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Monika Horstmann
nc327@uni-heidelberg.de
(Prof. Emerita, University of Heidelberg, Germany)

The Paradigm of Light in the Hindu-Muslim Religious Culture of Rajasthan

ABSTRACT: Nizārī Ismailism was a major strand in the fluid religious culture of Rajasthan and its periphery. D. S. Khan (1997) submitted the hypothesis that it also helped shape sects of *nirguṇa* bhakti, such as the Dādūpanth, which emerged as late as the 16th century. The article tests the case of this sect by a textual study focusing on the paradigm of light in the thought of Dādū and his disciples and related to the same paradigm elsewhere in the regional religious landscape. Dādū's bhakti beyond the Hindu-Muslim divide was characterized by the impulse it received from Sufism, conspicuously at a time when Nizārī Ismailism itself had been impacted by this for about three centuries.*

KEYWORDS: Dādū, Dādūpanth, *nirguṇa* bhakti, Nizārī Ismailism, Sufism

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* Earlier drafts of this essay benefited immensely from comments of Daniel Gold. Dalpat S. Rajpurohit shared with me a salient passage from an unedited text by Jān Kavi (see p. 9). Rajprabha Singh and Ramnivasji, the Mahant of Poh (Nagaur District, Rajasthan), procured me with the print reproduced as Fig. 1. I am grateful to all of them.

Nizārī Ismailism in Rajasthan: Dādū and the Dādūpanth as a test case

Scholarship has explored numerous aspects of intertwined religion in Rajasthan. Particularly important and challenging are attempts to identify a substratum that may have given momentum to similar religious phenomena. To D. S. Khan we owe seminal research on the fluidity of religion in Rajasthan and particularly Nizārī Ismailism whose missionaries spread their message in the language of *nirguṇa* bhakti (1997). She submitted the hypothesis that Nizārī Ismailism might have also been a momentous factor in the regional *nirguṇa* bhakti at large, including the Dādūpanth. With special reference to Saurashtra, F. Mallison (2019) pointed out that Khan's hypothesis was awaiting precise historical testing of the forces at work in the individual regional *nirguṇa* bhakti groups. Avoiding unwarranted conclusions and seeking a viable point of departure, she preferred speaking of "the confraternity of different sampradāyas" (Mallison 2019: 245). This essay aims at testing Khan's hypothesis for the fluid Hindu-Muslim religious culture of Marwar. Here, the soil was well-prepared by anti-normative non-brahmanical religion of which tantric yoga was a driving force. This culture found expression in the vernacular literature of *nirguṇa* bhakti. Here it was especially identified with Kabīr (15th century), who figures almost as an archetype of a *nirguṇa* bhakta, and who inspired also the Marwari saint Dādū (1544–1603) whose message was religion beyond the Hindu-Muslim or any other religious divide. Dādū passed his legacy on to the Dādūpanth where it has since that time been often under stress, though never quite muted.

The essay approaches the problem by a case study. It reviews the issue of the fluid Hindu-Muslim culture by focusing exclusively on the Dādūpanth of the 16th and early 17th century. In doing so, it restricts itself to the paradigm of light. Light is a common sign of gnosis, and so also in the Rajasthan of the 16th and 17th centuries including its periphery.[1]

[1] In the period and for the topic under review, Rajasthani culture must be considered as contiguous particularly with that of Sindh and Gujarat.

This notion was widely expressed in literature, music, ritual, and architecture,[2] and pervaded the porous Hindu-Muslim religious culture. Signifying the aim and end of the religious seeker's quest, it is ubiquitous in the vernacular *nirguṇa* bhakti literature of the Sants, the Nāth Siddha compositions, and light is of course a central concept of Islam. These and many other manifestations of religion, doctrinally fixed or popular, shaped the regional culture and kept engulfing each other. The religious groups involved have integrated one and the same religious notion variously into their symbolic complexes. The essay sketches how the said paradigm figures in Dādū's own theosophical reasoning and in hagiography. It further traces how the paradigm in its regional sectarian articulation became intertwined with the same paradigm as it was central to the legitimation of emperor Akbar. According to the various agents in the Hindu-Muslim *mêlée*, the paradigm has various significations. By way of conclusion, the validity of Khan's hypothesis for the Dādūpanth will be assessed.

Since the early 1580s, Dādū asserted himself as a religious leader of *nirguṇa* bhakti in Marwar. Like other Sants, followers of *nirguṇa* bhakti, before him, he preached bhakti beyond the Hindu-Muslim divide. His sect, the Dādūpanth, emerged at his life time from the fluid Hindu-Muslim milieu and came to form the arguably most influential sect of the Sant spectre. In the beginning of the 18th century, in a period of Hindu-political restoration, Muslims were forced out of leading functions in the sect by order of the Kachhwaha king Jai Singh II, though beneath the formal institutional surface the mixed Hindu-Muslim current continued flowing.

