

The *Sabadavāṇī* and Its Relation to the *Gorakhavāṇī*

Susanne Kempe-Weber

This presentation examines the canonical literature of the so-called Biśnoī Sampradāya and seeks to explore the representation of spiritual authority in one its central texts: the *Sabadavāṇī*. Originating in the late 15th century CE in Western Rajasthan's region Marwār, this religious tradition traces itself back to its alleged founder Jāmbhojī. Next to its well-known engagement for ecological issues, the protection of trees and animals as well as the strict vegetarianism it propagates, one of the main peculiarities of the Biśnoī Sampradāya is its intricate religious structure.

Although this is by no means exceptional for the multi-faceted spectrum of early modern South Asian religious traditions, the sheer amount of different religious metaphors, imageries and references that are employed in the *Sabadavāṇī* is certainly remarkable. Jāmbhojī is often considered to be one of Rajasthan's earliest Sants and the religious literature contains many elements closely resembling the literature of the Sant tradition of *nirguṇa bhakti*. Moreover, one can find many references and motifs that indicate a close connection with Nizārī Īsmā'īlīsm as well. Besides these two strands, a third strand is interwoven within the *Sabadavāṇī*: the yogic tradition of the Nāths. While the usage of yogic terms and concepts is not unusual for Sant literature, the *Sabadavāṇī* takes this idea one step further. Well beyond the mockery of Yogins or other ascetics and the usage of yogic terminology popular among the Sants, the *Sabadavāṇī* conspicuously comprises entire passages of a centerpiece of the Nāth Sampradāya: the *Gorakhavāṇī*.

This presentation will trace some of the yogic elements presented in the *Sabadavāṇī* and will attempt to find answers for such an unusual textual overlap between the *Sabadavāṇī* and the *Gorakhavāṇī*. Rather than suggesting a yogic origin of the Biśnoī Sampradāya or a mere close affiliation with the Nāths, it will be illustrated that the citation of passages of the *Gorakhavāṇī* is one of many techniques of the *Sabadavāṇī* of constructing and asserting the spiritual authority of Jāmbhojī. By focusing on spiritual authority a picture of the Biśnoī Sampradāya's relation with the Nāth Sampradāya emerges—characterized by both acceptance and rivalry in the quest for spiritual authority.