

***Bhakti* versus *rīti*? The *Sants*' perspective**

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Abstract

Scholars have rightly questioned the periodization of early modern Hindi literature (fourteenth to mid-nineteenth century) into two major thematic and temporal categories, often described as binaries: an early *bhaktikāl* (era of devotion), and the later *rītikāl* (era of mannerism). It is now common to understand *bhakti* and *rīti* as complementary modes of poetic expression rather than oppositional styles that poets had to identify with entirely. This paper uses the perspective of poet-saints (*sants*) to argue that, although the *sants* share many features with the *rīti* poets in terms of genres and register, they diverge fundamentally from them on the topic of the proper motives of composing verse. The criticism that the *sants* register with selected *rīti* themes – conflicts which would later figure in the writings of Hindi literary historians in the nationalist era – can be seen as anticipating the modern *bhakti* versus *rīti* distinction.

Keywords: Early modern India, Hindusim, Hindi, Sundardās, *Rīti*, *Bhakti*

The interrelation of *bhakti* and *rīti*

The prevalent Hindi historiographies define early modern Hindi literature (fourteenth to mid-nineteenth century) by categorizing the poetry in two thematic timeframes as *bhaktikāl* (period of devotion, 1318–1643) and *rītikāl* (period of mannerism, 1643–1843). While the project of writing histories of Hindi literature started in the nineteenth century (noteworthy are De Tassy 1870–71; Sengar 1967 [1878]; Grierson 1889), however, the tendency of designating different eras under certain themes emerged and was consolidated in the twentieth century (three principal accounts are: Miśra et al. 1972 [1913]; Śukla 1988 [1929 and 1940]; and Tripāṭhī et al. 1973). In these histories – of which Śukla's is the most popular and influential – poetry pertaining to *bhakti* (that is devotional or religious literature) is said to have flourished earlier than the *rīti*- period, when “mannerist”, “secular”, or “courtly” poetry was written in Brajbhāṣā – the language of the Braj region adopted not only by Kṛṣṇa devotional poets but which was also prominent in the court circles of early modern north

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India. The *bhakti-rīti* binary in these historiographies goes far beyond a simple temporal sequence. They are construed as opposites in theme, style, social imagination, and patronage. *Bhakti* poetry was considered spiritual and spontaneous: it spoke of personal devotion to god and, being expressed through the vernacular languages, it made religious experience more inclusive and participatory for people of all social strata. However, *rīti* poetry (*rīti* literally means custom or tradition, but more specifically the tradition of poetic ideals and compositions) was described as lacking originality (*mauliktā*) since it took much of its inspiration for composition from Sanskrit poetics (*kāvya*). *Rīti* poetry, for example the works of Keśavdās discussed in detail in this essay, was also considered to be ornate, eroticized, and hyperbolic in praising the courtly elites who patronized and appreciated such literature. Thus, *rīti* poetry finally came to designate a kind of literary culture that was representative of the decadence of Hindu princely states under the Muslim Mughal rulers of north India.

Scholars have rightly questioned the rigidity of this timeframe and the assumptions of nationalist historians in evaluating the literature of this era on the grounds that such a schematic classification hampers our understanding of the Hindi past. Many poets do not fit into either of the “tropes” about *bhakti* versus *rīti* under which early modern Hindi poetry was largely understood. Several *rīti* poets flourished during the so-called *bhakti* period, and there are other poets who can be described as having both *bhakti* and *rīti* sentiments in their poetry (Busch 2006: 42–5). Similarly, many devotional poets worked during the so-called *rīti* era when devotional communities themselves grew immensely. Scholars have therefore largely come to understand *bhakti* and *rīti* as modes of poetic expression rather than as fixed identities for poets to inhabit. For example, Rupert Snell (1994: 153–70) has shown that Bihārīlāl’s (born early 1600s) deeply felt devotion to Kṛṣṇa is inseparable from his highly cultivated poetic technique. In the same way, the poetry of Ānandghan (d. 1757), who flourished in the *rīti* period, was enjoyed in both courtly and religious centres. It appears that Ānandghan spent the early part of his career – although the sources are rather less reliable for these early years – in courtly circles, while later in life he lived as a devotee in Vrindavan (or Braj), the primary centre of Kṛṣṇa pilgrimage. Ānandghan masterfully weaves mundane and divine love in his poetry. The reception of Ānandghan’s multifaceted poetry presents an interesting case of contested identities of a poet: over time the compilers of Ānandghan’s poetry considered him either a Vaiṣṇava (devotee of the god Viṣṇu and his incarnations), or a lover-poet encompassing all aspects of human love in his ornate *rīti*-style quatrains (Bangha 2001; 2007). A case similar to that of Ānandghan can also be seen in Heidi Pauwels’ study of king Sāvant Siṃh of Kishangarh (1699–1764), who wrote under the pen name of Nāgarīdās. His oeuvre presents an excellent example of the “loving embrace” of scholastic (i.e. *rīti* style) works, devotional motifs like Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa sporting in Braj, as well as Sāvant Siṃh’s yearning to settle in Vrindavan. Although Sāvant Siṃh abandons his courtly affairs and settles in Vrindavan in the later period of his life, we cannot describe an early courtly and later devotional phase in his poetic life as we can for Ānandghan. These themes were intertwined in his poetry throughout his literary career, and the devotional references to Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa served as a way for him to construct his personal life (Pauwels 2005).

Thus, recent scholarship has questioned the rigid binaries presented by earlier historians in their portrayal of the Hindi literary past, and in doing so has opened new ways of studying early modern Hindi poetry. The majority of the poets discussed by these scholars, however, either lived in courts or were kings themselves. Their inclinations towards the *rīti* or “courtly” mode of expression might therefore be seen as a function of their social identities. To complement these studies, this paper examines a poet of a very different social identity: a poet-saint or a *sant* from the *nirguṇ* tradition of *bhakti*. Sundardās (1596–1689) – a prominent disciple of Dādū Dayāl (1544–1603) – is considered to be an expert in poetic art of the saint tradition (the *sant paramparā*), and illustrates how a devotional poet could engage with topics that are traditionally considered to be favourites of the poets of *rīti* style.