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[2] For example, light as the sign of eternal light conquering life's darkness in the pan-Indian light-waving ritual or the *akhaṇḍa-jyoti* ('perpetual light') illuminating shrines and sustained by pious donations. An important site of musical expression have been to this day *bhajan-qawwālī* sessions. For Islamic architecture, see Hillebrand 2015, and for a Mamluk exemplar of mosque lamps inscribed with the light verse of sura 24, see *Museum with no Frontiers*.

The paradigm

The paradigm of light governs the theosophical reasoning of Dādū himself, and was elaborated by the Dādūpanthī hagiographers Jangopāl (d. c. 1640) and Rāghavdās (active in 1660).[3] Jangopāl's hagiography (Jangopāl 1988) is dated between shortly after Dādū's death in 1603 and before 1636.[4] Rāghavdās's hagiography is dated 1660 (Rāghavadās 1965; Rāghavadās n.d.). Dādū's focus on "light", articulated in a particular collocation of terms, is striking and unique in Sant compositions of his period. Going beyond the impressionistic, the description here given of Dādū's own articulation of his faith is based on portions of his works first of all identified statistically by the frequency of the occurrence of the notion of light in that characteristic collocation of terms. This revealed numerous cohesive passages in the *sākhī* chapters of his work that carry doctrinal or didactic weight. The understanding that those passages are cohesive is shared by redactors of Dādū's works of the past. These gave those portions thematic headings (for which see presently). The text base of this essay, therefore, does not consist of unconnected *sākhī*s quoted *ad libitum* to support argument. It rather consists of cohesive, doctrinally relevant subgroups of *sākhī*s. The texts examined reveal aspects of Dādū's reasoned negotiation of the fluid Hindu-Muslim tradition into which he was born.

Similarly to other Sant authors, Dādū expressed the light of gnosis in several of the many Indic terms, notably, *prakāsa* ('light'), *joti* ('light'), *teja* ('splendor'), *jvālā/-a* ('flame'), and *dīpa* ('lamp'), and by the Arabic term *nūr* ('light'). Unsurprisingly, passages or entire compositions in the Indic language register feature usually the Indic terms, while those in the Arabic-Persian register feature the term *nūr*.[5]

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[3] For Rāghavdās's praise of Dādū's throne of light in the longer recension of his hagiography and part of Dādūpanthī liturgy, Rāghavdās 1965: 264, st. 978; Thiel-Horstmann 1985: 27–28.

[4] 1636 is the year of the death of Dādū's successor Garībdās, who was alive when Jangopāl wrote that hagiography.

[5] Compare, for example, a *pad* assigned to Kabīr which belongs to the earliest layer of the north-western Kabīr tradition (Callewaert 2000: 46). For this item, the semiotics

As it comes to the numerous texts carrying doctrinal weight, however, Dādū regularly collocates Indic words with the term *nūr*, usually in a cluster of three or four terms. No other Sant oeuvre shows this peculiarity. In all of the relevant passages, the clustering is no purely stylistic device, though by repetition of related terms it captures the overwhelming experience of the limitless effusion of light. The point is, rather, that the collocation of terms emphasizes a unity transcending Hindu and Muslim doctrinal difference. To show this, we will limit ourselves to two key compositions featuring the phenomenon. One is the *Abicala mantra* (*sākhī* 1.146[6]), named after the beginning words of that mantra. It forms the initiation into his teaching ordained by Dādū himself (*upadesa dīkṣā*; *ibid*.), a description not introduced by later redactors, but found uniformly from the earliest available exemplars of the *Dādūvāṇī* and thereby going back to Dādū's amanuensis Mohandās Daftarī. The other case is that of the *Paracā kau aṅga*, Chapter 4 of the *sākhī*s, which addresses the mystical experience. In this, the cluster is most densely represented. The focus is here put on a passage in this analytically identifying the Hindu and Muslim path to gnosis.

Theophanic initiation

Dādū's religious stance unfolded in a blending Nizārī-Sufi-Hindu spectrum. This is revealed in his own description of his initiation as it appears in the critical edition of Dādū's works as *sākhī*s 1.2–4 immediately after the auspicious opening, phrased entirely in Indic terms:

> Dādū says: I found the divine guru inside in the hidden, and received his grace.[7]

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of light as gnosis is underscored by the proto-*Ādigranth* tradition prescribing it to be performed in an early morning *rāga*, the break of dawn being the symbol of the awakening of enlightenment.

6 Numbering passim according to Callewaert and Op de Beeck 1991. Citations from Dādū's works are from this edition, translation are the author's.

