

Reviewing the Idea of Debate within the Intellectual History of South Asia: Early Modern Vernacular Inter- and Intra-Religious Dialogues¹

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Introduction: Debate and Dialogue in South Asia

Debate and argumentation are a vital condition for a healthy democracy, and making the case for India, Amartya Sen has shown that they have been important right from the beginning throughout its long history (2005: 3-33). This constitutes an important reminder of multivocality in an age where confrontational political tactics based on aggressively asserted singular identities wreak havoc worldwide. Issues are worsened in a media-climate where the preponderance of online communication seems to engender acrimonious hardening of oppositional stances rather than fruitful dialogue.

To bolster evidence of a tradition of religious multiplicity with room for dialogue, negotiation, and debate, a new series from Routledge called “Dialogues in South Asian Traditions” was established by Laurie Patton of Middlebury College, together with Brian Black and Ram-Prasad Chakravarthi of Lancaster University. In a first volume (2015), Patton and Black have collected essays that document in-depth the role of dialogue for negotiating contesting interpretations in early South Asian religions. Their goal is to examine how, why, and when dialogue can mediate differences, including interreligious ones, by means of examples of ancient India. While most of those concern debates in classical languages, they suggest the study of vernacular forms of dialogue as a desideratum. This paper answers that call for such studies by looking at early modern dialogues in New Indo-Aryan languages. One can intuitively appreciate the importance of vernacular debates if one thinks of the contemporary media where English-language South Asian media differ markedly from, say, Hindi ones in virulence. How does linguistic idiom impact the productivity of debate? In this paper, the focus is on early Hindi medium inter-religious dialogue with Islam. In the process

1 This paper was first presented at AAR in Boston in 2017. I am grateful to Véronique Bouillier of ÉHESS, Paris and Monika Horstmann of Heidelberg University for stimulating discussions and providing me with editions and manuscripts of the texts discussed here, but they are not to be blamed for any mistakes I may have made.

this paper raises some broader questions around the dialogic character of early modern vernacular debates that have been preserved to us.

The conclusions of Patton and her collaborators are relevant for current political and religious questions. In the first volume (2015), they helpfully draw distinctions between engaged, collaborative dialogues, competitive ones, and hostile ones. In a follow-up volume (2019), they systematically question what constitutes a dialogue, who participates, what is the subject, and what are its results. Here, they see three themes emerging: that of encounter, transformation, and interpretation. The most encouraging of their findings perhaps is that ideas are constituted dialogically, even when interlocutors are not really out to learn from each other but rather searching for the best way to articulate their own truth-commitments in encounters. They give evidence of transformative dialogues, which make for good pedagogy when the teacher is enlightened and the disciple willing to be transformed. In any case, in their “in-betweenness,” dialogues invite creative interpretations that cannot be reduced to one perspective. Dialogue “is revealed as intrinsically a call to an ethics of knowledge” (2019: 16) that can be applied to the political world as well as that of religious experience. One important lesson for contemporary democracies then is that the debates from ancient texts offer “ways of imagining interactive spaces in which a plurality of religious views can be expressed and discussed,” and exemplify inquiry that “can be collaborative without being monotonal” (20). There is an implication that perhaps the openness of the early period was somehow lost and needs to be regained. Should we speak of a “closing of the Indian mind”?²

The question then arises how and when this loss of open debate occurred, so lessons for its reversal can be drawn. One might be inclined to surmise this loss took place during colonialism, which encouraged divisive attitudes that pitted Hindu versus Muslim. In that case evidence from pre-colonial but early modern dialogic texts composed in vernaculars are crucial. To investigate such sources, it will be important to situate dialogues in their historical contexts. In an important article on shifts of Sanskrit discourse as it becomes translated in regional languages, Deven Patel, has emphasized the role of the milieu in which texts are composed (2011: 265):

Perhaps studies of literary developments in all phases of South Asia’s history may find it fruitful to see hermeneutic and creative discourses

2 The term is meant literally as closing off debate and is only ironically related to Allan Bloom’s 1987 book title intended to question the closed-mindedness he saw as a paradoxical result of academic open-mindedness.

commingling within broader institutional contexts, spurred on by shifting disciplinary agendas and newly emergent codes of literary production and reception.

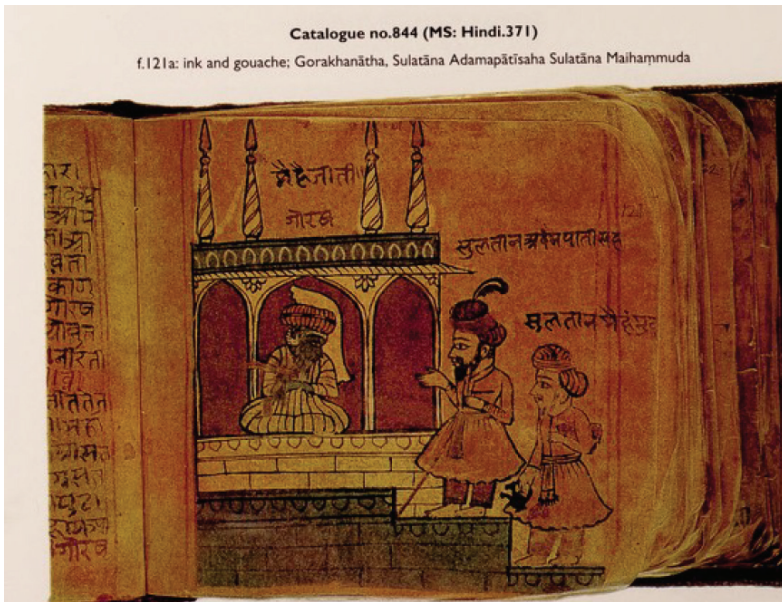
There is then a need for historicizing philosophical texts, in particular the ones of the debate genre. One difference from the ancient materials is that for early modern texts, we are in a better position to do so.

This article focuses on one important moment of intellectual transformation in precolonial North India in the first half of the eighteenth century, which was foundational for Hinduism as we know it now. At that point in time the role of religion in governance was being rethought. Monika Horstmann has written extensively about the religious reforms promoted by the influential king Jai Singh II, founder of the city of Jaipur and ally of the late Mughal emperors. His main agenda was not anti-Islam, but rather to reconcile the demands of Hindu orthodoxy in the form of *smārta dharma* with ecstatic devotional religion, or *bhakti*, to which he was personally inclined. To that end, he promoted social and religious reform for devotional sects within his orbit of influence, challenging them to collaborate in conforming to the caste hierarchical rules and demands (*varṇāśrama-dharma*) and to ally themselves with one of the classical philosophical schools (*catuḥ-sampradāya*). He also forced a military reorganization of the militia, or *ākhādās*, of warrior-ascetics that had been rather loosely organized thus far. To promote these agendas, Jai Singh II inspired and sponsored a wealth of commentarial and exegetical literature. This did not remain limited to his domains in Rajasthan. The issues he pressed for had a far-reaching impact because he held from 1722 through 1737 and again in 1740 also the subedari of Agra, in which the religious center of Braj was located. This gave him power to punish and excommunicate dissenters who traveled to or settled in that pilgrimage center and consequently, his influence was felt all over North India, all the way to Bengal.³ Horstmann has shown how productive it is to read Sanskrit philosophical treatises of the period against this religio-political agenda (2010). It turns out that the king's patronage forced several players overcome sectarian rivalry in order to collaborate productively. One expects that vernacular texts produced at roughly this time would also reflect some of that activity, so this period makes for an excellent focus of early modern vernacular debate literature.