Sundardās: Life and works

Sundardās became a disciple of the poet-saint Dādū Dayāl at an early age. Dādū Dayāl’s sect is called the Dādūpanth (the path of Dādū) and its main abode is in Rajasthan. The Dādūpanthī Rāghavdās (1965), in his *Bhaktamāl* (garland of devotees, 1660: vv. 419–22), writes that Sundardās was from the merchant caste, a *Sāhūkār* (*Vaiśya*) of “*būsar*” lineage. Similarly, Sundardās calls himself *būsar* in his poetry. The *būsar* lineage is a branch of the present day Khaṇḍelvāl Vaiṣṇava community and connects itself to its ancestral village “*Khaṇḍelā*” located in the Shekhawati region of north-eastern Rajasthan. Rāghavdās writes that at the age of 11, Sundardās abandoned his house and left for Banāras (Varanasi or Kashi), where he studied *vedānta* and the *purāṇas*. In Banāras, Sundardās received training not only in the prominent philosophical knowledge systems, but possibly learned poetic skills as well. From Banāras, Sundardās returned to Rajasthan and settled in Fatehpur-Shekhawati (north-eastern Rajasthan), which was ruled by the Kāyamḅhānī kings (a small gentry under the Mughals) during his time. It was in Fatehpur that Sundardās probably wrote most of his works.

Sundardās’s entire corpus expands up to almost 1,000 published pages. His oeuvre was critically edited by the master textual critic and scholar of *bhakti* traditions, Purohit Harinārāyaṇ Śarmā, in 1937. Much of our knowledge of Sundardās’s life and works is based on the erudite introduction that the editor wrote for this edition, which is the culmination of his lifelong research on Sundardās. This paper relies on the Śarmā edition for Sundardās’s works. Rameścandra Miśra published an edition of Sundardās’s works in 1992, and editions prepared by the modern-day followers of Dādū Dayāl have made Sundardās’s works more widely accessible. Monika Horstmann (1983) has translated a chapter on *bhakti* from Sundardās’s scholarly poem *Gyān Samudra* (the ocean of knowledge) and a shorter poem *Gurukṛpā-aṣṭaka* (eight verses (or verse-sets) of gurus’ blessings). Horstmann has also written a chapter that helpfully situates Sundardās in the larger *sant* tradition and examines the Sufi influences that are intertwined in his two short poetic

compositions (Horstmann 2014).¹ In general, however, Sundardās has not received a great deal of scholarly attention in English-language scholarship.

The lifespan of Sundardās – most of the seventeenth century – bridges the *bhaktikāl* and *rītikāl* as traditionally conceived, and the same can be said for his oeuvre. In his fundamental orientation, Sundardās was a *sant*. Throughout his corpus he honours his guru Dādūdayāl and proudly situates himself in the tradition of *sants* like Nāmdev (fl. thirteenth–fourteenth century) and Kabīr (fl. fifteenth century). He also composes a good portion of his poetry in *sākhī* (couplets) and *pad* (lyrical songs), which are the representative genres of *sant* poetry. Along with these staple *sant* genres, Sundardās wrote a text entirely in quatrains, i.e. in *Savaiyā* and *Kavitt* metres. This text is named as the *Savaiyā*, often called *Savaiyā Granth* (hence SG in quotations) or *Sundarvilās* (the joy of Sundar) by modern editors. Both of these metrical forms (*savaiyā* and *kavitt*) are much more a characteristic of *rīti* poetry. The *Savaiyā Granth* has become the basis for Sundardās’s fame in modern north India, where it has appeared widely in print since the late nineteenth century. While the *savaiyā* and *kavitt* metres were also employed by other devotional poets such as Tulsīdās and Raskhān as well as by Dādūdayāl’s disciple and Sundardās’s close ally Rajab (fl. sixteenth century), Sundardās’s virtuosic use of this metre put him in conversation with his contemporary courtly or *rīti* poetic circles, where writing poetry in multiple forms of *savaiyā* metres was highly prized. Sundardās’s deep interest in the metrical tradition and using multiple metrical forms to craft devotional and philosophical poetry for the *sant* audience is also seen in his scholarly poem, the *Gyān Samudra* (GS in quotations), written in 1653. The *Gyān Samudra* also shares many features with the so-called *rītigranths* (handbook of poets or poetic theories) which is a defining genre of *rīti* poetry. Some of the metrical forms Sundardās uses in the *Gyān Samudra* were rarely seen in earlier Hindi *bhakti* poetry.

I will argue, primarily on the basis of Sundardās’s *Savaiyā Granth* and *Gyān Samudra* (with relevant examples from his collection of couplets: *sākhīs*), that, despite the many features his poetry shares with the *rīti* poetic tradition, he contrasts starkly with the *rīti* poets in his motives for composing poetry. Sundardās registers his criticism with tropes like *śṛṅgāriktā* (the erotic sentiment) and *nāyikā bheda* (types of heroines in poetry), *nakh-śikh* (head-to-toe descriptions) which were prominent in the *rīti* tradition. These tropes of *rīti* poetry with which Sundardās and other *sants* – who engaged with the tradition of poetics considerably – express their disagreements would later be enshrined as the representative tropes of the diverse *rīti* poetic tradition, and when the pioneers of nationalist historiography wrote about them, they connected these tropes with poets living in the age of courtly decadence. Although the categories of *bhakti* and *rīti* were not always conceived in the schematic and oppositional way that nationalist historians of literature conceived of them, it is not the case, either, that the categories themselves were fashioned in the modern period. This paper aims to show that the distinction was both known to Sundardās and

1 Horstmann’s (2021) book, which studies the close relationship of *bhakti* and yoga in the seventeenth century manuscripts, discusses Sundardās’s poetry pertaining to yoga in great detail.

his contemporaries, and also structured the way they thought about the landscape of literature in their own time.

A *sant's* response to *rīti* poetry

Monika Horstmann (2014: 233–63) writes that the *sants* were extremely proud of having shown the “middle way” (*madhi mārga*) between Hinduism and Islam. It should be argued, then, that Sundardās was far more invested in establishing another sort of middle way. While Horstmann rightly indicates that Sundardās carved a niche for himself with respect to *sagun* Vaishnava orthodoxy, this was not his only concern as a poet. Sundardās was also interested in participating in the evolving scholarly discourse on metre and structural poetic devices that is now commonly referred to as *rīti*, and he sought to appropriate the conventions, themes, and techniques of this emerging classical poetry for the *sant-bāṇī* tradition. This was his most prominent “middle way”.

