādās'. By writing a commentary on the *Bhaktamāl*, Priyādās has placed his own stamp firmly on this tradition.

Conclusion

Nābhādās began the *Bhaktamāl* tradition, but Priyādās' commentary may be the more influential text. In his almost telegraphic verse, Nābhādās imagined into being a new kind of devotional community. Priyādās endorsed Nābhādās' vision but redefined the nature of the bhakti which bound this community together. Priyādās claimed that his commentary was as authoritative as the words of Nābhādās, and subsequent tradition seems to accept this claim. Nābhādās' vision of a supra-sectarian religious community has been realized, at least in part, in the adoption of his *mālā* across north India and by a number of *sampradāy*s.

The next chapter explores the role of early mass printing in shaping the *Bhaktamāl* tradition. Mass printing came to South Asia during the nineteenth century, and the *Bhaktamāl*, which would be among the first Hindi-language works to find its way into print, could not escape the impact of this technology. This impact, however, may not be the one we have come to expect from print.

Chapter Five: Print, Empire, and Traditionalism

> There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. And just as such a document is not free of barbarism, barbarism taints also the manner in which it was transmitted from one owner to another.
>
> – Walter Benjamin[1]

Introduction

In the preceding chapters, we have traced the development of the *Bhaktamāl* tradition as it is recorded in manuscripts. Nābhādās began this tradition with his widely inclusive garland, and Priyādās accepted this garland while modifying the logic that bound its flowers together. Extant manuscripts of the *Bhaktamāl* and its commentaries confirm the influence of Priyādās' re-imagining of this bhakti community. He is, in many ways, the central figure in this tradition. During the nineteenth century, the *Bhaktamāl* tradition, previously defined through manuscripts and performance, would be transformed by print and by the colonial context that brought print technology to South Asia.

This chapter begins with a consideration of approaches to the study of print in early modern Europe and in Asia. Previously, historians of the book tended to emphasize the role of print in establishing fixity, uniformity, and wider dissemination of ideas. Such emphases remain influential, particularly in popular discussions of more recent advances in information technology. More recent scholarship, however, has argued that these qualities are not inherent in the technology of print but are a result of the particular uses to which this technology has been put. As we shall see, the evidence provided by nineteenth-century print *Bhaktamāl*s supports those who stress cultural contingency over technological determinism. Print did not

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1 Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 256.

set the *Bhaktamāl* tradition on a straight line toward fixity and uniformity. It did, however, transform the *Bhaktamāl* tradition. Print enabled new readerships to engage with the *Bhaktamāl*; it allowed colonial administrators to create and disseminate knowledge about Indian society; and it established the conditions in which nationalist articulations of a broad Hindu community could take hold. As we saw in chapter four, the *Bhaktamāl* had already been widely distributed prior to the arrival of print. During the nineteenth century, print would bring the *Bhaktamāl* into new contexts and in so doing transform this tradition.

The Impact of Print

During the past several decades, the history of the book has grown into a vibrant field, especially in Europe. This literature is too vast to be considered in any detail here, but the extensive scholarship on print in early modern Europe offers some insights on how we might approach the study of print in South Asia. I consider several prominent studies of early modern European print in order to highlight how they might yield insights into the *Bhaktamāl* tradition in the nineteenth century. Then, following a brief overview of the study of print in East Asia, I consider the nascent field of the history of the book in South Asia. While the output of this field remains limited, it suggests fruitful approaches and provides necessary context.

Print in Early Modern Europe

An important early history of the impact of the printed book in Europe is Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin's *The Coming of the Book: The Impact of Printing 1450-1800*. This book combines technological, commercial, and intellectual history in order "to prove that the printed book was one of the most effective means of mastery over the whole world."[2] Febvre

2 Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, *The Coming of the Book: The Impact of Printing 1450-1800*, ed. Geoffrey

and Martin present the printed book as central to the basic changes in European society that began during the fifteenth century, but they acknowledge that this impact was neither instant nor consistent over time.[3] They describe the influence of this new technology on cultural, religious, and scientific developments. While they allow for exceptions, Febvre and Martin emphasize the rapid and revolutionary changes brought about by the arrival of print in early modern Europe.

Febvre and Martin emphasize the technological developments that allowed for the invention of print, but they also describe the very gradual development of standardized books. Early printers were not innovators in terms of form or style. The earliest incunabula looked exactly like manuscripts. Over time, now familiar features of the standard book were introduced. Title pages, for example, emerged between 1475 and 1480 and became ubiquitous by the end of the fifteenth century. Early title pages, however, were largely decorative. Around 1530, the title page assumed its present form and included title, author, and publisher's address. In about 1640, publishers began to concentrate bibliographic information on a purely typographical page following an illustrated frontispiece with illuminated title. Since then, the title page has more or less followed this form.[4]

Febvre and Martin are not technological determinists, but they do not dismiss the important role played by technology "in the revolutionary changes that took place during the period of the Renaissance and of the Reformation."[5] Print gave books a scale enabling an impact that manuscripts could never achieve. By 1500, as many as twenty million books had

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Nowell-Smith and David Wooton, trans. David Gerard (London: NLB, 1976), 11.

3 Ibid., 10.

4 Ibid., 77-86.

5 Ibid., 248.

been printed. Popular devotional literature and Latin works benefited disproportionately from the arrival of the press. Most books printed before 1500 were religious, an unsurprising fact given that most readers were clergy. Still, devotional literature found a substantial audience, and one of the first effects of the press was to amplify the reach of "works of popular piety."[6] Only about twenty-two percent of books printed in the fifteenth century were in the vernacular; the large majority were in Latin, and many, if not most, vernacular works were translations of Latin texts.[7] The record of early printed books seems to indicate that no immediate cultural change resulted from the introduction of print, but selections had to be made as to which of the many thousands of medieval manuscripts to print. Printing thus starts us down the road to "our present society of mass consumption and standardisation." Some books were rescued from oblivion while others were lost or nearly lost. The selection criteria of early publishers cannot be called humanist, but their efforts did aid humanism. Publishers made good editions of classical texts widely available, and the mass production of contemporary texts created the professional author and made authors aware of their individual reputations.[8]

Print played an ambiguous role in spreading scholarship and advancing new ideas. It helped scholars in some fields, but it cannot be said to have hastened the acceptance of new ideas. Rather, by popularizing long-held beliefs, the effect may have been the opposite.[9] Generally, religious works did not circulate outside circles of educated clerics and humanists until about 1520. This situation changed abruptly in Germany in 1517 when, for the first time

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6 Ibid., 248-252.

7 Ibid., 256.

8 Ibid., 260-261.

9 Ibid., 278.

in history, there was a propaganda campaign conducted by means of the press. Febvre and Martin reject the thesis that Protestantism is the child of the printing press, but they emphasize the importance of the press to Luther and Calvin in their attacks on Rome and the dissemination of new doctrines.[10] Luther's writings are the first example of a truly popular literature with a mass readership.[11]

While Febvre and Martin offer many caveats and provide rich texture, they present the impact of the book as sudden and unprecedented. For them, the printed book "arrived" during the first half of the sixteenth century. By 1550, manuscripts had largely gone out of use, except by scholars for special purposes. During the early sixteenth century, the proportion of religious books declined while the proportion of works of classical learning increased. For Febvre and Martin, "these are the years of the triumph of what has come to be called the humanist spirit."[12]

The Coming of the Book is a now classic introduction to the arrival of print, but Elizabeth Eisenstein lucidly argues for a larger role for the printed book. *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe*, an abridgment of her 1979 multi-volume masterpiece *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, stresses the role of print in establishing fixity, uniformity, and a wider dissemination of ideas. The first part of this book explores "the emergence of print culture in the West." In the late fifteenth century, the site of the reproduction of written materials shifted from the copyist's desk to the printer's workshop. Eisenstein acknowledges that there were limits to early print technology but cautions against exaggerating these limits. These limits do

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10 Ibid., 288-289.

11 Ibid., 295.

12 Ibid., 262-265.

mean that diffusion, rather than standardization, was the chief result of the arrival of printing.[13] She notes that we should be careful to avoid tracing modern standard editions back too far but insists that "[e]arly print culture is sufficiently uniform to permit us to measure its diversity." It is more difficult to describe pre-print literate culture. The wild diversity of output and the lack of typical procedure make it difficult to set the stage for the coming of print.[14] Eisenstein insists that the shift to printing was sudden. There was an abrupt increase in the quantity of books during the second half of the fifteenth century. Although, Eisenstein admits that it is difficult to measure how abrupt this transition was or to describe the immediate impact on literary production.[15] Eisenstein emphasizes the major features of the new print culture: it enabled wider dissemination of books and ideas;[16] it led to increased rationalization, codification, and cataloging;[17] the preservative powers of print enabled greater fixity and allowed for cumulative change and correction;[18] and print amplified socio-linguistic divisions and reinforced stereotypes.[19]

The second part of *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe* connects the coming of print to other developments. Print was not responsible for the humanist impulse of the Renaissance, but it made possible the systematization and diffusion of what otherwise would

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13 Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 5.

14 Ibid., 8-9.

15 Ibid., 19.

16 Ibid., 42-60.

17 Ibid., 64-73.

18 Ibid., 84.

19 Ibid., 88-90.

have been a local classical revival.[20] Eisenstein argues that printing was both a precondition of and a precipitant for the Reformation. Its role went beyond simple dissemination of religious ideas. In particular, she argues that the interests and outlook of printers was one of the factors shaping the Reformation.[21] Eisenstein argues that printing, rather than being a hindrance to the rise of modern science, made modern science possible by creating new avenues for discoveries to be recorded and confirmed.[22] Eisenstein consistently argues that print had a revolutionary impact in nearly every aspect of society. While she is not a technological determinist, Eisenstein presents print technology as an independent force that seems to function without human agency.

Adrian Johns insists on placing human agency at the center of the history of the book. In *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making*, he argues that what we often regard as essential elements of print, such as veracity, are more contingent than has been generally acknowledged. Johns argues that the stabilizing effects of print may have less to do with the press itself than with the uses to which the press has been put.[23] Seeking to bring the cultural and the social back to the center of our attention, Johns advocates for a new, historical understanding of print. He calls for closer attention to the labors of those involved in printing, publishing, and reading as well as to their representations of printing. We should, Johns argues, take seriously their fears that print was a destabilizing force, which threatened to disrupt civility. For Johns, there was no single print culture. Rather, there were many print

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20 Ibid., 125-145.

21 Ibid., 151-167.

22 Ibid., 185-212.

23 Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 2-5.

cultures, and they were all local in nature.[24]

Johns challenges the notion of a "printing revolution:" "The 'printing revolution' as we now know it is thus the product of a later, political revolution. It was a retrospective creation, forged with tools selectively chosen from the arguments created by eighteenth-century historians of the press for other purposes. It was designed to serve as the indispensable cusp separating Descartes, Bacon, Newton, and modernity from corruption, superstition, ignorance, and despotism."[25] Johns convincingly argues that the notion of a "printing revolution" is a later, ideologically loaded development. He notes that the idea of the "scientific revolution" has a similar origin: "Both may be traced back to the Enlightenment, but both solidified only in the mid-nineteenth century."[26] Johns' approach has been influential, and more recent studies of early modern printing have eschewed the technological focus of Eisenstein in favor of a triangle recognizing the roles of authors, printers and publishers, and readers in various locales in early modern Europe.[27]

Print in Asia

The history of printing is not limited to Europe, and printing in East Asia predates Gutenberg by several centuries. Tobie Meyer-Fong, writing in the *Journal of Asian Studies*, has helpfully provided an overview of the state of scholarship on the history of the book in late imperial China. As is the case with early modern Europe, this field has shifted away from "its

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24 Ibid., 28-30.

25 Ibid., 374.

26 Ibid., 378.

27 On Renaissance Italy, see Brian Richardson, *Printing, Writers and Readers in Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1999). On Protestantism in early modern England, see Ian Green, *Print and Protestantism in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

origins in the history of technology" and moved toward an "increasing engagement with social and cultural questions." In recent years, scholars have given increasing attention to the Chinese book "as a source for social and cultural histories." Meyer-Fong observes that scholars working outside of China, in particular, have de-emphasized technological developments and noted the longterm dominance of woodblock printing over movable type and the coexistence of printed books and manuscripts until the twentieth century. Such shifts mean that scholars now tend to concentrate on ordinary, popular editions rather than collectors' items and that they "deliberately call attention to formerly neglected periods, genres, and social groups."[28] Historians of the book in China seem to have followed the same trajectory as historians of the book in Europe. They previously treated print as an autonomous, technological force, which affected society without itself being affected. They now embed the study of printed books within the broader study of culture and society.

Compared to the study of the book in early modern Europe and late imperial China, the history of the book in South Asia remains in its infancy. A major contribution to this still nascent field in Abhijit Gupta and Swapan Chakravorty's edited volume *Print Areas: Book History in India*.[29] In their introduction to this volume, Gupta and Chakravorty introduce the new field of book history in India. They find the term "book history" to be "somewhat unsatisfactory, since it is limited neither to books nor to historians," and they see the field as retrospective, since it incorporates a variety of "hitherto marginalised scholarship." For Gupta and Chakravorty, book history is the history of documents and those involved in the "production,

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28 Tobie Meyer-Fong, "The Printed World: Books, Publishing Culture, and Society in Late Imperial China," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 66, no. 3 (August 2007): 787-790.

29 Abhijit Gupta and Swapan Chakravorty, eds., *Print Areas: Book History in India* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004).

transmission, and reception" of documents. Such a field is "impossibly large," but it is limited by its focus on materiality and by the ephemeral nature of many material documents.[30] While book history has become more prominent and international, it remains dominated by the study of European book history.[31] Gupta and Chakravorty observe that the printed book has a long but spotty history in India. The Portuguese brought the printing press to Goa "a century after Gutenberg, but it took almost two hundred years longer to reach Bengal." Printing in Goa ceased "around 1674 and did not reappear before 1821. Yet in Bengal the Baptists in Serampore alone printed 212,000 volumes in 40 languages between 1801 and 1832."[32] With several of the contributors to this volume exploring the role of print in shaping the modern languages and literatures of India, Gupta and Chakravorty's volume serves as an important milestone in the emergence of book history in India as a distinct field of study.

Ulrike Stark's *An Empire of Books: The Naval Kishore Press and the Diffusion of the Printed Word in Colonial India* advances scholarship in this field by offering a closely detailed study of the world of nineteenth-century publishing in north India. Stark convincingly argues that publishers such as Munshi Naval Kishore (1836-1895) were not exclusively commercial but actively engaged with the intellectual, social, and cultural concerns of their day. Naval Kishore "participated in the revival of Hindu traditions while acting as one of the foremost promoters of Islamic learning and preservers of the Arabic and Indo-Persian literary heritage in the subcontinent."[33] He founded his eponymous press in 1858, and Stark's work therefore focuses

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30 Abhijit Gupta and Swapan Chakravorty, "Under the Sign of the Book: Introducing Book History in India," in *Print Areas* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004), 1-2.

31 Ibid., 4-5.

32 Ibid., 11.

33 Ulrike Stark, *An Empire of Books: The Naval Kishore Press and the Diffusion of the Printed Word in Colonial India* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2007), 1-2.

on the second half of the nineteenth century, when print became commercialized in north India. She writes, "commercialization describes the transformation of the printed text from artifact and cultural asset into a cheap and easily available consumer commodity. As such, it is intimately linked to wider economic, social, and cultural shifts induced by colonialism – notably, the dawning of the age of industrial capitalism, the spread of colonial literacy and formal education, and the rise and economic empowerment of an Indian educated middle class."[34] Stark demonstrates that "state control over the publishing trade happened via three powerful mechanisms: licensing, censorship, and patronage." She argues that colonialism should not be treated simply as an "oppressive structure" but as a transactional relationship that can be seen, in this case, in the interface between state and publisher.[35] Stark has much to say on the history of Hindu and Urdu publishing, the relationship between publishers and the colonial state, and Naval Kishore Press, and I will return to these topics throughout this chapter. Stark offers a compelling model for understanding the complex technological, political, and social dynamics that shaped nineteenth-century north India.

Indian Publishers and the *Bhaktamāl*

Early Print Editions

The earliest print edition of the *Bhaktamāl* was published by the College of Fort William as part of William Price's grammar. I will discuss this edition in detail below, but here I consider early Indian editions of the *Bhaktamāl*. Not long after the publication of Price's grammar, Indian publishers issued editions of the *Bhaktamāl* in a variety of languages. As we

34 Ibid., 3-4.

35 Ibid., 24.

shall see below, these editions do not represent a sharp break with tradition; they serve to amplify the differences already present within the manuscript traditions. In the case of the *Bhaktamāl*, at least, we see a remarkable continuity between manuscripts and the first print editions.

The work of scholars such as Eisenstein, along with popular understandings, would lead us to expect the introduction of print to bring with it a sharp departure from earlier manuscript traditions.[36] Robert Darnton, however, in his essay "History of Reading," has argued that the initial impact of print on reading was probably "less revolutionary than is commonly believed." He notes that for "the first half-century of its existence, the printed book continued to be an imitation of the manuscript book. No doubt it was read by the public in the same way."[37] Darnton's essay suggests that, at least in its early stages, the introduction of print would not fundamentally transform manuscript traditions, and the *Bhaktamāl* tradition seems to follow this expectation.

I do not wish to suggest that the widespread introduction of print in north India during the early nineteenth century simply recapitulates the arrival of print in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Europe. Chakravorty, writing on Bengal, has noted that "the social contest among classes and regions for cultural dominance that fueled the drive toward standardisation was complicated by the colonial interests of the sponsors of early local printing – outsiders who brought the new technology with them."[38] The association of print technology with outsiders and the colonial state creates a substantially different context than was the case in

36 See above.

37 Robert Darnton, "History of Reading," in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, ed. Peter Burke (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 160.

38 Swapan Chakravorty, "Purity and Print: A Note on Nineteenth-Century Bengali Prose," in *Print Areas* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004), 209.

Europe.

Moreover, the manuscript culture that preceded the widespread adoption of print in South Asia was not at all identical to medieval European manuscript culture. Sheldon Pollock, in his article "Literary Culture and Manuscript Culture in Precolonial India," argues that the impact of manuscript culture and the rise of literacy could be argued to be more influential than the arrival of print in South Asia. He identifies two key shifts in South Asian literary culture prior to the arrival of colonialism and, along with it, print. These are the development of writing systems during the third century BCE and the vernacular revolution during the early centuries of the second millennium CE. The history of writing in South Asia has been contested, but Pollock identifies a "new consensus on the invention of writing," which places this invention around 260 BCE, during the reign of Aśoka. There are two implications that follow from this consensus: one is that all pre-Aśokan literary traditions were completely oral; the second is that *kāvya* – written literature – is a new cultural form in post-Aśokan India. Pollock does not deny or downplay the continuing importance of orality in performance or "a continuing vitality of primary oral poetry,"[39] but insists that "from the moment writing was invented the *literary* culture that resulted, the culture of kavya, became indissolubly connected with manuscript culture, so much so that the history of the one becomes unintelligible without taking into account the history of the other."[40]

Pollock distinguishes between *literization*, "the committing of local language to *documentary*, non-literary, written form," and *literarization*, "the development of literary

39 Primary orality refers to the orality of cultures untouched by literacy. It is very difficult for literate people to discuss these cultures without unconsciously referencing writing, using terms such as "oral literature." Walter Ong pithily observes, "Thinking of oral tradition or a heritage of oral performance, genres and styles as 'oral literature' is rather like thinking of horses as automobiles without wheels." Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Methuen, 1982), 5-15.

40 Pollock, "Literary Culture and Manuscript Culture in Precolonial India," 77-81.

expressivity in accordance with the norms of a dominant literary culture." He says that there is a time lag between these two forms of vernacularization so that documentary uses of the vernacular precede literary uses. This interval, Pollock suggests, may be explained by a relationship between culture and political power. Regionalization of politics may have required a regionalization of culture. Pollock also suggests that South Asia has undergone not one but two vernacular revolutions. The first was a "*cosmopolitan*-vernacular" revolution that brought the forms and standards of cosmopolitan, Sanskrit literary culture into regional languages. The second "*regional*-vernacular" revolution, characterized by figures such as Kabīr, "rejected the values and the very fact of manuscript culture."[41]

Pollock argues that South Asian literary culture made a deliberate decision to reject the technology of printing. Vernacular standardization was achieved not through print but through "forms of philological knowledge" that preceded printing. Pollock introduces the term "script-mercantilism" as a kind of replacement for "print-capitalism" to discuss the robust world of pre-print publishing in South Asia.[42] Indeed, Pollock, citing a variety of examples, argues that this was a literary culture "for which an entirely adequate and appropriate technology had been developed and maintained for centuries."[43] For Pollock, commonly cited effects of "the print-capitalism of modernity" such as "the obliteration of oral text

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41 Ibid., 81-83.

