

Social practice of Bhakti in the Śiv Nārāyaṇ *saṃpradāya*

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There have been several attempts by scholars to frame heterodox *nirguṇ* Bhakti as a religion of the oppressed. It has been argued that those poet-saints attacked the caste system.¹ This is the uniform and unequivocal opinion of Dalit authors, foremost and first formulated by Dr. Ambedkar.² Gail Omvedt stresses “the radicalism of the Sants against traditional Brahmanical interpretations”.³ Caste is the proofstone in the assessment of Bhakti.

That women, Śūdras or untouchables could become Sants and disciples of Sants was a “minor social revolution”.⁴ It did not last long, the heyday of Bhakti between the fifteenth and seventeenth century gave way to a Brahmanical appropriation of Bhakti.⁵ This was twofold: On the one hand, it spread Brahmanical values. “But paradoxical as it may seem, in spite of its anti-caste, anti-Sanskrit and anti-elitists stance, the Bhakti movement spread values such as vegetarianism and teetotalism - both characteristic of the highest castes - and the importance of religion and spirituality, among the people at large.”⁶ On the other hand, for untouchables Bhakti became the prerequisite of exclusive sects, castes or both, as in the case of the Satnāmīs.⁷ (16) The social practice of Bhakti contradicted the egalitarian religious teaching. Caste was been derogated, but has never been overcome.⁸

Another way to argue starts from the point of view of political religiosity. For Ranajit Guha, Bhakti is a precolonial mode of submission and subordination. It replaced mere force by religious devotion and inwardly asceticism. “Bhakti, in other words, is an ideology of subordination par excellence. All the inferior terms in any relationship of power structured as Dominance or Subordination within the Indian tradition, can be derived from it.”⁹

This subaltern argument is modified by Nandini Gooptu and applied by her to her study on the urban poor in the major towns of Uttar Pradesh. She differentiates between the Dalit and Śūdra poor who are characterised by different modes of religiosity: The Dalits are adherents of *nirguṇ* Bhakti and

1. Unfortunately Oliver Mendelsohn and Marika Vicziany fail to point out who considered ‘Bhakti to be a systematic attack on the caste system’. in their co-edited volume *The Untouchables. Subordination, Poverty and the State in Modern India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 22.

2. Bhimrao Ambedkar, ‘Annihilation of Caste’, in *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches*, vol I, Bombay: Government of Maharashtra, 1936, p. 74.

3. Gail Omvedt, *Buddhism in India. Challenging Brahmanism and Caste*, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2003, p. 187.

4. Richard Burghart, ‘The Founding of the Ramanandi Sect’, in: *Ethnohistory*, 25,2, 1978, pp. 121-139, p. 121.

5. Walter Fernandes, *The Emerging Dalit Identity: the Reassertion of the Subalterns*, New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 1996, p. 4.

6. M.N.Srinivas, ‘Introduction’, in *Caste, its Twentieth- Century Avatar*, ed by M.N.Srinivas, New Delhi: Penguin Publ., 1997, p. xv.

7. Purnendu Ranjan, ‘Kabirpanth and Politics in Mithila’, in: *Dalits and Peasants. The Emerging Caste-Class Dynamics*, ed. by Ashish Ghosh, Delhi: Gyan Sagar Publication, 1999, pp. 145-165; Saurabh Dube, *Untouchable Pasts: Religion, Identity and Power among a Central Indian Community*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1998.

8. Robert Deliège, *The Untouchables of India*, Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1999, p. 148.

9. Ranajit Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony. History and Power in Colonial India*, Cambridge: Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997, p. 50.

follow Sant Raidās, Kabīr and Śiv Nārāyaṇ. She concedes that Bhakti has an assertive quality, but on the whole it stands for a docile mode in juxtaposition to the Śūdras who pursue *saguṇ* devotionism which is combined with a militant Hindu *sanātana dharma* orientation.¹⁰ As she draws most of her material from Kanpur, I would like to qualify and contextualise her argument in respect to the Śiv Nārāyaṇ *saṃpradāya*.

Svāmī Śiv Nārāyaṇ (1716-1790) was a Kṣatriya from Candravār in Ballia District in eastern Uttar Pradesh. He founded a rather large *nirguṇ* Bhakti sect of approximately 300, 000 members. They are spread over eastern Uttar Pradesh, western Bihar, Nepal and Bengal. Most of the followers are Dalits, although their founder was a Rājput. They mainly belong to the Dhūsiyā and Jaisvāra subcastes of the Camār. They were landless labourers, some of them worked as leatherworkers and masons.¹¹ The Dhūsiyā served in the army and the Jaisvāra worked in the mills in Kolkata, Mumbai and Kanpur but also in the coal mines of Dhanbad district. Eastern Uttar Pradesh and western Bihar is the poorhouse of India, and labour migration was a necessity to eke out a living. Usually single men worked in the major towns of northern India, with their wives and children left behind in the village.¹² Besides, quite a substantial number were (17) recruited as indentured labourers from the 1830s onwards.¹³ They migrated to Mauritius, South Africa and the Caribbean.¹⁴ Quite a number of them are to be found in England and the United States, although among the diaspora Sant *saṃpradāyas* they do not play a prominent role.¹⁵

Among the Bhakti Sants, Svāmī Śiv Nārāyaṇ is a latecomer. Most of the sects trace their origin to Rāmānanda (traditionally dated 14th century, but probably later) who is credited for having brought South Indian Vaishnavism to northern India. He is the alleged guru of low caste saints like Kabīr and Raidās who drew a fairly large following.¹⁶ Although there has been a substantial body of literature on Kabīr and Raidās, references to Śiv Nārāyaṇ are rather scanty.