Sundardās was finely attuned to the discourse on aesthetics that is often called *rīti* in modern scholarship, but he used it for purposes radically different from those that modern characterizations of *rīti* would lead us to expect. He borrowed from earlier traditions of *rīti* poetry and Sanskrit poetics (*kāvya*) in order to cater to the needs of a new and decidedly non-courtly audience: the *sants*, whose modes of literary production (*bāṇī* or *sant-bāṇī*: sayings of the *sants*) are often understood to contrast with those we call *rīti kāvya*. Although it is erroneous to designate the *sant-bāṇī* that predated Sundardās as not having literary qualities, like the way early literary historians such as Rāmcandra Śukla characterized *sant* poetry, it is certainly true that Sundardās transformed it by engaging with the classical and courtly poetic discourses of his time.

Sundardās treats the traditional topics of poetics, such as prosody, with remarkable humour while presenting them to a non-scholarly audience. He avails himself of *kāvya* discourses in the project of creating a *bāṇī* that is not just religiously sensitive but aesthetically well-formed. He writes in the following verse that poetry written in uneven metres hobbles along like a lame man (*khuṛāvata nara*) and agitates poets and connoisseurs:

*nakha śikha śuddha kavitta paṛhata ati nīkau laggai,
 anga hīna jau paṛhay sunata kavijana uṭhi bhaggai.
 akṣara ghaṭi baṛhi hoi khuṛāvata nara jyom callai,
 māta ghaṭai baṛhi koi manau matavārau hallai.
 auṛhera kāṇa sau tuka amila, arthahīna andhau yathā,
 kahi Sundara harijasa jīv hai, harijasa bina mrita kahi tathā.²*

Reading poetry that is beautifully crafted from head to toe is extremely - pleasurable.

If someone reads poetry lacking the necessary limbs, though, poets will get up and run.

2 This is the first verse of Sundardās's “*kavitā lakṣaṇ*” (qualities of poetry), a text compiled under the miscellaneous poems (*phuṭkar kāvya*) section. See *Sundar Granthāvalī*, (vol. 2), p. 972 (Śarmā 1937).

When the syllables are arranged unevenly, poetry falters like a lame man. It staggers like a drunkard when the syllables are irregular and uneven. Bad rhyming is like a crooked, one-eyed person, and meaningless poetry is blind.

Sundar says the life of a poem is the glory of Hari. Without that glory, poetry is as good as dead.³

The particular anthropomorphic metaphors used here are found in Sanskrit and Apabhramśa sources⁴ and in a text that is closer to Sundardās in terms of time and language. It is striking how closely the imagery and terminology that Sundardās employs in this verse evoke a similar discussion of “flawed poetry” (*sadoṣa kavitta*) that appears in the *Kavipriyā* (beloved of poets, 1601) of the major *rīti* poet Keśavdās:⁵

chanda birodhī paṅgu gani, nagna ju bhūṣana hīna,
mṛitaka kahāvai artha binu Kesava sunahu pravīna.⁶

Consider poetry that contradicts the rules of metre to be lame, if it is without ornaments, it is naked

If poetry has no meaning it is called dead, says Keśav, listen, expert one!
[or: listen, “Pravīn”]⁷

As we see, then, Sundardās agrees with Keśavdās on metre: poetry that does not follow metrical rules falters like a lame man and garners no respect among connoisseurs. Yet the two poets diverge fundamentally when it comes to their opinion about the proper motives that ought to generate poetry, thereby giving it its *jīva* or soul. Keśavdās, harkening back to the Sanskrit *kāvya* tradition, says that the life of poetry is meaning (*artha*),⁸ but for Sundardās its life comes from extolling Hari’s fame (*harijas*).⁹ By designating *harijas* as the life force of

3 All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

4 “*śrutiduṣṭāpuṣṭārthavādāya kāṇatvakhanjativādāya iva śabdārthadvāreṇa dehadvāreneva*” (being harsh on the ears (*śrutiduṣṭā*) or having an insufficiently developed meaning (*apuṣṭārtha*), which take place through word and meaning (respectively), are like being one-eyed (*kāṇatva*) or having a limp (*khanjativā*), which take place in the human body). See *Sāhita-Darpaṇa* of Viśvanātha Kavirāja, p. 62 (Kauśik 1978). Similar metaphors can also be seen in *Prākṛitpaṅgalam* (verse 10), a seminal treatise on Prakṛit and Apabhramśa language metres.

5 Keśavdās (fl. 1600) was a Brajbhāṣā poet who lived in the court of Orchā. His treatises on various topics of poetics are considered to be “the birth of Hindi classicism” (Busch 2011: 32–7).

6 *Keśav Granthāvalī* (vol. 1), p. 101 (Miśrā 1954).

7 Keśavdās puns the word *pravīn*, thus there are different translations provided. *Pravīn*, also known as Rāy *Pravīn*, was a courtesan at the Orchā court in the time of Indrajit. Keśavdās devotes a considerable section of his work to describing Rāy *Pravīn* in the first chapter of *Kavipriyā* (Poets’ beloved) – according to the text, he composes the *Kavipriyā* for her instruction. *Keśav Granthāvalī* (vol. 1), pp. 97–9 (Miśrā 1954).

8 “*mukhyārthahatirdauṣo*” (Flaw is that which prevents principal meaning in poetry). See *Kāvya prakāśa* of Mammata Bhatta, p. 245 (Śāstrī 1972).

9 The word *hari* denotes a general meaning of God and should not be confused with the Hindu god Viṣṇu.

a poem, Sundardās was constructing a way for devotional poetry to be accommodated within the conceptual world of *kāvya*. As long as the poetry fulfils this objective of *harijas*, he says, the poetry in question will live on. Likening poetry to a temple and *harijas* to the image of the deity within it, Sundardās says:

racanā karī aneka bidhi, bhalau banāyau dhāma,
Sundara mūrati bāharī, devala kaune kāma. (Sākhī 17: 25)

People have created poetry in many ways, as if constructing a stylish abode.

But Sundar says, without an image, what is the use of a temple?

In Sanskrit *kāvya*, the question of the *jīva* or *ātman* (soul or essence) of literature was discussed in terms of concepts of poetics (e.g. *rasa*, *alaṅkāra*, *guṇa*), but Sundardās introduces a distinctly devotional concept into this role. Despite Sundardās's emphasis on the significance of aesthetics to the efficacy of the *bāñī*, the above couplet makes it clear that devotion to the Lord is of paramount importance.