7 GopS 33.1 v.l. for *sākhī* 1.2b: पाया हम पूर साध, "I found the perfect sadhu."

> He put his hand on my head for initiation into the Unapproachable Unfathomable. (2)
> Innate with him, the Satguru helped Dādū in numerous ways,
> The pauper was made rich when by meeting the guru he met the Provider. (3)
> When Dādū met him innate with himself, the Satguru embraced him.
> When the Merciful showed him his mercy, the lamp was lit. (4)[8]

Seven years after that first vision, the invisible divine guru appeared to him once again in pure luminosity, phrased by Jangopāl in Indic terms as the light of *brahman* (Jangopāl 1988: 1.13ab, tr. *ibid*.):

> He saw the splendour of the Divine Light, while Rām-within dwelt in his heart…[9]
> (translation by Callewaert)

The absence of a tangibly manifest guru of Dādū has caused embarrassment to the Dādūpanth, for religious authority rests normally on a chronological line of teachers and disciples. Its absence undermines the claim of religious teacher to authority.[10] Who actually was that Bābā Buḍhā to whom Jangopāl referred and whose representation as an old bearded man became iconographically established?[11] Scholarship, too, searched for the master who may have had initiated Dādū and came up with a Sufi shaikh active in Sambhar whose family, defunct since the first half of the 20th century, in fact claimed descent from that shaikh (Horstmann 2022: 55). All these attempts led to a dead end.

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[8] दादू गैब मांहि गुरदेव मिल्या, पाया हम परसाद ।
मसतकि मेरे कर धर्या, दष्या अगम अगाध ॥२॥
दादू सतगुर सहज मैं, कीया बहु उपगार ।
नृधन धनवंत कीया, गुर मिल्या दातार ॥३॥
दादू सतगुर सौं सहजैं मिल्या, लीया कंठि लगाइ ।
दया भई दयाल की, तब दीपक दीया जगाइ ॥४॥

[9] देष्यौ ब्रह्म जोति प्रकासू, आतमरांम हि भयौ निवासू… The translation ‘Rām within’ renders *ātamarāṃma*, the term for the formless interior god identical with the self.

[10] For a homily grappling with the problem as late as 1985, see Thiel-Horstmann 1992: 43.

[11] I do not know when this iconography became established, but I have seen it oftentimes in Dādūpanthī shrines in pictures seeming old.

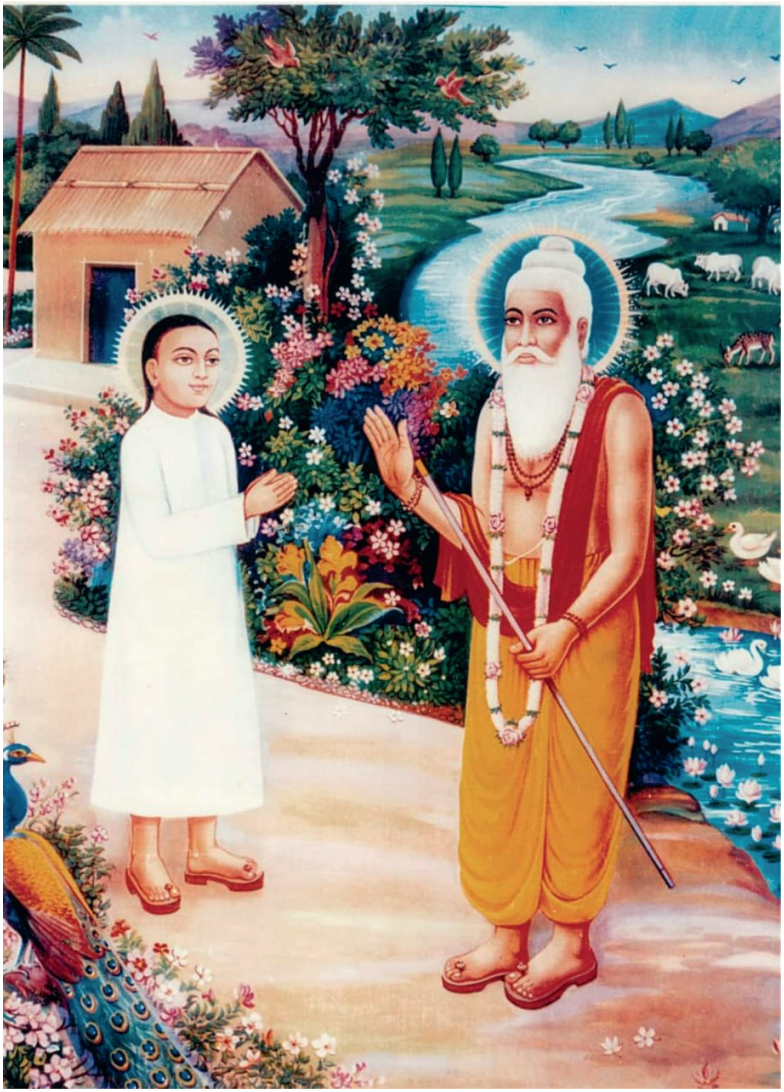

Fig. 1. Dādū's initiation (contemporary popular print, author anonymous, courtesy Mahant Ramnivasji, Poh).