10. Nandini Gooptu, *The Politics of the Urban Poor in Early Twentieth-Century India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 150,197.

11. Briggs mentioned Jaisvāra and Dusadhs as main members of the sect. To my knowledge Dusadh and Dhūsiya are the same. George Waston Briggs, *The Chamars*, Calcutta: Associated Press, 1920, p. 211.

12. Nowadays the Siv Narayan panth has members in Gorakhpur, Ghazipur, Jaunpur, Allahabad, Varanasi, Raibareilly, Chandauli, Bareilly, Lucknow, Kanpur, Jhansi, Mathura, Agra, Nainital, Dehradun, Bhagalpur, Ara, Sivan, Chapra, Sonpur, Muzaffarpur, Patna, Khagol, Samsthipur, Barauni, Mokama, Vachvara, Gangajhali, Ariya, Purnia, Koshanganj, Champaran, Raksaul, Ghatshila, Katiyar, Vardvan, Dhanbad, Betiya, Jamalpur, Bhabhua, Chindvara, Sinhhumi, Bokaro, Tata Jamshedpur, Virbhumi, Dinajpur, Howrah and Kolkata, Asam, Naida, Dibugarh, Orissa, Hazaribagh, Jharkhand, Purliya, Chakradhapur, Ratlam, Indore, Jabalpur, Nimadh Khandva, Baitul, Mahu Chavani, Manmarh, Nasik, Ahmedabad, Jaipur, Puna in Maharashtra, Mumbai, Delhi, Jalandhar, Nepal, Sikkim, Dhaka, Mauritius, London, South Africa, Natal, America. This list is derived from the invitation letter for the ‘Guru Granth Janantā Samāroh’ on the 6th December 2003.

13. Marina Carter, *Voices from Indenture. Experiences of Indian Migrants in the British Empire*, London and New York: Leister University Press, 1996, p. 21.

14. Steven Vertovic, ‘Hinduism in Diaspora’, in *Hinduism Reconsidered*, ed by Günther-Dietz Sontheimer and Hermann Kulke, New Delhi: Manohar, 1997, p. 288.

15. I owe this information to Sita Ram, a Kanadian Dalit activist. He had just come back from the First Dalit World Congress in Malaysia to attend the Buddh Mahotsav in Sarnath and Boddh Gaya. He supplied me with an exhaustive overview of the Kabir panth and Raidasi diaspora congregation in form of visiting cards. Most of them he had collected during the congress. There were no Siv Narayanas among them. Communication on 5.12.1998.

16. George A. Grierson, ‘Ramananda’, in: *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol 10, 1919, pp. 569-572.

There are only few comprehensive accounts on Svāmī Śiv Nārāyaṇ.¹⁷ Paraśurām Caturvedī's *Uttarī Bhārat kī sant-paramparā* gives a detailed account of Svāmī Śiv Nārāyaṇ and mentions the vast numbers of Non-Resident Indians in the Śiv Nārāyaṇ *panth*. Although Karine Schomer refers to Paraśurām Caturvedī's book, she surprisingly does not include the Śiv Nārāyaṇīs into her rather detailed description of the different Sant *saṃpradāyas*.¹⁸

(18) The Śiv Nārāyaṇīs are a 'textual community'¹⁹, insofar as the fifteen books which Svāmī Śiv Nārāyaṇ wrote play a prominent role in teaching, ritual, and symbolism of the sect.²⁰ The most important book, the *Gurū Anyās* (variant of *nyās* 'deposit, trust, endowment') is also called *Gurū Granth Sāhib* like the holy book of the Sikhs, and *Gyān Dīpak*. The great importance of the book becomes also obvious in the fact that the main festival of the Śiv Nārāyaṇīs is the Gurū Granth Sāhib Dīvas on the thirteenth day of the lunar month of Agahan (November/December). It is celebrated to commemorate the divine revelation of the book. On that occasion all *mahānts* and sadhus of the *panth* assemble in Candravār Dhām, the birthplace of Svāmī Śiv Nārāyaṇ.

The book is placed in the centre of the altar (*gaddī*) which is usually an elevated stool, sometimes under a canopy. This altar resembles very much the altar in a Sikh temple (*gurdvāra*), with only the martial insignia missing. The *Guru Anyās* is the iconic representation of God, the focus of devotion, and the basic text for preaching. Although it has the rank of a canonical text, it is mostly used as an icon. Every *mahānt* had to own the book which does not mean that he was able to read it. It was prestigious to copy the *Gurū Anyās* by hand although that was left to experienced scribes. This holy book as icon gave legitimacy to the *saṃpradāya*.

Most of the members of the sect were illiterate which made oral transmission of its teachings especially important. Literacy, though much desired, never replaced oral teaching. This allowed for the flexibility and contextual adaptability of the interpretation of the text. The words of Svāmī Śiv Nārāyaṇ or the guru were considered to be identical. The isomorphism between God and guru gave a higher legitimacy to the spoken work than to the written text.²¹ As the written text only became alive through the charismatic preaching of the respective *mahānt* or *ācārya*, his interpretation of the written text was authoritative.