Sundardās's exposition of poetics

Sundardās's *Savaiyā Granth* and *Sākhīs* are grouped according to the themes of the poems, called *aṅg* or chapters. This thematic classification was a common anthological practice within the *sant-bāñī* tradition, one that arguably began with the Dādūpanthī poet-saints. There were two major anthology traditions of the Dādūpanth that compiled the work of a diverse array of *bhakti* poets using the thematic model: the *Sarvāṅgīs* and *Pañcvāñīs*. The *Sarvāṅgī* tradition (Iraqi 1985; Callewaert 1993) compiles the works of more than a hundred poet-saints and the *Pañcvāñī* tradition (Callewaert and de Beeck 1991) compiled works of five poet-saints specifically: Kabīr, Dādū, Ravidās, Nāmdev, and Haridās. Many themes (*aṅg*), such as finding a true Guru, separation (*vichoha* or *viraha*), illusions (*māyā*) and so on are identical in the *Pañcvāñī* and *Sarvāṅgī* traditions and for that matter in most anthologies of Sant poetry. Sundardās introduces new themes such as *vacan vivek* (discerning speech) in his *Savaiyā Granth* and *Sākhīs* to discuss the importance of poetic aesthetics in the ongoing *sant-bāñī* tradition and thus exert an influence on *sant* communities that resulted in a greater concern with poetics and aesthetics.

In the thematic chapters on *vacan vivek*, Sundardās talks about *sant-bāñī* in the abstract, before providing concrete contexts from social life to help laymen understand his exposition. He emphasizes the importance of ornate poetry well equipped with poetic figures (*alaṅkāra*) and metres. Sundardās all but forbids substandard *bāñī*, i.e. poetry that either lacks a proper metre or rhyme scheme, or that it is not sung beautifully:

bolīye tau taba jaba bolibai kī sudhi hoi,
na tau mukha mauna kari cup hoi rahiye.
joriye u taba jaba joribau u jāṁni parai,
tuka chanda aratha anūpa jāṁmaiṁ lahiye.

*gāiye u taba jaba gāibai kau kaṅṭha hoi,
śravaṇa ke sunata hī mana jāyi gahiye.
tuka bhaṅga chanda bhaṅga aratha na mile kachu,
Sundara kahata aisī bāṇī nahim kahiye. (SG kavitt 14: 4)*

Speak only then when you know how to speak,
otherwise shut your mouth and remain silent.
Create [poetry] only when you know how to craft it,
so that unparalleled rhyme, metres and meaning are obtained.
Sing only when you have a suitable voice,
so that listening, the heart is captivated.
Where rhyme or metre is amiss, or where meaning is not achieved,
Sundar says, never utter a *bāṇī* such as that!

After setting the criteria for acceptable *bāṇī*, Sundardās proceeds with a lengthy exposition whose purpose is to associate this discourse on aesthetics with the social contexts and literary tropes his audience knew and preferred. In the following *sākhī*, for example, Sundardās uses a metaphor to describe people who know in aesthetic terms what a good *bāṇī* should be. He likens such people to experts who know prized horse breeds, and relegates those who speak subpar *bāṇī* to the status of boors – those whose knowledge goes no farther than mules:

*Sundar ghar tājī bandhai turkina kī ghursāl,
tākai āge āi ke ṭaṭuvā phaire bāla. (Sākhī 17: 17)*

Sundar says, in a stable of Tāzikistānī or Turkish horses
Why would you walk around with a little mule?

In the *vacan vivek* section of the *Sākhīs*, Sundardās goes on to assert three classifications of *bāṇī*, giving them a hierarchical order:

*Sundara vacana su tribidha haiṁ uttama madhya kaniṣṭa.
ek kaṭuka ik carparai ek vacan ati miṣṭa. (Sākhī 17: 15)*

Speech is threefold: supreme, average and sub-par;
One is bitter, another is acrid, and one is exceptionally sweet.

Alluding to the threefold classification of *kāvya* common in Sanskrit,¹⁰ Sundardās associates these three types of *bāṇīs* with contemporary poetic trends. Personifying poetry as a woman was a long-established tradition inherited from Sanskrit literature, and often adopted in *rīti* poetry. But for Sundardās there were limits. While he may have agreed with Keśavdās's general thoughts on the relevance of aesthetics in poetry, he eliminates from *bāṇī* the erotic sentiment, a

10 Daṇḍin and Mammaṭa both give threefold classifications of *kāvya*. For Daṇḍin the three types are: prose, poetry, and mixed, see *Kāvyaśāstra* (The ideal of poetry) of Daṇḍin, p. 14 (Miśrā 1972). Mammaṭa categorized *kāvya* according to the excellence created by word and meaning, see *Kāvyaśāstra* (The light of poetry) of Mammaṭa Bhaṭṭa, pp. 30–2 (Śāstrī 1972).

major theme not only in Keśavdās's corpus but also one of the largest single types of content in high vernacular poetics (*kāvya*) at the time. To gain a sense of what Sundardās rejected, let me offer the following *dohā* (couplet), where Keśavdās personifies poetry as a woman using the art of the pun (*śleṣa*):

*jadapi sujāti sulachani, subarana sarasa subrita,
bhūṣaṇa binu na birājahīm, kavitā banitā mita.*¹¹

Though well-born, virtuous, of good complexion, and charming and of good character,
My friend, without [proper] ornaments neither poetry nor women are resplendent.

Sundardās uses similar vocabulary and retains the parallel between speech and womanhood, but he clearly excludes the eroticized element from his description of what good speech should be:

*ek bāṇī rūpavanta bhūṣaṇa baṣana aṅga,
adhika birajamāna kahiyata aisī hai.
ek bāṇī phāṭe ṭūṭe ambara uṛhāye āni,
tāhū māṁhi biparīti suniyata taisī hai.
ek bāṇī mṛitakahi bahuta siṅgāra kiye,
lokani kau nīki lagai santani ko bhai sī hai.
Sundara kahata bāṇī tribidha jagata māṁhi,
jānai kou catura prabīna jākai jaisī hai. (SG kavitt 14: 2)*

One type of *bāṇī* is beautiful, decorated with ornaments and well-clothed; very well respected, she [this *bāṇī*] is described in this manner. Another *bāṇī* drapes herself with tattered and ruined clothing; when a *bāṇī* like this is heard, it sounds unfavourable. The third type of *bāṇī*, loaded with a lot of *śṛiṅgār*, is dead; she may please the common public, but *sants* dread her. Sundar says, in the world there are three sorts of *bāṇī*. Only experts and clever people can see the differences between them.