Fig. 2. Khwaja Khizr Khan. Mughal, mid-17th century.
https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O85611/painting-khwaja-khizr-khan/

In fact, Dādū's respective *sākhī*s speak of an initiation by theophany which is common to the understanding of Sufi and Shia Islam (Corbin 2012: 48, 74–88). Dādū does not mention how the old man of his vision was clad. According to the Dādūpanthī iconography witnessed in the 20th to the turn of the 21st century, the attire of the theophanic guru was regularly white (Orr 1947: 52), whereas of late it is preferably painted in yellow and orange and thereby likened to the robe of a Hindu mendicant (Fig. 1). The figure evokes, however, Khizr (A. al-Khiḍr), the green saint, an "enigmatic figure venerated throughout the Islamic world… and an embodiment of God's mercy… If a person "meets" or "sees" Khiḍr this is generally understood as a divine distinction" (Franke 2022). He is found represented as an old shaikh (Fig. 2). Almost identical with the theophany experienced by Dādū is the vision of Khizr described in the *Ratnāvatī kathā* by Jān Kavi, scion of the Rajput-Muslim Kyāmkhānī dynasty of Fatehpur (Sīkar).[12] Lost in the wilderness and stricken with fear and hunger, a young prince encountered "a *mahāpuruṣa*."

> (*dohā*) Whose robe was coloured green, with a white beard, and a face of light. He had a splendour about him as if the light of the sun had shone up. (69) Khwāja Khizr had entered the vision of the prince, seized him by the arm and conveyed him to the garden. (*caupaī*) The prince hurried along and fell at his feet. The *mahāpuruṣa* put his hand on [the prince's] head…[13]

The passage is allegorical of the wilderness of *ẓāhir* ('exterior') and the garden of *bāṭin* ('interior'), a contrast dominating Nizārī Ismailism and Sufism alike.

One of the most powerful instantiations of the theophany of Khizr is that of the vision of him of Ibn ʿArabī. In great depth the dimensions

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[12] *Caupaī*s 69 into 70 of the unedited manuscript no. 37902 of the Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute, Jodhpur. I thank Dalpat S. Rajpurohit for sharing the respective passage with me.

[13] हरित बसन रातै बरन, सित दाढी मुष नूर। उजियारो वन ह्वै रह्यौ, मनहु प्रकास्यो सूर ॥६९॥
कुंवर की दिस्ट ख्वाज खिजर आयौ, कुंवर की बाहि गहि बांग मै पुहंचायौ ॥ चौपाइ॥
कुंवर दोरि कै पाइन पर्यौ, महापुरुष सिर पर कर धर्यौ ॥

of this were analyzed by Corbin (2012) who also pointed to the authority theophanic vision provides, for it establishes authority beyond and above the ordinary consecutive sequence of masters and disciples. This relevant aspect solves the problem of Dādū's "missing" guru. The hinduization of the Dādūpanth caused a partial amnesia of the sect's Islamic heritage and led thereby also to the futile search for a human guru figure.

Khizr is ubiquitous in the Muslim world (Boivin and Pénicaud 2024). In South Asia, and noteworthily in the north and particularly in Sindh and Punjab, he is venerated by Muslims and Hindus alike. He appears as the guide initiating and guarding his disciple, as the verdant saint venerated at riverine sanctuaries, and he is also identified with Gorakhnāth. This archetype, though not his green colour, is reflected also in the iconography of Gurū Nānak. In Khizr merge the Sufi or Nizārī perspectives, as for example in Bābā Būḍhan (also Pīr Būḍhā), born in Talvaṇḍī and buried in Kīratpur. Here, in places otherwise sacred to the Sikhs, he is venerated as a Sufi shaikh, but is also known as the Nizārī Sayyid Shams al-Dīn (Balmotra 2021). The theophany experienced by Dādū thus places him firmly in the fluid Hindu-Muslim religion of the wide region extending from Sindh to Rajasthan.

The same religious fluidity is reflected in the procedure of Dādū's initiation as described by Jangopāl. According to him, the theophanic old man, represented by Jangopāl as if in the flesh, shared a *pān* roll with Dādū. He did so in exchange for Dādū's *bhēṭ* of a small coin. Juice from the *pān* dropped on Dādū's feet. By the drop of *pān*, it must be concluded, Dādū's feet were sanctified. This was a case of the transfer of saliva. Saliva has mystical power in Islam, and so also in South Asia. The transmission of saliva is the transmission of *baraka* whereby a shaikh legitimates his successor (Abu-Rabia 2015: 75; Behl 2013: 99; Bayly 1986). The same holds good of tantra (White 1996: 310–312).