Besides, the language of the books could not be understood easily. Some guessed that it was written in *gurmukhī*, the script of the *Ādī granth*. Others pointed to the Muṛiyā, or to the Kaithī script,

17. George A. Grierson, 'Siv Narayanis', in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol 11, 1921 and J.N.Farquhar, *The Outline of the Religious Literature of India*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1966.

18. Karine Schomer, 'Introduction, the Sant Tradition in Perspective', in *The Sants. Studies in a Devotional Tradition*, ed. by Karine Schomer and W.H. McLeod, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1987, p. 5.

19. Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 89.

20. They are 1. Lava Granth 2. Sant Vilas 3. Sant o Jan Granth 4. Santsundar 5. Guru anyas 6. Sant acari 7. Santopades 8. Sabdavalī 9. Sant parvana 10. Sant mahima 11. Sant sagar 12. Bara stotra 13. Bara parvana 14. Pati parvana 15. Bari Bani. The sixteenth book still has to be revealed. George A. Grierson, 'Siv Narayanis', in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol 11, 1921, p. 579.

21. Heinrich von Stietencron 'Charisma and Canon: The Dynamics of Legitimization and Innovation in Indian Religions', in *Charisma and Canon. Essays on the Religious History of the Indian Subcontinent*, ed. By Vasudha Dalmia, Angelika Malinar and Martin Christof, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 24.

which was used (19) by accountants and traders.²² The confusion between script and language illustrates the widespread ignorance of the written text. This was partially overcome by printed editions which gave a comment in Hindi. They go back to the Lahore edition of 1920 with a Hindi commentary of the original Awadhi text.²³

The second book of importance is the *Sant vilās* which is recited and preached upon on the occasion of death. Like in most Sant *saṃpradāyas*, in the Śiv Nārāyaṇ *saṃpradāya*, death is considered to be the ultimate liberation of man from the cycle of rebirth. The procession to the grave is accompanied by music. The Dalit members of the sect bury their dead, the Kṣatriya members burn them. Both of them construct graves (*samādhis*) for important members of the *panth*.

On initiation (*dikṣā*) which takes place on Vasant Pañcmī, the spring festival, the new disciple is given a small booklet instead of a the holy thread (*janeū*) as in Brahmanical Hinduism or a necklace of beads (*kañṭhī*) as in some Sant groups. The book is called *Lau parvānā*. *Parvānā* means ‘order, warrant, passport’. It is also called *Hukm nāmā* which means ‘divine order’.²⁴ The term is rather misleading as the booklet does not contain any orders, rules or commandments. It is neither a catechism nor a code of conduct. Instead it teaches the message of an inwardly oriented religiosity. Only those who internalise the spiritual meaning will be able to escape the cycle of rebirth (*saṃsāra*), only they are able to get access to the heavenly abode and attain eternal salvation. The *Lau parvānā* contains the essence of Svāmī Śiv Nārāyaṇ’s teaching.

There is a strong similarity with Udāsī Sikhism.²⁵ The Udāsīs follow the teachings of Gurū Nānak but they reject the dress code, initiation ritual, body culture and code of conduct of the Khālsā Sikhs.²⁶ *Udāsī* means ‘detached’ and signifies indifference to the world. In the seventeenth century Udāsīs spread all over northern India, and even after the establishment (20) of the Khālsā in 1699, they maintained their independence and inwardly oriented mode of worship.

The eighteenth century was marked by the decline of Mogul sovereignty, the rise of local powers, and the beginning of colonial penetration by the East India Company. It witnessed the assertion of Sikhism as a new religion in Northern India against Mogul hegemony. The Nawab of Awadh transformed his territory into an independent kingdom in Uttar Pradesh. It was a time of warfare, uncertainty, and famine. The Muslim and Christian influence is reflected in the hagiography of Svāmī Śiv Nārāyaṇ.

22. This information I owe to Walter John, friend and mentor in my explorations into Dalit Bhakti. A fervent admirer of Kabir, he did not feel comfortable with Svami Siv Narayan’s teachings. His native village is right next to Candravar Dham and many information concerning the Dham I owe to him. He died unexpectedly in July 2003.

23. Communication by Beni Madhav Sonkar in August 1977 in Kanpur. Other urban editions were published in Shimla, Lucknow, Allahabad, Kanpur and Mumbai. Sri 108 Svami Siv Narayani *Guru Anyas, Gyan Dipak*, Kanpur: Sant Samaj Prabandhak Samiti, 1964, p. 4.

24. W.H. McLeod, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1968, p. 150.

25. Udasi Sikhs can be traced back to Sri Chand, the second son of Guru Nanak, *ibid.*, p. 79.

26. The Five Ks, each begins with the character 'k', are unshorn hair (*kes*); wooden comb (*kangha*); sword (*kirpan*); steel bracelet (*kara*); and undershorts (*kach*). Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction*, p. 25.

Svāmī Śiv Nārāyaṇ was a Bund-Niraunī Kṣatriya. His father Baghray had to leave his native place due to a severe famine. He settled in Candravār in present day Ballia district.²⁷ Śiv Nārāyaṇ was born there in the year 1716. At the age of seven he had a mystical encounter with his inner guru. God is for him Viṣṇu and his inner guru Dukhharāṇ and God are identical. Dukhharāṇ, the Dispeller of Sorrow, borrows from Christian, Islamic and Buddhists conceptions of God.