Sundardās asserts that *bāṇī* well equipped with rhetoric (*bhūṣaṇ*), proper rhymes, and metres, garners respect among clever ones and connoisseurs (*catur pravīn*), but *bāṇī* spoken against one's wellbeing (*viparīt*) and not properly crafted (*phāṭe ṭūṭe ambar*) is of a low standard. Even though he adopts this classical metaphor of comparing poetry to a woman, he excises the erotic sentiment. We see this especially in his description of the third sort of *bāṇī*. This acrid *bāṇī* (*caṭpaṭī*), as he calls it elsewhere in his *Sākhī Granth* (collection of couplets, 17: 15), is the sort in which there is a discussion about *śṛiṅgār* (erotic sentiment) that may please ordinary folk but is deeply frightening to the sentiments of the *sants* (*santani ko bhai sī hai*). Sundardās's diction is crucial

11 All words after "jadapi" in the first line should be read as a pun (*śleṣa*) for poetry and woman (*kavitā-banitā*). *Keśav Granthāvalī* (vol. 1), p. 112 (Mīśrā 1954).

to his *śleṣa* in this third category, because he refers specifically to a woman's *śṛṅgār*. The word *śṛṅgār* is multivalent: on the one hand it is synonymous with *bhūṣaṇ* (ornament), as used in Keśavdās's *dohā* above, on the other it carries the baggage of *śṛṅgāriktā* (erotic sentiment) and its evident associations with eroticized *rīti* literature. On this account Sundardās warns his audience – in his words, the *sant* community – about the negative effects of *śṛṅgārik* poetry. The intertextual reference and careful diction attest to both Sundardās's familiarity with Keśavdās's oeuvre, and his ability to use those very same categories to caution against the temptations to which language such as Keśavdās's may lead.

Composing didactic poetry with literary excellence enabled Sundardās to preach to a like-minded audience yet simultaneously refine it. Being aware of the literary culture that existed beyond the borders of *sant* literature in his own time, Sundardās criticized some of the major genres and works of *rīti* literature. He connected the *nāyikā-bheda* aspect of *rīti* poetry with the popular *nārī-nindā* (denouncing or censuring the women) theme of *sant-bāñī*, in which a woman is traditionally compared to worldly pleasures (*māyā*) and forsaken for the path of devotion:

*rasika priyā rasa mañjarī aur śiṅgār hi jāṃni,
 caturāī kari bahut viṣaiṃ banāī āṃni.
 viṣaiṃ banāī āṃni lagata viṣayana kauṃ pyārī,
 jāgai madana pracaṇḍa sarāhaiṃ nakha śikha nārī.
 jyom rogī miṣṭhān khāi rogahi bistārai,
 Sundara yah gati hoi ju tau rasika priyā dhāre. (SG kuṇḍaliyā 9: 5)*

Knowing *rasikpriyā*, *rasmañjarī* and *śṛiṅgār*;
 and bringing them together, many topics [or worldly pleasures]
 can be described cunningly, with poetic expertise.
 Many topics [or worldly pleasures] are described, which gratify covetous men;
 when women are glorified from head to toe, such descriptions
 fiercely provoke sexual desires.
 Just as an ill-person prolongs an illness by eating sweets,
 Sundar says, so does happen with people who hold onto the
Rasikpriyā.

Here Sundardās uses a pun (*śleṣa*) on words like *rasikpriyā* (the connoisseur's beloved) in the first and last lines and on *rasmañjarī* (bouquet of emotion), *śṛiṅgār* (erotic sentiment) and *viṣaiṃ* (topics or desires) throughout the verse. Each of these words relates generally to heroines and aesthetics in *kāvya*. The first three words serve as the title of a specific text in the *rīti* genre such as Keśavdās's *Rasikpriyā* (1591) and the *Sundar-Śṛiṅgār* (1631) composed by Mughal emperor Shahjahan's court poet Sundar-Kavirāy. *Rasmañjarī* in Sundardās's verse refers to Bhānudutta's Sanskrit treatise on the *nāyikā-bheda* composed in the 1500s and also its vernacular adaptations, the earliest in this tradition is the *Rasmañjarī* of Nanddās (fl. sixteenth century), one of the eight great poets associated with the bhakti sect of *Vallabhācārya*. This shows that Sundardās was clearly reading and critiquing these major treatises. Sundardās satirizes the scholarly texts prominent in courtly circles, primarily because

these poets rhapsodize about women with cunning wit (*catūrāī kari . . . sarāhaim nakh-śikha nārī*). He cautions his *sant* audience about listening to glorified *nakh-śikh* descriptions, warning that they might kindle sexual desire. This criticism of Sundardās of such texts did not go unnoticed by the later generation of poet-saints. However, the poetic device of punning that Sundardās used in naming these texts becomes simpler later when the Niranjanī poet-saints in Rajasthan as well as the Swāminārāyaṇī poet-saints in Gujarat express their disapproval of the same texts for their imagined *sant* communities and likeminded audience.¹² The poet-saint Harirāmdās (fl. eighteenth century) of the Niranjanī Sampradāy – the community flourished in proximity with the Dādūpanthīs in Rajasthan (Williams 2014) – thought about Keśavdās and his corpus:

Keśavdās composed marvelous texts on the erotic sentiment,
 Because of these qualities his birth as *brahmin* went in vain just
 like born as ghost.
 He obtained the birth of ghost, then who sang the virtues of *nirguṇa*,
 Even being born in the weaver caste, Kabīr got liberated through
 good poetry.
That poetry is better, there is no doubt in it,
 Where abandoning the sentiment of eroticism, god is described.
 (Translation, Baid 2013: 128)

Though underpinning the importance of Keśavdās' oeuvre, which might have served as a model for Harirāmdās himself as he wrote treatises on metres and rhetoric, he still places Kabīr above Keśavdās for primarily being a poet-saint of devotional orientation.

It is important to note that *bhakti* themes are not absent from the world of *rīti* poetry and it is rightly said that the developments in Vaishnava aesthetics – prominently by the disciples of Caitanya Mahāprabhū (1486–1533) – in the sixteenth century contributed to the emergence of the courtly *rīti* genre (Busch 2011: 33) – a genre that describes “methods” of poetry. Describing the Kṛṣṇa-gopīs *rās-līlā* (love plays of Kṛṣṇa and the cowherd ladies) based on the models of *nāyikā bheda* was not only prevalent in the literature of Kṛṣṇa-worshipping communities but also attracted poets who were devoted to Rāma in the early modern period (Burchett 2018). However, in their engagement with the long-established *kāvya* traditions, the *sants* liked *nāyikā bheda*, *nakh-śikh* and elaborate depictions of *śringār* far less.¹³ Amatory themes in *sant*-poetry deal mostly with the separation (*viraha*) motif, where the poet-saints take

12 The Swāminārāyaṇī poet-saint Muktānand possibly borrowed from Sundardās where he names Rasikpriyā and Rasmañjarī and forbids their reading for his *sant* audience. Muktānand's *Vivek Cintāmaṇī* (especially the *vacan vivek* and *nārī nindā* sections) show immense intertextuality with Sundardās's *vacan vivek* and *nārī nindā* chapters. See *Muktānand Kāvya* (Muktānand 2001, vol. 1: 104–7).