To be sure, there had been multiple Classical Hindi dialogical texts in circulation already before Jai Singh II's period. Such texts often carried

3 This paragraph is based on the excellent monograph by Monika Horstmann (2009). For more in English, see also Pauwels 2017, chapter 2.

a title including the words *milan* (“meeting”) or *goṣṭhī* (“colloquium”), to represent competitive debates by different sectarian leaders pitted against each other, such as the *goṣṭhī* of the famous *nirguṇa bhakta* Kabīr, founder of the Kabīr Panth and the yogi Gorakh'nāth, founder of the Nāth Sampradāy (Lorenzen and Thukral 2005), or one being interrogated by the other, such as the founder of Sikhism, Guru Nānak, by the Nāths in *Siddh-goṣṭ* (Nayar and Sandhu 2007). Another genre, *bodh* (“awakening”), hints more at conversion and persuasion towards a predetermined doctrinal truth rather than genuine meeting of minds. Analysis of the Socratic discourse represented in these texts allows exploring the possible closing of the Indian mind, particularly if we follow how those texts were transmitted over time.



Friedlander 1996: 604; courtesy Wellcome Institute.

We will start our exploration with a puzzling eighteenth-century image of inter-religious dialogue that illustrates one such *Bodh* text. This will lead us to a cluster of texts working through the same cluster of dialogical materials, but each in its own way. This possibly is indicative of intensification of certain points of debate over time. As we explore the ways in which these *Bodh* texts were recycled with different main agents, and reframed within different contexts, we are able to track a hardening of these debates down into the colonial period.

An Eighteenth-Century Manuscript Resource for Studying Debates

Let us start with an image of what looks like inter-religious dialogue (fig. 1). It is found in an illustrated manuscript preserved in the Wellcome Institute in London. The manuscript foregrounds dialogues in text as well as images.⁴ According to its colophon (on fol. 188r), it was written down in the year 1715 (1772 VS), and it mentions specifically that this was during the reign of Jai Singh II of Jaipur (Savāi Jai Sī(n)gh rāje), so clearly in the period of interest to us here.⁵ It was committed to writing in Naraina, near Jaipur, which by this time had developed into an important center of devotion to an abstract God, or *nirguṇa bhakti*, namely the Dādū Panth.⁶ The texts are richly illustrated with images of intra-religious dialogues, between *nirguṇa bhaktas* as well as yogis of the Nāth Sampradāy. Several depict gurus with their contemporaneous disciples, such as the founder of the Dādū Panth, Dādū Dayāl with his disciple Sundar'dās (fol 166r, Friedlander 1996: 602), but there are also images of “imaginary dialogues” of gurus with much later disciples, such as the founder of the Sikh religion, Guru Nānak, with the seventh in his succession, Guru Har Rāy (fol 188v, Friedlander 1996: 601). In some cases, it is quite clear from the positioning and body language who is depicted in a position of authority, including in the picture of the famous *nirguṇa bhaktas* Kabīr and Raidās (fol 25r., Friedlander 1996: 602), where the former is represented as the guru and the latter as disciple. Sometimes, however, both parties are depicted on equal terms, such as the image of the same Kabīr and his purported guru Rāmānanda (fol 151r, Friedlander 1996: 601).⁷ The fascinating image reproduced in fig. 1 is inter-religious, depicting the yogi Gorakh'nāth seated on a platform in what is explicitly designated as a mosque (*maihaijīti*). Two Muslim visitors standing approaching him, one with an elaborate turban and walking

4 The tome in the Wellcome Institute is a compilation of loose-leaf folios that have been bound in somewhat random sequence, the core of which consists of a combination of Nātha and Sant works. Although its illustrations are reproduced in the catalogue by Peter Friedlander that was published in 1996, this manuscript has attracted surprisingly little scholarly attention and deserves to be studied in its own right.

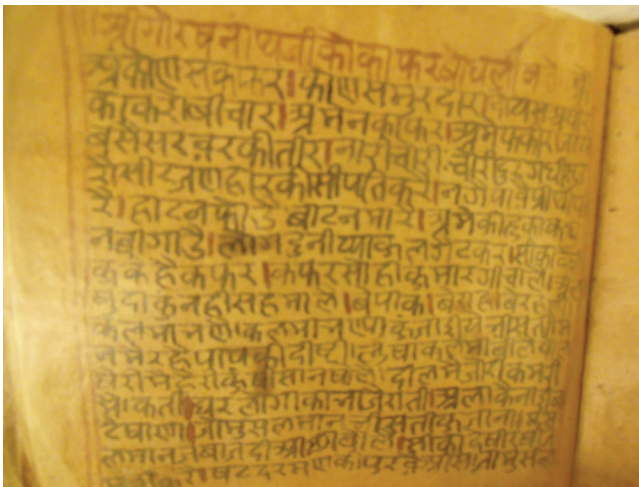
5 The colophon also specifies the name of the scribe, Tivāḍi Gokal. It is difficult to say whether this colophon can be taken as a *terminus ad quem* for the entire manuscript, especially because the folios are not in sequence, one cannot even be sure whether the texts preceding what is now fol. 188 were not written down later.

6 This sect looks to the late-sixteenth-century cotton-carder saint Dādū Dayāl for its origins. For a good succinct introduction, see Horstmann 2012.

7 I have discussed both images and related texts elsewhere (Pauwels 2018).

stick in hand is identified as Sul'tān Adam Pātisah, and the other carrying a water jar (*loṭā*) and perhaps a prayer mat under his arm, as Sul'tān Maiḥammud (fol 121r, Friedlander 1996: 604). The first of Gorakh's interlocutors seems to represent the legendary Sufi-prince, Ibrāhīm ibn 'Addham of Balkh (d. 777–8; Jones 2012, Alikberov 2017). It is trickier to identify "Sul'tān Maiḥammud," we will return to the issue below.

What interests us here is what opportunities for inter-religious dialogue such an image might represent. It may be intended as shocking: after all Gorakh has squarely occupied the "mosque," even the niche of the holy *qibla*, so it seems, whereas his Muslim interlocutors are outside, approaching him perhaps with the request to explain himself thus positioned. Just visually, it seems that Sul'tān Adam is addressing, perhaps challenging or interrogating Gorakh, who is listening somewhat grudgingly and impatiently, while Sul'tān Maiḥammud is standing by. In what follows I will gradually try to unpack the image and explore the relevance for inter-religious debates from the "Hindu" sectarian point of view. I will do so with reference to the text that accompanies the image in the manuscript and its multiforms. This is just a small contribution to the project building a complement from the Hindu perspective to Carl Ernst's masterly cumulative work of the Muslim counterpart with regard to inter-religious dialogue.



Fol. 121v. of Hindi Manuscript 371 in the Wellcome Institute, London

Our exploration of the answers to the question of interreligious dialogue starts right at the backside of the image (fol. 121v., see image), which contains the beginning of a text named *Kāfir-bodh*, "Illumination of the

non-believer (*Kāfir*),” which is ascribed to Gorakhnāth. It is not easy to figure out what that text stands for, or even to translate the compound in the title, which is left ambiguous in the quick translation above. The crux to understanding it is to determine whether it is intended as an objective or agentive compound (*dvitīya* or *tr̥tīya tatpuruṣa*), that is, whether it is to be understood as “illumination brought about by or to the non-believer.” The image seems to suggest that the *kāfir* refers to Gorakh, who in the eyes of the two Islamic figures might be deemed such. Again from an Islamic point of view the *kāfir* (i.e., Gorakhnāth) would be naturally considered as someone in need of enlightening, so one could translate as “Awakening of the *Kāfir*, Gorakh,” presumably by the teaching of the delegation of Muslims, namely the Sufi Adam and witnessed by the Sultān. Such would set up the expectation of a text in favor of conversion to Islam. However, Gorakh’s elevated position in the image, and the fact that he is already seated in the *qibla* of the mosque suggest rather an agentive interpretation: “Illuminating Teaching by the *Kāfir* Gorakh.” This might announce that the discourse that is to follow answers the challenge of Sultān Adam, and suggest that Gorakh will dispense “heathen” wisdom. Perhaps the location of the mosque further suggests this will be congruent with Islam and eventually appreciated by the audience represented by the delegation of Sultān Adam and Maihammud.