42 "Script-mercantilism" is Pollock's term for pre-print publishing as conducted by courts, religious institutions, and eventually commercial concerns. Pollock observes that, "we have no good accounts of the pre-print publishing industry of south Asia, least of all of such core features of manuscript culture as the conditions of manuscript diffusion. For very few texts do we have any sense of the pace or networks of manuscript distribution, or how language and genre affected these." Ibid., 87-88.

43 "This manuscript culture was enormously productive and efficient. The more than thirty million manuscripts estimated still to be extant (eight million in Rajasthan alone), along with many hundreds of thousands of inscriptions, represent the merest fraction of what must once have been produced. (Consider that for all of Greek literature, classical, Hellenistic, and Byzantine, some thirty thousand manuscripts are extant – a figure that the Indic materials thus exceed by a factor of 1000.)" Ibid., 87.

performance, the privatization of reading and the hyper-commodification of the book" cannot be said to have had "in India anything like the historic impact, in depth and extant, of pre-modern script-mercantilism."[44]

Stark provides an overview of the history of printing in north India. Jesuits set up the first press in Goa in 1556, but there were no presses in north India until the very end of the eighteenth century. It is difficult to locate sources on early printing in Hindi. Stark explains, "one needs to resort to the holdings of libraries, private collections, and other bibliographic source material and from these deduce a history." The first Nāgarī books appeared in Europe, from 1625, and the first books in Hindi and Urdu were published in Calcutta. In 1800, the Baptist Mission at Serampore and the College of Fort William were established. Disputing Indian critics, who "have tended to dismiss the importance of Fort William College texts in the development of modern Hindi and Urdu literature," Stark argues that the College of Fort William played a major and "incontestable" role "in shaping the Hindi and Urdu book." The College's publication program introduced "principles of Western typography" and "provided the first model of a standardized system of arranging printed texts."[45] The College of Fort William published the first selections from the *Bhaktamāl*, a text which I will consider below.

The key technology enabling mass printing in South Asia was not movable type but lithography. Introduced in the 1820s, lithography made an "enormous impact on regional language printing." Invented in 1798 by Alois Senefelder (1771-1834), lithography quickly spread to England and France but "remained a subsidiary method of book printing in Europe, to be employed mostly for reproducing works of music and art." In South Asia, on the other

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44 Ibid., 85-91.

45 Stark, *An Empire of Books*, 29-41.

hand, "the new technique met with immediate and overwhelming success." Astonishingly, "[a]lmost three times as many works were lithographed in India than in Europe during the period 1824-50." Lithography was especially useful for printing in Arabic, Persian, and Urdu, since it allowed for "the reproduction of the aesthetically prestigious *nasta'līq* script." It thus "continued the manuscript tradition, a crucial cultural factor in its widespread acceptance across the subcontinent." Lithography kept the calligraphic tradition alive: "Lithography, as Graham shaw puts it, allowed for the 'mass-produced manuscript'; it was 'in essence, a link with the past. It combined the cultural attributes of the manuscript with the technical advantages of mass-production.'"[46]

In addition to lithography, other technological advances – such as the iron press, the steam press, and the indigenous paper industry – made mass printing possible in north India. The commercialization of the press and consequent print-capitalism did not really take off in north India until the second half of the nineteenth century. Technological advances enabled a great drop in the cost of printed matter, so that during the 1850s and 1860s, Hindi books became, for the first time, an affordable commodity. Large print runs also brought down prices so that from 1868 to 1895, there was "a nearly fourfold quantitative increase in the production of Urdu books and a nearly threefold increase in Hindi books."[47]

In my search for manuscripts, detailed in chapter four, I have also attempted to find nineteenth-century print editions of the *Bhaktamāl*. While several archives and libraries contain later print *Bhaktamāl*s, only the British Library houses printed copies of Nābhādās' text dated prior to 1900. The earliest print *Bhaktamāl* of which I am aware was published in 1866 in

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46 Ibid., 45-47.

47 Ibid., 64-70.

Benares. It is a lithographed edition that is laid out like a manuscript in every way: this text appears to be handwritten – an affordance of lithography – and the pages are wide and short, as is typical for manuscripts. This edition includes Nābhādās' original, Priyādās' commentary, and an anonymous commentary in modern Hindi prose and verse.[48]

An 1876 edition, published in Bombay by the Nārāyaṇ Bhikaśeṭ and Sakhārām Bhikaśeṭ Khānū Press follows the layout of a typical manuscript while adopting the familiar proportions of a printed book. This edition has a decorated title page, reading only "Atha Śrī Bhaktamāl Graṅth Prāraṁbhaḥ." The verso of the title page has an illustration of Agradās flanked on one side by a group of figures labeled as "Saṅt Maṅḍalī" and on the other side by Nābhādās, Priyādās, and a third unlabeled figure. This volume has a brief preface *(sūcanā)*, followed by a table of contents (*anukramaṇikā*). The text here is Nābhādās' *mūl* with Priyādās' *ṭīkā*. There is no additional commentary, just section headings. Information about the publisher and date of publication is found in a colophon at the end of the volume.[49] This volume must have been successful, as the same publisher seems to have released another edition in 1879. This volume is very similar to the 1876 edition, but the illustration is replaced by a picture of Ram and his entourage, including a group of musicians labeled as *bhaktas*. In this picture, all eyes look toward Ram while Ram faces his devotees.[50] The new illustration places this edition within a general context of Vaishnava bhakti, emphasizing the link between Ram and his devotees. The picture in the 1876 edition, on the other hand, may suggest a more specific association with the Rām Rasik tradition, purportedly founded by Agradās.

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48 Nābhājī, Priyādās, and Anonymous, *Bhaktamāl Saṭīk* (Benares, 1866).

49 Nābhādās and Priyādās, *Bhaktamāl* (Bombay: Nārāyaṇ Bhikaśeṭ and Sakhārām Bhikaśeṭ Khānū Press, 1876).

50 Nābhādās and Priyādās, *Bhaktamāl* (Bombay: Sakhārām Bhikaśeṭ Khānū Press, 1879).

In 1883, Naval Kishore Press published an edition of the *Bhaktamāl*.[51] I will consider this edition below – along with versions of the *Bhaktamāl* which do not include Nābhādās' original text – as part of a broader consideration of Naval Kishore Press.

In 1896 Bombay's Śrī Veṅkaṭeśvar Press published an edition of Nābhādās' and Priyādās' texts along with Vaiṣṇavdās' commentary. This edition includes publication information on a standard title page, advertisements for other books from the same publisher, and a detailed table of contents.[52] As we saw in chapter four, Vaiṣṇavdās, who may have been affiliated with the Kabīr Panth, wrote his sub-commentary by 1807 CE at the latest, probably during the late eighteenth century.

These editions do not reveal any definitive break with the manuscript tradition. This overview is limited and incomplete, but this handful of books seem to follow a progression from printed manuscript toward modern book. The 1866 Benares edition appears in every respect like a manuscript. The 1876 Bombay edition does not stray very far from the manuscript form, but it takes on the proportions of a printed book and includes such features of print books as a table of contents. By 1896, Śrī Veṅkaṭeśvar Press had released a *Bhaktamāl* in the form that we have come to see as standard for print books. Still, in terms of content, even this volume reproduces a commentary that had already circulated in manuscript form.

The scholarship on the first half century of printing in Europe as well as Pollock's understanding of pre-print publishing in early modern South Asia would lead us to expect exactly the situation we find with early print *Bhaktamāl*s. Mass printing did not arrive in South Asia before the second half of the nineteenth century, so these editions are among the early

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51 Nābhādās, *Bhaktamāl Saṭīk* (Lucknow: Naval Kishore Press, 1883).

52 Nābhādās, Priyādās, and Vaiṣṇavdās, *Bhaktamāl Saṭīk* (Bombay: Śrī Veṅkaṭeśvar Press, 1896).

products of Indian publishers experimenting with this newly available technology. As Pollock observes, "script-mercantilism" had become well established in pre-colonial South Asia, blunting the expected impact of print technology. The eventual emergence of print capitalism in India undoubtedly amplified the impact of "script-mercantilism" by making many more copies of texts available, but it does not initially seem to have transformed textual traditions. These editions do not suggest a transformation of the contexts in which readers – or auditors, more likely – would have encountered the *Bhaktamāl.*

Naval Kishore Press

Print capitalism did eventually bring the *Bhaktamāl* to new readerships due, in part, to the efforts of the printer and publisher Naval Kishore. Naval Kishore has been praised, Stark notes, as a "great symbol of Hindu-Muslim unity," but she cautions against repeating this "stereotypical portrait." Stark questions, "whether such epithets would have come naturally to Naval Kishore's contemporaries."[53]

British patronage, the publication of religious books, and the Urdu newspaper *Avadh Akhbār* supported Naval Kishore Press in its early years.[54] By the mid-1860s, Naval Kishore Press had become the largest privately owned publishing house in northern India, and in 1870, the press moved to the prestigious Lucknow neighborhood of Hazrat Ganj, suggesting the press' high standing and close association with the British administration.[55] Support from the colonial state was essential to the success of Naval Kishore Press. Governmental printing work effectively subsidized publications in Indian languages. Stark observes that, on the surface, the

53 Stark, *An Empire of Books*, 109.

54 Ibid., 167.

55 Ibid., 170.

relationship between state and publishers seems like "an example of a highly successful collaboration," but closer examination reveals "constant negotiation" and conflict. There were issues of "money and profit margins" along with "fundamental questions of agency and control over the publishing market."[56]

By the early 1870s, Naval Kishore Press "had established itself as a strong presence in the Hindi literary marketplace, defying a popular notion which associates the Hindi book trade with places like Benares and Allahabad only."[57] Based in Lucknow, a "stronghold of Urdu," Naval Kishore Press became a major publisher of Hindi-language texts. The press published a limited selection of bhakti works from its earliest days, but as the number of bhakti texts increased, new forms of commentary became necessary.[58] Stark explains,

> Print culture had brought with it the transition gradual [*sic*] from practices of collective oral exposition to silent individual reading, entailing the need for a new type of textual explanation. This was particularly evident in the case of religious texts, which traditionally relied on oral exposition in the form of public readings (*kathā*). Whereas such oral practices centred on the Brahmin priest or learned pandit as the sole exegete of the text, in a private reading situation this interpretive function had to be assumed by the text itself. What was needed were commentaries that would facilitate contemporary readers' understanding of the classics with regard to both their archaic and dialectical language and their subject matter.[59]

These commentaries provided a spur for critical engagement with classical Hindi texts. For the first time, "identical textual sources" became "available to a large audience of scholars and laymen dispersed over different geographical regions."[60]

Lucknow has long been acknowledged as a center of Urdu and Persian publishing, but

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56 Ibid., 227-228.

57 Ibid., 182.

58 Ibid., 393-394.

59 Ibid., 397.

60 Ibid., 399-401.

Stark argues for its place in the history of Hindi publishing, due primarily to the output of Naval Kishore Press. Naval Kishore Press was "the first large-scale commercial publisher" of Hindi works. This press "was the first to address a prospective mass public of Nagari readers with a steadily expanding range of widely circulated and inexpensive texts," and through its wide array of publications, it "contributed to the consolidation of modern standard Hindi and provided a major impulse for the spread and development of its literature." The Naval Kishore Press also played a role "in the grand effort to revive Hindu literary tradition" while also serving "as one of the foremost publishers of Urdu, Persian, and Islamic literature in northern India." During a time when the Hindi and Urdu literary traditions were becoming increasingly defined and separated,[61] Naval Kishore Press' "multifaceted translation activities – from Sanskrit into Urdu, from Hindi into Urdu and vice versa –" represented "one of the last sustained efforts in propagating the values of a shared and composite Indian culture."[62]

Naval Kishore Press did not publish an edition of the *Bhaktamāl* and its commentary until 1883. Stark speculates that this delay was due to the success of two earlier adaptations: an Urdu prose version by Tulsīrām and the *Bhaktakalpadrum*.[63]

Tulsīrām was a Rāmānandī scholar and Bhagavān Prasād's uncle.[64] Stark writes,

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61 See King, *One Language, Two Scripts: The Hindi Movement in Nineteenth Century North India*.

62 Stark expands this point: "It is important to understand that for commercial publishers in nineteenth-century North India to bring out translations or transliterations from Hindi into Urdu and vice versa was nothing extraordinary in itself. What distinguished the house of Naval Kishore was that it produced an unparalleled range of translations, particularly of Hindu religious literature in Urdu, and that this translation activity continued unabated into the 1890s, that is for several decades after the Hindi-Nagari movement first started to propagate an exclusive Hindi-Hindu identity. Against this backdrop, translation assumed a broader cultural significance: it meant counteracting dichotomization through a textual ensemble which not only bridged the linguistic divide but implied a clear statement against the narrow identification of language and script with religious community." Stark, *An Empire of Books*, 443-444.

63 Ibid., 401-402.

64 See chapter six.

"Tulsiram's own Urdu rendering had first been printed at the Lahore Koh-e Nur Press in 1854. For the NKP edition of 1871, this first edition was revised, enlarged, and supplemented by a gloss of difficult words and names in both Nagari and Urdu script. In this new format it was quickly sold out. A second edition followed in 1873. By 1880 the text had been reprinted four times, reflecting the wide interest in Vaishnava hagiology among Urdu-reading Hindus."[65] Stark notes that while Tulsīrām's version "was perhaps not the first Urdu version of Nabhadas's hagiology, it was the only one to be widely publicized in print. She notes that "[e]arlier Persian renderings include those by Lalla Lalji Das (c. 1771) and Lala Gumani Lal (c. 1841)."[66]

The *Bhaktakalpadrum* or "Wishing Tree of Devotees" was another popular version of the *Bhaktamāl*, published by Naval Kishore Press in 1870. It was a Hindi version of Tulsīrām's Urdu edition, composed by Raja Pratap Singh of Sidhua, in northern Bihar. Stark explains, "Pratap Singh's version was originally in Brajbhasha. Prior to publication it had been revised by Pandit Kalicaran, who ended up recreating it in modern standard Hindi. Thus re-fashioned, the Hindi *Bhaktakalpadrum* sold as well as its Urdu counterpart and was frequently reprinted."[67] In his "Gleanings,"[68] George Abraham Grierson called this publication "a useful and convenient work," which "must be used with caution, as the original Persian character has not always been read correctly by the author."[69]

The 1883 Naval Kishore edition of the *Bhaktamāl* fits alongside other early print editions

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65 Stark, *An Empire of Books*, 401-402.

66 Ibid., 402f29.

67 Ibid., 402.

68 See chapter six.

69 Grierson, "Gleanings from the Bhakta-Mala," 608. Partially quoted in Stark, *An Empire of Books*, 402.

of this work. It is a straightforward edition of Nābhādās' and Priyādās' texts. The title page notes some of the highlights to be found within: "Nābhādās' *Bhaktamāl* with commentary, in which the stories of the divine devotees Rāmānand, Kabīrdās, Nāmdev, Dhruv, Mīrābāī, Raidās, Sultān Bādśāh, Sadhankasāī, etc. are excellently described."[70] The verso of the title page includes an advertisement listing available titles at affordable but unspecified prices. This edition of the *Bhaktamāl* is exactly what one would expect for this point on the trajectory from early manuscript-like books to modern, standardized editions. Editions of the *Bhaktamāl* already in circulation must have been commercially successful for Naval Kishore to have brought out another edition of this text.

The *Bhaktamāl* thus claimed an important place in Naval Kishore's commercial publishing program. Devotional texts were an important source of income for Naval Kishore Press, and the three distinct *Bhaktamāl*s published by Naval Kishore must have been profitable. With editions in Urdu and Hindi, the *Bhaktamāl* played a role in the ongoing mixed culture of north India. Tulsīrām's Urdu text brought the *Bhaktamāl* to Urdu-reading Hindus, and the *Bhaktakalpadrum* brought Tulsīrām's interpretation to a Hindi-reading audience. In the publications of Naval Kishore, we see the *Bhaktamāl* reaching new audiences through new forms. These various editions presaged the extensive expository work of Rūpkalā, which, in its definitive form, would also be published by the house of Naval Kishore.

The Colonial State and the *Bhaktamāl*

Print helped to carry the *Bhaktamāl* into new contexts, including the colonial government. The colonial state played a role in shaping the Indian press. Seeking both to

70 "भक्तमाल सठीक / بھکت مال ستك / श्रीनाभादास कृत / जिसमें / रामानान्द कबीरदास नामदेव ध्रुव मीराबाई रैदास सुल्तानबादशाह सधनकसाई इत्यादि भगवाद्भक्त महातमाओं की कथा अत्युत्तम वर्णित है" Nābhādās, *Bhaktamāl Saṭīk*.

monitor and to nurture publishing, the state alternated between "phases of liberal encouragement and strict censorship." By 1854, only "seditious writings and, increasingly, literature of an 'obscene' or 'immoral' nature" demanded particular governmental attention, and after the 1857 rebellion, the government adopted a liberal approach to the regulation of print. As a result, printing flourished. The state came to rely on patronage, rather than censorship, as a mechanism of control over Indian publishers.[71] As we have seen in the case of Naval Kishore Press, certain publishers thrived under this arrangement. The state also participated directly in publishing, and several British administrators engaged with the *Bhaktamāl* through the medium of print. As we are about to see, William Price, working under the auspices of the College of Fort William, brought selections of the *Bhaktamāl* into print for the first time ever, while H.H. Wilson and F.S. Growse drew on the *Bhaktamāl* in their efforts to understand Indian society.

Hindee and Hindoostanee Selections

It was the East India Company, through the College of Fort William, that first printed portions of the *Bhaktamāl*. The College was founded in 1800 "to impart general education to the young British civil servants" and "remained an active centre of Indian language studies for about thirty years." After 1830, the College "continued to function as an establishment to conduct examinations in Indian languages for another two decades."[72] Sisir Kumar Das emphasizes that the College of Fort William was not an Orientalist Institution. Rather, it existed to serve administrative ends. Das distinguishes the purpose of the College of Fort William from

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71 Stark, *An Empire of Books*, 83-86.

72 Sisir Kumar Das, *Sahibs and Munshis: An Account of the College of Fort William* (Calcutta: Orion Publications, 1978), ix.

the activities of scholar-administrators – like Wilson and Growse – who in his evaluation kept "their scholarly persuasion free from their official duties and colonial interests." In contrast, the College had administrative concerns at the core of its mission. It sought to teach British civil servants "Indian languages which were useful as tools of administrative efficiency." For Das, "Orientalism is an outcome of the Western man's intellectual curiosity about the Orient," while "the College of Fort William was but a means to meet the demands of the administrative necessities of the British rulers in India."[73]

The College of Fort William published 132 books. For the most part, these volumes served pedagogical ends, but a few were intended for a general readership.[74] There was a tension between the College's stated mission and its publication program. While the College was meant to "impart instruction in Indian languages," its publication program also sought "to play a significant role in the process of dissemination of Oriental learning in Europe." The College published pedagogical texts, including Price's grammar, but it also "encouraged its teachers to prepare editions of many works which had no immediate pedagogical value."[75] These publications had little direct impact on Indian readers; they were not widely read

73 Ibid., xi. Writing before Edward Said, Das employs a more narrow and traditional definition of "Orientalism" than that proposed by Said. Said accepts this meaning as "the most readily accepted designation for Orientalism": "Anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient – and this applies whether the person is an anthropologist, sociologist, historian, or philologist – either in its specific or its general aspects, is an Orientalist, and what he or she does is Orientalism." Said, though, is more concerned with a related but more general concept of Orientalism: "Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident." This style of thought has implications for – and is implicated in – the grossly uneven power relations between West and East: "Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient." Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 2-3. In a Saidian sense, then, the College of Fort William is an Orientalist institution *par excellence*. Its mission, Das reminds us, did not even pretend to the intellectual niceties of Orientalism narrowly conceived. It was meant to serve administrative ends, not scholarly ones. Das presents this distinction as significant. For Said, it would seem, this distinction would carry very little weight.