When Svāmī Śiv Nārāyaṇ was sixteen there was a drought again. According to the sectarian tradition, he went to Delhi to meet emperor Muhammad Śāh (1719-1748) and asked for tax exemption. He was put into jail instead where he had to grind cereals. The jail was full of other sadhus and Sants. Svāmī Śiv Nārāyaṇ stopped them from grinding the cereals and miraculously, the flour mills ran on their own. Svāmī Śiv Nārāyaṇ proved himself as wonder-worker which impressed Muhammad Śāh deeply. Svāmī Śiv Nārāyaṇ was released from jail and the other holy men with him.

Muhammad Śāh invited Svāmī Śiv Nārāyaṇ and the sadhus for a meal but the food was inappropriate.²⁸ Svāmī Śiv Nārāyaṇ argued that sadhus and Sants only eat pearls. The emperor ordered pearls to be served, but Svāmī Śiv Nārāyaṇ transformed the pearls into delicious food. From that day onwards the offering (*prasād*) of Svāmī Śiv Nārāyaṇ is called *motībhoj* or *mohanbhog*.²⁹ Muhammad Śāh became his first disciple.

The peaceful compromise with the Muslim power is only one aspect of the hagiography. Among later disciples of esteem were the Rājā of Ayodhyā and one Mr. Brown, to balance the three major religions against each other. Svāmī Śiv Nārāyaṇ also had to compete with Kabīr and Gorakh (21) Nāth. During a meeting (*goṣṭhī*) of all the three it had to be decided who could sit in the sky. Of course only Svāmī Śiv Nārāyaṇ could.

At last the episode of the fish eaters should be mentioned. As Svāmī Śiv Nārāyaṇ was outwardly not discernable as a sadhu, the Rājā of Ayodhyā neglected to invite him for a sacrifice (*yajna*). So Svāmī Śiv Nārāyaṇ fried fish next to the *yajna* which disturbed the ceremony. He was severely reprimanded for that. His response was that the other sadhus were fish eaters as well. The Raja was puzzled but when he lifted the turbans of the sadhus and untied their hair the fish dropped from it.

This episode does not only refer to the Shaivite identity of Svāmī Śiv Nārāyaṇ looming in the background³⁰ but also to the tantric heritage represented in the five Ms.³¹ It also repeats the common

27. In 1878 Ghazipur District was divided and the new district of Ballia founded. Nowadays Candravār Dham is situated in Ballia district. The *Ghazipur District Gazetteer* mentions famines in 1631, 1770, and after the introduction of the British Raj, in 1783. H.R. Nevill, *Ghazipur District Gazetteer*, vol 24, Allahabad: Government of India Press, 1908, p. 48.

28. The hagiography does not dwell on that but I assume the Sadhus were served beef. *Svami Siv Narayan jivan caritra*, ed. by Beni Madhav Sonkar, Kanpur: Deepak Press, 1962, p. 36.

29. At the beginning of any major festival the *mohanbhog* has to be prepared and consecrated to Svami Siv Narayan before the religious ceremony (*puja*) begins. It consists of nourishing semolina with sugar, clarified butter (*ghī*), and it is cooked in milk.

30. This episode repeats the Puranic legend how Siva was not invited to the Vedic *yajna* of his father-in-law Daksa because he lived as an ascetic. Out of fury, he decapitated Daksa and committed the mortal sin of murdering a Brahmin. Axel Michaels, *Der Hinduismus*, München: C.H.Beck, 1998, p. 240. The same motif has many variations. Raidas, the untouchable cobbler saint, is not invited to a ritual meal when food is served to the Brahmans. Miraculously he multiplies and sits next to each Brahman, thereby punishing them for practicing untouchability.

31. The five Ms are: liquor (*madya*), meat (*mamsa*), fish (*matsya*), parched grain or kidney beans (*mudra*) and sexual union (*maithuna*) for which see Agehananda Bharati, *The Tantric Tradition*, London: Rider and Company, 1965, p. 242.

Sant motif of the futility of ritualism. Unless man performs the sacrifice within his own body in a purely esoteric manner, salvation can't be achieved.

His hagiography is very much in line with the *nirgun* Sants of northern India: Svāmī Śiv Nārāyaṇ is a non-Brahman, he adheres to Viṣṇu, he is reborn in each aeon (*yug*). God reveals himself to him at the early age of seven. He is a householder (*grhasth*) and has two children, a son and a daughter. He has encounters with the Muslim emperor, a Hindu king and a Brahman. His death is miraculous and his body is not found.³² His final liberation (*samādhi*) leaves no traces on earth, a common motif in Sant hagiographies.

The *Gurū Anyās* is written in verse form, with a metrical structure resembling that of *Rāmcaritmānas* of Tulsīdās. *Caupāis* give the narrative and *dohās* a thematical conclusion. The whole book is organised in twelve chapters (*khaṇḍ*).³³ It depicts a theological monism of Sant orientation. Upanishadic conceptions of the world as illusion (*māyā*) and of (22) ultimate salvation (*samādhi*) from the cycle of rebirth through an interior devotion prevail.