Such an interpretation is confirmed by the first few lines of the text that contain a rhetorical question about who is a *kāfir* or infidel:

koṇa sa kaphara, koṇa sa muradāra, doya sa akhāra kā kare bīcāra (fol. 121v)

Who is the infidel? Who is the untouchable?⁸ Consider both words⁹ carefully.

8 This term seems to be used here to connote a similar concept as “infidel.” According to Platts, *P murdār* s.m. can mean “A dead body, a corpse; a carcass; carrion; a piece of carrion; —adj. Dead; impure, unclean, polluted; dirty; squalid; ugly; profane; obscene.” In a Dādū Panthī context, this may also refer to the practice of abandoning dead bodies in the desert (rather than either cremation or funeral). The negative interpretation of this in Islamic eyes may go back to the confrontation with Zoroastrians in Iran with similar practices of exposition of the dead in the “Towers of Silence.” I am grateful to the participants of the seminar in Heidelberg for this suggestion.

9 *Akhāra* or *aḥsara*, literally means “syllable,” which foreshadows the next line. One variant (in the Kabīr version introduced below) gives the variant *sabada*, which confirms our translation.

Contrary to our expectations perhaps, this initial rhetorical question challenges the very category of the *kāfir* and its equation with “untouchable.” It reads as a response to an unstated challenge by the Muslim interrogator, who presumably sought to classify the speaker as an unbeliever or an untouchable. Thus challenged, Gorakh immediately counters by in turn challenging the very notion of “non-believer.”

First, Gorakh provides an unambiguous denial of being identified as *kāfir*:

ame na kāphara ame phakīra, jāya basai saravara kī tīra (fol. 121v)

I am not a *kāfir*, I am a *fakīr*! I go and dwell at the lake’s shores.

A radically different identity is asserted: a clever play of words reverses the first two consonants (*akṣara*) of *kāfir*, to render another term recognizable as respectable in the interrogator’s eyes, namely *fakīr*. In one stroke we see a seductive strategy develop to counter the accusation of “non-believer.” In view of the image and attribution of the text, presumably this is Gorakh’s way of countering negative characterizations of his system. In doing so, he provides a blueprint for yogis to defend themselves.

In response perhaps to the challenge of what a *kāfir* like him is doing in the mosque, Gorakh first denies being a *kāfir*, then asserts he is a *fakīr*. He continues by insisting on his right to dwell anywhere as a wanderer, essentially dwelling with God, evoking the yogic image of the swan returning to the shores of the mystic Lake, Mān Sarovar.¹⁰ In this light, our understanding of the title *Kāfir-bodh* can be emended to “Illumination of (the Category) *Kāfir*.” There is a certain defensiveness to the title thus translated, setting up an expectation of an apologia for Nāth yogis, who are not to be deemed non-believers. Is that borne out by the rest of the text?

Unfortunately, the manuscript itself is very sloppily written and seems quite garbled, its meaning is certainly not straightforward. One can make out as much as that Gorakh takes care to distance the *fakīr* from the *kāfir*. In particular, itinerant *fakīrs* might be confused with roving gangs of robbers:

nagai pāvai prīthī pharai, hāṭa na phodai bāṭa na mārai

ame kīhu kā kacha na bīgāḍai (fol. 121v)

Barefooted we roam the earth, we do not break up the market, nor
waylay travelers

We do not cause trouble to anyone.

10 One variant (on fol. 558r in the Sharmā manuscript, introduced below) gives the Persian variant *dariyā*, which evokes Hāfiz’s poetry, again I am indebted to the participants of the Heidelberg seminar for this reference.

In the following lines, still on the same folio in the manuscript, the *kāfir* is redefined as one who is described as violent and disrespectful to God:

kaphara sohī kumāragī cālai,¹¹ *alaha khudā ku nahī sahabhālai* (fol. 121v)

A non-believer is someone who moves on the wrong path, who
does not care for God, the Lord.

If these statements seem to confirm the Muslim interrogator's prejudice about *kāfirs*, Gorakh now launches further elucidation, this time questioning the antonym, the category of Muslim (*musalamāna*) or believer with the goal to establish that a *fakīr* is actually a true believer. Formal allegiance to Islam is not sufficient to be called a true believer.

Alā kai nāī bāṅṅṅe khāṅṅā, jo musalamāna bhīsati ku jānā (fol. 121v)¹²

Distributing food in the name of Allāh, does that make a Muslim
who goes to paradise?

kalamā bhāṅṅyā ku jāṅṅe bhīsati, mana mai rahai pāpa kī dīṅṅī (fol. 121v)¹³

For reciting the Kalamā, how would you get to go to paradise?

As long as a sinful view prevails in your heart?

In other words, the accused *kāfir* has quickly turned the tables and not only redefined what constitutes a *kāfir* or heterodox person as more generic, but also challenged the challenger on his definition of who is a true believer.

Yet, the tone is not belligerent. The conclusion comes at the top of the next folio:

hīndu musalamāna dohu alā ke bande,

hama jogī na rakhai kīsahu kai chande (fol. 122r)¹⁴

Hindus, Muslims, both are friends of Allāh.

We yogis do not keep favoritism towards either.

These lines then strike an ecumenical tone, asserting that both religions are dear to God, yet marking the yogi as being impartial and transcending both. This is congruent with how Lorenzen has characterized Gorakh'nāth's view based on other works of his (2011).

If we put image and text together, it seems that at the heart is a clever defense of the position of the Nāth Sampradāy as neutral with regard to inter-religious debate. Gorakh is portrayed as at the same time transcending duality, yet counting both religions as equally valid and shifting the conversation to the godless as the true *kāfirs*, deserving the negative

11 The variant in Kabīr's version is *so kupharānā kare* (Azīz 1905: 26/698).

12 Gopāldās *Sarvāṅgī* 19.113 has *khudāi* instead of *allā*, and its second line is different: *te kyūṅṅ bolīyai bābā musalamānā*.

13 Gopāldās *Sarvāṅgī* 19.112.

14 Gopāldās *Sarvāṅgī* 19.118 (for more on this, see below).

epithet. Could this be a clever way of avoiding being on Jai Singh II's bad side? Is the argument ultimately that yogis do not need to fit in Jai Singh II's straightjacket of orthodoxy, since they fall beyond the *catuḥ-sampradāya* scheme anyways. It is tantalizing to see in the initial equation of kāfir with "untouchable" (*murdār*) an echo of Jai Singh II's concerns with social orthodoxy (*varṇāśrama-dharma*). The word does not reoccur though in the text, but perhaps it is indirectly addressed?

To be sure, this is only a preliminary understanding of the text. The rest of the work needs to be verified, the difficult passages that seem garbled need to be sorted out, which involves a lot of work as there is no easy text in print. Editions of Gorakh's collected works, or *Gorakh Bānī*, typically do not include *Kāfir-bodh*: it is neither in the standard scholarly edition by Pītāmbhar Datt Baṛath'vāl (1946), though he reports it is found in one of the manuscripts he used,¹⁵ nor in popular editions such as the one by Rām'lāl Śrīvāstav, published by the Gorakh Mandir in Gorakhpur in 1978. What material is available to draw on?

Many Kāfir-bodhs: Redefining Kāfirs or Re-educating Muslims?

It is not the case that the work has been forgotten since the eighteenth century: it is still current in the Nāth Sampradāy today, though under a different the name *Mohammad-bodh*, "Awakening of Muhammad," a work that the French anthropologist Véronique Bouillier has recently brought to scholarly attention and provided a partial of (in French 2010: 567–573; in English 2015: 5–6). There is a popular publication of *Mohammad-bodh* by Yogī Savāī Nāth 'Sāmān' (141-2).¹⁶ This text shows significant overlap with the *Kāfir-bodh*: there are several near-identical verses all through. One main difference is that in the *Mohammad-bodh* the introduction is expanded with formulae in a more modern Hindi linguistic idiom, which includes a long list of equations of different parts of the yogic body to Islamic concepts, such as the following passage:

15 The so-called Pauṛī manuscript, estimated ca 1750, named after the place where it was preserved at the time, the residence of Pandit Gairolā, who in turn received it from Dr. Daljang Singh of Jaipur (Baṛath'vāl 1946: 12). It is comparable to the illustrated Wellcome ms. in date, and in its inclusion of Nāth yogī *Bānīs* as well as Dādū Panthī texts, in addition to a Pañc-vāṇī section at the beginning and selections made by Rajjab at the end.