74 Das, *Sahibs and Munshis: An Account of the College of Fort William*, 68.

75 Ibid., 75.

outside of the College.[76] They did, however, prod the development of modern prose styles in several Indian languages, introducing features such as Western-style punctuation, spaces between words, and verse arranged by line.[77]

In 1827, Tarinee Churun Mitr, Head Moonshee of the Hindoostanee Department of the College of Fort William, under the supervision of William Price, Professor of the Hindee and Hindoostanee Languages, edited *Hindee and Hindoostanee Selections: to Which Are Prefixed The Rudiments of Hindustanee and Bruj B,hak,ha Grammar*.[78] The title page of the volume indicates that it was "compiled for the use of the interpreters of the Native Corps of the Bengal Army," and in his introduction, Price explains that the "following selections have been made to facilitate, chiefly to the Junior Members of the Military Service, the acquisition of the prevailing language of *Hindoostan*."[79] The contents do, to some degree, reflect this purpose. Following the introduction and a nine-chapter grammar, there is a copy of "The Articles of War" in both English and Hindi followed by a glossary of "Military Terms." This pragmatic first half of the volume is joined to the decidedly more literary second half, which includes a selection of texts in Devanagari script, including "Betal pucheesee, or the Twenty-five Tales of a Demon,"[80] "Selections from the B,hukta Mal, or Lives of the Principal Hindoo Saints,"[81] "Selections from

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76 Ibid., 79.

77 Ibid., 86.

78 Tarinee Churun Mitr and William Price, eds., *Hindee and Hindoostanee Selections: To Which Are Prefaced the Rudiments of Hindoostanee and Bruj Bhakha Grammar* (Calcutta: Hindoostanee Press, 1827), xi.

79 Ibid., vii.

80 Ibid., 1-83.

81 Ibid., 84-134.

the Rekhtus of Kubeer,"[82] "The Soonduru kandu, extracted from the Ramayunu of Toolsee Das,"[83] "Humorous Stories in an easy style,"[84] and "Popular Hindee Songs."[85] Price explains that these "various selections of local utility" are "intended to assist the young Military Student in his professional duties, and make him better acquainted with the individuals under his command."[86] Practical local information follows the selections, in the form of "A Descriptive list of the popular and religious Festivals of the Hindoos"[87] and "A List of Hindoo Castes."[88]

Mitr and Price's anthology marks an important milestone in the canonization of Hindi literature. The *Selections* is the earliest anthology of "easy" prose, "suitable for instructional purposes."[89] This anthology and its successors represent the "earliest selections and systematizations of what was to constitute Hindi literature." The *Selections* became the standard Hindi textbook until it was replaced by Bābū Śivaprasād's *Hindi Selections* in 1867. While Price saw the distinction between Hindi and Urdu (or Hindee and Hindoostanee) as "primarily religio-cultural rather than linguistic," by the 1860s these languages were considered separate, and Śivaprasād's selections are limited to Hindi.[90]

The "Selections from the B,huktu Mal, or Lives of the Principal Hindoo Saints" included

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82 Ibid., 135-178.

83 Ibid., 179-196.

84 Ibid., 197-240.

85 Ibid., 241-268.

86 Ibid., x.

87 Ibid., 269-277.

88 Ibid., 278-288.

89 Stark, *An Empire of Books*, 424-425.

90 Dalmia, *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions: Bhartendu Harischandra and Nineteenth-century Banaras*, 274-275f43.

in Price's volume takes the form of the "*Mūl* or Argument" (the author is never identified) followed by a "*Ṭīkā* or Gloss." This *ṭīkā* is a prose commentary by an unidentified author. No explanation is given for the saints included in these selections. They are Kabīr, Pīpā, Mīrābāī, Sūrdās, Tulasīdās, Bilvamaṅgal, Narasī Bhagat, Pṛthīrāj, Madhukarsāh, Agradās, Śankarācārya, Nāmdev, Jayadeva, Dhanā Bhagat, Raidās, Rāṅkā and Vāṅkā, Sadhanā, Kasāī, Mādhodās, and Rūp and Sanātan.

It is not clear why these particular *bhakta*s are included in the "Selections." Priyādās devotes particularly detailed treatment to several of them, such as Kabīr, Pīpā, Mīrābāī, Tulasīdās, Narasī Mehtā, Jayadeva, and Raidās, but does not consider others in detail or at all, notably Sūrdās. Sūrdās is a particularly prominent *bhakta*, so it makes sense to include him on this basis. The editors may have also selected Śankarācārya, Nāmdev, and Rūp and Sanātan Goswami due to their unquestionable prominence. Pṛthavīrāj and Agradās are, as we have seen, important figures for Nābhādās, but these reasons do not explain all the included figures, nor do they explain the much longer list of interesting, prominent, or significant *bhakta*s who have been excluded. Perhaps the editors found these selections better suited to their pedagogical ends, or they may simply have acted according to personal preferences.

In these hagiographies there are inevitably transformations between Priyādās' verse commentary and the anonymous prose commentary published by Mitr and Price. To take the Kabīr selection as an example, the most obvious change is the addition of another episode, which takes place prior to the birth of Kabīr. With the exception of this initial episode, the "Selections" relates the same episodes as Priyādās and Anantadās. The "Selections'" opening episode tells of a young widow who came to Rāmānand for *darśan*. She prostrated herself before the great teacher, and he blessed her, saying that she would have a son. A Brahmin, who

was engaged in *sevā* to Rāmānand, exclaimed that the woman was a widow, but Rāmānand said that his words were not without meaning: she would have a son, but he would not come from the womb. He would be faultless and the savior of the world. Ten months later, a Julāhā found the baby Kabīr by a pond and raised him.[91] The message of this episode seems fairly clear. This commentary reduces Kabīr's subversive potential. This Kabīr may have been adopted by members of a subordinate, Muslim caste, but his origins are not so humble.

Lorenzen writes that very similar "versions of the legend of Kabir's birth are current in oral tradition." He tentatively attributes the first mention of this legend to G.H. Westcott,[92] but as it is found in both the "Selections" and, as we shall see, Wilson's *Sketch*, this attribution is mistaken. Lorenzen notes that the denial of Kabīr's lowly origins is common in Kabīr's birth legends: "Most versions of the legend of Kabir's birth reflect the desire of Kabir's followers to somehow deny, or at least mitigate, the opprobrium attached to his Muslim and low-caste family heritage. The most extreme versions [...] not only deny this heritage but also declare Kabir to be a full incarnation of an anthropomorphic Vishnu. Other versions are content simply to assert that Kabir was only the *adopted* son of his Muslim parents, without specifying exactly who his real parents were."[93] The birth episode included in the "Selections" follows this pattern. It is unfortunate that neither Mitr and Price nor Wilson provide enough bibliographic information to trace this popular legend's origin.

The other major departure from Priyādās' account of Kabīr occurs in Kabīr's encounter with an *apsara*, who attempted, unsuccessfully, to cause Kabīr to stray. This episode is in the

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91 Mitr and Price, *Hindee and Hindoostanee Selections: To Which Are Prefaced the Rudiments of Hindoostanee and Bruj Bhakha Grammar*, 84.

92 G.H. Westcott, *Kabir and the Kabir Panth*, Reprint. (Calcutta: Susil Gupta, 1953).

93 Emphasis in original. Lorenzen, *Kabir Legends and Ananta-das's Kabir Parachai*, 43-44.

Bhaktirasabodhinī, but the anonymous commentator adds Kabīr's sung response to the *apsara*:

> You come to my house, my sister, where there is nothing for you. Without Ram, without Govind, all sensual delights seem like parched grain.[94]
> With the brilliance of cloth, ornaments, precious jewels, and gems, and strings of pearls on the breast, you come to me, beguiling, from heaven, to make me your husband.
> Oh body, leave this country and sing of the qualities of Govind. Put on the rosary of *tulasī* beads.[95] Why do you not quickly reach the highest level?
> In heaven, there is said to be one fault. Besides me, there is no other. You have come to shake me from my path. The honor which is given is lost.
> Much time has passed while engaged in asceticism, in threads of coarse cotton. You expend much effort trying to light a fire under water.
> I have only Hari's shelter. You are false illusion. In the majesty of the guru and the community of saints (*sādhu kī sangatī*), there the highest level is reached.
> The one with the name Kabīr is of the auspicious Julāhā caste. He lives alone in the forest (*ghar van rahauṁ udāsī*). She who comes bearing great honor, the first is your aunt (*māī*[96]), the second another aunt (*mausī*[97]).[98]

This poem begins, as one might expect, with the rejection of earthly delights in favor of Ram and Krishna. It then dismisses asceticism, again insisting on the necessity of Hari, the guru, and the companionship of the sadhus. The poem concludes with an unusual line. It identifies Kabīr as a Julāhā and as an ascetic (*udāsī*). The poem does not reject asceticism *per se*, but asceticism unaccompanied by devotion to Hari. I am not sure what to make of the second half of the final line. Are the two types of aunts simply a misogynistic symbol of attachment to this

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94 That is they are sterile and will not bear fruit.

95 An external mark of a *bhakta*.

96 That is *māmī*, wife of maternal uncle.

97 Maternal aunt.

98 "तुम घर जावो मेरी भैना, इहां तुमारो लेना न दैना. राम विना गोविंद विना सव विषै जु लगे चबेना. जगमगात पट भूषन नग मनि, उर मोतिन के हार, इंद्र लोक तें मोहन आई मोहि करन भरतार. इन वातन को छांडि देऊ री गोविंद के गुन गावो, तुलसी माला पहिरो काहे न वेगि परम पद पावो. इंद्र लोक में टोट भयो कहा हम से और न कोइ, तुम तो हमें डिगावन आई जाऊ दई की खोई. वहुते तपसी वांधि विगारे कचे सूत के धागे, जौ तुम जतन करो वहुतेरो जल में आगि न लागे. हम तौ केवल हरि के सरने तुम हो झूठी माया, गुरु परताप साधु की संगति मैं जु परम पद पाया. नाम कबीर सुजाति जुलाहा घर वन रहौं उदासी, जौ तुम मान महत करि आई तौ एक माई दूजू मौसी." Mitr and Price, *Hindee and Hindoostanee Selections: To Which Are Prefaced the Rudiments of Hindoostanee and Bruj Bhakha Grammar*, 86-87.

world or is there some deeper meaning at work? This major departure from Priyādās does not alter the narrative, but it does provide, in words attributed to Kabīr, a new element to his his encounter with the *apsara*.

In other episodes, the anonymous commentator follows Priyādās' narrative without adhering to Priyādās' form. This commentator renders Priyādās' Braj Bhāṣā verse in Khaṛī Bolī prose, but this work is not a translation. The commentator tells stories. Priyādās' narrative comes through but not his language. There does not seem to be any mapping of vocabulary from one text to the other, nor is there a direct correspondence between the lines of the *Bhaktirasabodhinī* and the sentences of the selections. Indeed, the anonymous commentator is much wordier than Priyādās, and the "Selections" often makes clear and explicit what Priyādās leaves implied and difficult. If the *Bhaktirasabodhinī*'s form implies communal recitation, the "Selection's" implies individual reading. Musicality is lost. Easy comprehension without external aids is gained.

The value of such relatively straightforward and simple prose to the student of Hindi is clear. This *Bhaktamāl* serves a practical, pedagogical purpose. Along with the other texts and classificatory lists included in this volume, it provides a means for officers of the East India Company to acquire familiarity with the language and customs of their subordinates. Presumably, Mitr, Price, and their collaborators chose these texts due to their popularity and exemplary nature, but they never give an explanation as to why they chose these particular texts for inclusion.

H.H. Wilson's Sketch of the Religious Sects of the Hindus

First published in *Asiatic Researches* in 1828 and 1832, H.H. Wilson's *Sketch of the Religious*

Sects of the Hindus relies on the *Bhaktamāl*, in addition to more contemporaneous Persian sources, to provide an account of the sectarian divisions of Hindu society. Wilson reports that he "had frequent recourse" to the *Bhaktamāl*, "a work of great popularity and extensive circulation, which embodies the legendary history of all the most celebrated Bhaktas or devotees of the Vaishnava order." Wilson provides an overview of the *Bhaktamāl*: "The original, in a difficult dialect of Hindi, was composed by NA'BHA'JI, about 250 years ago, and it little more than a catalogue, with brief and obscure references to some leading circumstances connected with the life of each individual, and from the inexplicit nature of its allusions, as well as the difficulty of its style, is far from intelligible to the generality even of the native."[99] Wilson is dismissive of the *Bhaktamāl*, describing it as "little more than a catalogue" and as unintelligible. He identifies the author as Nābhā-jī and dates the work to about the turn of the seventeenth century.

Wilson continues by presenting the two-author theory, identifying Nārāyandās as having made additions and modifications to Nābhā's text. According to Wilson, Nārāyandās' "share in the composition is, no doubt, considerable, but cannot be discriminated from NA'BHA'JI's own, beyond the evidence furnished by specification of persons unquestionably subsequent to his time – NA'RA'YAN DA'S probably wrote in the reign of SHA'H JEHA'N."[100] Wilson's attribution of authorship, no doubt following his informants, is well within the mainstream of *Bhaktamāl* interpretation. As we saw in chapter two, however, while it is difficult to say anything about the author of the *Bhaktamāl* with certainty, it is most likely that Nābhādās and Nārāyandās are two names for a single individual.

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99 Horace Hayman Wilson, *Sketch of the Religious Sects of the Hindus*, 1846, 6-7.

100 Ibid.

Given the difficulty of the *mūl* text, Wilson reports that it is always accompanied by a commentary: "The brevity and obscurity of the original work pervade the additional matter [of Nārāyandās], and to remedy these defects, the original text or Múla, has been taken as a guide for an amplified notice of its subjects, or the Tíká of KRISHNA DA'S; and the work, as usually met with, always consists of these two divisions. The Tíká is dated Samvat, 1769 or A.D. 1713. Besides these, a translation of the Tíká, or a version of it in the more ordinary dialect of Hindustan, has been made by an anonymous author, and a copy of this work, as well as the original, has furnished me with materials for the following account."[101] The *tīkā* described by Wilson seems to be Priyādās' commentary, which nearly always accompanies Nābhādās' text and which was completed in V.S. 1769, which is to say 1712 CE, not 1713. I am not sure why Wilson refers to Priyādās as Kṛṣṇadās. It seems probable that the anonymous translation described here is the same commentary excerpted by Mitr and Price in the *Selections*, particularly since Price identifies Wilson's library as the source for his copy of the *Bhaktamāl*.[102] Unfortunately, Wilson does not provide enough detail to definitively establish this correspondence.

Wilson does not express a positive opinion of the *Bhaktamāl*'s contents: "it may be sufficient here to observe, that it is much less of a historical than legendary description, and that the legends are generally insipid and extravagant; such as it is, however, it exercises a powerful influence in Upper India, on popular belief, and holds a similar place in the superstitions of this country, as that which was occupied in the darkest ages of the Roman

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101 Ibid.

102 Mitr and Price, *Hindee and Hindoostanee Selections: To Which Are Prefaced the Rudiments of Hindoostanee and Bruj Bhakha Grammar*, ix.

Catholic faith, by the Golden Legend and Acts of the Saints."[103] Wilson dismisses the *Bhaktamāl* as an "insipid and extravagant" catalog – hardly words of praise – but this text nonetheless plays a central role in shaping Wilson's *Sketch*. For Wilson, the *Bhaktamāl* becomes an account not just of the individuals described therein but a guide to the various religious communities of north India.

Wilson's stated goal is to trace the varieties of the Hindu religion.[104] He seeks to disrupt the sense that this religion consists of a single, unified collective. He limits the boundaries of his study. Wilson does not seek to pierce the "impenetrable gloom" of ancient history nor to "undertake so arduous a labour, as the investigation and comparison of the abstruse notions of the philosophical sects." Rather, "the humbler aim of these researches has been that of ascertaining the actual condition of the popular religion of the inhabitants of some of the provinces subject to the Bengal Government; and as a very great variety prevails in that religion, the subject may be considered as not devoid of curiosity and interest, especially as it has been left little better than a blank, in the voluminous compositions or compilations, professing to give an account of the native country of the Hindus."[105] Wilson wishes to provide an account of the variety of Hindu communities in Bengal and north India. As we shall see, the *Bhaktamāl* provides a structure for his *Sketch*, particularly for his description of Vaishnava sects.

Following his introduction, Wilson outlines the "State of the Hindu Religion, anterior to its present condition," but the great bulk of the *Sketch* describes the "Present divisions of the Hindus, and of the Vaishnavas in particular. Wilson attributes this classification to his sources.

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103 Wilson, *Sketch of the Religious Sects of the Hindus*, 6-7.

104 Ibid., 1.

105 Ibid., 5.

He "divides all the Hindus into three great classes or *Vaishnavas*, *Saivas*, and *Sáktas*, and refers to a fourth or miscellaneous class, all not comprised in the three others."[106]

It is clear that Wilson understands Vaishnavas to have the greatest prominence, and it is in his description of Vaishnavas that Wilson leans most heavily on the *Bhaktamāl.* Wilson follows Nābhādās by arranging Vaishnavas "into four principal Sampradáyas, or sects," and for Wilson, as for Nābhādās, "of these, the most ancient and respectable is the Sri Sampradáya, founded by the Vaishnava reformer Rámánuja Achárya, about the middle of the twelfth century."[107] In a footnote, Wilson elaborates on the link provided between our own age and the previous ages by the founders of the four *sampradāys*, citing and translating the *Bhaktamāl*: "'HARI, in preceding ages, assumed twenty-four principal shapes, but four were manifest in the Kali Yug: the magnanimous Rámánuja, a treasure of Ambrosia and terrestrial tree of plenty: the ocean of kindness and transporter across the sea of the universe, Vishnu Swami: Madhu Achárj, a rich cloud in the autumnal season of piety: and Nimbáditya, a sun that illumined the cave of ignorance; by them acts of piety and obligation were divided, and each sect was severally established' There are also Sanscrit texts authorising the different institution, and characteristic term of each Sampradáya."[108] It is clear that Wilson's framework for classifying the Vaishnava sects is drawn almost entirely from the *Bhaktamāl.*

Wilson next considers the "Ramanandis, or Ramawats." He discusses the connection of Rāmānand and his disciples to Rāmānuja.[109] Several of Rāmānand's disciples correspond to

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106 Ibid., 20.

107 Ibid., 23-24.

108 Ibid., 23.

109 Ibid., 31.

distinct sects, which "are considered to be but branches of the Rámánandĭ Vaishnavas."[110] In each example, Wilson cites the *Bhaktamāl.* For Wilson, this list of disciples shows, "that the school of RA'MA'NAND admitted disciples of every caste: it is, in fact, asserted in the Bhakta Málá, that the distinction of caste is inadmissible according to the tenets of the Rámánandis: there is no difference, they say, between the BHAGAVA'N and the Bhakt, or the deity and his worshipper; but BHAGAVA'N appeared in inferior forms, as a Fish, a Boar, a Tortoise, &c., so therefore the Bhakt may be born as a Chama, a Kori, a Ch'hipi, or any other degraded casts."[111] Wilson also relies on the *Bhaktamāl* in his discussion of Rāmānand's disciples who did not found separate sects. He summarizes the lives of Pīpā, Surusurānand, Dhana, Raghunāth, Narahari, Nābhādās, Sūrdās, Tulasīdās, and Jayadeva. Wilson notes that these anecdotes may "not afford much satisfactory information regarding their objects" but "will at least furnish some notion of the character of this popular work.[112] On Pīpā, for example, he notes that, "The life of this vagrant Raja is narrated at considerable length in the Bhakta Málá, and is made up of the most absurd and silly legends. On one occasion the Raja encounters a furious lion in a forest; he hangs a rosary round his neck, whispers the Mantra of Ráma, and makes him tranquil in a moment; he then lectures the lion on the impropriety of devouring men and kine, and sends him away penitent, and with a pious purpose to do so no more."[113] Like many earlier commentators on the *Bhaktamāl*, Wilson does not seem to distinguish between the *mūl* text and the commentary.

Wilson narrates the life of Nābhādās, following Priyādās' account. On the matter of

110 Ibid., 36.

111 Ibid., 36-37.

112 Ibid., 37-38.

113 Ibid., 38.

Nābhādās' caste, he writes, "NA'BHA'JI, the author of the Bhakta Málá, was by birth a Dom, a caste whose employ is making baskets and various sort of wicker work. The early commentators say he was of the Hanumán Bans, or Monkey tribe, because, observes the modern interpreter, Báner, a monkey, signifies in the Marwar language, a Dom, and it is not proper to mention the caste of a Vaishnava by name."[114] In chapter two, we saw that the meaning of Hanumān *vaṁś* is controversial, and I will return to this controversy in chapter six. Wilson's interpretation of this term as synonymous with Ḍom is a common one. He seems to accept the notion that caste would have had no place within the ashram, noting that "it is not proper to mention the caste of a Vaishnava by name."