Fusing bhakti with Sufism

Hagiography is vague about the eleven years between Dādū's second theophanic experience and his coming to Sambhar in the year 1573 when he started propagating his path of bhakti. It is unknown when he first came up with the well-defined "bhakti-*ṭarīqa*" of his own which aligns a three-tiered bhakti ascent to the luminous mystical vision with the common Sufi three-tiered *ṭarīqa*. While this may well have been elicited by the request for systematic clarification of his path by an interested party, as the Dādūpanthī tradition would have it, it lacks otherwise sharp contours in Dādū's or his disciples' works.

Regardless of the actual circumstances in which the passages under review took shape, they both show Dādū subjecting elements of both the Hindu and Muslim traditions to theosophical reflection. In one case, he achieved this by amalgamation, and in the other, by alignment.

First for the *Abicala mantra*, a composite mantra of twenty-three constituent mantras: Each of these represents an aspect of the Supreme and is suffixed by the designation "mantra" (*abicala mantra*, and so forth). The constituents are:

(1) *abicala*, 'immovable,'
(2) *amara*, 'immortal,'
(3) *akhai*, 'undecaying,'
(4) *abhai*, 'fearless(ness),'
(5) *rāma*, 'Rām,'
(6) *nija sāra*, 'innate essence,'
(7) *sajīvani*, 'life-giving,'
(8) *savīraja*, 'envigorating,'
(9) *sundara*, 'beautiful,'
(10) *siromani*, 'crest-jewel,'
(11) *nirmala*, 'pure,'
(12) *nirākāra*, 'formless,'
(13) *alakha*, 'invisible,'
(14) *akala*, 'unbroken,'
(15) *agādha*, 'profound,'
(16) *apāra*, 'infinite,'
(17) *ananta*, 'endless,'
(18) *rāyā*, 'king,'
(19) *nūra*, 'light,'
(20) *teja*, 'splendor,'
(21) *joti*, 'light,'
(22) *prakāsa*, 'light,'
(23) *parama*, 'supreme,'
and, finally, *pāyā*, 'is attained.'[14]

[14] Counted by the Dādūpanthī tradition as constituent no. 24.

The constituents (19)–(22) form the concluding climax of the aspects of the Supreme. Except for equating all the instances of "light," Dādūpanthī exegesis has been silent about that clustering. The mantra in its totality captures the innate king Rām in largely apophatic terms and revealed as light. He is beautiful (no. 9 of the series of mantras), hence of a beauty invisible to the eyes of flesh. With Dādū, *sundara* as the attribute of king Rām is intrinsically connected with the luminosity expressed in the foursome cluster, as in his *pad* 269:

> Beautiful king Rām
> Has come as the Supreme Life Breath by supreme gnosis and supreme meditation. (refrain)
> He is unbroken, complete, totally incomparable, without shadow or *māyā*,
> Formless, supportless, boundless. (1)
> Profound and stable treasure in the body, without quality, formless,
> Complete, immortal Supreme Man, pure, the innate essence. (2)
> Supreme Light (*nūra*), Supreme Brilliance (*teja*), Splendour of Supreme Light (*joti prakāsa*),
> In Supreme Totality (*puñja*) beyond and different from anything; Dādū is His innate servant. (3)[15]

Sundara as the privileged attribute of the invisible interior Rām beckons to Islam which extols God's beauty. God the Beautiful is al-Jāmil. God's beauty is embodied in the Prophet whose outward beauty is but a mirror of this. The Prophet is Perfect Man, *al-insān al-kāmil*, a concept elaborated by Ibn ʿArabī according to whom,

> [t]he Perfect Man is the spirit in which all things have their origin; the created spirit of Muhammad is, thus, a mode of the uncreated divine spirit,

[15] सुंदर रांम राया।
परंम ग्यांन परंम ध्यांन, पतरंम प्रांण आया ॥ टेक ॥
अकल सकल अति अनूंप, छाया नहीं माया ।
निराकार निराधार, वार न पाया ॥१॥
गंभीर धीर निधि सरीर, त्रिगुंण निराकार ।
अषिल अंमर परंम पुरिष, त्रिमल निज सार ॥२॥
परंम नूर परंम तेज, परंम जोति प्रकास ।
परंम पुंज परापरं, दादू निज दास ॥३॥

> and he is the medium through which God becomes conscious of Himself in creation. (Schimmel 1975: 224)