16 I am grateful to Véronique Bouillier for providing me with copies, and for stimulating discussions on the topic.

Rām to Rahīm hai. om to Muhammad hai. śīs to masjid hai. sir to madār hai. kār to kurār hai. nain to nabī hai. nāk to kabar hai. mukh to makkā hai. hāth to hazrat hai. peṭ to dozakh hai. kadam to rasūl hai [...]. (141)

Rām stands for Rahīm. The Sacred syllable Om for Muhammad. The forehead for the mosque. The head for the shrine.¹⁷ The ear [kār] for the Qurān. The eyes [nain] for the Prophet [Nabī]. The nose for the grave. The face [mukh] for Mecca. The hand [hāth] for the holy [hazrat]. The stomach for hell. The foot for the Prophet.

These equations are loosely associative, characterized in several cases by the phenomenon of associating cross-religious concepts by first letter. This overabundance of magical-sounding equations can be explained by its current use in the sect. Bouillier pointed out that Yogī Vilās'nāth, general secretary of the Pan-Indian Nath Yogi association, recommended it for the purpose of recitation for “Muslim Yogis” during the month of Ramadan in a 2005 pamphlet *Śrī Nāth Rahasya*, or “The secret(s) of the Holy Nāth” (vol. 3: 524–7). This explains the formulaic mantra-like quality of the *Mohammad-bodh*. Still, this is not new: while absent from the beginning, the *Kāfir-bodh* in the 1715 manuscript is followed by another work attributed to Gorakh'nāth, *Avali Silok Granth*, the beginning of which is characterized by a similar chain of formulaic equations (fols. 123v–124v).¹⁸ If we keep in mind that Yogī Vilās'nāth suggests this text for the edification for Muslim yogis, the chain of equations acquires the purpose of justifying yogic practices in Islamic categories. The new name, then, can be read as “Illumination of Muhammad,” with objective resolution of the compound. That would carry the opposite connotation of the earlier title of the same text *Kāfir-bodh*.

Something more than just formulaic equations of Muslim with yogic concepts for a Muslim audience is going on. At the end of the modern text (in the edition provided in *Śrī Nāth Rahasya*, as well as the one by 'Sāmān'), it is revealed that the Prophet himself who is said to have received this instruction:

*Śrī Śambū jatī guru Gorakṣanātha jī ne Aṭak daryāv par baiṭh'kar
Mohammad ko samajhāyā* (Vilās'nāth vol. 3: 526; Sāmān 142).

17 Literally *mazār*, s.m. & f. A place of visitation; — a shrine; a sepulchre, tomb, grave. (Platts).

18 This work is not included in the popular nor scholarly edition either, but Baṛath'vāl indicates it is found in the same manuscript as *Kāfir-bodh* (1946: 12).

The Shaiva ascetic Guru Gorakhnāth jī explained this to Muhammad seated at the river in Attock.¹⁹

It is not surprising if contemporary Nāth yogis would promote such a reading that glorifies the superiority of a (now perceived as) “Hindu” authority over Islam. One wonders, were the seeds of this transformation were already there in the 1715 version? There the concluding note read:

*etī kāphira bodha.*²⁰ *prasādī Jatī Gorakhanātha jī pādīya namaste.*

Thus the Kāfir-bodh. Hail to graceful ascetic Gorakhnātha jī’s feet.

Still, while the text does not mark Muhammad as the interlocutor, the preceding image visually suggested, something similar to what we read in *Muhammad-bodh*, namely that Gorakh is (retroactively) educating Muslim leaders in response to their challenge. Should one go as far as to suggest that the Sultān Maihmud in the image could be intended to represent the Prophet Muhammad himself? That would make for a more radical interpretation of the encounter. The more defensive-sounding “Illumination of the [term] *Kāfir*” perhaps covers already for the later articulated rather aggressive claim of “Awakening of Muhammad.” Is there anything in the *Kāfir-bodh* text itself to justify this identification?

One might have hoped that the lines the modern editions have in common with the 1715 text might help to puzzle out the meaning. Unfortunately, both the editions by Yogī Savāī Nāth ‘Sāmān’ and Yogī Vilās’nāth are garbled and as much a mystery (*rahasya*) as the title of Yogī Vilās’nāth’s compendium promises. Though Bouillier’s interest as an anthropologist is mainly with the Muslim yogis, she valiantly ventured to translate several verses, but reports that even the experts she consulted felt it was very tough-going (2012: 569). Bouillier has perceptively pointed out many overlaps of the text with other works by Gorakh’nāth (2015: 3) as well as by other devotional authors (ib. in the notes on 16–7). The *Muhammad-bodh* version now current, then, looks like a compilation and elaboration of older verses that were current in an oral milieu, but became obscure over time and are hard to reconstruct now. The extant version is for ritual use, and its meaning is now clearly secondary. It has evolved to such extent that it is not very useful in establishing the meaning of its ancestor, the *Kāfir-bodh* text of the 1715 manuscript.

19 A symbolic explanation of Attock, the ford on the Indus, is provided in Bouillier 2015:17 n 45.

20 Two letters are erased here, possibly originally it too read *Śambū*, but the reference to Shaivism was blotted out.

More helpful are versions recorded closer to the time of the manuscript within a century preceding it. A partial version has been preserved in the 1627 Dādū Panthī compendium *Sarvāṅgī* (19. 104–118) compiled by Dādū's disciple Gopāl'dās, which has been transcribed by Winand Callewaert (1993: 198–9).²¹ Gopāl'dās included many of Gorakh's compositions, but he did not attribute the *Kāfir-bodh* to the yogi guru. In this compilation, the text is not even marked as a separate work: no title is given and it is not demarcated from immediately preceding and following poems. Those tend to be *dohās* containing the *chāp* or "signature" of Dādū and Kabīr, and are all on generically related themes, as is fitting with the title of section (19) it appears under: *Nridoṣ sāc atīt ke lakhyani kī pārah* or "Touchstone of the Characteristics of Immaculate Truth from the Past".²² The *Kāfir-bodh* fragment that is included in the *Sarvāṅgī* constitutes the most dialogic element of the text. This version too is riddled with difficulties, even though it was printed.²³ Still, this fragment provides an early attestation of circulation of the first part of the text of *Kāfir-bodh* within the Dādū Panth, and gives us a sense of its core notwithstanding all textual instability.

There are two other early resources to draw on that contain more complete versions that are actually named *Kāfir-bodh* and attributed to Gorakh.²⁴ They too are from Dādū Panthī collections, both preserved in Jaipur: one is a 1658 (1715VS) manuscript from the Vidyābhūṣaṇ collection of Jaipur's Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute (no. 34), another is a roughly contemporaneous *pothī* written by Dādū's immediate disciples preserved in Jaipur (*Sanjay Śarmā Pustakālay evaṃ Śodh Saṃsthān*, no. 3190; with multiple colophons dated 1614–21, see Strnad 2016: 547–

21 There is only partial overlap: the first two folios worth of verses in the 1715 ms. correspond with the *Sarvāṅgī* 19.104-106, 111-113, and 117-8.

22 The *kāfir* theme seems to have been popular and taken up by several authors. A different, more straightforward text, also named *Kāfir-bodh* is authored by Garīb'dās. Ranade (1954 in the Hindi version on p 36) quotes a *pada* about the meaning of *kāfir* attributed to Dādū Dayāl and (in the English version on p 52-4) discusses poetry expressing similar sentiments. A few verses with similar content are also translated in Husain 1929, as noted by Bouillier.