13 For example, several Niranjanī poet-saints wrote vernacular texts relating to Vedānta, Purāṇa, Upaniṣads, Bhagvad Gītā, Sanskrit epics, and treatises on metrics, but themes like *Nāyikā-bheda* and the sentiment of *śringār* did not feature much in their corpus. See Tyler Williams's PhD dissertation (2014: 215–24). Also, personal email communication with Tyler Williams 21 November 2017.

the persona of women (signifying the soul separated from god) and long for a union. The depiction of love in union (*saṃyog śrīṅgār*), which is the major theme in poetry focused on Kṛṣṇa and the gopīs and had a major influence on the *nāyikā bheda* descriptions in early modern Hindi poetry, had limited scope for the *sants*. Therefore, the *sants* were giving their poetry a different character from even the *sagun* Vaiṣṇava literature written on Kṛṣṇa-Gopī love-plays. The Niranjani poet-saint Harirāmdās starkly criticizes the poetry that draws on the Kṛṣṇa-gopī love plays themes of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (Baid 2013: 127–8). In the same vein, considering texts such as *Rasikpriyā* and *Rasmañjarī* as titillating (*jāgai madana pracanḍa*), Sundardās demands his audience strive for knowledge and well-articulated speech by providing a set of revised poetic manuals. His criticism of the *nāyikā bheda* and the sensual aspect of *rīti* poetry is not mere reproach on the part of a *sant*, but a different vision of which Sanskrit texts one should study and what poetic devices could play a role in crafting meaningful *bāñī*. Although he certainly endorsed some structural features of Keśavdās’s literary science on aesthetics, Sundardās intended to replace the content of these *rīti* texts with a different type of poetry handbook, one that catered to the prospective *sants*. It was in his *Gyān Samudra* that he constructed an alternative to the courtly *rītigranths*. The *Gyān Samudra* matches them point for point – in metrical discourse, narrative strategy, language, and register – and yet it supplies quite a different content, one borrowed from different knowledge systems that suit the *sants*’ ideology: that is bringing the philosophies of Yoga, Sāṃkhya, and Advaita Vedānta into conversation with *bhakti*.

Crafting a poetic handbook for the *Sants*

The *rīti-granths* are Brajhbhāṣā scholarly texts that teach “the tradition of poetic art” (*kāvya-kalā kī rīti*) for the proper enjoyment of poetry. Having a strong foundation in traditional Sanskrit poetics, these *rītigranths* comprised a major genre of the literature that emerged from early modern Brajhbhāṣā courtly circles (Busch 2011: 102–4). As textbooks on literary science, these *rītigranths* adopted a “description and example” (*lakṣaṇ-udāharaṇ*) technique to describe topics like *nav-rasa* (the nine sentiments of *kāvya*), *nāyikā bheda* (types of heroines and their descriptions from “head to toe” (*śikh-nakh*), prosody (*chanda*), rhetoric (*alaṅkāra*), and so on. In Sundardās’s *Gyān Samudra* we observe several of the structural features that arise in these courtly *rītigranths*. Sundardās arranges his text as a *Sāṅg-Rūpak* (metaphor with all of its elements) – a common method of presenting theoretical texts in Sanskrit and vernaculars – where the “ocean of knowledge” (*Gyān Samudra*) contains the five waves (*ullāsa*) of Guru, bhakti, Yoga, Sāṃkhya, and Advaita Vedānta. In this ocean, poetic metres are like oysters that hide the pearls of meaning (*arth*), and one must be a true diver (*marjīvā*) to obtain them:

*jāti jītī saba chandana kī bahu sīpa bhaī ihīm sāgara māhīm,
hai tina maiīm mukatāphala artha lahaiīm una kauīm hita sauīm avagāhīm.
Sundara paiṭhi sakai nahīm jīvata dai ḍubakī marijīvahi jāhīm,
je nara jāna kahāvata haiīm ati garva bhare tinakī gamī nāhīm.* (GS, 1: 7)

Meters of all types have become the many oysters in this ocean.
 In them pearls take meaning: for your benefit plunge in and reach for them.
 Sundar says certain divers cannot enter, however expert:
 Those who become arrogant because people think them knowledgeable
 cannot enter this ocean.

While the *Rāmcāritmānas* of Tulsīdās may precede the *Gyān Samudra* in its use of the “oyster and pearl” image,¹⁴ Sundardās tailors it to his own special purpose. To see how he does this in vivid terms we might turn to the opening chapter of the *Gyān Samudra*. There he ambitiously claims to have composed this poem in “metres of all types”. By this, Sundardās seems to mean that he incorporates the metres of Sanskrit, Prakrit, and Bhāṣā (vernacular), such as *bhujaṅgī*, *troṣaka*, *roṣā*, *savaiyā*, *chappay*, and so on. Therefore this text is important, as Sundardās makes it so, not only for the philosophical content but also for its style of composing and introducing metres of various types to a vernacular audience. The language of the *Gyān Samudra* is heavily Sanskritized and full of technical terms. This style is characteristic of the *rīti*granth handbooks and appears less frequently in *bhakti* poetry but gained prominence among the *sant* communities such as the Dādūpanth and Nirājanī Sampradāy in the seventeenth century. What we see in Sundardās is an effort to bring the two traditions together. The descriptions of the Guru, *bhakti*, Yoga and Advaita Vedānta are underpinned by Sundardās’s knowledge of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*, *Haṭhyoga Pradīpikā*, and the *Upaniṣads*. He sometimes presents a Brajbhāṣā version of what is written in Sanskrit and often re-contextualizes the original Sanskrit texts, tailoring them to suit his innovative purposes. Observe, for example, how he presents his “description of the Guru” (*guru-lakṣaṇ*):

sadā prasanna subhāva praḡaṭa sarbopari rājai
tripta gyāna vīgyāna acala kūṭastha birājai.
sukha nidhāna sarvagya māna apamāna na jānai,
sārāsāra bibeka sakala mithyā bhrama mānai.
puni bhiddiyante hridi granthi kauṃ chiddiyante saba samśayam,
kahi Sundara so sad guru sahī cidānandaghana cinmayam. (GS, 1: 15)¹⁵

He is eternally happy and rules the hearts of everybody.
 Filled with knowledge and science, he sits neutral without wavering.
 Abode of happiness, knower of all, he is yet indifferent to honour and
 dishonour.
 He has the discretion of all essences and considers the world illusionary
 and fake;
 In the realm of his heart, too, illusions are pierced, and all doubts are torn
 asunder.