Wilson recounts Nābhādās' early life, following Priyādās, then calculates Nābhādās' date:

> The age of NA'BHA'JI must be about two centuries, or two and a half, as he is made contemporary with MA'N SINH, the Raja of Jaynagar, and with AKBER. He should date much earlier, if one account of his spiritual descent which makes him the fourth from RA'MA'NAND be admitted, but in the Bhakta Málá, KRISHNA DA'S, the second in that account, does not descend in a direct line from RA'MA'NAND, but derives his qualifications as teacher from the immediate instructions of VISHNU himself: there is no necessity, therefore, to connect NA'BHA'JI with RA'MA'NAND. The same authority places him also something later, as it states that Tulasi DA'S, who was contemporary with SHAH JEHAN, visited NA'BHA'JI at Vrindavan. It is probable, therefore, that this writer flourished at the end of AKBER's reign, and in the commencement of his successor.[115]

Wilson's dating of Nābhādās is basically correct.[116] He seems to rely directly or indirectly on Priyādās' account, as the *Bhaktirasabodhinī* describes Nābhādās' encounters with Mānsingh and Tulasīdās. Contrary to Wilson's claims, the *Bhaktamāl* does assert a direct connection between Rāmānand and Nābhādās. Kṛṣṇadās Payahārī was a follower of Anantānand, one of Rāmānand's

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114 Ibid., 39-40.

115 Ibid.

116 See chapter two for a detailed consideration of Nābhādās' and the *Bhaktamāl*'s dates.

twelve principal disciples.[117]

Wilson draws on the *Bhaktamāl* as a source about communities in the present rather than about individuals in the past. His account of the Kabīr Panthīs begins with a discussion of Kabīr, based on the *Bhaktamāl* and, apparently, its commentaries. Wilson writes,

> The origin of the founder of this sect is variously narrated, although in the main points, the traditions are agreed: the story told in the Bhakta Málá, is, that he was the son of the virgin widow of a Brahman, whose father was a follower of RA'MA'NAND: at his daughter's repeated request, he took her to see RA'MA'NAND, and that teacher, without adverting to her situation, saluted her with the benediction he thought acceptable to all women, and wished her the conception of a son: his words could not be re-called, and the young widow, in order to conceal the disgrace thus inflicted on her, contrived to be privately delivered, and exposed the child: it was found by a weaver and his wife, and brought up as their own.[118]

This episode is not found in Priyādās' commentary. It is found in the anonymous commentary reproduced by Mitr and Price, which reinforces the suggestion that their commentary and the one cited by Wilson are identical. Wilson notes that Kabīr's followers reject this account. They "do not admit more than the conclusion of this legend: according to them, the child, who was no other than the incarnate deity, was found floating on a lotus in Lahartaláb, a lake, or pond near Benares, by the wife of a weaver, named NIMA'."[119]

Wilson is mainly concerned with describing the religious communities of north India.

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117 Nābhādās' lineage corresponds to the traditional consensus, which gives Rāmānand a fifteenth-century floruit. As we saw in chapter two, Agrawal argues that twentieth-century scholarly arguments, which claim Rāmānand flourished in the fourteenth century, are based on specious "radical Rāmānandī" claims dating to the early twentieth century. Wilson accepts the earlier date: "We had occasion, in the notice taken of NA'BHA'JI, to shew that the spiritual genealogy now enumerated could scarcely be correct, for as RA'MA'NAND must have flourished prior to the year 1400, we have but three generations between him and the date even of AKBER'S succession 1555, or a century and half: it was then mentioned, however, that according to the Bhakta Málá, KRISHNA DA'S was not the pupil of ASA'NAND, and consequently the date of succession was not necessarily uninterrupted." Wilson, *Sketch of the Religious Sects of the Hindus*, 66-67. Wilson's assertion casts some doubt on Agrawal's argument since it indicates that the earlier Rāmānand was not simply a twentieth-century invention. Agrawal, "In Search of Ramanand: The Guru of Kabir and Others."

118 Wilson, *Sketch of the Religious Sects of the Hindus*, 45.

119 Ibid.

In carrying out this task, he has repeated opportunities to cite the *Bhaktamāl*. He describes a group known as the Khākīs. They were supposedly founded by Khīlha, but as Nābhādās does not mention this sect, Wilson supposes this sect "to be of modern origin."[120] Wilson briefly discusses the "Maluk Dásis," "another subdivision of the Rámánandi Vaishnavas, of comparatively uncertain origin and limited importance." This group's founder, "Malúk Dás" is said to be a disciple of Khīlha and thus a contemporary of Nābhādās.[121] In his discussion of the Dādū Panth, Wilson notes that Dādū "is not mentioned in the Bhakta Málá, but there is some account of him in the Dabistan."[122] Wilson next describes the "Rai Dasis." On Raidās, Wilson comments that "there appears to be but little known of him of any authentic character, and we must be contented with the authority of the Bhakta Málá, where he makes a rather important figure."[123] Wilson recounts the life of Raidās then concludes, "Such are the legends of Bhakta Málá, and whatever we may think of their veracity, their tenor, representing an individual of the most abject class, an absolute outcast in Hindu estimation, as a teacher and a saint, is not without interest and instruction."[124] Wilson then briefly describes the Senā Panth, noting that Senā "is the subject of a ludicrous legend in the Bhakta Málá."[125] Wilson describes the "Rudra Sampradayis, or Vallabhácháris." He cites the *Bhaktamāl* in his account of this lineage, but accurately notes that the *Bhaktamāl* does not linger on this *sampradāy*: "The Bhakta Málá also contains a variety of legends regarding different teachers of this sect, but it is less a text-book

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120 Ibid., 65-66.

121 Ibid., 66-67.

122 Ibid., 70.

123 Ibid., 70-71.

124 Ibid., 73.

125 Ibid.

with this sect than any other class of Vaishnavas."[126] For the remainder of his *Sketch*, Wilson is much less reliant on the *Bhaktamāl*. In his description of the "Mira Bais," he notes that "MI'RA' BAI is the heroine of a prolix legend in the Bhakta Málá, which is proof at least of her popularity."[127] In other cases, Wilson references the *Bhaktamāl* in passing but is much less reliant on it.

The remainder of the *Sketch* describes"Saivas,"[128] "Saktas,"[129] and "Miscellaneous sects."[130] In these sections, Wilson does not draw significantly from the *Bhaktamāl*, which is hardly mentioned. Wilson does observe that Śaivas have no equivalent to the *Bhaktamāl*: "The Saivas have no works in any of the common dialects, like the Rámáyana, the Bártta, or the Bhakta Málá."[131]

In sum, Wilson's *Sketch* explicitly seeks to classify the various Hindu religious communities of north India. He relies on the *Bhaktamāl* as a source of information about these communities even as he denigrates it as an untrustworthy compendium of superstition. Observing nineteenth-century north India, Wilson could not help but note the predominance

126 Ibid., 82.

127 Ibid., 86.

128 These are: Dandis and Dasnamis; Yogis or Jogis; Jangamas; Paramahansa; Aghoris; Urddhabahus, Akas Mukhis, and Nakhis; Gudaras; Rukharas, Sukharas, and Ukharas; Kara Lingis; Sanyasis, Brahmacharis, and Avadhutas; and Nagas.

129 These are: Dakshinas, or Bhaktas; Vamis, or Vamacharis; Kancheliyas (Wilson notes that the very existence of this sect "may be questioned" Wilson, *Sketch of the Religious Sects of the Hindus*, 170.); and Kerari (a sect which engages in human sacrifice "and, consequently, it cannot be believed that this sect is in existence" Ibid., 171.). Wilson does not acknowledge Śāktas as fully independent but sees them as associated with one of the other major divisions, particularly Śaivas: "Although any of the goddesses may be objects of the Sakta worship, and the term Sakti comprehends them all, yet the homage of the Saktas is almost restricted to the wife of SIVA, and to SIVA himself as identified with his consort. This sect is, in fact, a ramification from the common Saiva stock, and is referred to SIVA himself as its institutor." Ibid., 162.

130 These are: Saurapatas, or Sauras, Ganapatyas; Nanak Shahis (including: Udasis, Ganj Bakhshis, Ramrayis, Suthreh Shahis, Govind Sinhis, Nirmalas, and Nagas); Jains; Baba Lalis, Pran Nathis; Sadhs; Satnamis; Siva Narayanais; and Sunyabadis.

131 Wilson, *Sketch of the Religious Sects of the Hindus*, 120.

of Vaishnavism, and he perceived the *Bhaktamāl* as a distorted mirror of this community. It may not be an accurate record of particular saints, but it is a telling account of the communities who hold up these saints as exemplars. For all his harsh criticisms, Wilson falls into a tradition of understanding the *Bhaktamāl* as a text which imagines a broad community united by bhakti. Wilson does not, however, find unity in this community; he emphasizes the distinctiveness of each separate sect. For Wilson, the strands that hold Nābhādās' garland together are not sufficiently strong to overcome what he sees as the sociological reality of north India.

F.S. Growse's Mathura – A District Memoir

Like Wilson, F.S. Growse sees the *Bhaktamāl* as a resource for understanding north India's sectarian divisions. In his 1882 work *Mathura – A District Memoir*, Growse draws heavily on the *Bhaktamāl* to provide accounts of the various Vaishnava religious communities found in the Mathura District and cites it extensively throughout. Growse introduces the work:

> This Memoir was originally intended to form one of the uniform series of local histories compiled by order of the Government. Its main object was therefore to serve as a book of reference for use of district officers; thus it touches upon many things which the general reader will condemn as trivial and uninteresting, and in the earlier chapters the explanations are more detailed and minute than the professed student of history and archæology will probably deem at all necessary. But a local memoir can never be a severely artistic performance. On a small scale it resembles a dictionary or encyclopœdia and must, if complete, be composed of very heterogeneous materials, out of which those who have occasion to consult it must select what they require for their own purposes, without concluding that whatever is superfluous for them is equally familiar or distasteful to other people.[132]

There can be little doubt, then, that this work is, at least in part, an example of knowledge produced in service of empire, but Growse is not much concerned with the "general history" of the district, since Mathura has not held much importance as a "political centre." Rather,

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132 F. S. Growse, *Mathurá - A District Memoir*, Reprint. (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1993), i.

Growse is deeply concerned with the district's religion and literature: "All its special interest is derived from its religious associations in connection with the Vaishnava sects—far outnumbering all other Hindu divisions—of whom some took birth here, all regard it as their Holy Land.[...] It may also be desirable to explain that the long extracts of Hindi poetry from local writers of the last two centuries have been inserted not only as *à propos* of the subject to which they refer, but also as affording the most unmistakeable proofs of what the language of the country really is."[133] Mathura's importance derives from its centrality for Vaishnavas, so Growse is especially interested in the Vaishnavas of the district. Growse follows the plan he lays out for himself, describing the district's history from Buddhist to British times before moving onto "Brindában and the Vaishnava reformers," "Brindában and its temples," and finally the district's geography, both sacred and mundane. Growse cites the *Bhaktamāl* at several points in this "memoir," but it is centrally important for his account of the religious communities of the district.

For Growse, the *Bhaktamāl* is important because of the esteem in which it is held by the Vaishnavas of Vrindavan: "The one point upon which all the Vaishnavas sects theoretically agree is the reverence with which they profess to regard the Bhagavad Gíta as the authoritative exposition of their creed. In practice their studies—if they study at all—are directed exclusively to much more modern compositions, couched in their own vernacular, the Braj Bháshá. Of these the work held in highest repute by all the Brindá-ban sects is the Bhakt-málá, or Legends of the Saints, written by Nábhá Ji in the reign of Akbar or Jahángir."[134] Growse is hardly more sympathetic to these communities than Wilson, but he acknowledges at least a hint of sincerity

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133 Ibid., ii.

134 Ibid., 191.

at their core. He identifies a core Vaishnava creed in the *Bhaktamāl*:

> Its very first couplet is a compendium of the theory upon which the whole Vaishnava reform was based:
>
> Bhakt-bhakti-Bhagavant-guru, chatura nám, vapu ek:
>
> which declares that there is divinity in every true believer, whether learned or unlearned, and irrespective of all caste distinctions. Thus the religious teachers that it celebrates are represented, not as rival disputants – which their descendants have become – but as all animated by one faith, which varied only in expression; and as all fellow-workers in a common cause, *viz.*, the moral and spiritual elevation of their countrymen.[135]

While Wilson compares the *Bhaktamāl* to the "Golden Legend and Acts of the Saints" from the "darkest ages of the Roman Catholic faith," Growse sees the *Bhaktamāl* as a key work in the "Vaishnava reform," albeit a reform that has become utterly degenerate.

Like many other commentators, Growse notes the difficulty of the *Bhaktamāl*: "The Bhakt-málá, though an infallible oracle, is an exceedingly obscure one, and requires a practised hierophant for interpretation. It gives no legend at length, but consists throughout of a series of the briefest allusions to legends, which are supposed to be already well-known. Without some such previous knowledge the poem is absolutely unintelligible. Its concise notices have therefore been expanded into more complete lives by modern writers in both Hindi and Sanskrit."[136] Growse, like Wilson, relies on commentaries rather than the original text of Nābhādās in order to describe the religious communities of the Mathura District.

Growse clearly and explicitly intended *Mathurá – A District Memoir* to be a useful text for those, like himself, who would govern this district. For Growse, the importance of the Mathura District stemmed from its religious institutions. Vaishnava *sampradāy*s regarded, and continue to regard, Mathura and Vrindavan as, in Growse's words, their "Holy Land." Growse sought to

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135 Ibid., 191-192.

136 Ibid., 192.

describe and understand these sects, and in this task, he was aided by the *Bhaktamāl*. Growse was far more sympathetic to these communities and to the *Bhaktamāl* than Wilson was, but they each in their own way approached the *Bhaktamāl* as a guidebook to the varieties of Vaishnavism in nineteenth-century north India.

Hindu Traditionalism and the *Bhaktamāl*

Wilson and Growse drew on the *Bhaktamāl* in their efforts to understand the religious communities of north India. For Bhāratendu Hariścandra (1850-1885), the *Bhaktamāl* was an essential work for the articulation of modern Hinduism. Hariścandra was a key articulator of the traditionalist Hindu response to European and reformist Hindu critiques. Vasudha Dalmia's *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions* offers an in-depth consideration of this response. She outlines how Hariścandra's stance evolved during his brief but brilliant career. The initial phase of Hariścandra's response was rooted in "the activities of ostensibly traditional formations" such as the Puṣṭi Mārg and the Kāśī Dharma Sabhā and was concerned with "defending and defining tradition." The second phase sought to bring together various Vaishnava *sampradāys* under the umbrella of the Tadīya Samāj and to present the "common features" of these organizations as "the core of Hindū dharma." In this phase, dialogue with the Ārya Samāj and other reformists organizations led image-worship and other practices to be defined as "essential to Hinduism as a whole" and defended as such. In the third phase, Hariścandra articulates bhakti and monotheism "as the essential features of modern Hinduism." Such a position, presented as anchored by Vaishnavism "from the most ancient times," allows Hariścandra to claim for Hinduism "a certain parity" with Christianity and

Islam.[137] This overview is schematic; these phases were hardly distinct but overlapped extensively. As we shall see, the *Bhaktamāl* played a central role in Hariścandra's articulation of a modern Hinduism defined by bhakti and rooted in Vaishnava tradition.

The *Bhaktamāl* does not seem to play a significant role in the first phase of Hariścandra's career, when he focused on the defense of orthodoxy.[138] This comes as no surprise, since he was rooted in the Puṣṭi Mārg, a tradition with its own body of hagiographic literature. At this point, orthodoxy "defined itself primarily by virtue of administering the legacy of the Vedas." Hariścandra's defense was not uncritical, and he challenged certain "aspects of the temple and ritual life," leading some orthodox Vaishnavas to regard him as too reformist and possibly "influenced by Christianity." Still, he remained within the traditionalist fold, and his "critique, when it came, came from within the ranks."[139]

The *Bhaktamāl* plays a central role in the second and third phases of Hariścandra's religious career. The second phase began roughly in 1873, with the founding of the Tadīya Samāj. This society sought to unite separate Vaishnava *sampradāy*s. By this point, "Hariśchandra could not but become aware that the sampradāya, whatever its own claims to the centrality of its teaching, could, in its totality, be designated as little other than a 'sect' within the larger Vaiṣṇava tradition, which was itself but one strand, again however overruling, within the vast body of Hinduism."[140] Much like Nābhādās, Hariścandra sought to articulate a vision of a devotional community inclusive of but not limited to the *sampradāy*.

Hariścandra advanced a vision of "the overarching importance of bhakti as the

137 Dalmia, *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions: Bhartendu Harischandra and Nineteenth-century Banaras*, 339-340.

138 Ibid., 361-362.

139 Ibid., 366.

140 Ibid., 367.

mūladharma" along with "a new emphasis on monotheism." By focusing on "purely emotional bhakti, the path of love" Hariścandra can claim equivalence to Christianity and can include even those communities with "no such emphasis on the worship and attachment to a personal god." Dalmia identifies the traditional basis for this position in the *Bhaktamāl*, which "displayed an equally catholic trend in this respect." This position has a nationalist tint. Dalmia writes, "In this fusion of bhakti with ārya and with Hindū samāj, the dimensions of the monotheistic bhakti are larger than those posited ever before." Despite this broad vision, Hariścandra remains centered in the particular arrangements of the *sampradāy*. He does not propose a bhakti "so transcendental as to be divorced from the community and from rituals."[141] Hariścandra remained rooted in his particular tradition, but sought "to place it in the centre of Hindu tradition."[142]

Hariścandra's 1876 poem *Uttarārdha-bhaktamāl*, or "The Latter Half of the Garland of Devotees" presents his vision of Vaishnava catholicity. The title of this poem indicates that Hariścandra conceived of it as a continuation of Nābhādās' work, adding new *bhakta*s to Nābhā's garland. This poem adopts Nābhādās' inclusive mode, enabling Hariścandra to position "himself and other contemporary poets within the traditional hagiographical accounts of Vaiṣṇava bhaktas." He begins the poem with an account of his own religious experience then remembers "the lives of traditional Vaiṣṇava bhaktas." He casts a wide net and "gathers up the many strands of bhakti, accommodating bhakti from different regions of the subcontinent," going so far as to include Muslim *bhaktas*.[143]

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141 Ibid., 374-376.

142 Ibid., 378-379.

143 Ibid., 379.

Hariścandra begins the *Uttarārdha-bhaktamāl* by describing his own religious experience.[144] This experience is distinctly Krishnaite. The poet identifies himself as "an utter rascal, not worthy of compassion and forgiveness," but Krishna took pity on him and appeared to "his companion Mādhavī, one-time Rājpūt turned Muslim in the courtesan profession" in a dream, telling her to "view the poet as a sant, a bhakta." As Hariścandra expands his focus to take in Vaishnava *bhaktas* more generally, he gives even more emphasis to his own *sampradāy*, the Puṣṭi Mārg. Following "his own biography seen as hagiography," he "proceeds to enumerate the bhaktas of the Vaiṣṇava tradition, commencing with the *parama guru*, Śiva, Nārada, Vyāsa, Viṣṇuswāmī, Gopīnātha, the seven gurus up to Bilvamaṅgala and finally Vallabha, his *vaṃśa*, his followers, and then all the devotees, *premījan*, who follow the ways of Hari: a catalogue having a certain open-endedness."[145] The emphasis on Vallabha serves to establish the centrality of the Puṣṭi Mārg. Hariścandra positions his own family as followers of this order. Like Nābhādās, he refers to the four *sampradāys* "to focus then upon Vallabha and his descendants." The "most substantial portion" of the *Uttarārdha-bhaktamāl* draws on Vallabhite hagiographies. He praises each of the eight *aṣṭachāp* poets and devotes a *chappay* each to "the rest of the eighty-four bhaktas of the *Caurāsī vaiṣṇavan kī vārtā*." Hariścandra also "incorporates many of the bhaktas of the subsequent *Do sau bāvan vaiṣṇavan kī vārtā*; some are just listed as names, without further details of their lives as bhaktas." He also casts a much wider net, celebrating *bhakta*s from throughout South Asia including, famously, Muslim

144 This account of Hariścandra's *Uttarārdha-bhaktamāl* follows Vasudha Dalmia-Lüderitz, "Hariścandra of Banaras and the Reassessment of Vaiṣṇava Bhakti in the Late Nineteenth Century," in *Devotional Literature in South Asia: Current Research, 1985-1988*, ed. R.S. McGregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 288-289. Hariścandra published the poem in installments in his journal *Hariścandracandrikā.* It is available in Bhāratendu Hariścandra, *Bhāratendu Samagra*, 3rd ed. (Vārāṇasī: Pracāraka Granthāvalī Pariyojanā, Hindī Pracāraka Saṃsthāna, 1989), 67-81.