Though inspired by this notion, Dādū does not associate it with the beauty of the Prophet *qua* Perfect Man, for the Prophet is absent from his oeuvre. He rather shares an understanding common to the Nāth Siddhas and rest of the Sants. With these, Perfect Man is the Siddha or Parama Puruṣa identical with the Ādipuruṣa.[16] In the 16th century, the Nāth Siddha Prthīnāth, appearing first in Dādūpanthī manuscripts, devoted to this the long composition *Sādha puriṣa* which remained popular into at least the 19th century (Dvivedī vs 2014: 70–84). This *sādhu puruṣa* is the perfected seeker identical with the eternal Puruṣa of stanza 2cd of the above-quoted song, "[c]omplete, immortal Supreme Man, pure, the innate essence." The full range of the meaning of *sundara* unfolds in the works of Dādū's disciple Sundardās, felicitously named "Servant of the Beautiful", who in a composition in the Sufi register speaks of the "beautiful servant of the Beautiful,"[17] and for whom the *sadguru* who lit the light of gnosis is *sundara*.[18]

An understanding of *sundara* as echoing al-Jāmil seems to be the key fitting into the composite structure of the *Abicala mantra*. Though much shorter than the Muslim list of the names of God, it may well be inspired by it. Each of the mantras is conducive to gnosis, and each reflects how an individual devotee may recollect aspects of God in his mind. Dādū seems to express this in *sākhī* 21.25:

> Everyone asks for the Experience, everyone says: "Give some of this to me!", My Lord is competent, he gives them understanding according to how they understand.[19]

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16 *Sākhī* 4.7c: आदिपुरुष अंतरि मिल्या…, "I've found the Primeval Man inside …".

17 *Pīr murīd aṣṭaka*, st. 8, text with translation at Horstmann and Rajpurohit 2023: 162–164.

18 *Guru upadeśa jñāna aṣṭaka*, stanza 1, text with translation: *ibid*.: 164–166.

19 परचा मांगैं लोक सब, कहैं हम कौं कुछ दिय लाइ ।
संग्रथ मेरा साईयां, ज्यूं समझैं त्यूं समझाइ ॥

This rings like a popular echo of the *unio sympathetica* laid out by Ibn ʿArabī, whose thought had been dominant in Indian Sufism since the 14th century.[20] According to this, every human being by his creative imagination establishes his own personal relationship with an emanation of God, the *rabb* particular to himself and recollected by his respective name.[21] Dādū says, for example: "He will not be even slightly forgetful of the *rabb,* he dies recollecting him continuously…" (*sākhī* 3.57ab).[22] In any event, the result of such recollection is fulfilment in the vision of light.

The other exemplary occurrence of the cluster of terms for light is in the fourth chapter of Dādū's *sākhī*s, the "Chapter of the Experience." Some of its 324 *sākhī*s represent coherent text sequences. One of these is especially noteworthy (4.116–34[23]) because it lays out theosophically the experience of the beatific light of the supreme truth. In this Dādū explains the path to the union of God and the soul. He articulates this in terms of the *brahman-ātman* unity which he correlates systematically with the stations of the Sufi *ṭarīqa*. He equates the "void of *brahman*" with *nūr-tej-joti*, the path to which he lays out in that text. At the end of the path the inseparable Allah-Rām (or "Rām-Rahīm" and similar doubles) reveals himself as light. In this, then, lies the reason for the collocation of the terms for "light." Theologically, such wedding of *brahman-ātman* with Sufi thought had become viable by the *waḥdat al-wujūd* monism developed by Ibn ʿArabī and long-familiar in South Asia. Rather than formal theology, however, the reality of live religion may have shaped Dādū's stance. His "bhakti-*ṭarīqa*" is in any

[20] Schimmel 1975: 357; Ibn ʿArabī's *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* and commentaries on this had formed part of the Indian Muslim canon of learning since its earliest period (Malik 1997: 74).

[21] For the *unio sympathetica*, see Corbin 2012: 163–174. The last chapter of the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* (see previous note), for example, is an instance of this (Ibn ʿArabī 2008). Schimmel 1975: 270–272.

[22] रती रबु न बीसरै, मरै संभालि संभालि ।

[23] Space does not permit a discussion of the passage which is deferred to a separate study in preparation.

case bracketed in the mood of bhakti as the eternal bond between the ever-failing *bhakta* and the ever-compassionate god (*dīna dayāla*).

The paradigm of light in the regional context

Nūr, equated by Dādū with the effulgent emptiness of *brahman* (*sākhī* 4.419), is of course al-Nūr, God as he is called by one of his ninety-nine names and famously praised in sura 24.35. God bestowed his light as *al-nūr al-Muḥammadī* to the Prophet. It has been existing since before the creation of the world. This basic tenet is captured, for example, in the preambles of the Avadhi Sufi tales since the 14th century. In the preamble of his *Kyāmkhān rāsā*, the aforementioned poet Jān Kavi (1996 [1953]: 1.9–10) speaks in consonance with Quranic teaching of the angels of light subservient to the Prophet, the very light that enlivened Adam who was formed from a lump of earth and from whom sprang mankind. The poet adds that for this reason Hindus and Muslims are the same though called by different names (*ibid*.: 1.13–15).