23 Callewaert transcribed, parsing the words, without too much attention to meaning (this, he indicates is the case for all parts of the compilation that had not been edited by date of publication; 1993: 12).

24 I am grateful to Monika Horstmann, first for bringing these manuscripts to my attention, then providing copies of the text, sharing her transliteration, and reading through the text with me together with Anand Mishra and a group of other interested parties in Heidelberg on January 23, 2018. My readings have benefited much from the vivid exchange.

8, 553, 560–67). Both contain much better legible manuscript versions of *Kāfir-bodh* (fol. 357r.–8r. and fol. 558r.–59v. resp.).

While several passages remain obscure, generally speaking all these related texts have a common core that foregrounds commonalities between the two faiths of Islam and Hinduism, yet distinguishes yogis-fakirs as transcending both and being partial to neither. Thus, with the help of these manuscripts we can decipher the meaning of some other dense passages in our 1715 *Kāfir-bodh* on fol. 122v.:

[*āju māju*]²⁵ *ājija bājija donu guru celā, dekhyā dasa daravājā*²⁶
*alekha purasa ku sīsa nivāvo, aiha nīsī karau nīvājī*²⁷

Both guru and disciple are confused and perplexed²⁸ upon spotting the ten doors.

Bow your head to the invisible God: do the namāz day and night.

To relieve the confusion of the material world, surrender to God is recommended, whether the God of Islām or the Sant/yogic “invisible” (*alakha puruṣa*). Again we see an equation: of *namāz* or obligatory prayer of Islam with bowing to the imperceptible Upaniṣadic *puruṣa*. Equivalence between Islamic and Hindu practices is further confirmed on fol. 123r.:

hīndu kahāye ka musalamānā, kāyyā jānai te kājī bolīye
mana jānai te mulā, darda jānai te darāvesa bolīye (cf. Sharmā 559r;
Vidyābhūṣan 358r)

Whether called Hindu or Muslim, call one who knows the body, a qazi.

Call one who knows the mind, a *mullā*. Call one who knows pain, a *darvesh*.

25 This does not make much sense, nor does the reading in the Vidyābhūṣan ms., *ājū bājū*, (fol. 357v-358r). The ms. from the Sharmā collection though helpfully gives: *ājuja bājuja* (fol. 559r), which makes one suspect an original *ājija bājija* (see note on the translation below). Kabīr (about whom more below) has *hājī gājī*: “the pilgrim and the warrior.”

26 The reading in the Vidyābhūṣan ms. *khojo dasa daravājā* (fol. 358r) “find the ten doors.” Sharmā has *dekhe dasa daravājā*; fol 559r.

27 The reading in the Vidyābhūṣan and Sharmā mss. are similar, but metrically superior: *alekha purisa kauṇī sīsa navāvahīṇī, aha nisi karahīṇī nīvājā* (Sharmā fol 559r). Kabir reads *alakha puruṣa kahaṇī mātha navāo, isa vidhi karo nimāzā*.

28 While the reading of in the Vidyābhūṣan ms looks like *āzū-bāzū* (redupl. of *bāzū*) = “roundabout,” the variant from the Sharmā collection is *ājuja*. Scribes frequently vocalize unstressed short vowel as -u- even if etymologically they should be correctly pronounced as -i-, especially for less common words of Arabic origin. So I propose it is a reduplication of the original A ‘ājiz (adj.) “baffled, frustrated” (Platts).

Through this pseudo-etymologizing, terms for Islamic religious figures are explained in relation to concepts familiar to *nirguṇa bhaktas*. Thus *kāzī* is related to *kāyā* “body”, *mullā* to *mana* “mind”, and *darvesh* to *dard*, “pain”. By this tactical move, yogic practitioners can be called Muslim authorities. This is the inverse of the similar-sounding formulaic equations in the contemporary versions of *Muhammad-bodh*, where the point was to absorb Islamic concepts in Hindu ones. The technique is the same, though: the creation of mantric evocations through pseudo-etymology. Perhaps we see here at work the principle noted by Laurie Patton and her collaborators that philosophical knowledge is constituted dialogically, in exchange with the conversation partner’s world, in this case that of Islam.

The early seventeenth-century versions show a surprise congruence with the modern *Muhammad-bodh* at the end of the text, where not only is Gorakh identified as the speaker, but Muhammad as the listener:

*etā kāphira bodha. Śrī Gorakha nai bolyā. Mahammadam kū pramodhyā.*²⁹

Thus the *Kāfir-bodh*. Spoken by holy Gorakh. It delighted
Muhammad.

It is clear then that the inclusion of the Prophet as audience for Gorakh’s *Kāfir-bodh* is not modern, it goes back all the way to the early seventeenth century, even if in the 1715 version, this element was omitted. Notably too, the Prophet is said to have been “delighted”, which could be taken as amused by the clever argument, rather than the more triumphalist take in the modern *Muhammad-bodh*. Finally, both manuscripts also include the work attributed to Gorakh called *Avali Siloka Granth*, which followed *Kāfir-bodh* in the 1715 manuscript and, as mentioned, has similar formulaic equations as the modern *Muhammad-bodh* (here using the more archaic copula *asi* instead of Modern Hindi *hai*).

To complicate matters yet further, there is a very similar, yet distinct text, named also *Kāfir-bodh*, but this one attributed to none else than the famous *nirguṇa Sant* Kabīr himself. This text has been preserved in manuscript, apparently dating back at least to 1817.³⁰ It is now available as part of a work encyclopedic in scope, called *Kabīr-i mansūr* or “Kabīr’s Charter.”³¹ Compiled by “Āziz” Paramānand of the Kabīr Panth, it was

29 This is the reading from Vidyābhūṣan manuscript (fol. 559v), the Sharma ms. mis-reads *hammahammad kauṇi pramodhyā* (fol. 559v).

30 One manuscript dated 1874VS is preserved in the *Kabir Chaura Math* 014 fol. 344 (*Muhammad Nāmā* on fols 132v-143v): *Dharmdāsī goṣṭhī* on fols. 2-7 (Lorenzen 1994: 31-3).

31 The Urdu version gives the spelling منشور *manshūr* s.m. “A royal mandate, diploma,

originally produced in Urdu and edited in 1880, but now most readily available in its Hindi translation, begun by Yugalānand Bihārī and completed by Pandit Mādhavācārya with expanded editions in 1887 and 1891 (Swain 1994: 115; Friedlander 2012: 48–9). The part of interest to us is included in the popular separate edition of two texts, the first one called *Muhammad-bodh* printed in Devanāgarī in 1905 (1962 VS) from Venkateshvar Press in Bombay, with *Kāfir-bodh* as an appendix (1905: 26/698–28/700; the latter page number is that of the broader *Kabīr-i manṣūr*). The editor indicates that this *Kāfir-bodh* is based on a sole manuscript in corrupted Hindi letters (*aśuddh Hindī akṣaroṃ meṃ*; 31/703).

Like Gorakh’s, Kabīr’s *Kāfir-bodh* too is framed as a dialogue, starting with the same question and answers. To provide an idea of the manner in which the texts are interrelated, I give parallel examples from the first few verses from both texts:

Gorakh Kāfir-Bodh

*koṇa sa kaphara, koṇa sa muradāra
ame na kāphara ame phakīra*

Kabīr Kāfir-Bodh

*kona so kaphira, kauna muradāra
hama nahiṅ kāphira ham haiṅ
phakīra*

The main difference in these lines is simply linguistic, manifest mostly in the first-person plural pronouns, with Gorakh’s version being more archaic and Rajasthani in its extra retroflexes. Otherwise there is very little variation. In between the two verses from which these half-lines are taken though, Kabīr gives an extra one, not found in the Gorakh versions:

gussā kāphira manī murdāra, doū sabda kā yahī vīcāra (26/698)

Anger [characterizes] a non-believer, egotism the untouchable.