145 Dalmia-Lüderitz, "Hariścandra of Banaras and the Reassessment of Vaiṣṇava Bhakti in the Late Nineteenth Century," 288.

bhaktas: "Sacrifice crores of Hindus for these Muslim people of Hari."[146] He also manages to include his father and himself among the celebrated *bhaktas*, establishing himself as a ninth member of the *aṣṭachāp*: "Loving always like a companion of Śyām, a ninth (or new) companion of Śyām, the famous poet Hari[ścandra]."[147] Despite his self-avowed flaws, Hariścandra "locates himself within the lineage of Vaiṣṇava poets as a *navasakhā*,[148] and spreads the net of bhaktas over time and space, subsuming thereby a number of traditions within the fold of Vaiṣṇava bhakti."[149] Throughout the *Uttarārdha-bhaktamāl,* Hariścandra situates himself within a broad Vaishnava community, structured by multiple *sampradāys* and defined by bhakti.

Hariścandra's defense of orthodox Vaishnavism was defined in terms of his debates with opponents of image worship, such as Ram Mohan Roy and Dayanand Saraswati,[150] but his arguments for the centrality of Vaishnavism coincided with arguments made by Western Orientalists. The arguments of Hariścandra and his allies for "the centrality of the Vaiṣṇava tradition in their conception of Hindū dharma and the increasing emphasis on bhakti as a category which transcended the ritual of Brahmanical religion" dovetailed with "a dominant stream of thought and research" in European Indology.[151] For Orientalists, such as Monier Monier-Williams, Vaishnavism was "a religion of faith and love, which was founded by the abolition of the triune equality of Brahmā, Śiva and Viṣṇu in favour of Viṣṇu, most of all as

146 "इन मुसलमान हरिजनन पै कोटिन हिन्दुन वारियै ।।" Quoted in Ibid., 289.

147 "नित श्याम-सखी सम नेह, नव श्याम-सखी हरि सुजस कवि ।।" Quoted in Ibid.

148 The exact meaning of *navasakhā* is ambiguous. It may refer to either the ninth or a new companion of Krishna. Taking *nava* as "nine" stresses Hariścandra's *puṣṭi mārg* affiliation as it would establish him as the ninth member of the *aṣṭachāp*, the eight poets who serve as the "seals" of this tradition.

149 Dalmia-Lüderitz, "Hariścandra of Banaras and the Reassessment of Vaiṣṇava Bhakti in the Late Nineteenth Century," 289.

150 Dalmia, *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions: Bhartendu Harischandra and Nineteenth-century Banaras*, 385.

151 Ibid., 390.

manifested in his two human incarnations, Kṛṣṇa and Rāma."[152] Indian Orientalists, especially Rajendralal Mitr, secretary of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, served an intermediary role. Unlike Monier-Williams and other Western Orientalists, they did not mention any Christian influence on Vaishnavism, nor did they perceive a sharp distinction between Vaishnavism and philosophical monism. Grierson – who will be considered in more detail in the following chapter – formulated a "theory of bhakti as the overarching principle which encompassed the most diverse streams, as in fact the "religious system current over a large portion of India," and further to posit a bhakti movement in medieval India, unitary in character, which carried the message of love to all corners of the subcontinent and to see it all as the gift of Christianity."[153] For Dalmia, "the process of the reconstruction of the bhakti ideology" is not "entirely the work of western Indology" but is "the result of a process of interaction with concerned and interested persons and groups in India, who had stakes in this reading and who colluded in the creation of this discourse."[154]

In the third phase of his religious position, Hariścandra presented Vaishnavism as a nationalist religion that had room even for his erstwhile opponents in the Ārya Samāj and Brahmo Samāj, albeit somewhat ambiguously.[155] Hariścandra and other traditionalists borrowed selectively from European Orientalist scholarship to establish, for instance, Vaishnavism as "a historical continuum, which made for the internal coherence of

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152 Ibid., 398.

153 Ibid., 400-401. Cf. John Stratton Hawley, *The Bhakti Movement--From Where? Since When?*, Occasional Publication 10 (New Delhi: India International Centre, 2009).

154 Dalmia, *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions: Bhartendu Harischandra and Nineteenth-century Banaras*, 410.

155 Ibid., 413-417.

Bhāratvarṣ."[156] Hariścandra presented Vaishnavism's various strands as "intrinsically coherent," forming the "central core of Hinduism" and holding "the most promise for the future development of the country."[157] Hindu traditionalists came to understand Vaishnavism as a monotheistic faith, similar but superior to Christianity and Islam.[158]

Hariścandra's religious career, then, began in the service of particular sectarian structures but moved to an articulation of Vaishnavism as a unifying nationalist ideology. Dalmia notes that the "main characteristics of the true religion of the Hindus" – that is to say "monotheism and devotion to a personal god" – "drew the most support from the traditionalist groupings as well as from western Orientalists." Such a formation may have marginalized Shiva, but it was still broad enough to encompass Shaivas along with Vaishnavas. Hariścandra's position represented "public opinion" in north India, but his role as "a leading publicist, speaking with all the authority of the holy city of Kāśī and its institutions, with a massive reputation in the world of Hindi letters" meant that he also actively shaped public opinion.[159] Hariścandra's religious position can be taken as representative of the most influential strand of modern Hinduism, a strand which he helped to shape.

The *Bhaktamāl* holds an important place within this formation. The inter-sectarian, bhakti-defined, pan-regional community imagined by Nābhādās serves as an important precedent for the modern Hinduism promoted by Hariścandra. The *Uttarārdha-bhaktamāl* makes this connection explicit. Hariścandra's articulation of bhakti as the universal religion of India, defined in Vaishnava terms and structured by the ritual and institutional life of the

156 Ibid., 411-412.

157 Ibid., 417.

158 Ibid., 424-425.

159 Ibid., 429.

sampradāy, follows from Nābhādās' and Priyādās' visions. Such a progression cannot be said to be inevitable, but it is compelling.

Conclusion

Print, along with the cultural and intellectual climate of nineteenth-century north India, played an important role in altering the *Bhaktamāl* tradition. Early Indian print editions of the *Bhaktamāl* seem to continue the manuscript tradition, but presses such as Naval Kishore's would eventually start printing *Bhaktamāl*s in new languages and with modern, prose commentaries that would enable new readerships to engage with this text. Before these editions, though, the colonial state first brought the *Bhaktamāl* into print as part of a volume intended for junior military officers. Price saw the *Bhaktamāl* as a text well-suited to making European officers more familiar with those whom they would command. Later, Wilson would draw on the *Bhaktamāl* in his efforts to provide an account of the religious communities of contemporary north India. Similarly, but with far more sympathy, Growse would look to the *Bhaktamāl* as a key source for his description of the Vaishnavas of Vrindavan. In the *Bhaktamāl*, both Wilson and Growse perceived a text that was intimately connected to community formation. In this perceptive observation, they are not so different from Hariścandra, but while Wilson emphasized the divisions of Hindu society, Hariścandra found a vision of Hindu unity in the *Bhaktamāl*. For Hariścandra and other traditionalist advocates of modern Hinduism, the *Bhaktamāl* offers a compelling vision of proto-nationalist bhakti. In the nineteenth century, as in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Nābhādās' *Bhaktamāl* continued to serve as a site of discussion and argument over the composition and boundaries of the broad-based devotional community that eventually came to be known as Hinduism.

Chapter Six: A Standard *Bhaktamāl*: Rūpkalā and Grierson

> Suddenly, like a flash of lightning, there came upon all this darkness a new idea.[...] This new idea was that of *bhakti*.
>
> - George Abraham Grierson[1]

Introduction

The preceding chapters have traced the *Bhaktamāl* tradition from its origin in the early seventeenth century to the advent of print in the nineteenth century. In each of these chapters, we have seen how Nābhādās' *Bhaktamāl* has remained a site of disputation over the boundaries of a broad-based community defined by a shared commitment to bhakti. Nābhādās set the terms of this centuries-long debate with his invocation of a widely inclusive bhakti community that, while centered on the *sampradāy*, exceeded all institutional boundaries. Priyādās accepted the boundaries of Nābhādās' community but sought to impose a new, more restrictive logic on its inclusiveness. This tradition continued to flourish in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as commentators approached Nābhādās' and Priyādās' texts from a variety of perspectives and in a number of languages. The technology of print and the colonial context in which it was introduced brought the *Bhaktamāl* into new contexts. The *Bhaktamāl* became a key ingredient in the articulation of modern Hinduism. Print did not, however, instantly bring about fixity and standardization.

In this chapter, we shall see how a sense of fixity did emerge in the *Bhaktamāl* tradition. While technology may not be sufficient to explain the move toward standardization, it may be a necessary factor. It took a concerted cultural effort to bring a sense of order to this

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1 George A. Grierson, "Modern Hinduism and Its Debt to the Nestorians," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (April 1907): 313-314.

contentious textual tradition. Two key figures in this effort were "Sītārāmśaraṇ" Bhagvān Prasād "Rūpkalā" and George Abraham Grierson. Despite their different backgrounds, these two figures had much in common. They were both colonial civil servants and shared a commitment to aestheticized devotional forms of religiosity, and they each helped to carry the *Bhaktamāl* tradition into the twentieth century.

This chapter focuses on the reception and publication of the *Bhaktamāl* during the first decade of the twentieth century. This period saw the publication of two influential and related texts. In the years between 1903 and 1909, Rūpkalā released his monumental work of devotional scholarship, an edition of the combined text of Nābhādās' *Bhaktamāl* and Priyādās' *Bhaktirasabodhinī* along with his own exegesis, the *Bhaktisudhāsvād*, "A Taste of the Nectar of Devotion."[2] This work, in a single-volume edition first published in Lucknow in 1913, has become the standard edition of the *Bhaktamāl* and remains in print. In 1909 and 1910, his friend, the scholar-administrator George Abraham Grierson, published his "Gleanings from the Bhakta-mala" as a series of articles in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*. These articles translate the opening stanzas of Nābhādās' and Priyādās' works into English and provide explanatory notes. "Gleanings" could be regarded as the beginnings of a modern English-language commentary on the *Bhaktamāl*, and in later editions of his *Bhaktamāl*, Rūpkalā lists it

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2 "The bibliographic details of Bhagvan Prasad's commentary are less than clear: According to Sharma, *Bhaktamal aur Hindi Kavya mem Uski Parampara*, 141, the commentary was first published in 1903 in six parts as *Bhaktisudhasvadtilak* [The Sweet Nectar of Bhakti] by Babu Baldev Narayan, vakil (or pleader) of Kashi. This would appear to be the edition referred to by George Grierson, "Gleanings from the Bhakta-Mala," Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1909, 608–9, who notes in 1909, however, that it was "in course of publication." The edition I have used here was also issued in six parts, in two volumes of three parts each, by the Chandraprabha Press in Kashi, between the years 1903 and 1909. On the inside title page one Baldev Narayan Sinha (described here as vakil of Gaya District) is credited for having arranged the publication of the earlier imprint. R. D. Gupta, "The Bhaktirasabodhini of Priya Dasa," 552 n. 22, maintains that "this is the oldest printed edition." Later editions were published by the Naval Kishore Press (1913, 1925) and the Tejkumar Press (1962), both in Lucknow. On the high scholarly regard for the Sitaramsharan Bhagvan Prasad, see Sharma, *Bhaktamal aur Hindi Kavya*, 142–43, and Grierson, "Gleanings," 609, 623." William R. Pinch, *Peasants and Monks in British India*, np. chap. 2. n. 32.

as such.

Lives of the Commentators

"Sītārām Śaran" Bhagvān Prasād "Rūpkalā"

Rūpkalā and Grierson had much in common. They each came from prominent families, served in the colonial administration, and shared a commitment to devotional religiosity. Bhagvān Prasād was born in 1840 to a family of scholarly Kāyasthas, which had already produced noted *Bhaktamāl* commentators. His uncle, Tulasirām, and his father, Tapasvirām, both had written Persian-language commentaries on the *Bhaktamāl*. Bhagvān Prasād spent much of his childhood in Mubarakpur, "a prestigious Kayasth enclave near the town of Chapra in Saran District," Bihar.[3]

Bhagvān Prasād was affiliated with the *Rasik* branch of the Rāmānandī *sampradāy*. Both Sītārāmśaraṇ and Rūpkalā are names that were granted to him upon initiations within the order. In 1858, a year after his marriage, he became a disciple of a Swāmī Rāmcaraṇdās, who gave him the name Sītārāmśaraṇ, one who takes refuge in Sita and Ram. In 1881, Bhagvān Prasād met "the famous rasik of Bhāgalpur, Śrī Rāmcaraṇdās Haṁskalā, and was granted the title Rūpkalā, which may be translated as 'manifest beauty'".[4]

Bhagvān Prasād had a successful career in the civil service. In 1863 he became a subinspector of schools in Patna, and for the next thirty years he remained in the educational administration. He served as a headmaster and, in 1867, became a Deputy Inspector. He was posted to Bhāgalpur in 1881 and Patna in 1886. He never had any children. His father died in

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3 Ibid., np.

4 Ibid.

1885, and his wife died in 1890. In 1893, he gave up government service and retired to an ascetic life in Ayodhya, as his father and uncle had done before him. His mother died in 1895.[5] It was during his years in contemplation at Kanak Bhavan in Ayodhya that Rūpkalā compiled his edition of the *Bhaktamāl*.[6]

George Abraham Grierson

George Abraham Grierson was born to a prominent Dublin family in 1851.[7] Grierson's father, also named George Grierson, was the joint-proprietor of the *Daily Express* and "Printer to the King in Dublin." His grandfather, another George Grierson, was likewise a well-known Dublin printer.[8] He received a classical education then read, initially in mathematics, at Trinity College, Dublin. He came under the influence of Professor Robert Atkinson and went on to win prizes in Sanskrit and Hindustani. He passed into the Indian Civil Service in 1871 and, after two more years at Trinity, reached the Bengal Presidency in 1873, where he commenced his service

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5 Brajendra Prasāda, *Śrī Rūpakalā Vāk Sudhā* (Naī Dillī: Sarayū Prasāda, 1970), 39-40.

6 William R. Pinch, *Peasants and Monks in British India*, n.p. Kanak Bhavan is "the oldest and arguably most important *rasika* insitution in Ayodhya. *Kanak bhavan* means 'house of gold' and is considered the abode of Sītā, Rām's wife." Vijay Pinch, "Bhakti and the British Empire," *Past & Present* 179 (May 2003): 171. "At the end of the last century it [Kanak Bhavan] was still a charming little temple, although even at that time the place had a certain fame as the palace where Ram and Sita had spent their happy married life. For that reason it had always been a centre for adherents of the sweet devotion, who stress the emotional bond between the devotees and Sita in terms of her relationship with friends and servants in the palace. At the beginning of this century, when the raja of Orccha decided to buy the temple and embellish it in the manner of a real palace, the importance of Kanak Bhavan began to grow beyond measure. An enormous and richly decorated palatial building was built on the site of the old mud building and the images were decked with precious stones and expensive clothing. Peter van der Veer, *Gods on Earth: The Management of Religious Experience and Identity in a North Indian Pilgrimage Centre* (London: Athlone Press, 1988), 22. "In Kanak Bhavan, there is an upper storey on which there are several rooms for the gods: a bedroom, a study-room/library, a *darbār* (court), a shrine and even a toilet." Ibid., 161. "Except for Hanumangarhi, no temple in Ayodhya attracts as many pilgrims as Kanak Bhavan. This is also the key to its success. While the other temples built by rajas remained of parochial interest to the pilgrimage system of Ayodhya, Kanak Bhavan's very splendour gave it an importance which surpassed its connection with the Orccha family." Ibid., 274.

7 F.W. Thomas and R.L. Turner, *George Abraham Grierson 1851-1941*, The Proceedings of the British Academy (London: Humphrey Milford Amen House, E.C., 1941), 1.

8 Ibid.

as Assistant Magistrate, Collector, and Small Cause Court Judge.[9] By 1890 he had risen to Magistrate and Collector at Patna, and in 1896, he received his last normal appointment as Opium Agent for Bihar. In 1898 he was appointed Superintendent of the newly formed Linguistic Survey of India. He took "furlough in England for convenience of consulting European libraries and scholars" and remained there following its expiry in 1900 on "special duty."[10]

Grierson's earliest publications were in the *Journal and Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*.[11] He wrote on the dialects of Bihar[12] and published *Bihar Peasant Life* in 1885.[13] He turned to Hindi and composed *The Modern Vernacular Literature of Hindustan*, which gave biographical and bibliographical accounts of as many as 950 authors.[14] He never focused exclusively on Hindi but studied and wrote on many Indo-Iranian languages.[15]

From 1908 – 1926, Grierson contributed numerous articles to the *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*. His contemporaries noted his lack of sympathy with Vedantic Advaita, which he regarded as "Pandit religion," but commented on his "warm appreciation of the monotheistic devotion of the country folk."[16] During this period, Grierson considered the

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9 Ibid., 2.

10 Ibid., 3.

11 Ibid., 6.

12 Ibid., 7.

13 George A. Grierson, *Bihār Peasant Life, Being a Discursive Catalogue of the Surroundings of the People of That Province, with Many Illustrations from Photographs Taken by the Author* (Calcutta: The Bengal secretariat press, 1885).

14 George A. Grierson, *The Modern Vernacular Literature of Hindustan* (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1889).

15 Thomas and Turner, *George Abraham Grierson 1851-1941*, 8.

16 Ibid., 11.

relationship between Hindu and Christian bhakti.[17] This aspect of Grierson's thought is considered in some detail below.

Most of Grierson's later works deal with linguistics. Due to his work for the Linguistic Survey, he covered a wider range of languages than his earlier works on Indo-Aryan and Iranian languages. The thick and numerous volumes assembled by the Linguistic Survey of India are not the work of a single mind but rather that of a bureaucratic government that was inclined to such "scientific projects." Thomas and Turner write, "the work may be regarded as a great Imperial museum, representing and systematically classifying the linguistic botany of India."[18]

"Bhakti and the British Empire"

Vijay Pinch's essay "Bhakti and the British Empire" explores "the lives and thoughts of Bhagvān Prasād and Grierson in order to contest "recent post-colonial depictions of British India as a site of unidirectional mental colonization inflicted by a rationalizing, scientific Europe on a pliable pre-modern Orient."[19] He argues "that we need to pay more attention to religion and religious belief if we are to arrive at a fuller understanding of what Empire meant to the individuals who lived in it."[20] Pinch focuses specifically on popular bhakti rather than elite modes of religiosity. For Pinch, bhakti "paralleled the overarching religious values that sustained the imperial age."[21]

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17 Ibid., 12.

18 Ibid., 18.

19 Vijay Pinch, "Bhakti and the British Empire," 160.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid., 164.

Pinch explores Grierson's and Bhagvān Prasād's engagement with bhakti and the British Empire. Both their lives "reflect, in different ways, their own perceptions of imperial obligation. Each took refuge in the world of *bhakti* in a way that reflected his relative place in the British Empire." Grierson's support for empire is clear, but Bhagvān Prasād is almost entirely silent on this question.[22] On the other hand, we know about Bhagvān Prasād's inner spiritual life due to his wide following among "mid- and upper-level government servants throughout Bihar and the United Provinces." One of these followers, Brajendra Prasād (1880-1947), "committed his guru's recollections to paper, and they were published posthumously in 1970."[23] Less is known about Grierson's inner life, but he seems to have been an Anglican. While nothing is known "about his religious upbringing," his brother became a bishop in the Church of Ireland.[24]

Pinch's essay argues for taking religion seriously in the study of empire. He criticizes post-colonial historians, such as Ranajit Guha, Partha Chatterjee, and Dipesh Chakrabarty, who in various ways reduce bhakti to a form of either subordination or resistance to empire. Such understandings rely on the assumption that "all Indians who took part in Empire did so under duress, either conscious or unconscious." Pinch sees this proposition as rooted in contemporary political concerns and as reflecting "a desire to explain religious devotion in terms of subaltern failure and colonial displacement." For post-colonial historians then, bhakti is simply a reflection of power relations. It is not what its practitioners claim it to be: "If God has a role to play in all this, it is an exceedingly small one."[25]

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22 Ibid., 165-166.

23 Vijay Pinch, "Bhakti and the British Empire," 166; Brajendra Prasāda, *Śrī Rūpakalā Vāk Sudhā.*

24 Vijay Pinch, "Bhakti and the British Empire," 178 n. 54.

25 Ibid., 166-168.

In order to understand Bhagvān Prasād and Grierson, Pinch argues, "what is needed is a fuller investigation of religious culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Only then can we begin to understand the interpenetrations, religious and otherwise, that inevitably occurred between them, and between India and Europe."[26] Bhagvān Prasād "loved God and he loved Government" and "these two loves were connected."[27] Grierson's engagement with the *Bhaktamāl* "was not simply scholarly," and he commented "at length on the shared religious ground occupied by Hinduism and Christianity."[28] Grierson's interest in bhakti and, thus, the *Bhaktamāl* "stemmed from his interest in it as the product of Hindu-Christianity, or Christian-Hinduism." Grierson believed "that Christian Europe's tolerant engagement with Hindu India would enable the latter to fulfill itself religiously."[29] I have more to say about Bhagvān Prasād's and Grierson's engagement with the *Bhaktamāl* below.