In northern India, *nūr* unfolds in a broad semantic spectrum. In Nizārī Ismailism, the *nūr al-Muḥammadī* is cast in the image of "Pillar of Light", the Imām, and the experience of this takes place in the interior of the faithful (Nanji 1978: 127–129). One must reckon for a Nizarī-Dādūpanthī interface, for the Nizārīs had spread over the same space since long before the formation of Sant sects, and a good number of places in Marwar feature both Nizārī and Dādūpanthī settlements (Khan 1997; Horstmann and Gold, forthcoming). Dādū himself seems to mention these Ismailis in an allegoric *sākhī* (4.212; GopS 55.23), if not by their designation, by their congregation (*jamāt*).[24]

> Dādū says: He makes his body the mosque, his five senses the *jamāt*; and his mind, mullah and *imām*.[25]

[24] Sufi and Nizārī congregations met at the *jamāʿat-khāna*; for the Nizārīs, see Nanji 1978: 21, 25. In other contexts, *jamāt* refers also to a band of yogis.

[25] "Mosque" and "mullah" are taken to represent Islam in general, and "jamāt" and "imām", the Nizārīs.

> Where he himself stands before the formless God, he prostrates himself and salutes.[26]

Nūr is also present in the "Supreme Principle worshipped as *jyot-agnir-nūr*, light and sun, the equivalent of Primeval Energy" of the Mahāpanthīs of Saurashtra and Kutch in whose religion Nāth-yogic and Nizārī elements fuse (Mallison 2019: 237–238).

Nūr in hagiography

In the so-called *aṅgabandhū* redaction of Dādū's works, the textual unity and weight of the aforementioned passage from the "Chapter of the Experience" was fully recognized. This redaction, first coming to light in manuscripts of the 19th century,[27] introduced thematic sub-headings to the chapters of the *Dādūvāṇī*, and entitled the passage *Jajñāsa*[28] *upadesa praśnottarī* (*Teaching an enquirer by interview*). In the 20th century one finds the passage expressly interpreted as the conversation of Dādū with Akbar at their meeting in 1585 (Nārāyaṇdās 1975: 360–367).

In the 16th century, *nūr* figured paradigmatically in the legitimation of emperor Akbar, and this paradigm remained vital through the regnal period of emperor Jahangir. A grand design put on public display, it became fecund in Dādūpanthī hagiography where it triggered the depiction of a contest of spiritual authority, represented by Dādū, and political authority, embodied by Akbar. The lifetime of the hagiographer Jangopāl, who met Dādū first in 1585 and died before 1636, spans the period of Akbar and Jahangir. Jangopāl devotes two and a half (Chapter 5 to the middle of 7) out of the sixteen chapters of his *Life of Dādū*

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[26] दादू काया मसीति करि पंच जमाती मन ही मुला इमामं ।
आप अलेष इलाही आगैं तहां सिजदा करै सलामं ॥

[27] Tripāṭhī in *Dādūvāṇī* 1985: 6; Siṁhal (Rajjab 2010: 109–114) thinks that this system was introduced by Dādū's disciple Rajab. The late appearance of it is hard to reconcile with Siṁhal's supposition.

[28] From *jijñāsu*, 'curious,' 'inquisitive.'

(*Dādū janmalīlā*; Jangopāl 1988) to Dādū's real or imagined meeting with Akbar in Fatehpur Sikri in 1585.[29] This was allegedly the occasion on which the above-mentioned dialogue from Dādū's *Paracā kau aṅga* was conducted. For forty days (Jangopāl 1988: 7.1), Dādū is described as replying also to queries of the emperor's confidants, Abū'l Faẓl and Raja Man Singh of Amer. These queries concerned Dādū's views and unorthodox social behaviour. The meeting culminates in Dādū's appearance before the emperor. Forty days are the period of the *chilla*, meditation in seclusion which leads the disciple guided by the Sufi master to the light of God (Schimmel 1975: 103). In this case, the roles are reversed: Akbar is the disciple and Dādū the master. Akbar is bestowed with the vision of light in which Dādū appears before him sitting on a throne of light, in sheer luminosity. This is the throne of God praised in sura 24:35, and brings to mind Sufi throne visions, such as that made by Ibn ʿArabī (Corbin 2012: 71). Akbar prostrates himself in awe before this. Jangopāl wrote his hagiography after 1603, the year of Dādū's death. Though it was written decades after the event, it is well possible that its author heeded the chronology of facts, for he is seen otherwise doing so meticulously: for all events in Dādū's life he named the circumstances, places and individuals involved. Being a member of the merchant community, he would have laid down these details in *bahī*s, ledgers systematically recording such facts for the purpose of trade and administration. For an unknown time, he was also in Fatehpur Sikri where he met Dādū first. He surely kept track of the events crucial for the year 1585. The year 1584 had seen the introduction of the era of Akbar, *tārīkh-i ilāhī*, retroactively effective since *naurūz* 1556, the year of Akbar's accession to the throne.[30] The sun calendar had come to replace the Islamic moon calendar. Akbar was the sun of spring appearing at *naurūz*. The author of that symbolism was Abū'l Faẓl, in this seconded by court poets. It was he who transferred