14 “*juguti maṅju mani sīpa sohāī*” (The Caupāīs) are the oysters that hide pearls (of meaning). *Rāmcāritmānas* 1: 37 (Tulsīdās 1992).

15 Also see Rameścandra Miśrā’s (1992) commentary on this verse in his edition of *Sundar Granthāvalī*.

Sundar says, one whose heart is immersed in bliss and united with the Brahma – that one indeed is the true Guru.

The second line of this verse, *tripta gyāna vigyāna acala kūṭastha birājay*, forms an exact Brajbhāṣā translation of a phrase from the *Bhagavad Gītā*. While the *Bhagavad Gītā* version ascribes these characteristics to a yogi, Sundardās re-contextualizes the phrase so that it describes the Guru. The *śloka* (couplet) in the *Bhagavad Gītā* reads as follows:

*jñānavijñānatriptātmā kūṭastho vijitendriyah,
yuktam ityucyate yogī samaloṣṭāsmakāncanamah. (Bhagavad Gītā, 6: 8)*

The man whose soul is filled with knowledge and science, who sits neutral without wavering and controls the five senses -
That yogi, it is said, is united with God, for whom dirt, stone, and gold are all equal.

In the fifth line of his *Guru-lakṣaṇ*, Sundardās similarly reframes the verse that describes the encounter with Brahma from the *Upaniṣads*, fashioning the verse which takes up this encounter so that it describes not Brahma but the Guru instead. The phrase “*puni bhiddiyante hridi granthi kauṁ chidiyante saba saṁśayam*”, (in his heart illusions are pierced and all doubts are torn asunder) is a Brajbhāṣā and “popularized” Sanskrit rendition of the following line from the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*: “*bhidiate hṛdayagranthiś chidiyante sarvasaṁśayāḥ*”.¹⁶ In the two lines we have just considered, Sundardās thus “traditionalizes” his teachings by seeking parallel expressions in Sanskrit philosophical works, explaining in effect that Brahma or a yogi can represent the Guru (of *sant* poetry), but in doing so, paradoxically, he introduces an important innovation into *sant* ideology – a scholastic one¹⁷ – as this kind of direct reference to Sanskrit *śāstra* was less frequent in *sant* poetry prior to Sundardās’s writings.

This kind of effort is by no means confined to the *Gyān Samudra*’s early verses. Sundardās’s language register becomes even more sanskritized and filled with philosophical terminology in the later three chapters of the *Gyān Samudra*. There he describes Yoga, Sāṁkhya, and Advaita Vedānta. Consider what happens when he explains the process of doing various yogic postures (*āsana*) in verse. For much of this description he quotes the Sanskrit text *Haṭhayoga Pradīpikā* directly:

*ye daśa prakāra ke yama kahe haṭha pradīpikā grantha mahim,
so pahilai hī inakaṁ grahai calata yoga ke pantha mahim. (GS chappay 3: 8)*

16 *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*: 2: 2: 9 (Olivelle 1996). See Rameścandra Miśra’s (1992) commentary on this verse in his edition of *Sundar Granthāvalī*.

17 Justin Ben-Hain’s (2014) thesis explores a similar example of an innovative yet (paradoxically) traditional appropriation of the Vallabh-Sampradāya’s *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā* in the form of a commentary. The process of one text’s encompassment and appropriation into a new text was not uncommon in early Hindi.

These are the ten types of Yama [religious observances] described in the book called *Haṭha Pradīpikā*.

Having grasped them first, one may progress in the path of Yoga.

This transformation of *sāstra*-based knowledge so that it became accessible to the *sants* and the vernacular audience had a great deal to do with making the *Gyān Samudra* an early modern classic. The Sanskritized register of Brajbhāṣā that Sundardās created made the text more widely accessible than would have been the case otherwise. It became less vernacular, less regional, and more capable of wide circulation. This accomplishment did not go unnoticed. Within the Dādūpanth, Sundardās came to be accorded the title “the next Śāṅkarācārya” very soon indeed. That phrase occurs in the *Bhaktamāl* of Rāghavdās,¹⁸ which was composed only seven years after the *Gyān Samudra* itself. But that was not the end of Sundardās’s fame. About a century later the Rāmsanehī Sampradāy, another *sant* community, would recognize the importance of Sundardās’s treatise on ornate poetry in their own *Bhaktamāl*.¹⁹ The abundant presence of Sundardās’s *Gyān Samudra* manuscript in various Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute (RORI) libraries throughout Rajasthan suggests that this text was read by a broad range of audiences – by communities of *sants* and courtly circles as suggested by the colophons and catalogue descriptions.²⁰ The popularity of this poem also led to its transcriptions into Gurmukhī script.²¹ And in 1749, when a Brajbhāṣā school was established in Kutch, Gujarat by the ruling elite, to inculcate in the minds of future court poets the learned and refined poetic art of that time, the texts assembled included not only *rīti*-poetry, which was certainly predominant, but also the two texts discussed in this essay: Sundardās’s *Gyān Samudra* and his *Savaīyā Granth*.²² What could better vindicate the project on which he had embarked?

18 *Bhaktamāl* of Rāghavdās, v. 419. (Rāghavdās 1965).

19 *Bhaktamāl* of Dayālūdās, v. 410. (Dayālūdās 1980).

20 During my fieldwork, I found information on around 80 manuscripts of the *Gyān-Samudra*, ranging from the late seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, which are now preserved in various RORI centres in Rajasthan as well as in Punjab and Gujarat. According to the catalogue of the Pāṭhśālā Museum, City Palace Jaipur, the manuscripts of the *Gyān-Samudra* there bear the seals of Jaipur royalty and of Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb. Manuscripts of the *Gyān-Samudra* are preserved in the Aina Mahal manuscript archives in Bhuj (Gujarat). A manuscript of the *Gyān-Samudra* was also prepared for personal reading by the king of Kutch Rāo Desalīr (r. 1718–41).