Pinch encourages us to take Bhagvān Prasād's and Grierson's religious stances seriously – particularly miracle stories in which Ram intervenes on behalf of Bhagvān Prasād – and not "to read into these stories a host of hidden meanings that stem from the calculus of colonial domination and resistance." Pinch explains, "In our haste to provide a reasonable (and tragicomic) history situated in colonial anxiety, we would deprive the past of its voice, the central claim of which is that Rām performed miracles on behalf of Bhagvān Prasād. We would lay that claim aside and allow it to gather dust because it bothers us in an age of reason."[30] Taking these claims seriously would alter "our understanding of the British Empire:" "We are

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26 Ibid., 169.

27 Ibid., 166.

28 Ibid., 173.

29 Ibid., 178.

30 Ibid., 192.

forced to contend with Grierson's call for a trusting love between the fellow subjects of Empire, British and Indian alike. We are forced to make intellectual room for Bhagvān Prasād's desire for a 'liberal brotherhood among ourselves' and his admonition to 'Love God, Government and goodness.' These sentiments, uttered in distant mental retreats, suggest that the British-Indian experience of the British Empire cannot be reduced to colonial antipathy enacted in racism, violence, anxiety and displacement."[31] Pinch concludes by arguing that such an understanding makes "the British Indian Empire" "more imperial and less colonial." He explains,

> India was not a British colony. To refer to the British domination of India as 'colonialism' suggests that Indians did not take part, but simply watched from the shrinking sidelines while Britons appropriated to themselves the wealth and territory of the subcontinent. Such descriptions may assuage a wounded national pride, or serve some narrow political interest in the present, but they silence a wide range of important voices and meanings. The historiographical logic of 'colonialism' for India, which has produced post-colonial theory globally, creates a mythology of the past where Indian participation in Empire never happened. And this is tantamount to saying imperialism itself did not happen.[32]

For me, this conclusion takes Pinch's argument a step too far. I find it difficult to understand why "colonialism" suggests a complete lack of Indian agency while "imperialism" suggests a more sophisticated understanding of empire. Pinch is certainly correct to reject any theory of empire that "presents a mythology of the past where Indian participation in Empire never happened," but who among serious historians advances such a simplistic vision of British India? Guha, Chatterjee, and Chakrabarty – whatever their flaws – are certainly not guilty of this crime. Pinch is correct to insist on the reality of Indian participation in the British Empire, but I am not convinced that using the word "colony" implies the opposite. Certainly, references to "colonialism" in this dissertation should not be read as such.

Pinch is on far firmer ground in his critique of post-colonial theorists'

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31 Ibid., 194.

32 Ibid., 194-195.

misunderstandings of bhakti. His insistence on taking religious claims seriously is welcome. Bhakti cannot be reduced to a simple response to the unbalanced power relations of British India. Bhagvān Prasād and Grierson each demonstrated a deep and longterm engagement with bhakti. Pinch reminds us that this engagement must be considered alongside their careers in the civil service, but it should not be explained away as a product of hegemony or resistance.

The Commentaries

Bhaktisudhāsvād

While Pinch explores the lives of Grierson and Bhagvān Prasād in order to argue for a greater role for religion in our understandings of British India, this chapter focuses specifically on Grierson's and Rūpkalā's *Bhaktamāl* commentaries in order to better understand their roles in shaping the textual tradition begun by Nābhādās.

Rupkala's edition opens with the "Srī Vaiṣṇav Nāmāvalī," which is "a list of 108 prominent Vaishnavas throughout the central Gangetic region." The "Nāmāvalī" provides "names, dates, and places" along with "a confirmation of each individual's contribution to the sampraday. It represented a way of commemorating the breadth of Ramanandi achievement, both geographically and intellectually; it also allowed Bhagvan Prasad to express his own personal religious roots within the Ramanandi universe."[33] In a sense, Rūpkalā continued the *Bhaktamāl* tradition by establishing a community through the praise of prominent devotees from the past. Pinch emphasizes that "Bhagvan Prasad's edition of the Bhaktamal should be understood not simply as a scholarly tour-de-force and a concrete example of deep faith, but as

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33 William R. Pinch, *Peasants and Monks in British India*, np.

a commemoration, indeed celebration, of the Ramanandi sampraday."[34]

Following this preface, however, the text consists of Nābhādās' *Bhaktamāl* and its commentaries, including Rūpkalā's new, modern commentary. Rūpkalā brings together three different levels of text. The core text is Nābhādās' *Bhaktamāl*. The outermost layer of text is Rūpkalā's *vārtik tilak*, or exegetical commentary. This modern standard Hindi prose commentary expands the verses of Nābhādās and Priyādās. Rūpkalā provides glosses of difficult terms, restates episodes from Priyādās in clear prose, provides a wider context by quoting verses from sources such as the *Bhāgavat Purāṇa* and the *Rāmcaritmānas*, and generally expands the descriptions of the *bhakta*s mentioned by Nābhādās and Priyādās. As with Priyādās, Rūpkalā's commentary does not simply clarify and explain the meaning of the texts on which he comments. Instead, as we will see below, it expands the meaning of these texts in interesting and significant ways.

"Gleanings from the Bhakta-mala"

"Gleanings from the Bhakta-mala" was published as a series of three articles in the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society from 1909 – 1910. In these articles, Grierson provides loose translations of the first eight stanzas of Nābhādās' *Bhaktamāl* and of Priyādās' commentary on these verses. He also provides his own explanatory notes. Grierson explains that a simple translation of the *Bhaktamāl* would not be of much value: "the book partakes of the nature of the sūtra-works of Sanskrit literature. It is written in an extremely compressed style, every possible superfluous word being omitted, and every epithet being intended as the clue to some legend not otherwise recorded. Hence a translation of the mere text would be of little use.

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34 Ibid.

Under his instructions his pupil Priyā-dāsa [...] wrote a commentary explaining the various allusions in the text. This commentary really forms an integral portion of the work, and owing to the circumstances of its composition is of equal authority with the rest."[35] Grierson may overstate the compressed nature of the *Bhaktamāl*. As we saw in chapter two, Nābhādās' verse is telegraphic, but it is by no means unintelligible. Grierson is right to note that the *Bhaktamāl* does seem to encode more than it states outright, and Priyādās – who was not Nābhādās' contemporary[36] – expands Nābhādās' terse passages into more fully realized narratives. Priyādās' claim that his commentary is as authoritative as Nābhādās' *mūl* text has been accepted by tradition, and Grierson acknowledges this fact.

Exegesis, Aesthetics, and Devotion

Rūpkalā's and Grierson's commentaries are both basically explanatory. They each seek to make the *Bhaktamāl* accessible to new audiences in modern contexts. As we shall see, for Rūpkalā, this means offering an exegetical commentary that could potentially replace a trained reciter while negotiating the thicket of competing interpretations that had entered into circulation. Grierson sought to sympathetically explain bhakti to a Western audience. He relies heavily on Rūpkalā, a debt which he acknowledges, but while Rūpkalā's commentary is characterized by the elucidation of difficult passages and competing interpretations, Grierson's reading of these passages feels comparatively muddled, lacking Rūpkalā's clear distinctions. Rūpkalā and Grierson each in his own way expands the bhakti community imagined by Nābhādās.

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35 Grierson, "Gleanings from the Bhakta-Mala," 608.

36 See chapter three.

Caste and Communities of Interpretation

A useful point of comparison between Grierson and Rūpkalā is their respective treatments of questions of Nābhādās' identity, particularly relating to his early life and caste affiliation. Rūpkalā describes several distinct responses to these questions, but he does not try to adjudicate between them. Rūpkalā's bhakti community – his Hinduism – is a big enough tent to accommodate competing interpretations of the *Bhaktamāl*. Grierson's treatment of these questions is less clear. He demonstrates dependence on Rūpkalā but does not present these interpretations as distinct. Rather, he sees them as part of a single, somewhat muddled, shared perspective.

Grierson's dependence on Rūpkalā served as an endorsement of Rūpkalā's editorial and commentarial approach. Gupta has noted that Grierson's "translation and notes are mainly based on S.Ś. Bhagavān Prasāda's commentary, which he himself declares to be his "chief authority in doubtful points." Consequently, S.Ś. Bhagavān Prasāda's misinterpretations, some of which are based on his own sectarian beliefs, and misleading information have been included by Grierson in his articles."[37] Gupta is mainly concerned that Grierson's reliance on Rūpkalā led to the repetition of some of his mistakes,[38] but this dependence also acted as a kind of imprimatur, helping to establish Rūpkalā's edition and commentary as the standard version of the *Bhaktamāl*.

For Rūpkalā, Priyādās' commentary provides a platform from which to consider variant

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37 R.D. Gupta, "Studies in the Bhaktirasa-bodhinī of Priyā Dāsa," 15.

38 For example, Gupta's note on Priyādās' third *kavitta* reads in part: "lāla pyārī: Kṛṣṇa and his beloved Rādhā. G.A. Grierson translates this term as 'the Lover and the Beloved', and in the footnote interprets it as 'Rāma and his spouse Sītā.' Grierson's interpretation is based on S.Ś Bhagavān Prasāda, whom he states to be his 'chief authority in doubtful points'. S.Ś. Bhagavān Prasāda, being a follower of the Rāma cult and a member of the 'Rasika samprdāya', has interpreted this term as 'Rāma and Sītā' in the light of his religious belief." Ibid., 363-364.

accounts of Nābhādās' early life. Rūpkalā devotes particular attention to Priyādās' third stanza, in which Priyādās writes that Nābhādās was born blind in Hanuman's lineage (*Hanūmān vaṁś*) and that, when he was five years old, during a time of famine, his mother abandoned him in the forest. Kīlhadās and Agradās found the helpless orphan, and Kīlhadās sprinkled water into the boy's eyes, miraculously granting him sight.[39] Rūpkalā devotes nearly three full pages of commentary on these four lines of verse. Much of his discussion is devoted to a consideration of what it means to identify Nābhādās as part of Hanuman's lineage.

He begins by citing the work of his father and uncle, who hold that a partial avatar of Hanuman named Rāmdās lived in the South, in "Tailaṅg Deś," near the Godavari River. Rāmdās was a Maharashtrian Brahmin, exceedingly famous for his devotion to Sita and Ram. He even had a small tail! Because of the extent of his devotion, his descendants became known as *Hanūmān vaṁśīs,* and to this day, according to Rūpkalā, they are known for their skill at song and serve as royal singers.[40]

Rūpkalā also lists other interpretations of *Hanūmān vaṁś*. He cites Raghurāj Siṁha, a noted *bhaktamālī*, as interpreting it to mean *Lāṁgūlī* Brahmin. Rūpkalā discusses interpreters who claim that Nābhādās was a Ḍom, claiming that in western Marwar and environs, Ḍoms are prominent and well-respected singers. Rūpkalā also refers to Nābhādās' and Priyādās' descriptions of the *bhakta* Lākhā to interpret *Hanūmān vaṁś* as referring to monkeys. He suggests that Nābhādās may have been neither Brahmin nor Ḍom, but a member of an "untouchable" caste.[41]

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39 See chapter three.

40 "Rūpkalā", *Śrī Bhaktamāl*, 43.

41 Ibid., 43-44.

Rūpkalā also addresses the possibility of Nābhādās' divine origins. He discusses a tradition that sees Nābhādās as a partial avatar of Brahma. According to this tradition, Krishna punished Brahma for the crime of kidnapping, condemning him to be born blind in the Kaliyug. Krishna was pleased by Brahma's praise, though, and he granted him the boon that he would only remain blind for five years, after which he would simultaneously gain ordinary and divine vision and achieve great glory.[42]

Following a narrative summation of Nābhādās' abandonment in the forest and rescue by Kīlhadev and Agradās, Rūpkalā continues his "discussion of Nābhā-jī's birth, caste (*jāti*), and name," adding yet another interpretation. He explains that the proper name of the author of the *Bhaktamāl* is "Nabhabhūj" (Sky-born), and that he is not born of a woman (*ayonij puruṣ*). He therefore has no *jāti*. He was born from a drop of Hanuman's sweat and is thus famous as a *Hanūmān vaṁśī*. Rūpkalā then narrates the story of how Nābhā-jī came to be born in this unusual manner. One time, Shiva was instructing Hanuman in yoga. Due to Hanuman's great mental effort a drop of sweat fell from his body. Shiva caught the drop in a container, and in order to increase bhakti, threw it down to earth where it became "Nabhabhūj," better known as Nābhā-jī. It is for this reason that Nābhā-jī is said to be a *Hanūmān vaṁśī*. Rūpkalā further explains that when Hanuman's drop of sweat fell, he was in a state of *samādhi*, and Nābhādās was therefore born without eyes. From birth, though, he possessed a divine interior vision.[43]

This section of Rūpkalā's commentary is fairly typical of his approach to the text. He will usually provide a modern Hindi prose paraphrase of the verse as well as whichever other explanatory comments he chooses to include. Rūpkalā reports several mutually exclusive

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42 Ibid., 44.

43 Ibid., 44-45.

accounts of Nābhā's origins and early childhood, but he does not adjudicate between them. The arrival of print editions during the late nineteenth century brought different traditional accounts of Nābhādās' life into sustained contact. Rūpkalā provides us with an encyclopedic collection of these traditions, but does not provide a standard by which to choose between them.

Western scholarship on the *Bhaktamāl* did not necessarily find it easier to make sense of the variety of interpretations that clung to this text. Grierson's notes on these verses bear a remarkable similarity to Rūpkalā's exegesis but lose much of Rūpkalā's admirable clarity. Grierson acknowledges his debt to Bhagvān Prasād, whom he refers to as a friend, and praises his commentary, calling it his "chief authority in all doubtful points."[44] If anything, however, this praise under-acknowledges his reliance on Rūpkalā.

Grierson's notes on Nābhādās' origins begin with an account of "a Māhārāṣṭra Brāhmaṇ named Śrīrāma-dāsa." He then discusses the possibility that Nābhā was a Ḍom, followed by the origin story in which he is born from a drop of Hanuman's sweat.[45] Grierson's notes on this passage are simply a paraphrase of Rūpkalā's commentary, but while Rūpkalā's accounts of Nābhādās' early years are clearly separated and attributed to multiple sources, Grierson mostly runs them together, providing significantly less detail than Rūpkalā. Rūpkalā makes it clear that he is offering accounts of several different interpretive possibilities, but Grierson gives the impression that, generally speaking, each of these accounts is equally accepted. Rūpkalā acknowledges that *Hanūmān vaṁś* is a contested term with multiple possible meanings. Grierson blurs the distinctions drawn by Rūpkalā, using terms such as "According to tradition"

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44 Grierson, "Gleanings from the Bhakta-Mala," 608-609.

45 Ibid., 621.

and "According to the ordinary story" to introduce each separate account. One comes away with the feeling that these accounts are a confused amalgamation, not different possible interpretations.

New Contexts

Grierson's dependence upon and endorsement of Rūpkalā continues in the second and third installments of "Gleanings." Neither Rūpkalā's nor Grierson's text fit well with traditional reading practices. Both of them open up the *Bhaktamāl* to those who would encounter it outside of a *guru-śiṣya* relationship or recitation coupled with commentary. Rūpkalā allows the reader of Khaṛī Bolī to understand the *Bhaktamāl* as well as to position it within its broader context. Grierson serves a similar function for the readers of the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, and he does so in a manner that owes much to Rūpkalā.

Rūpkalā's and Grierson's respective treatments of the story of Ajāmil illustrate how their commentaries make the *Bhaktamāl* accessible to new readerships. Nābhādās mentions Ajāmil in his stanza on the twelve chief *bhakta*s, even though Ajāmil is not himself counted among these twelve. The seventh stanza of the *Bhaktamāl* marks the proper beginning of the work since this stanza is the first to praise devotees, the twelve original *bhakta*s, whom Grierson refers to as the "Twelve Mighty in the Faith."[46] As we saw in chapter two, these twelve are Brahma, Nārad, Shiva, Sanak and the others, Kapildev, the royal sage, Prahlād, Janak, Bhīṣma, Bali, Śuk the sage, and Yama.[47] Nābhādās also celebrates Ajāmil in this stanza, in connection with Yama, and early editions of Rūpkalā's commentary treat Ajāmil, rather than

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46 Grierson, "Gleanings from the Bhakta-Mala," 87-109.

47 See chapter two. Rūpkalā lists Manubhūp (King Manu) instead of Munibhup (the royal sage), a variation noted by Jhā.

Yama, as the twelfth chief *bhakta*.[48] Rūpkalā writes that the story of Ajāmil is suitable for determining the highest dharma, which is to say that even the invocation of the divine name is adequate to destroy great sins.[49] Grierson identifies Yama as this stanza's twelfth *bhakta* but notes that there is disagreement on the matter. For Grierson, Yama "is the supreme judge of actions performed, or not performed in this life," and he is included as one of the chief *bhakta*s due to his role in the story of Ajāmil. This story "is a typical instance of the valuelessness of works (*karma*) as compared with faith (*bhakti*). So far as works went he [Ajāmil] was a gross sinner, but the accidental utterance of the name of the ADORABLE at the moment of his death was an act of faith, albeit a small one, and the ADORABLE, in His infinite mercy, took advantage of the opportunity thus offered, destroyed the sequence of all his evil works, and saved him."[50] Grierson establishes a parallel here between Hindu bhakti and Christianity, specifying that "We see here the same distinction between faith and works that exists in Christendom."[51]

Priyādās devotes two stanzas to the story of Ajāmil, which Rūpkalā, as always, reproduces. Priyādās introduces Ajāmil: "His parents gave him the name Ajāmil. He became true [to his name] and became wicked (*ajāmel*). He abandoned his Brahmin (*shubhjāt*) wife. He drank alcohol. He gave up his intellect and wrecked his body there, which is the result of sin. Laughing, some wicked person sent a sadhu. He came to his house. Seeing him, his consciousness returned, and he became *sāttvik*. He attentively performed *sevā* to the saints, and they became pleased. He gave the name Nārāyaṇ to the son in the womb of his mistress."[52]

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48 Pollet, "Studies in the Bhakta Mâla of Nâbhâ Dâsa," 250-251.

49 "Rūpkalā", *Śrī Bhaktamāl*, 60.

50 Grierson, "Gleanings from the Bhakta-Mala," 98.

51 I will return to Grierson's thought on the relationship between bhakti and Christianity below. Ibid.

52 "धर्यो पितु मात नाम "अजामेल", साँचो भयो, भयो अजामेल, तिया छूटी शुभजात की। कियो मद पान, सो सयान गहि दूरि

Rūpkalā provides a gloss of this passage, along with brief explanatory notes, then moves on to the next stanza: “Some time passed. He remained entangled in the net of illusion. He saw one of Yama's most fearsome messengers. With distress in his voice, he [Ajāmil] called out for the very son who, due to the mercy [of the saints] had been named Nārāyaṇ. Hearing this a member of Hari's assembly himself came running to that place. Breaking his noose, he spoke and explained dharma. Having been driven away by Hari, he [Yama's messenger] went to his lord and cried out. He [Yama] said, 'Listen, you who kill with lightning! Don't go where the praises of Hari are sung.'”[53] Rūpkalā again offers a modern standard Hindi summary of this stanza, along with some explanation. He concludes by exhorting his readers: “See the greatness of the Name that has been fixed even slightly in one's consciousness.”[54]

The main function of Rūpkalā's commentary here is to enable readers of modern standard Hindi to read the *Bhaktamāl* without the aid of a trained exegete. Rūpkalā provides a gloss of the Braj Bhāṣā verse text in Hindi prose and specifies the moral of the story. Rūpkalā's book takes the place of public recitation. It makes the *Bhaktamāl* available to the India's educated, middle class – people like Bhagvān Prasād (at least prior to his retreat to Ayodhya) and his followers. Grierson also seeks to bring the *Bhaktamāl* into new contexts. As the divide between Nābhādās or Priyādās and Grierson's elite, anglophone readers is greater than the one being bridged by Rūpkalā, Grierson needs to provide comparatively more explanation to make

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डार्यो, गार्यो तनु वाही सों, जो कीन्हो लैकै पातकी।। करी परिहास काहू दुष्ट ने पठाए साधु, आए घर, देखि बुद्धि आइ गई सातकी। सेवा करि सावधान, सन्तन रिझाइ लियो, ‘‘नारायण" नाम धर्यो गर्भ बाल पातकी।।" 23:1-4 "Rūpkalā", *Śrī Bhaktamāl*, 69.