Only the guru, who is identical with God, can save from the ocean of existence. It is through the grace of God alone that the liberating insight of the ultimate union of individual soul and eternal soul can be achieved. God or the highest self is called Viṣṇu. There are the ten reincarnations (*avatāras*) of Viṣṇu and Svāmī Śiv Nārāyaṇ is his tenth *avatāra*, replacing Kalki. The Vedas are accepted, *karma* and *saṃsāra* are part of the theology. The world is an illusion (*māyā*). Man can achieve salvation by realising that only God is the ultimate reality. The *Gurū anyās* is a plea not to waste one's life in the entanglement of *māyā* but to search for the eternal truth and for liberation from *saṃsāra*.

Liberation is possible through meditation and yoga. The *Gurū anyās* is full of tantric images. The human body is depicted as the vessel for the eternal essence. The tantric notion of the rising *kuṇḍalini* expresses man's ascent to unification with *paramātma*, the highest self. Bhakti is conceptualized in highly emotional, sensual images. Unification with God as the eternal man (*purusa*) is seen as the consummation of the sacred marriage between a loving, passionate woman and the divine. But a woman easily goes astray and gets entangled into the net of *māyā*. Only when she realised the eternal truth, she is able to cross the ocean of existence, and unite with the embodied eternal *purusa*.

Elaborate typologies classify the mortal sinner, of whom there are fourteen categories, as well as the truthful devotee. Five devoted *bhaktas* and four heroines (*nāyikās*) are distinguished who represent the inner virtues and the nobility of heart in their devotion to the highest self. They are role models of piety, truthfulness, and devotion. Besides, there are heroes of Bhakti like Hanumān and the five Pāṇḍavas, as well as the Bhakti saints who are identified in the *Gurū anyās*. Svāmī Śiv Nārāyaṇ puts himself in one line with Rāmānanda, Tulsīdās, Kabīr and Gurū Nānak. The day of ultimate liberation (*mukti dīvas*) is celebrated on the seventh day of the waxing half of the lunar month of Śrāvaṇ

32. David Lorenzen, 'The Life of Nirguna Saints,' in *Bhakti Religion in Northern India. Community Identity and Political Action*, ed David Lorenzen, New Delhi: Manohar, 1996, pp. 186-7.

33. The chapters are called: 1. Introduction ('Arambh khand'), 2. Yoga, 3. The trader ('Sahu khand'), 4. The thief ('Cor khand'), 5. Consummation of marriage ('Gavan khand'), 6. The passionate woman ('Kamini khand'), 7. Mortal sin ('Yam khand'), 8. Devotion ('Bhakt khand'), 9. Ten forms of Visnu ('Das avatar khand'), 10. The four ages of the world ('Yug'), 11. Four heroines ('Cār nayika khand'), 12. Devotee (Bhakta khand).

(July/August) which is also Tulsīdās birthday (*jayantī*). The Śiv Nārāyaṇ *panth* borrows from a wide range of traditions, from the Brahmanic-Sankritic as well as Sant.

There is no “rough rhetoric” as in Kabīr’ oeuvre,³⁴ no challenge to the Brahmans as in Raidās’s hagiography,³⁵ and no outright condemnation of caste as in Gurū Nānak’s sayings.³⁶ The teaching of Svāmī Śiv Nārāyaṇ is (23) rather moderate, inwardly oriented. Caste is not mentioned and Brahmanism is neither attacked, nor ridiculed.

In Kanpur, the Śiv Nārāyaṇīs were the first to present themselves in public with the construction of a beautiful temple. This temple is even marked on the city map as Sikh temple (*gurdvāra*). It was constructed in 1870 by Bihārī Lāl, a rich Khaṭik building contractor.

These were the ‘golden days’ for Kanpur’s Dalits.³⁷ The British had not only decided to reconstruct Kanpur as a Civic Station after the devastation through the ‘First Indian War of Independence’, but were also expanding on industrial lines. Kanpur was going to become India’s first industrial town, the so called ‘Manchester of the East’. The nascent industrial town needed coolies, labourers and mechanics (*mistries*) to set up and later on work in, the factories. This opened up unequalled opportunities for Dalits.

The Khaṭiks are a Dalit caste (*jati*).³⁸ In Kanpur they constitute two endogamous groups with a different settlement history, different profession and distinct religious orientation. The Khaṭiks in Colonelganj ward (*mohalla*) were experienced masons and followers of the Bhakti saint Śiv Nārāyaṇ, the Khaṭiks off Latoucheroad were pork butchers, bristle manufacturers and followers of devotional Hinduism, especially of the Goddess, Devī, in her many manifestations. Both profited from colonial power and became immensely rich. This is perhaps the reason why their Dalit identity became camouflaged, negated and blurred.

For Bihārī Lāl and his extended family, the veneration for Svāmī Śiv Nārāyaṇ was a matter of vocation, but for the Dhūsiyā and Jaisvāra a matter of tradition. Both came from eastern Uttar Pradesh and they were Dalit. The Dhūsiyā blended their Sant Dharm with Ārya Samāj notions. For them, life reform was important. They actively practiced *śuddhī* (cleanliness and life reform) and abstained from meat and alcohol. Their weekly meetings (*satsamg*) took place in the Ārya Samāj Hall off Cooliebazaar under the photo of Dayānand Sarasvatī.