This is the way to think about the two words.

This line changes the dynamics of the discourse: it treats the initial rhetorical question as a real question. Kabīr provides an answer that confirms the negative view of both terms. He seems to “read the mind” of his interrogator and specifies the negative value of both words, before identifying himself in more positive terms.

In the lines that follow though, Kabīr gives practically exact parallels to the verses by Gorakh quoted in the previous section: he too contrasts the *fakīr* further to the *kāfir*, who is described as violent and disrespectful to God, followed by an elucidation of the term *musalamāna*, to ultimately

patent, charter” (Platts). One wonders though whether the intended form would actually be a near-homophone, منصور *manṣūr* part. adj. “Aided, succoured, defended, or protected (by God); triumphant; victorious, conquering” (Platts), in which case the translation could be “Kabīr Triumphant.”

arrive at the conclusion that equates the Muslim and the Hindu path.³² We see basically the same core text we could identify in the versions introduced above, in yet another configuration. Clearly, the blueprint for a defensive argument attributed to Gorakh had caught on sufficiently to be used creatively by Kabīr and/or his followers.

There are some divergences that seem to indicate a different approach between the two purported authors. Thus, introducing the etymologizing verse about the qazi and mullā quoted above, Gorakh had said rather ironically:

jhuṭhā kājī jhuṭhā mulā, jhuṭhā beda kurānā (fol. 122v.)

The qazi is false, the *mullā* is false, false are Vedas and Quran.

Whereas Kabīr asserts the opposite:

sabhai sāce kājī sāṃce, mulanā beda kurāna (26/699)

All is true, the qazi is true, so is the *maulāna*, so are Vedas and Qurān

In Gorakhnāth's version then, all religious authority is fake, but for Kabīr, in this text at least, it is all true.

This should not distract from the similarities, in both texts, the *bodh* or "awakening" is of the presumably Muslim challenger in response to whose initial name-calling the (rhetorical) question "what is a *kāfir*?" began the whole diatribe. Through the transformative dialogue with the guru, whether Gorakh or Kabīr, this interlocutor has been led from that surface level of contrasts between believers and disbelievers, to transcend those as he delves deeply into the wisdom of the *fakīr*, realizing that the duality of "true" and "false" and "right" and "wrong" is ultimately meaningless.

At the end of Kabīr's *Kāfir-bodh* (28/700 ff.) too are appended some sections that contain equations between yogic and Islamic concepts, similar to what we encountered in the modern *Muhammad-bodh* versions of the Nāth Sampradāy. Again here we see evidence of intense exchange in dialogue, even if in the end the goal is to stress the superiority of one group over the other.

32 Both the text attributed to Kabīr and that to Gorakh are on the same page in this regard. For example: *hīndu musalamāna dohu alā ke bande, ama jogī na rakhai kīśahu kai chande* (27/699 in Kabir-bodh Sāgar); and *kalamā bhanyā ku jāīye bhīsatī, mana mai rahai pāpa kī dīṣṭī* (ib.). Some differences basically confirm the same point: Gorakh says: *hīndu kahāye ka musalamānā, kāyyā jāṇai te kājī bolīye*, whereas Kabīr gives the first half-line as: *Rāma Rahīma base eka thāṇā* (ib.) "Rām and Rahīm dwell together".

The Use of *Kāfir/Muhammad-bodhs*: Framing the Dialogues

How to understand these opaque texts, and what to make of their twinning? We have already learned about the use of *Muhammad-bodh* in contemporary recitational ritual practices to obtain one's wishes, as indicated by contemporary Nāth yogi pamphlets (see above, Bouillier 2015). The inclusion of mantra-like equations in all manuscripts studied seem to support such ritual use. This does not preclude other usages in the past. One could postulate that a core text was the fruit of encounters between Muslims and yogis and/or Sants. Gorakh as well as Kabīr, and/or their followers, not to forget Dādū Panthīs, must have been challenged for being *kāfirs* by their Muslim contemporaries, as well as "untouchables" or outside the pale of *varṇāśrama-dharma* by orthodox Hindu groups. Jai Singh II for one was a latish example of the latter. We could assume then that they or their followers composed their *Kāfir-bodhs* on the spot, whether in direct response to the challengers, or afterwards to justify themselves to their followers, and that their responses were immortalized by the yogis' or Sants' admirers. The two texts may consequently have become conflated. Or we can surmise that the compilers of these texts, used components of the works of Gorakh and Kabīr, and so the part determined the authorship to the whole. Or yet, one such composition may have come to be attributed to Kabīr perhaps due to following *sākhīs* attributed to Kabīr, as in the Sarvāṅgī manuscript. Alternatively, one could surmise the texts are the results of a period of compilation with the express purpose of creating a blueprint response to a Muslim's challenge of heresy, and only later came to be ascribed to Gorakh or Kabīr. Like their more illustrious colleagues, individual interlocutors may have adapted the words as needed according to the circumstances. This would explain the twin near-duplicates ascribed to "rival" religious authorities, as well as other unattributed yet related versions. Do we have circumstantial evidence to pin this down with regard to either the yogi or the Sant? We will first consider stories that frame each the Gorakh and Kabīr set of texts, and then situate these texts in their intellectual and institutional historical contexts.

To return to the image in the manuscript, its presence on the preceding folio frames the *Kāfir-bodh* as an actualized instance of (rather than generic) teaching by Gorakh of no less than two important figures in Islam. No matter how ahistorical, the intent is to imply that Gorakh instructed the Sufi renouncer-prince, Ibrāhīm ibn 'Addham of Balkh (c. 718–782) and "Sul'tān Maihammūd." By now one suspects that in the eyes of Dādū Panthī audience at the time, he may well have stood for

the Prophet himself. Bouillier again led us into the direction of a tradition claiming that Gorakhnāth taught the Prophet that was circulating by the time of our earlier manuscripts (2012: 573, n 50; 2015: 11). This is recorded in *Dabistān-i Mazāhib*, a work from ca. 1655 by the author Zul-Fiqār Āzal-Sāsānī ‘Mūbad,’ a member of the neo-Mazdean sect of Azar Kaivan (d. 1618; Ernst 2018: 437–8). Gorakhnāth, who teaches the path of Yoga, is identified here with Bābā Ratan Hājī or Zindā Pīr, whom we find frequently referenced in the manner akin to a signature, or *chāp*, by the author in our *Kāfir-Bodh* text.³³

The *Dabistān* reports the following rumor about Bābā Ratan Hājī in section 2.6 on the yogis:

‘aqīdat-i īn tā’ifad par īn ast kih Muhammad alīyah al salām ham-parwardah o shāhgird-i Gorakhnāth budah ummā āz harās-i musalmānān natavānand guft

A fundamental article of faith (*‘aqīdat*) of this sect is that Muhammad (PUH) was a cohort (*ham-parwardah*) and became a pupil (*shāhgird*) of Gorakhnāth, but they could not declare it out of fear (*harās*) of Muslims (Malik 1983: 159 l. 21–22).

It is then not far-fetched to see the image as representing an imagined dialogue between Gorakhnāth and the Prophet, in which, according to this esoteric tradition, the former is regarded as the teacher, while the latter is considered his pupil.

What was the institutional context in which such a view of the *Kāfir-bodh* came to be illustrated? Circumstantial evidence for the image can be deduced by the information of its date as provided in the colophon. At the time the manuscript was written down in 1715, the Mahant, or “abbot,” in Naraina was Jait’rām (d. 1732), who was likely the first Brahmin head of the seat. In the spirit of the reforms of Jai Singh II of nearby Amer, the abbot worked to establish his authority through an attempt to “clean up” the many divergent and idiosyncratic factions within his devotional sect, which has been documented in the account of his abbotship, *Jayat-prakāś* “The light of Jayat(rām).”³⁴ He did so

33 For example, *aisā hai bābā jīda pīra, alekha puraṣa kā dhīra* “Such is Bābā Zindā Pīr, steadfast as the Invisible Man.” ms. folio 122 r. This recurrence led Barath’vāl to omit the text from his Gorakh Bānī edition since he considered a work instead of Ratan Nāth (1946: 12).