53 "आइ गयो काल, मोहजाल में लपटि रह्यो, महाबिकराल यमदूत सों दिखाइये। वोही सुत "नारायण’’ नाम जो कृपा कै दियो, लियो सो पुकारि सुर आरत सुनाइये।। सुनत ही पारषद आए वोही ठौर दौर, तोरि डारे पास कह्यो धर्म्म समुझाइये। हरि लै बिडारे जाइ पति पै पुकारे कहि "सुनो वज्रमारे! मत जावो हरि गाइये।।’’ 24:1-4 Ibid., 70.

54 Ibid., 71.

the *Bhaktamāl* intelligible to them.

Grierson identifies the final chief *bhakta* as Yama, "the ruler of the nether world." Grierson explains that he is included due to "his readiness to forego his claim to carry off sinners, on hearing, at the time of their death, merely the name of the ADORABLE."[55] Like Rūpkalā, Grierson draws on Priyādās to present the story of Ajāmil as an example of Yama's forbearance. Grierson provides an evocative account of the climactic moment of this story:

> The ADORABLE's archangels (*pārṣada*), who ever wander hither and thither on their Master's business, heard a poor human being calling in distress upon "Nārāyaṇa," and rushed to his aid. They tore open the nooses which Yama's demons had cast around him. When these demons asked them why they had released so great a sinner, they told them the glories of the name of the ADORABLE and drove them away. The demons hastened to Yama and complained, but he, when he had heard their tale, condemned them. "May the thunderbolt fall upon you," said he. "Hear ye me. No matter how great a sinner a man may be, go ye not near him if ye hear issuing from his mouth, even though it be in error, the Holy Name of the LORD."[56]

Grierson follows his commentary on this stanza with a "Note on the Power Attributed to the NAME of the Deity in the Bhāgavata Religion." Grierson observes parallels between the understanding of "the sacredness and mystic power of the Name of the Deity" presented by "Bhāgavata writers" and that presented in "ancient and mediaeval Christian compositions." He cites Origen, Thomas à Kempis, P. Pelbart, S. Bonaventura, Ricardus de S. Laurentio, S. Bridget, and Honorius and explicitly compares them to Tulasīdās and Nānak.[57]

Grierson relies, then, on comparisons to Christianity in order make bhakti and the *Bhaktamāl* understandable to his readers. Grierson's attitude toward bhakti is tremendously sympathetic, and he wishes to convey this sympathy to his readers. Rūpkalā, in this case, is

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55 Grierson, "Gleanings from the Bhakta-Mala," 105.

56 Ibid., 107.

57 Ibid.

able to provide little more than a straightforward gloss of Priyādās' words. He does not need to resort to Christian analogies to gain his readers' sympathies. Still, both Grierson and Rūpkalā are bringing the *Bhaktamāl* into new contexts. The translation provided by Grierson's commentary may be more dramatic, but his readers were more distant from the *Bhaktamāl*'s original context. Still, the *Bhaktamāl*'s meaning was hardly self-evident to Rūpkalā's followers among the emerging Hindu middle class, necessitating exactly the sort of commentary he provides for them.

Christian Bhakti?

A striking feature of Grierson's commentary is the regular comparisons to Christianity. I have had occasion to mention several of these comparisons above. Grierson saw bhakti as profoundly connected to Christianity. He had previously argued that Hindu bhakti was the result of historical borrowings from Christianity, but he does not necessarily present this position in "Gleanings." For Grierson, bhakti – whatever its origins – reflected Christian ideals and, perhaps, ongoing entanglement with Christianity.

In a paper he presented to the Royal Asiatic Society in 1907, Grierson argued that "the beliefs of the early Nestorian Christians have been absorbed by Hinduism" and "have profoundly affected the religious system current over a large portion of India."[58] Grierson saw Nestorian Christians[59], established in south India since antiquity, as the source of Christian

58 Grierson, "Modern Hinduism and Its Debt to the Nestorians," 311.

59 Grierson does not seem particularly interested in the particulars of Nestorianism: "The great source of missionary activity in those days was, however, not Alexandria, but the Nestorian Christians of Syria; and a flourishing Nestorian community gradually rose in Southern India. These being isolated from their brethren in the West, their faith became corrupt. In 660 A.D. they had no regular ministry. In the fourteenth century they had even given up the rite of baptism, and a mixed worship, Christian, Musalmān, and Hindū, went on at the old hill-shrine of St. Thomas at Mylapore, near Madras. We need not pursue their history further; what is important for our present purposes is that the Christians had been in India for fourteen hundred years, and that they were on friendly terms with their Hindū neighbours. The same phenomenon presents itself at the

influence on Hinduism.[60] For Grierson ancient Hinduism did not have much to recommend it, but it underwent a rapid transformation: "Suddenly, like a flash of lightning, there came upon all this darkness a new idea. No Hindū knows where it came from, and no one can date its appearance; but all the official writings which describe it and which can be dated with certainty were written long after the Christian era. This new idea was that of *bhakti*. Religion was now no longer a matter of knowledge. It became a matter of emotion. It now satisfied the human craving for a supreme *personality*, to whom prayer and adoration could be addressed."[61] Two southern teachers – Rāmānuja and Viṣṇuswāmī – spread this new doctrine, which eventually reached the north:

> Late in the 14th century, or early in the 15th, a teacher of Rāmānuja's school, named Rāmānanda, drank afresh at the well of Christian influence, and quarrelling with his co-religionists on a question of discipline, founded a new sect, which he carried with him northwards to the Gangetic plain. From his time Sanskrit was no longer the official language of the *bhakti*-cult. It was preached and its text-books were written in the vernacular. Moreover, his motto was *Jāti pāti pūrchai nahi kōi, Hari-kō bhajai sō Hari-kā hōi*, "Let no one ask a man's caste or sect; whoever adores God, he is God's own." In other words, all castes were admitted to his communion. He had twelve apostles (note the number), and these included, besides Brāhmans, a Musalmān weaver, a leather-worker (one of the very lowest castes), a Rājput, a Jāt, and a barber. Nay, one of them was a woman.[62]

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present day." Ibid., 312. Corinne G. Dempsey offers a succinct summary of Nestorian Christians in India: "Nestorian heresy originates from Nestorius, patriarch of Constantinople (428-431), and his followers, who understood Jesus as having two distinct natures – one human and one divine. Because Jesus' human dimension is reflected through his birth and death, Nestorians refused to refer to Mary as "Theotokos" (bearer of God), preferring instead "Christotokos." This insistence led to a rejection of Nestorian theology at the Council of Ephesus in 431, causing a near schism in the fifth-century Church. According to Koilparampil, Indian Nestorians probably hail from a Nestorian stronghold in east Syria rooted in the celebrated theological school of Edessa led by Ibas. Although it is uncertain when Syrian Nestorians arrived in Kerala, there appear to have been very few. Between 1599 and 1663, they united with the Catholic Church, but broke off again after Portuguese power faded. Currently, a few families of practicing Nestorians live in Thrissur." Corinne G. Dempsey, *Kerala Christian Sainthood: Collisions of Culture and Worldview in South India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 165 n. 12.

60 My reading of this article follows Vijay Pinch, "Bhakti and the British Empire," 175-180.

61 Grierson, "Modern Hinduism and Its Debt to the Nestorians," 313-314.

62 Ibid., 319.

Indeed, the period following Rāmānand's arrival in the north was notable, according to Grierson, for the fervor of its devotion. The region "was filled with wandering devotees, vowed to poverty and purity." The rich gave all their wealth to the poor, and "even the poorest would lay aside a bundle of sticks to light a fire for some chance wandering saint."[63] Grierson cites example after example of saints who reflect these virtues. In each case, he cites the *Bhaktamāl* along with a comparable passage from the Gospels. The student of these legends "beholds the profoundest depths of the human heart laid bare with simplicity and freedom from self-consciousness unsurpassed in any literature with which I am acquainted."[64] Grierson's passion for bhakti and for the poets who express it is undeniable.

Grierson builds a cumulative case for the salutatory influence of Christianity on Hindu bhakti. He places the origin of bhakti "in the immediate vicinity of the Christian colony in Madras." He demonstrates that "it spread over India in wave after wave, always receiving fresh impulse from the south," and he argues that in "its ground principles" as well as its "details," bhakti shows "remarkable resemblances" to and "evident borrowing" from Christianity.[65] For Grierson, Christianity has had an ongoing role in shaping bhakti. These traditions are not simply comparable, but the origins of bhakti and its ongoing power flow from continued contact with Christian communities.

Grierson concludes his paper with "a plea for the serious study of the Indian vernacular literature by all interested in our great Eastern possession, whether as administrators or as missionaries." He laments the fashion for Sanskrit, insisting, "No one would pretend that a

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63 Ibid., 321.

64 Ibid., 322-323.

65 Ibid., 323.

knowledge, however complete, of the glories of Latin literature would enable anyone to understand or describe modern Italy; and yet it is thus that we seem to think that we can act towards India." He insists that familiarity with the words of poets such as Tulasīdās or Kabīr "will do more to unlock the hearts and gain the trust of our eastern fellow-subjects than the most intimate familiarity with the dialects of Śaṅkara or with the daintiest verses of Kālidāsa." Knowledge "of the old dead language" may "win respect and admiration," Grierson insists, "but a very modest acquaintance with the treasures,– and they are treasures,– of Hindī literature endows its possessor with the priceless gift of sympathy, and gains for him, from those whose watchword is *bhakti*, their confidence and their love."[66] Grierson unquestionably loves Hindi literature, and he insists that the basis for empire should be mutual confidence and love. For Grierson, those who would govern India should come to this task with a sympathetic knowledge of the religion and literature of the great mass of its people.

It did not take long for Grierson to give up the historical claims of the "Nestorian" article, but he continued to insist on the compatibility between Christianity and Hindu bhakti.[67] In "Gleanings" Grierson's argument is not at all identical to the one presented in "Modern Hinduism and Its Debt to the Nestorians." He draws comparisons between bhakti as portrayed in the Bhaktamāl and Christianity without explicitly arguing for bhakti's origins in Christianity. Commenting on the Bhaktamāl's first couplet, Grierson emphasizes the shared identity between the devotee and the object of devotion. He writes, "In Western language we might say that the brotherhood of man is a necessary inference from the universal fatherhood of God. As Growse [...] well says, this couplet is a compendium of the theory upon which the

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66 Ibid., 327-328.

67 Vijay Pinch, "Bhakti and the British Empire," 177.

whole Vaiṣṇava reform was based. It declares that there is a divinity in every true believer, whether learned or unlearned, and irrespective of all caste distinctions."[68] Here, and throughout the "Gleanings," Grierson highlights what he sees as the profound connection between Christian and Hindu bhakti. Following his presentation of "Modern Hinduism and Its Debt to the Nestorians," Grierson faced criticism on the historical basis for his claims, and he seems to have almost immediately backed away from the strongest of them without giving up any of his admiration for bhakti.[69] Positioned within a long tradition of reading the *Bhaktamāl* as the site of the articulation and disputation of a broad-based devotional community, Grierson's comparisons with Christianity could be read as an attempt to expand this community to include Christian *bhakta*s. For Grierson, the devotional community imagined by Nābhādās is broad enough to reach beyond Vaishnavas and to include fellow subjects of Empire, united by love and sympathy.

The most striking difference between these two commentaries is that Rūpkalā comments on the entirety of the *Bhaktamāl* and the *Bhaktirasabodhinī,* while Grierson only provides commentary for Nābhādās' first nine stanzas along with Priyādās' commentary on these stanzas. Grierson's three articles represent the beginning of an English-language commentary on the *Bhaktamāl*, but this commentary is by no means complete. Rūpkalā's monumental feat of scholarship, on the other hand, provides a commentary on every stanza of the *Bhaktamāl* and the *Bhaktirasabodhinī*. He is, however, far more verbose in the beginning of the text than he is toward the end. As he approaches the end of the book, he tends to simply

68 Grierson, "Gleanings from the Bhakta-Mala," 617.

69 See "Notes of the Quarter. (January, February, March, 1907," *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1907): 477-508.

paraphrase the Brajbhāṣā verse and provides little in terms of context or explanation. Perhaps Rūpkalā felt he had already provided enough ancillary materials toward the beginning and saw repetition as unnecessary, or he may simply have realized that maintaining such a level of detail would have made his commentary unwieldy and very, very long. As I come to the end of this dissertation, I cannot help but speculate that he may simply have been tired.

Conclusion

Rūpkalā and Grierson had very different backgrounds, but they shared much in common. Most significantly, they shared a commitment to a generous and inclusive devotion. They each demonstrated this commitment through their respective commentaries on the *Bhaktamāl*. These commentaries negotiated the layers of interpretation that had formed around the *Bhaktamāl* and brought the *Bhaktamāl* to new readerships. Grierson's sympathetic portrait of bhakti relied on analogies to Christianity. He had previously argued that bhakti was rooted in Christian teachings, but whatever his historical arguments, Grierson saw bhakti as a good in itself and wanted his fellow administrators to share this view.

The first decade of the twentieth century was critical in the transmission and reception of Nābhādās' *Bhaktamāl*. From the time of its first commentary in the early eighteenth century, the *Bhaktamāl* has been the site of disputation over the nature of a trans-regional and supra-sectarian religious community. The arrival of print did not immediately lead, as one might expect, to the standardization of this text. It was not until the beginning of the twentieth century that Rūpkalā, a former colonial administrator, would compile an edition and commentary that would come to be seen as authoritative. This monumental work of Hindi-language scholarship indirectly brought the *Bhaktamāl* to serious scholarly attention for the

first time in the English-speaking world.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

> They'll name a city after us
> and later say it's all our fault.
>
> – Regina Spektor

Introduction

This dissertation has traced the *Bhaktamāl* tradition from the turn of the seventeenth century until the beginning of the twentieth. In so doing, I have attempted to clarify one significant thread in the consolidation of modern Hinduism. Nābhādās articulated a vision of a broad and inclusive community united by bhakti. His verse, however, is condensed and highly allusive. Any interpretation is by necessity tendentious, including that of Priyādās. As the *Bhaktamāl*'s first commentator, Priyādās placed his own stamp firmly on the *Bhaktamāl*, going so far as to claim to speak with Nābhādās' voice, a claim endorsed by subsequent commentators. Print technology and colonial administration brought the *Bhaktamāl* into new contexts and employed it as a guide to understanding the religious communities of north India. Print did not, however, eliminate the variety present in manuscripts. By the third quarter of the nineteenth century, Hariścandra employed the *Bhaktamāl* as part of his traditionalist articulation of modern Hinduism, but it was not until the first decade of the twentieth century that Rūpkalā compiled the edition of the *Bhaktamāl* that would come to be seen as standard, no doubt in part due to its endorsement by Grierson. From its inception, the *Bhaktamāl* tradition has been centrally concerned with imagining and defining a bhakti-centered religious community that eventually came to be known as Hinduism.

This conclusion begins by considering the life of the *Bhaktamāl* in the century since Rūpkalā and Grierson presented their authoritative interpretations of this textual tradition.

The textual and exegetical tradition traced in this dissertation is not as strong as it once was, but elements of it have thrived through performance and in various media. I then offer a recap of the thesis so far. Finally, I consider the impact of this dissertation on broader questions in the study of religion in South Asia.

The *Bhaktamāl* in the Twentieth Century

This study traces the *Bhaktamāl* tradition until the first decade of the twentieth century, but it did not end there. The *Bhaktamāl*'s textual and exegetical tradition is not as vibrant as it once was, but the influence of this tradition continues to be felt. The *Bhaktamāl* performance tradition continued well into the twentieth century and still survives today. Newer media have eclipsed these forms of expression to some degree, but the *Bhaktamāl* has continued to live through these media, especially comic books and film. A detailed treatment of the *Bhaktamāl*'s most recent century falls outside of the the scope of this dissertation, so the following sections should be understood as suggestions for further study.

Performance

This dissertation has focused on the *Bhaktamāl* as a textual tradition, but this tradition has always combined manuscript production with performance. Norvin Hein, in his *The Miracle Plays of Mathura*, illustrates the persistence of the *Bhaktamāl* as an influential text well into the twentieth century. Hein describes a troupe of actors who, during the mid-twentieth century, performed dramatic adaptations of the lives of devotees. This troupe, the Bhaktamāl Nāṭak Maṇḍalī, based its dramas on Nābhādās' text. Their performances were in Khaṛī Bolī Hindi and were thus easily and widely understood. Based in Aligarh, they performed across north India, traveling as far west as Jaipur and as far east as Gaya. Hein acknowledges the deep impact of

such performances but does not speculate on the extent of their reception or their history.[1]

Public exegesis of the *Bhaktamāl*, which according to legend dates at least to Priyādās, continues to take place today. While in Vrindavan, I had the chance to meet Śrīmatī Sharma, whose father was a renowned *Bhaktamāl* exegete, known by the honorific title Bhaktamālī-jī. Every September, there is a festival in his memory, and *bhaktamālī*s from across north India assemble at the family home to recite the *Bhaktamāl*. Anup Sharma, Bhaktamālī-jī's grandson, played a cassette recording of this recitation for me. It was sung in a call and response style where the leader would sing out a line for the assembled *bhakta*s to repeat. No distinction was made between the texts of Nābhādās and Priyādās. *Bhaktamāl kathā* (recitation) remains a regular practice in Vrindavan, and there are traditional scholars renowned as *bhaktamālī*s and known by this title. Among the Rāmānandīs of Vrindavan, Swāmī Śrī Rajendradās-jī, the *mahant* of Malūk Pīṭh, is an expert on both the *Bhaktamāl* and the *Bhāgavat Purāṇa*.[2]

Amar Citra Kathā

While the *Bhaktamāl* survives as a performance tradition, it has lost much of its scope and vibrancy. Observers of South Asia have noted that the introduction of private, electronic forms of entertainment has eroded the role of more traditional forms during the past several decades, and the *Bhaktamāl* seems to be no exception. Contemporary forms have not, however, disrupted this tradition. They have instead enabled it to spread into new contexts, much as print did during the nineteenth century.[3]

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1 Norvin Hein, *The Miracle Plays of Mathurā* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972).

2 Vijay Ramnarace. Personal Communication. 8 November 2010.

3 The *Bhaktamāl* tradition has continued in print as well, through new commentaries and editions and through publications such as Gita Press' *Kalyāṇ* magazine.

A striking example of the *Bhaktamāl*'s continuing relevance can be found in the *Amar Citra Kathā* series of comic books. These books offer a vision of an ideal Indian society and collectively read almost like a *Bhaktamāl* for modern India. Anant Pai (1929-2011) began this series in 1967 in order to present Indian classics to middle-class, English-educated children.[4] Each of the volumes in the series was initially released in English then translated into various languages, but Hindi is "the only regular and numerically significant Indian language."[5] Pai claimed to operate according to the Sanskrit maxim "*satyam bruyat priyam bruyat ma bruyat satyam apriyam*," which he translates as "You must tell the truth; you must tell what is pleasant. And that which is unpleasant – just because it is true, you need not say it."[6] As this aphorism implies, defining these stories as "classic" serves a canonizing role rather than offering an evaluation of quality. It also incorporates market concerns, although the necessity of profits is rhetorically subsumed by talk of educational value.[7]

It is in the formation of a canon of heroes for modern India that *Amar Citra Kathā* carries on the *Bhaktamāl* tradition. Karline McLain's *India's Immortal Comic Books: Gods, Kings, and Other Heroes* offers a detailed exploration of the *Amar Citra Kathā* series. She argues that these comics, "as a form of public culture that has reached into the everyday lives of millions of middle-class Indian children over the past four decades, are a crucial site for studying the ways in which dominant ideologies of religion and national identity are actively created and re-created by

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4 Frances W. Pritchett, "The World of Amar Chitra Katha," in *Media and the Transformation of Religion in South Asia*, ed. Lawrence A. Babb and Susan S. Wadley (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 77.

5 Ibid., 78.

6 Quoted in John Stratton Hawley, "The Saints Subdued: Domestic Virtue and National Integration in Amar Chitra Katha," in *Media and the Transformation of Religion in South Asia*, ed. Lawrence A. Babb and Susan S. Wadley (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 109.

7 Ibid., 129.

ongoing debate."[8] A major way in which *Amar Citra Kathā* participates in the shaping of these ideologies is through the assembly of a collection of gods, saints, leaders, and other heroes.