[29] Critical edition and English translation by Callewaert (Jangopāl 1988); for Jangopāl portrayed as an exemplar of an early-modern socially engaged intellectual, see Lorenzen and Agrawal 2024.

[30] For the hypostasis of Akbar as the sun, this paragraph draws on Franke 2005: 185–248, particularly p. 215 *passim*.

the *nūr-i Muḥammadī* on to Akbar (Franke 2005: 217). The emperor was made the receptacle of the light of the Prophet and hence the light of God. Since well before 1584, inscriptions of coins propagated the emperor as *khurshid*, the sun. By 1585, accordingly, the notion had gained currency. Akbar's authority was legitimized by identifying him with the light of Muḥammad, and so was Dādū by the pen of Jangopāl and maybe expressing common Dādūpanthī sentiment. Dādū's initiation by a theophanic figure had established his authority in a line over and above mundane chronological history. Jangopāl does indeed make the meeting of the emperor and the saint a contest of authority, and this hinges on the paradigm of light. Both the emperor and the saint had been styled *avatāra*s, Akbar by brahmans (*ibid.*: 231), and Dādū first indirectly in the shorter recension of Jangopāl's work ("as it were, an *avatāra* of Kabīr", 1.17), and since the mid-17th century expressly in the longer recension of the same text (1.6.8; 4.6.3). The prostration of Akbar before the throne vision instantiates a hyperbolic hagiographical trope, but here it was refreshed by the real background: etiquette demanded that the proskynesis (*sijda*) due to God alone was also to be made before Akbar, not in public, but in private court, the circle that had realized that in him was at work the power of God so that prostration to him would be prostration to God.[31]

Conclusion

D. S. Khan and other scholars exhaustively documented the entangled Nizārī-Sufi-Hindu religion of Rajasthan and the regions to the north and west of it. The observations made here only further illustrate these findings. In this religious *mêlée*, the momentum made by Nizārī Ismailism cannot be precisely assessed, however. Historically, Dādū's case is situated around three centuries after the beginning of the vigorous Sufi transformation of Nizārī Ismailism. The models of Dādū's stance are

[31] As phrased by Abū'l Faẓl (Franke 2005: 223–224). On this in the context of Safavid and Mughal sacrality of kingship, see also Moin 2012: 184.

found in the Sufi corpus transmitted from the very earliest Dādūpanthī codices. The first available of these is from 1615 but consists largely of copies from earlier material. The Sufi corpus therein usually features Qāḍī Qāḍan, Bahā' al-Dīn Zakarīyā, Qāḍī Muḥammad, and Farīd al-Dīn Ganj-i Shakar (Horstmann and Rajpurohit 2023: 47). In the 13th century, Bahā' al-Dīn went from Multan to Baghdad where he joined the Suhrawardiyya which he spread widely and with great success after his return, while a little earlier Farīd had become head of the Chishtī *ṭarīqa*. These and other Sufis from Sindh were instrumental in the Sufi transformation of Nizārī Ismailism (Nanji 1978: 46–47). A Dādūpanthī anthology from the early 17th century appositely quotes an aphorism extolling four Sufis of the 13th and 14th centuries from Sindh, namely Bahā' al-Dīn, Makhdūm Jahāniyān from his line, Farīd, and Shahbāj Qalandar (GopS 121.4). Dādū was part of this kind of Hindu-Sufi live religion. On the level of theosophical thought, in the 16th century the gap between Sufism and bhakti had long been bridged by Ibn ʿArabī's *waḥdat al-wujūd* monism. A natural consequence of this long-term development was that Dādū straightforwardly related bhakti to Sufism. The Nizārī *taqīya*, dissimulation in the garb of its Indic host culture for fear of persecution by the dominant Muslim power, is therefore totally dissimilar from Sufism as the positively connotated Muslim reference tradition distinctly and openly addressed by Dādū and his disciples. Similarly, the characteristic Nizārī *avatāra* concept, embedded in a particular system of cyclic descent (Nanji 1978: 110–120), is missing in Dādūpanthī thought.

Khan's hypothesis of Nizārī Ismailism's role in the *nirguṇa* bhakti of Rajasthan and its periphery remains intriguing, but the factual Nizārī momentum is hard to assess, notably for the Sufi impact on north-western India's fluid religion.

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