The Jaisvāra have a different tradition. Originally they worked with the British in the cantonments. Their military background is also reflected in the offices of the Śiv Nārāyaṇ *saṃpradāya*. They range from the *hukmī mahant* over the *brigadier mahant* to the *mahānt* proper. In

34. Linda Hess, ‘Kabir’s Rough Rhetoric’, in *The Sants*, oc., p. 143-166. J. H. Farquhar claims that Svami Siv Narayan stands in the tradition of Kabir, but there is no evidence of that. Farquhar, *Outline.*, p. 334.

35. Winand M. Callewaert and Peter G. Friedlander, *The Life and Works of Raidas*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1992, p. 31.

36. W.H. McLeod, *Guru Nanak*, *ibid.*, p. 209.

37. I am deliberately borrowing an expression from David Washbrook. He uses the term to describe the situation of the Dalits in the Madras Presidency in the eighteenth century. At that time they profited from colonial rule. David Washbrook, ‘Land and Labour in Late Eighteenth Century South India: The Golden Age of the Pariah?’, in *Dalit Movements and the Meaning of Labour in India*, ed. by Peter Robb, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993.

38. Goptu does not know of the difference between the two Khatik lineages and takes their claims for higher status for granted. For her, the Khatik are Sudras and she builds her argument of Hindu militancy on them.

the 1940s they were recruited in large numbers for textile industry to break the Brahman (24) dominance in the trade union movement. Recruited as docile labourers, they became to be regarded as rebellious devotees (*bhagats*) because they neither abstained from meat nor from alcohol. Through their religious practice, the Śiv Nārāyaṇ *panth* became the epitome of untouchable culture.

This was vehemently brought forth against them by the Kabīrpanthīs. They also had established themselves in Kanpur at the beginnings of industrialization. Their membership was overwhelmingly Dalit as well with members from Kori (weaver) and Kurīl (Camār leatherworker) *jātis*. The Koris were poor whereas among the Kurīl there were quite a number of rich patrons, most of them leather merchants.³⁹

The Kabīrpanthīs belonged to the Dhamakhera branch which practiced an elitist *śuddhī* ideology with Brahmanical overtones.⁴⁰ Disputes between Kabīrpanthīs and Śiv Nārāyaṇīs arose on matters of purity and pollution.⁴¹ Paradoxically, the, in the literal sense of the word, purist Kabīrpanthīs were pursuing a ritually polluting profession like tanning and work with leather, whereas the untouchable (*achūt*) Śiv Nārāyaṇīs were working in clean professions of textile industry and construction. Besides, the Śiv Nārāyaṇīs were accused of ‘dirty’ tantrism and secretiveness by the Kabīrpanthīs.

This melee became even more intriguing when the Raidāsīs from 1924 onwards became prominently visible with an annual procession (*julūs*). A new version of Dalit Bhakti emerged: after the ‘untouchable’ Bhakti of the Śiv Nārāyaṇīs and the purism of the Kabīr *panthīs*, the Raidāsīs presented themselves as a an assertive Dalit movement (*āndolan*).⁴²

This was an epistemological shift in the understanding of Bhakti. An inwardly oriented religiosity was turned outside and became a public arena (25) activity and as such the leading model.⁴³ The Raidāsīs questioned the Śiv Nārāyaṇīs: Why follow a Ṭhākur saint when the Ṭhākurs have been the exploiters and oppressors for so long? Self-reliance and trust in God is embodied in Raidās. Why not follow one of their own brethren?⁴⁴

The Śiv Nārāyaṇīs tried to gain ground. Fortunately, they gained a potent patron in Jagjīvan Rām (1908-1986), the Harijan leader of the Congress and leading Congress politician during the era of Indira Gandhi. His wife was from Kanpur, therefore he kept close contact with the Dhūsiyās in

39. Maren Bellwinkel-Schempp, ‘Kabir-Panthis in Kanpur: From sampradāya to Dalit Identity’, in *Images of Kabir*, ed. by Monika Horstmann, New Delhi, Manohar, 2002, pp. 215-32.

40. The Dhamakhera branch is headed by a Vaisya *acarya* but the members are mostly Dalits. The spiritual essence of Satguru Kabir runs through the hereditary line from his first disciple Dharmdas to the present *acarya*. Their religious functions, the *cauka* enacts the revelation of the four Vedas through elaborate ritualism. They believe in *karma* and rebirth and represent within the different branches of the Kabir panth an orthodox orientation. See also: Uma Thukral, ‘The Avatar Doctrine in the Kabir Panth’, in *Bhakti Religion*, *oc. pp.*, 221-30.

41. This is even recorded by George Herbert Westcott, an Anglican missionary from the Society of the Propagation of the Gospel who lived in Kanpur from 1890 till 1915. He wrote one of the first books on Kabir. He quotes the Kabirpanthis saying that the lowest castes like sweepers and washermen should join the Siv Narayan *panth* and not be allowed to wear *kanthis*. George Herbert Westcott, *The Kabir Panth*, Calcutta: Susil Gupta, 1953, p. 73.

42. In Uttar Pradesh the Raidasis do not constitute a *panth* as in Punjab. Marc Juergensmeyer, *Religion as Social Vision. The Movement Against Untouchability in 20th Century Punjab*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982, p. 87.

43. Sandria Freitag, *Collective Action and Community. Public Arenas and the Emergence of Communalism in North India*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989.