21 At least four *Gurumukhī* script manuscripts of the *Gyān Samudra* are preserved in the Punjab Digital Library. I thank Simranjeet Singh for introducing me to the Punjab Digital Library, email communication on 29 December 2012. Including the *Gyān Samudra*, several of Sundardās’s works, including his *Savaīyās*, the *Guru Sampradāya*, and the *Adbhut Updeś Granth* are transcribed in Gurmukhī and preserved in the Punjab Digital Library.

22 Dalpatrām Dāhyābhāi (1820–98), a student of the Brajbhāṣā Pāṭhśālā in Bhuj, who is our earliest source of information on the Pāṭhśālā and its syllabus, notes the importance of the *Gyān-Samudra* for precisely the reason that it teaches “knowledge” in *many diverse metres*. See the “syllabus” of the Pāṭhśālā quoted in Mallison (2011: 171–82).

Conclusions

Sundardās was an early poet-saint whose compositions on topics of *śāstra* and poetics became focal points for other emerging *sant* communities – the Nirānjanīs early on and later the Rāmsnehīs.²³ These later generation *sants* compel us to re-evaluate the relationship between *bhakti* and *rīti* traditions and also revisit the recent scholarship which designates these tropes to be a nationalist construction of modern times. *Sants*' engagements with *rīti* poetry shows that such categories were meaningful in early modern India. During the era of growing popularity of *rīti* poetry in the seventeenth century, *sants* like Sundardās were expanding the very nature of *sant* compositions. Through the work of Sundardās, *Sant bāñī*, which had previously been primarily used for singing or preaching purposes, and mostly composed in couplets (*sākhī*) and songs (*pada*) to be performed and discussed in religious gatherings, now came to use the poetic style of high culture and was written in genres and styles of courtly Brajbhāṣā literature. Sundardās's scholarly poem the *Gyān Samudra* showed how *sant* poetry could be written in the scholarly tradition of Sanskrit, Prakrit, and vernacular metres, in a way that resonated with Keśavdās's Brajbhāṣā Rāmāyaṇa, the Rāmacandrikā, composed to exemplify the metres discussed in his *Chandmālā* (the garland of metres). The refashioning of religious *bāñī* in the mould of literary *kāvya* that we see in Sundardās's corpus further led to the composition of a treatise on metrics and figures of speech by *sant* Harirāmdās of the Nirānjanī sampradāya. Modelling his work not only on Sanskrit literary theorists such as Vāgbhaṭa (twelfth century) and Appaya Dīkṣita (sixteenth century), but also on the courtly books of method (*rīti granths*), Harirāmdās composed his *Chandarātnāvalī* (the garland of metrical gems) in 1738. It appears as the composition of a highly skilled court poet (Baid 2011: 93–116). Thus, writing *rīti granths* did not remain an exclusively courtly enterprise in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. However, unlike court poets such as Keśavdās, who called themselves primarily poets (*bhākha kavi*), such poet-saints still called themselves *sants*. Sundardās often refers to himself as a *sant*, or just Dādū's disciple (*Dādū kā celā*) throughout his corpus. This is similar to Tulsīdās, who identified himself as a devotee of Rām even though his work ranges over almost all the styles of poetic composition prevalent in his time. By making the tradition of poetics essential for composing *sant* poetry, Sundardās not only recognizes the discussions on poetics going on in court circles, but makes them important for *sant* poetry. Keeping his primary identity as a *sant* who takes pride in situating himself in the tradition of Kabīr and Dādū Dayāl, Sundardās expends the very idea of a *sant* who blends devotional themes with the refined tradition of *kāvya* and inhabits those poetic skills that are learned and exhibited in courtly settings.

Sundardās's oeuvre, especially the *Savaiyā Granth* and *Gyān Samudra*, shows many overlapping features with the *rīti* poetic tradition with regard to

23 The poet-saint Dayāldās (1759–1828), who is revered in the Rāmsanehī Sampradāya for his discourse on *śāstra* and *purāṇa*, and whose ornate poetry is infused with the excellence of metres and rhetoric, is often compared with Sundardās (Citārā 2007: 362 and 407).

form, genre, register, and the composition of didactic and ornate poetry, yet he disparages some of the content that we find in the descriptions of *śṛṅgār*, the *nāyikā-bheda* and *śikh-nakh* genres that are such prominent aspects of *rīti* poetry. Thus, he distinguished *sant* compositions from *rīti* poetry. Sundardās's *vacan vivek* appears to have started a new discourse on aesthetically pleasing *bāñī*, which gained acceptance in the *sant* communities in Rajasthan, Punjab, and Gujarat. For example, the Swāminārāyaṇī poet-saint Muktānand (eighteenth–nineteenth century) possibly rephrased Sundardās's *vacan vivek* in his text *Vivek Cintāmaṇī*.²⁴ The frustrations with *rīti* poetry enunciated by Sundardās and the Niranjanī poet-saint Harirāmdās in Rajasthan, as well as the Swāminārāyaṇī poet-saints in Gujarat, would be expressed by the architects of nationalist literature in the early twentieth century (Dwivedī 1995 [1901]; Pant 1967 [1926]). But the reasons for this discontent had substantially changed: these features of *rīti* poetry were now seen as some of the prime examples of the decadence the nation was so eager to shed. It cannot be fully proven that this nationalist disapproval was based on Sundardās and his contemporary *sants*' criticism of *rīti* poetry in any historical way. Though Sundardās's *Savaiyā Granth*, where he criticized *rīti* poetry in this way, has been published widely since the late nineteenth century and was the key text for introducing the poet-saint to twentieth-century historiography, it is nevertheless hard to link the criticism of *rīti* poetry by Hindi authors during the nationalist period to their reading of Sundardās's work. Assimilating many features of literary science and aesthetics – main features of the *rīti* world – into his own poetry, Sundardās embraced *śāstra*-based knowledge while at the same time tailoring it and its styles of theorization to his own ends. The literary science he put forward was entirely in the service of the *sant* community, their beliefs, and their own distinctive practices.

Declaration of Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

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24 *Muktānand Kāvyaṃ* (Muktānand 2001, vol. 1: 114–6). Sundardās's texts (the *Savaiyā Granth* and the *Gyān-Samudra*) were taught at the Brajbhāṣā Pāṭhśālā (The Brajbhāṣā School [of Bhuj] in Kutch established in 1749). Though Muktānand was not affiliated with the Brajbhāṣā Pāṭhśālā, his familiarity with Sundardās's texts suggests that they were circulating among the *sant* communities in the Gujarat region outside of the Brajbhāṣā Pāṭhśālā.

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