This new canon draws on the nineteenth-century discourse from which modern Hinduism emerged. As comics, these books draw on "western artistic and storytelling traditions," but they also "draw upon a long tradition of Indian visual and literary culture," particularly as developed during "the nationalist period in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when popular images and texts were employed in India's struggle for independence from British colonial rule." These comics "combine mythology and history, sacred and secular, in their effort to create a national canon of Indian heroes." They "seek to immortalize India's own heroes – its mythological gods and historical leaders – as their protagonists."[9] Anant Pai and his staff follow a "formulaic template" in the production of the series, leading to a blurring of "the line between the two categories – the mythological and the historical."[10] Following Dalmia, McLain observes that "beginning in the late nineteenth century, leading Hindus set out to define Hinduism and project it as India's national religion. Today in postcolonial India this process is ongoing, and comic books are one important public medium in which the questions "What is Hinduism?" and "Who speaks for Hinduism?" are being considered."[11] The nature of this canonization is contested. Nandini Chandra depicts the *Amar Citra Kathā* series as "deeply entrenched stories of a pan-Indian Hindu past as recorded by the

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8 Karline McLain, *India's Immortal Comic Books: Gods, Kings, and Other Heroes* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 22.

9 Ibid., 3.

10 Ibid., 36.

11 Ibid., 113.

19th century orientalist/nationalist historiography."[12] Frances Pritchett acknowledges that *Amar Citra Kathā* undoubtedly suffers from exclusions based on gender, politics, and religion.[13] The series completely excludes "educated, urban, twentieth-century women," modern Sikhs, and virtually all Muslims.[14] Pritchett qualifies this observation, however, by pointing out that hostility is never promoted, except against the British, untouchability, and the plight of the poor. Overall, she concludes that *Amar Citra Kathā* promotes a sense of "India as a multicultural nation in which they can all work together."[15]

Film

While the *Amar Citra Katha* series can be read as a kind of *Bhaktamāl* for twentieth-century India, the film industry has also made a contribution to continuing this tradition. The lives of canonical *bhakta*s have been a recurring topic in Indian cinema. The "mythological" genre dates to the earliest days of Indian cinema, with the enormously successful 1913 film Hariścandra. This film and its successors established the mythological genre, which remains an important part of the Indian film industry today "to a degree inconceivable to the West."[16] Many of these films present the lives of the same figures celebrated by the *Bhaktamāl* and *Amar Citra Kathā*. McLain identifies the influence of *Amar Citra Kathā* on recent television serials, films, and now internet productions, which feature "the same Indian Heroes that were canonized in ACK:" "Thus not only have Amar Chitra Katha comic books been instrumental in

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12 Nandini Chandra, "The Market Life of Amar Chitra Katha," *Seminar* 453 (May 1997): 25.

13 Pritchett, "The World of Amar Chitra Katha," 104.

14 Ibid., 95.

15 Ibid., 105.

16 Chidananda Das Gupta, "Seeing and Believing, Science and Mythology: Notes on the "Mythological" Genre," *Film Quarterly* 42, no. 4 (July 1, 1989): 12.

establishing a national canon of heroes that defines what it means to be Hindu and Indian for millions of middle-class readers in India and throughout the transnational Indian diaspora. These comics have also been instrumental in disseminating that definition of Hinduism and Indianness through other popular Indian media."[17]

Gulzar's 1979 *Meera* presents a cinematic adaptation of this famous *bhakta*'s life. Pauwels argues that Gulzar works within Mīrā's hagiographical tradition but "'updates' the stories in a profoundly modern way." The narrative is framed according to "the conventions of popular Indian cinema," and the director "raises a whole host of contemporary women's issues." Notably, Mīrā's devotion is presented as a selfish choice that does not bring her personal happiness. Significantly, it is not Mīrā but her cousin Krishnā who drinks the poison, becoming "the true national heroine by drinking poison to avoid bloodshed and facilitate an alliance of Hindu forces against Muslim hegemony."[18] This focus on *national* community formation brings us a long way from Nābhādās' paean to Mīrābāī, but we remain within the trajectory described throughout this thesis.

Christian Novetzke has considered the treatment of Nāmdev in two films, both titled *Sant Nāmdev* (1949 and 1991). For Novetzke, these films, each situated in a very different context, "survey a sacred past invested with religious and historical importance to Namdev's followers and to the imagination of India's progression from diverse cultural landscape to modern nation. In this endeavor, the films make explicit the role of *bhakti* in creating publics and the process by which memory through media sustains the legacy of a *sant*."[19] Novetzke

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17 McLain, *India's Immortal Comic Books: Gods, Kings, and Other Heroes*, 213.

18 Heidi Pauwels, "Who Is Afraid of Mīrābāī? Gulzar's Antidote for Mīrā's Poison," in *Religion in Literature and Film in South Asia*, ed. Diana Dimitrova (Palgrave Macmillan, n.d.), 61-62.

19 Novetzke, *Religion and Public Memory: A Cultural History of Saint Namdev in India*, 220.

reads these films, like *kirtan* performance, as "the physical sites of memory associated with Namdev, and the multiple contexts for retellings of Namdev's life as all responding in similar ways to a vibrant public culture stretched over centuries, with its own systems of memory, in which Namdev remains both device of recollection and social critique, as well as an object of reverence in his own right."[20] The *Bhaktamāl* tradition then lives on as part of what Novetzke calls "public memory."[21] He sees both bhakti and memory as forms of participation. Novetzke deploys the idea of a public to chart a path between "two extremes – of *bhakti* as personal devotion and as a social movement." Public designates "the vast area between these poles where a complex interchange exists that presupposes the individual as the essential node of creation and transmission, but understands that until ideas, materials, and memories circulate among individuals, and indeed among individuals in diachronic measure, there is not *bhakti* outside the mysterious confines of the human soul in solitude."[22] It is through the retelling of these stories that the community envisioned by Nābhādās has taken shape as a social and political reality.

Summary of the Argument

Nābhādās composed his *Bhaktamāl* around the turn of the seventeenth century. In almost telegraphic verse he praised the qualities of hundreds of *bhakta*s. Taken as a whole, the most conspicuous feature of the *Bhaktamāl* is its inclusiveness. Nābhādās praises *bhakta*s from throughout South Asia, members of various *sampradāy*s, people from all social strata, women

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20 Ibid., 243.

21 That is the *Bhaktamāl* tradition in a broad sense. As we saw in the introduction, the Maharashtrian Vārkarī tradition has its own collective hagiographies. The most celebrated of these texts is Mahīpati's *Bhaktavijay*, which draws on the *Bhaktamāl*.

22 Novetzke, *Religion and Public Memory: A Cultural History of Saint Namdev in India*, 22.

and men, gods and humans. The bhakti celebrated by Nābhādās is essentially Vaishnava, but this Vaishnavism is broad enough to incorporate Shaivas and others. Whether or not members of these traditions would appreciate such inclusion is another question.

Members of other Vaishnava *sampradāy*s, at least, did find Nābhādās' vision to be compelling. Priyādās was a Gauṛīya Vaishnava from Vrindavan. His expansive commentary on the *Bhaktamāl* added episodic narratives to Nābhādās' words of praise. Like Nābhādās, Priyādās is engaged in imagining a supra-sectarian and trans-regional bhakti community. He accepts Nābhādās' boundaries for this community but substantially alters the logic holding it together. For Nābhādās, the *bhakta*s are central, but Priyādās insists on the centrality of God. Nābhādās does not differentiate between *bhakta*s of different social status, but Priyādās grants spiritual importance to caste and more strongly emphasizes royal patronage. Nonetheless, Priyādās does not stress his differences from Nābhādās. Indeed, he insists that his commentary is indistinguishable from the original text.

Subsequent tradition has accepted Priyādās' claim to speak with Nābhādās' voice. In many ways, Priyādās, even more so than Nābhādās, is the central figure in this tradition. Eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century manuscripts almost invariably include his commentary, and all subsequent commentators comment on the combined text of Nābhādās' *mūl* and Priyādās' *ṭīkā*. During this time period, the *Bhaktamāl* was a popular text with a wide geographic reach. Its appeal was broadly Vaishnava and even extended to communities outside of orthodox Vaishnavism, such as the Kabīr Panth.

Popular understandings of the impact of print have focused on this technology's capacity to bring about standardization, uniformity, and wide diffusion of knowledge. Recent scholarship, however, has questioned the technological determinism of this understanding and

stressed the culturally contingent nature of such transformations. Print, along with its colonial context, would transform the *Bhaktamāl* tradition, but not in the ways expected by a naive understanding of this technology. Print brought the *Bhaktamāl* into the context of colonial administration where it became a key text for understanding and governing the religious communities of north India, and it facilitated the distribution of new exegetical commentaries that allowed new readerships to engage with this text in new ways. The *Bhaktamāl* also played an important role in Hariścandra's articulation of modern Hinduism. Hariścandra's vision of Hinduism was defined by bhakti, centered on Vaishnavism, and rooted in – although not exhausted by – the *sampradāy*. In this, the *Bhaktamāl* represents a key precedent.

The nineteenth century, then, saw the Bhaktamāl introduced into new contexts and new interpretations. In the first decade of the twentieth century, Rūpkalā published an exhaustive work of devotional scholarship that combined an edition of Nābhādās' and Priyādās' texts with a compelling prose commentary that permitted readers to access this oftentimes elusive text without the aid of a trained exegete. Rūpkalā's interpretative strategy compiles a variety of earlier interpretations without explicitly adjudicating between them. This strategy supports a "big tent" vision of Hinduism that is wide enough for a variety of perspectives. Grierson relied heavily on Rūpkalā's work in his "Gleanings." Grierson provided Rūpkalā with a prestigious imprimatur that helped to establish Rūpkalā's edition as the standard. Grierson's own commentary, however, largely reiterates Rūpkalā's but without Rūpkalā's exceptional clarity.

At each stage of the *Bhaktamāl* tradition over its first three centuries, commentators, scribes, editors, and scholars have been concerned with articulating a broad bhakti-centered community. Nābhādās initiated this tradition with his terse words of praise for a wide

community of saints. Priyādās expanded Nābhādās' words of praise and advanced a more restrictive notion of what it means to be a *bhakta*. As *Bhaktamāl* manuscripts spread across north India and through a variety of contexts, Priyādās became the central figure in this tradition. By the nineteenth century, British Orientalists turned to the *Bhaktamāl* as a guide to the religious diversity of the land they ruled. Hariścandra drew on the *Bhaktamāl* in his articulation of a modern Hinduism defined by bhakti, and Rūpkalā and Grierson provided a systematic and scholarly presentation of this articulation.

Such a recapitulation of the *Bhaktamāl* tradition is undoubtedly too narrow. As has been noted throughout this dissertation, Nābhādās and his successors were concerned with matters besides community formation. For Nābhādās, *bhakta*s are exemplars, and each of his individual cameos celebrates them as such. Priyādās celebrates the power of Krishna to intervene on behalf of his devotees. Price and Mitr provide a powerful pedagogical tool in their grammar and anthology. Hariścandra narrates his own family's history through a hagiographic lens. Rūpkalā carefully compiles the work of earlier scholars and storytellers, and Grierson presents his singular vision of Hindu bhakti as a form of Protestant Christianity *manqué*. Moreover, a wider interpretation of what constitutes the *Bhaktamāl* tradition would open up many more conversations. Nābhādās' *Bhaktamāl* served as a model for independent *Bhaktamāl*s by other authors, which, in some cases, attracted their own commentaries. And, as we have seen in chapter two and elsewhere, this tradition is a literary tradition. Nābhādās was a poet, as were many of the *bhakta*s he praised. He was engaged both in the process of making poetry and in defining what it means to be a poet.

A Prehistory for Hinduism

The *Bhaktamāl* is an important and understudied text. Nābhādās articulates a new kind of community, and his vision gained an enormous amount of currency in the centuries following its original expression. Nābhādās' broadly inclusive community of *bhakta*s is an important precursor to nineteenth-century expressions of Hinduism. This dissertation, then, has implications for discussions of the history of Hinduism in South Asia as well as for the relationship of colonial to precolonial modernity. It has become untenable to deny the far-reaching effects of colonialism on South Asian society, but an exclusive focus on change obscures continuities that have continued to shape this region.

In the introduction, I considered recent scholarship on the existence of Hinduism prior to colonialism and on the consolidation of Hinduism in the late nineteenth century. Lorenzen argues against the position that the British invented Hinduism and instead posits that a roughly coherent Hindu religious system took shape between 1200 and 1500 in response to rivalry with Muslims. Dalmia argues for a nineteenth-century consolidation of Hindu traditions, rooted in Vaishnavism and centered on bhakti. In Dalmia's account, a foreign Other also served as a catalyst for consolidation: the British. Colonial administrative policies defined the context for this consolidation and Orientalist representations provided one of the foils against which the proponents of modern Hinduism would define their religious position. In many ways, these two accounts are complementary, and I attempt to read them as such. The British did not invent Hinduism; indeed, no one did. Hinduism is an emergent phenomenon. It is a complex combination of various traditions and new elements, which began to take shape in response to encounters with Muslims. It was not until the colonial period, however, that Hindus began to articulate a systematized understanding of Hinduism. Hinduism became more

defined and transformed during the colonial period, but it was not created on a *tabula rasa,* and it was certainly not invented.

There are gaps in this account. There are hundreds of years between the periods described by Lorenzen and Dalmia. In some ways, this dissertation could be read as an attempt to bridge this gap. The *Bhaktamāl* was composed around the turn of the seventeenth century, after most of the sources cited by Lorenzen but before others. The *Bhaktamāl* represents a moment of consolidation and therefore conforms with at least the rough outline of Lorenzen's argument. Nābhādās presents a vision of a community united by bhakti, centered in but not limited to the *sampradāy*, and widely inclusive. Inclusive visions have hidden – or not so hidden – exclusions, and the *Bhaktamāl* is no exception. Nābhādās' vision is expansive, but it has its limits. It is difficult to establish exactly where these limits lie, though. Nābhādās does not explicitly posit an Other to his community. Contrary to Lorenzen's expectations, Nābhādās does not seem to be reacting to Muslim rivals. Nābhādās may have been emulating Muslims – he was located near the heart of the Mughal Empire and benefited from the patronage of one of the most crucial Mughal vassal states – but he makes neither rivalry nor emulation apparent.

It is true that Nābhādās does not celebrate Muslim *bhakta*s, but he also leaves out others who seem much closer to his own position, such as Dādū and Nānak. Are these teachers too heterodox even for Nābhādās or did he simply overlook them? He does not explain his logic. He certainly does not tell us whom he deliberately left out, so any attempt to find meaning in these exclusions would be speculative at best. Is Nābhādās expressing the rivalries of his *sampradāy*? His imagined community includes Vaishnavas and non-Vaishnavas, but his vision remains, at heart, Vaishnava. With regard to Shaivas, in particular, Nābhādās' inclusiveness is

hierarchical. Shiva himself is celebrated as a Hari *bhakta,* and Nābhādās imagines Shaivas to be part of the bhakti community, but in a distinctly subordinate fashion. By honoring one of the chief *bhakta*s, they inadvertently participate in Vaishnava bhakti. It seems unlikely that many Shaivas would be willing to accept inclusion on such terms.

The *Bhaktamāl* may be notable for its nonsectarian flavor, but Nābhādās' catholicity has conditions. This Vaishnava vision of bhakti, rooted in a particular *sampradāy* and arguably reflecting particular sectarian rivalries, cannot be read as Hinduism *avant la lettre*. The *Bhaktamāl* represents a key moment in the consolidation of Hindu traditions, but its articulation of this consolidation is hardly as systematic as nineteenth-century articulations, such as Hariścandra's. Importantly, however, Hariścandra's articulation of modern Hinduism reflects remarkably similar limits. His religious activities, too, were rooted first in his own *sampradāy* and then in a more broadly conceived Vaishnavism. It is in these more specific formations that Hariścandra found the essential bhakti of "all true Indian religiosity." Hariścandra was explicit about articulating Hindu identity in ways that Nābhādās was not, and he sought to express this identity not only through literary expression but also through institution building. However, the step from Nābhādās to Hariścandra is, in many ways, not a particularly long one.

Nābhādās' community of *bhakta*s and Hariścandra's Vaishnava-dominated Hinduism have much in common, but how are they connected? It was Priyādās who established the *Bhaktamāl* as a key site for articulations of and debates about the composition of a widely inclusive devotional community. Priyādās' conception of the bhakti community seems more conservative, with greater weight given to social institutions such as the *sampradāy*, kingship, and the family. Through episodic narratives, Priyādās describes conflicts and cooperation with

Muslim rulers. Such narratives would seem to lend weight to Lorenzen's contention that Hinduism cohered due to rivalry with Muslims, and to a degree they do. However, Priyādās describes conflicts with and support from Hindu rulers as well. What matters is not Hindu or Muslim identity, but bhakti. Priyādās celebrates *bhakta*-kings from Pṛthvīrāj of Amer to the Emperor Akbar. They are usually, but not always, Hindu. Similarly, Sikandar offers a vivid portrait of a Muslim persecutor, but the royal opponents of bhakti can be Hindu as well, as we see in Mīrābāī's struggles.

The *Bhaktamāl* tradition thrived from the *Bhaktirasabodhinī*'s composition in 1712 until Hariścandra's *floruit* in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. During the eighteenth century, *Bhaktamāl* manuscripts achieved wide distribution in terms of both geography and *sampradāy*. Without this transmission, it seems extremely unlikely that a Banarasi Puṣṭi Mārgī intellectual like Hariścandra would draw upon a Rāmānandī text from Rajasthan with a Gauṛīya commentary from Braj. The process of consolidation that we can see with Nābhādās and with Hariścandra was ongoing if uneven. Not everyone who participated in the *Bhaktamāl* tradition sought to articulate a supra-sectarian devotional community; some wished to use the *Bhaktamāl* for sectarian ends, but from Nābhādās and Priyādās through to Hariścandra and beyond, the articulation of this sort of community remained central to the *Bhaktamāl* tradition.

The *Bhaktamāl* tradition is a thread that ties the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to the nineteenth and twentieth. This thread was not broken by colonialism. Many historians of nineteenth-century South Asia have emphasized the sharp disruptions of the colonial encounter, and such disruptions are real. Hinduism as we now know it is, to a large degree, a product of the nineteenth century. It was not invented by the British, but it emerged as a response to a context dominated by them. It was not, however, produced *ex nihilo*. Many of the

ingredients that were mixed together to form modern Hinduism existed and were already beginning to cohere prior to the colonial period. In the first two centuries of the *Bhaktamāl* tradition, we see a trend toward consolidation as yet untouched by the colonial catalyst.

Hinduism, then, can be said to have a prehistory that is not simply a matter of diffuse communities united through vaguely defined traditions and practices. The creative work of assembling these communities, practices, and beliefs into a unified whole was already underway from at least the time of Nābhādās. This process was far from teleological. There is no straight line from Nābhādās to Hariścandra. Indeed, Priyādās – who may be even more influential than the Bhaktamāl's author – could be read as an opponent of this trajectory. Still, the tension between Priyādās' particularism and Nābhādās' universalism, if I may oversimplify, is a tension that remains in the still contested, ongoing consolidation of Hinduism.

Conclusion

This dissertation has provided an overview of the *Bhaktamāl* tradition from its inception in the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century until the beginning of the twentieth century. On one level, the *Bhaktamāl* is a text about community. By praising the qualities of exemplary devotees, Nābhādās imagines an expansive community united by bhakti. Later commentators found this vision to be compelling but modified the logic binding this community together in substantial ways. By the nineteenth century, the *Bhaktamāl* had become a popular text. It served, for British scholar-administrators, as a guide to the religious communities of north India, and it played a key role in the traditionalist articulation of modern Hinduism. During the first decade of the twentieth century, Rūpkalā and Grierson reinforced this traditionalist understanding and offered an interpretation of the *Bhaktamāl* that would come to be accepted

as the standard. The story of the life of the *Bhaktamāl* is also an account of the consolidation of a tradition. Nābhādās articulated a vision of a community with remarkable similarities to modern Hinduism as articulated by Hariścandra and his successors. The colonial context served as a catalyst for a consolidation that was already underway in the preceding centuries.

The *Bhaktamāl* can seem, at times, like a *tabula rasa* for anyone's vision of a supra-sectarian devotional community. It may be this quality of transparency that has helped to establish the long-term vitality of the *Bhaktamāl* tradition. The *Bhaktamāl*, however, is hardly a blank slate. Certain features of Nābhādās' vision survive throughout the tradition. Nābhādās begins by asserting the equivalence of bhakti and *bhakta*, God and guru. The centrality of these four terms remains constant within the *Bhaktamāl* tradition. Nābhādās and his successors share a commitment to a broad community united by bhakti. They remember past exemplars of devotion and thereby construct a community for the present and future. This present community is linked to divine origins in the mythic past through lineages of gurus and disciples. For all the disagreements about the precise nature and boundaries of this community, certain features remain indelible. For Nābhādās, bhakti is the only legitimate basis for human society. The *Bhaktamāl* tradition has struggled for centuries to understand the implications of this powerful insight.

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