44. Maren Bellwinkel, *Die Kasten-Klassenproblematik im städtisch-industriellen Bereich. Historisch-empirische Fallstudie über die Industriestadt Kanpur in Uttar Pradesh, Indien*, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1980, pp. 217.

Cooliebazaar and came for meetings and inaugurations. His father was a Śiv Nārāyaṇ *mahānt* from Bihār and Jagjīvan Rām got initiated into the Śiv Nārāyaṇ *panth* as well.⁴⁵ In his autobiography, however, there is no mention of that spiritual allegiance.⁴⁶ In 1945 however, he presided over an ‘Akhil Bhāratīya Svāmī Śiv Nārāyaṇ Sammelan’ in Kanpur.

The 1950s and 1960s were a time of optimism, industrial expansion and intellectual fermentation in Kanpur. For the first generation of educated Dalits, there were new openings in Government service, education, and politics through reservation. The Raidās *juḷūs* became increasingly longer, more elaborate, and politically more pronounced.⁴⁷ The Śiv Nārāyaṇīs responded with a procession on Śiv Nārāyaṇīs commemoration day (*jayantī*) which was of course shorter.⁴⁸ However, Benī Mādhav Sonkar, a descendent of Bihārī Lāl, undertook the enormous task to publish the fifteen books of Svāmī Śiv Nārāyaṇ with a Hindi commentary in the 1960s.⁴⁹ He was not (26) alone in this endeavour: Printed versions of these books were published in many towns of northern India.

When the Dalit movement finally turned Buddhist in the 1980s, the Śiv Nārāyaṇīs fell into oblivion. In the 1990s Navayāna Buddhism became a public arena activity with mass conversions and mass weddings. This did not tally well with the inner devotionalism of the Śiv Nārāyaṇīs. They withdrew. A few educated Śiv Nārāyaṇīs converted to Buddhism without renouncing the religion of their forefathers. When the mills closed in the 1990s, the Śiv Nārāyaṇīs lost their patrons as well as their followers. And the silver coins which Bihārī Lāl inserted into the Colonelganj temple (*math*) have long been removed.

The least privileged of the Dalit in Kanpur, the Śiv Nārāyaṇīs in Candravār Dhām, presented themselves much more radical. Candravār Dhām is situated 7 km off Rasra, a small country town of approximately 6000 inhabitants in Ballia District. Rasra Tehsil is predominantly inhabited by Dalits and Other Backward Castes. An area of great poverty, it became the focus of a Catholic order, namely, that of the ‘Queen of the Apostles’ which set up a mission station there in 1947.⁵⁰ It lies close to the Dhām. Its highschool and health post served as a model for Candravār Dhām insofar as there are beyond the boundary walls of the monastery proper, a ‘Dr. Ambedkar Health Post and Highschool’.

45. His wife Indrani gives a detailed description of the Siv Narayan *panth* in her autobiography: Indrani Jagjivan Ram, *Dekhi suni biti batem, (Seen, Heard and Past Tales)*, New Delhi: Jagjivan Bhavan Press, 1994, p. 52.

46. He mentions Raidas, Kabir, and Dāyanand Sarasvati as his spiritual fathers. Jagjivan Ram, *Caste Challenge in India*, New Delhi: Vision Books, 1980, p. 38.

47. Arthur Niehoff gives a detailed description of the Raidas procession in Kanpur but does not mention the Siv Narayanis at all. *Factory Workers in India*, Wisconsin: Milwaukee Public Museum, 1959, p. 73.

48. This procession left the temple (*math*) in Colonelganj and went via Gwaltoli, the working class area, to Parade, the main meeting place right in the middle of Kanpur, and back. It lasted till 1961, the Indo-Pakistan War, when all public processions were prohibited. It was not resumed after the war.

49. They can't be easily compared with Grierson's compilation as some compilations contain more than one book. 1. *Gurū anyās bhaṣa ṭikā sahit*, 2. *Śabd granth sant vilās*, 3. *Śabdāvalī bhajnavālī*,

4. *Lav parvānā bhaṣa ṭikā*, 5. *Santakṣari*; 6. *Saral pūjan vidhi (mantrāvlī)*, 7. *Sangrah granth jismen jaijulākī samvad tatha tinom vānī*; 8. *Pāti parvānā*; 9. *Sant sundar granth*; 10. *Mūl granth (jīvan caritra)*; 11. *Sangrah Granth (jismen do granth hain)*

50. M. Callista Panachickel, SRAP, *The Fall and Rise of a Grain of Wheat. Origin and Development of Missionary Sisters of 'Queen of Apostles'*, Vienna: Missionary Sisters of 'Queen of Apostles', 1995, p. 167.