34 The text was authored by Jñān’dās. Only one chapter of this lengthy text has been published as *Panth-paddhati*, details of the manuscript sources are unknown, but the text was definitely written before 1827. It has been translated and studied in Horstmann 2000: 546-7. She corroborates the evidence with reference to other sources, in particular documents from the Naraina archives.

notably with regard to commensuality rules,³⁵ but also in connection with ritual exchanges between guru and disciple.³⁶ This may well explain the unusual preoccupation of the Wellcome manuscript with images of gurus and their disciples. The *Jayat-prakāś* also articulates the obligation for Dādū Panthīs to collect the words of the Sants and carry those along,³⁷ which explains further our manuscript's *raison d' être*. It is in that broader context we need to see the inter-religious image and dialogue discussed. It is only one of the many images and texts collected, just one of the ways to mobilize the authority of Gorakhnāth and the Nāth Sampradāy for the Dādū Panth at that moment. The background for this inter-religious exchange then is a complex mixture of intra-sectarian debate, negotiation of the relationship of the Panth with the yogis, involving, among others, the disciplining of the warrior ascetic groups (*ākhāḍā*) of different denominations that Jai Singh II sought to organize. More about this will be revealed in forthcoming work by Monika Horstmann.

Similarly, for Kabīr there are claims that he taught the Prophet. This tradition is preserved in the aforementioned late nineteenth-century volume *Kabīr-i manṣūr* (1880) in its Hindi translation by Yugalānand Bihārī. This large encyclopaedic text relates all incarnations of Kabīr, the True Divine Being or Satya Puruṣa. It includes the eight one during which he instructed the Prophet, related at length in section 14, called *Muhammad-Bodh*, which, as mentioned, is published separately with *Kāfir-Bodh* as appendix. Thus, just like there is a mirror image *Kāfir-Bodh/ Muhammad-Bodh* ascribed to Gorakhnāth, there is also a twin attributed to Kabīr, though here they are distinct texts. In connection with the image from the Wellcome manuscript, it is important to note that there is as well a tradition that Kabīr during his ninth incarnation instructed Sultān Ibrahīm, related in a section called "Sul'tān-bodh". This is collected together with "Muhammad-bodh" in the aforementioned separate edition of 1905.

The *Muhammad-bodh* frame story is told from the perspective of establishing Kabīr's superiority. Satya Kabīr goes to meet Muhammad in Singhal Dvīp (5/677). They meet as equals addressing each other as *bhāī*, using the informal second person pronoun *tum* (6/678 ff.). Soon though, Muhammad asks Kabīr to show his divine power (*qudrat*), whereupon

35 See Horstmann 2009: 173.

36 Hastings p. 47, Horstmann 2000: 546-7 on the basis of the document *Panth-paddhati* (written before 1827), of which she provides a translation and commentary, corroborating with other sources, in particular documents from the Naraina archives.

37 Horstmann, *ibidem* 548.

follows a long lecture by Kabīr, who reveals the wisdom of the world starting with the Vedas (9/681 ff.). While the Prophet's message is acknowledged as part of this extended continuous line of revelation, the effect is to dwarf it, as just one of the many sacred scriptures of the world. Having led the Prophet through the different stages of the path of wisdom, eventually Kabīr sends him off with permission to reveal his message, but on one condition:

*cāro kalamā prakāṣa bhākho, pacavāṃ kalamā gupta jo rākho
pacavāṃ kalamā ilma phakīrī, jāke parḥe kuphra ho dūrī* (sic) (15/687)
You can reveal the four professions of faith, but keep a fifth part of
the *kalamā* secret.

That fifth *kalamā* is the science of the *fakīr*, whoever learns it will
shed heresy.

This is a more strident view of religious interrelations than we have encountered thus far, but this text too returns to the contrast between *fakīr* and *kāfir* that we have seen was central in the *Kāfir-Bodh* texts. Similar to what we observed in those texts, here too we find a generous dose of Islamic philosophical concepts that are equated with Advaita concepts, including the “stages” on the Sufi journey (*makām*) with Hindu mythological places, such as the first one with *Mān'sarovar* (12/684)

In Kabīr's *Sul'tān-bodh* too, the dialogue is inter-religions. Sultān Ibrahīm himself is depicted as setting out on a quest with the purpose to find out which is the true religion:

doū dīna mili kaho samajhāī, do meṃ sāmca kauna ṭhaharāyī (6/710)
Tell me and make me understand how the two religions relate, and
which one among the two established the truth?

The Sultān receives a visit from a “Gosvāmī from Benares”, who comes in the form of none else than Zindā.³⁸ The dialogue between the king and the holy man is masterly reduced to the bare essentials, starting with the king's question in a distych (*sākhī*):

*kahāṃ se āye jīnda jī, phera kahāṃ tuma jāva
hinda turka meṃ kauna ho, mohi kahī samajhāva
jīndā bacana (caupāī)
kahe durvesha suno re bhāī, jīndā rūpa khudā ko āī
Allāh āpa sakala ghaṭa māhīm, doū dīna dou rāha calāhīm* (8/712)
*From where have you come, Zind-jī, and where are you going?
What are you? Hindu or Turk? Tell me and explain.*

38 Perhaps in the figure of this mysterious Zindā Pīr, we find the identity of the ascetic in the cave depicted in some of the Mughal Indian representations of the Sufi saint (Alikberow 2017: 6).

Zindā's answer:

I'm called a Darvesh, listen, brother, this Zindā is a manifestation that has come from God.

God himself is in all bodies, he has created both religions, and made available two paths.

Fascinatingly, we see Satya Kabīr here taking on the form of Zindā Pīr, whom we have already seen equated with Gorakhnāth in the Dabistān, there rumored to instruct the Prophet. The question then of who is the true interlocutor, Gorakh or Kabīr, seems rather academic, as all three in the end are perceived as mere forms of the same divine.

In this text too, the dialogic preoccupation turns around the term *kāfir*, as later the Sultān receives a visit from the eighty-four Siddhas, whom he tests and finds to be *kāfirs* (11-2/715–6). After many adventures, in the final instance, the Sultān recognizes Satya Kabīr as the Lord of both religions:

Satya Kabīra samaratha dhanī, doū dīna ke īśa (31/735).

Satya Kabīr is the powerful Lord, Lord of both religions

In *Sull'tān-bodh* too then, the central concern is with countering the stigma of the *kāfir*. The perceived superiority of Islam is subverted through the professed equivalence of both religions. The central agent is again the *fakīr* as the one who transcends both, in this case through his divinity.

What do we know about the historical context of the *Kabīr-i mansūr* compendium? It originated with the Dharm'dāsī branch of the Kabīr Panth: the frame of each book, and chapter within it, involves Dharm'dās.³⁹ It was published first in Lahore in 1880, and later reprinted among others in Lahore and Ferozpur in Punjab. The atmosphere at the time was one of intense intellectual debate of Ārya Samāj followers intent on *śuddhi* or reconversion of "fallen" Hindus confronting members of Muslim revivalist movements, such as the Deobandis. This happened in a context of All-India *sabhās*, or conferences, inspiring also a lively print culture of promotional pamphlets (Mir 2010). But there was more going on than Hindu-Muslim animosity. There was a fair amount of intra-sectarian rivalry within the Kabīr Panth itself. The more upper-caste Dharm'dāsīs from the Madhya Pradesh area were rivals of the Chaura Branch in Benares. The latter had been publishing Kabīr's works, the *Bijak* since 1868 (Friedlander 2012: 48). The translator of *Kabīr-i mansūr*, Yugalānand Bihārī was a Dharm'dāsī devotee of the branch in

39 Dharm'dās, a merchant from Bandhavgarh, is mentioned in Raghodās's *Bhakt-māl* (1660) as one of the nine direct disciples of Kabīr, but he lived in the early eighteenth century (Friedlander 2012: 47).

Damakheda near Raipur, whose rival was the Kharsiya in Chattisgarh (Ranjan 2008: 70). Around 1895, he was vocal in a reform campaign of the Kabīr Panth to distinguish it from the Ārya Samāj, trying to overcome internal rivalries within the Panth under the aegis of one Satya Puruṣa, Kabīr. This went hand-in-hand with a feverish collection of “authentic” Kabīr songs that were then published, among others at the Venkateshvar Press in Bombay (Friedlander 2012: 49–51). Bihārī also saw himself in competition with the newly founded reform movement of the Radhasoami, who had appropriated Kabīr. They were actively publishing their own “authentic” Kabīr editions from Allahabad (ib. 51–3). These particular versions of our *Kāfir-Bodh* type of texts then have a stridency that is not just directed at Islām, but also at rivals from Hindu reform movements, as well as within the Panth. A lively description of hot-headed oral debates within the sect that sometimes led to fist fights is provided in a work by the Gujarati low-caste Kabīr Panthī, Makan’jī Kuber published in 1908 (Friedlander 2012: 49). This all takes place within a colonial context, with growing Hindu-Muslim animosity, the challenge too from Christian missionaries, and religious reform movements. Yet, the assertive tone was clearly also part of the intra-sectarian debates.

Conclusion

Our quest for understanding the manuscript illustration featuring Gorakh, Sul’tān Adam and Sul’tān Maihammud has led us to the discovery of a set of inter-related texts, variously named *Kāfir-*, *Muhammad-* and *Sul’tān-bodh*. They all revolved around a defense of the challenge that holds yogis or Sants to be *kāfir*, adding the social stigma of “untouchable” (*murdār*) in the eyes of traditional Hindu orthodoxy (*varṇāśrama-dharma*). They all do so through a strategy of first redefining the meaning of the very notion “unbeliever” as someone morally corrupt, then turning the tables on the opponent to question its opposite, who is a true believer? While asserting equivalence between Islamic and yogic / Sant concepts, they all provide a self-definition as a third category to transcend this duality, namely that of *fakīr*.

The most interesting question about these texts is not whether they originated with and are consistent with the teaching of Gorakh’nāth (to whom it is attributed as *Gorakh-bodh* as late as the rule of Mān Singh (r. 1803–43) in a manuscript in the Jodhpur Library; see Das 1906: 43ff) or Kabīr (earliest attribution in a manuscript of 1810 in the Kabīr Chaurā

library, see above). Such identification is superseded by the claim that they imparted this teaching in their divine form (intermediated by the mysterious Zindā Pīr, whose *chāp* is encountered throughout the text). Nor is it crucial to insist that the Sant or the yogi are said to have thus instructed the Prophet himself. Rather, the attribution of highly similar texts to different authors and audiences reveals something about the dialogical nature of this genre itself: its flexibility to be reworked with different variants according to different times and places, including different permutations of interlocutors. This is not unlike the feature of Upaniṣadic dialogue highlighted by Laurie Patton and Brian Black, where the conversation between the young Brahmin Śvetaketu, his father, and the king, appears with different permutations in more than one *Upaniṣad* and even in Buddhist traditions (Black and Patton 2015: 1–2). Perhaps it is best to think of these debates and discourses as successful blueprints that can be adapted to the need of the historical moment.

It is important then to keep in mind the intertextuality with reference to other discourses and the scenarios set up to frame the debates, as relevant in the particular historical contexts. The *Kāfir-bodh/Muhammad-bodh* type of inter-religious debate were embedded in stories that were quite popular and of which many different versions circulated. At least by the early seventeenth century there were stories of Gorakh'nāth as Zindā Pīr teaching the Prophet himself, and by the nineteenth century stories of Kabīr as Satya Puruṣa and Zindā Pīr lecturing not just the Sufi Sul'tān, but also the Prophet himself. While in the mid-seventeenth century, the *Dabistān* registers a strict air of secrecy around the Gorakh tradition “out of fear,” by the late-nineteenth century, the time of the *Kabīr-i mansūr*, these stories had become quite boldly asserted. It may be tempting to see that as a consequence of hardening of Hindu and Muslim identities in the colonial context. Yet in all cases, the inter-religious debates and rivalries take place against a complex background of intra-religious, inter- or even intra-sectarian disputes. It would be taking it out of context to read these *Bodhs* as a monolithic Hinduism challenging the Islamic classification as *kāfir*. Early modern dialogic texts composed in vernaculars are diverse, even if there are multiversions into the modern period. The tone may have changed from more defensive, to bolder in asserting superiority of the sectarian group, but this is not monodirectional and to be seen in the context of a variety of factors that go well beyond Hindu versus Muslim antagonism. If early religious dialogues in South Asia showed a spectrum ranging from engaged, collaborative, competitive, and hostile ones, we see a similar diversity for early modern vernacular ones.

Situating the early modern texts in their institutional and historical contexts is paramount. The conversations reported do not take place in a vacuum, but within a hierarchical framework. Thus, power dynamics are at work, and we cannot necessarily take the dialogic element for granted as indicative of an open, let alone democratic attitude, neither in the past nor today. Debates can be staged to score points. The purpose may be on a one-sidedly victory declaration, mainly intended to celebrate the greater glory of one sectarian position. The dialogic aspect can be just window-dressing for a guru's discourse, with disciples' prompts for further exposition, the audience being already converted by his charismatic personality. We do not really hear "the other side" of the debate. In that sense, we could say the Indian mind had closed already long ago. Still, even in such cases, there is evidence of exchange of ideas that is two-directional indicated by the fondness of establishing equivalences, a pervasive feature of all *Bodhs* we studied.

We started with the intuition that the linguistic medium of the vernacular lends itself well to the genre of debate, the very word "colloquial" implying conversation. In our limited sample we find indeed that very often the tone is informal (using *tum* form of address), which affords at least a semblance of equality between partners. There is another advantage to the vernacular: its flexibility allows for exploiting the ambiguity of terms, which lends itself to pseudo-etymologizing used to establish equivalences with concepts of the interlocutor's community. Does the vernacular then sit better with democracy? We need to keep in mind though that equivalence is not equality. Like in ancient Indian cosmopolitan debates, the three trajectories that emerge are (1) that of encounter with the religious other, in the case pursued here, the challenge from Islam, (2) transformation where enlightened teaching impacts in transformative ways the willing disciple, in this case Muslim yogis, but even the Sufi or the Prophet himself, and (3) creative interpretation to find equivalence, in this case between Islamic and yogic concepts. Here too, it appears that ideas are constituted dialogically. The early modern vernacular debates then are not that different from the ancient ones. They are far from monotonal and allow for a plurality of religious views to leave their traces, even if each asserts the triumph of its own. We can conclude hopefully that the Indian mind then has not yet closed, not even in its most recent evidence. The difference with the ancient period is that we know more of the specific circumstances of the debates that have been preserved. A more systematic study is in order to determine how those affect vectors of openness in comparative

perspective.⁴⁰ The blueprints are manifold. Ultimately, the choice to adopt and adapt them for more or less democratic purposes lies squarely with future interlocutors.

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40 It is perhaps proper to end with a note of caution. In researching these issues, we have to be aware that for NIA texts, a lot of work still remains to be done. There are many texts of dialogues circulating, but only a fraction has been edited, and only a handful translated. Even in the case where there are editions, it is important to return to the manuscripts and study at the same time the materiality of how the debates were preserved, and look for indications of the performative aspects of the texts behind the one preserved on the page (see Pauwels 2018). But the good news is that we have work by excellent and careful scholars like Horstmann and Lorenzen to look forward to.

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