Crooke claims that the Śiv Nārāyaṇīs are susceptible to Christian influence which he attributes to the similarity between Dukhharāṇ, the Merciful and Jesus Christ.⁵¹ According to one narrative, the Catholic mission was invited to the area by a Dalit *mistry* out of a number of considerations. He had become quite wealthy and wanted to invest his money in land. He was originally from Azamgarh, but as there was land available in Rasra, he settled down there. He came under Christian influence in Varanasi. Although there was already an Anglican mission in Rasra, he nevertheless thought it better to ask the Catholic fathers for support. He feared that the Ṭhākurs would otherwise appropriate his land. For him, the celibate fathers were less susceptible to intimidation than the married Anglicans. It was his initiative which led to the establishment of the Catholic mission station.⁵²

(27) The exchange between Francispur and Candravār Dhām was amicable in the 1950s and 1960s. Even nowadays, there are vivid memories of the theological debates (*goṣṭhī*) between a Canadian Capuchian monk and the then Dalit *ācārya*.⁵³ These were the days of recognition and support. Jagjīvan Rām also extended his patronage to Candravār Dhām and visited it four times during his ministry. Once he even organised a Congress workshop on the premises of the Dhām. But still, the monastery is only known to insiders and also in recent publications there is no mention of the monastery.⁵⁴ All this can be attributed to the inwardly oriented and secretive nature of Svāmī Śiv Nārāyaṇ's teachings and the fact that the *panth* was politically for a long time in the Congress fold.

Quite to the contrary of many other Sant *saṃpradāyas*, the genealogy of the *panth* shows openness and flexibility with regard to gender and caste.⁵⁵ Although there were three times as many caste Hindu (*savarna*) *ācāryas* as Dalit *ācāryas* in the past, under the present Dalit *ācārya* Sarjū Dās, the Dalit dominate. It is unknown to what extent Svāmī Śiv Nārāyaṇ's five disciples constituted different branches (*gharānās*) of their own.⁵⁶ Three *gharānās* were pointed out to me. In Sasna there is

51. Briggs, *ibid.*, p. 214.

52. He was Walter John's grandfather who settled in a village called Nimbu near Francispur. Walter John only disclosed his family history shortly before our first visit to Candravār Dhām from 28.2.2001 to 4.3.2001. Monika Horstmann and Martin Fuchs accompanied me. I would also like to thank the sisters in St. Francispur, Walter John's relations in Nimbu and especially Mahant Bholanāth and *bhajanik* oṃyām Sundar Dās in Candravār Dhām for their hospitality. Since that visit we have been reckoned as members of the *panth* and included into the annual invitation letter for the ØGuru Granth Jayantā SamārohŪ as Prof. Dr. Monika, Dr. Maren and Dr. Martin.

53. The Capuchian monk was John Viani, a Canadian with an Italian name. He worked for forty years in the Banaras Dioceses but only lived from 1952 till 1955 in St. Francispur. He left a lasting impression due to his spirituality, wisdom and ascetic living.

54. There is no mention of the Dhām, neither in the District Gazetteers, nor in more recent accounts on Ballia district. H.K. Nevill, *Ballia, A District Gazetteer*, Allahabad: Government of India Press, 1907. Anil K. Singh, *Ballia District: A Study in Rural Settlement Geography*, Varanasi: The National Geographical Society, 1985 and S.B. Singh, *Fairs and Festivals in Rural India. A Geospatial Study of Belief Systems*, Varanasi: Tara Book Agency, 1989.

55. 1. Śiv Nārāyaṇ, Rājput; 2. Lakhan Rām, Rājput; 3. Dāyal Rām, Camār; 4. Baudha Devī, f. Brahman; 5. Rajkalo Mai, f. Rājput; 6. Ajāheb Rām, Rājput; 7. Chetan Dās, Camār, 8. Raghunāth Singh, Rājput; 9. Muneshvar Singh, Rājput; 10. Jhandul Dās, Gareria; 11. Bacho Devī, f. Brahman; 12. Gulāb Chand, son of BD; 13. Sansāraṇ Dās, Camār; 14. Sarjū Dās, Camār.

56. These were 1. Ram Nath from Parsia, a Kṣatriya; 2. Sadarśiv from Citraya in Ballia District;

3. Lekhrāj from Madhūban in Azamgarh District, he was Bhatbramar. 4. his brother Jobrāj, 5. Lakhan Rām from Bharsari in Ghazipur District, he was Rājput. Among Svāmī Śiv Nārāyaṇ's disciples, he was the only educated. Svāmī Śiv Nārāyaṇ's books are supposed to be kept with Lakhan Rām.

a Brahman *gharāṇa* which centres around the (grave) *samādhī* of Dukhharāṇ. They only accept Brahman disciples. There is a dispute over land.⁵⁷ In Nagra there has been a Kṣatriya *gaddī* for seven generations. They burn their dead but build *samādhīs* for them. There are also women *mahānts* in that line. The third (28) *gharānā* is in Ghazipur, with the *maṭh* nowadays dilapidated. This is a Dalit line. The Camārs there call themselves Rāvat.

Since Viśva Mahānt Sarjū Dās got elected in 1982 to head Candravār Dhām, the *saṃpradāya* pursues a more assertive course. Although he is illiterate, only he is believed to have the power (*śakti*) to make an impact on Candravār Dhām and the Śiv Nārāyaṇīs in general. The present flourishing state of the monastery goes entirely to his credit. Svāmi Śiv Nārāyaṇ's *samādhī* was constructed in the form of an impressive two cellar temple in 1991. The translation of *samādhī* with Ēgravej is misleading sofar, as death is understood in the Sant tradition as the ultimate liberation of man from the cycle of rebirths. Besides, as already mentioned, nobody knows where Svāmi Śiv Nārāyaṇ actually died. The two cellars of the temple contain the iconic representations of two books. The *Gurū anyās* represents the spiritual birth and the *Sant vilās* the spiritual liberation of Svāmi Śiv Nārāyaṇ. The temple is constructed in west-eastern direction, so that the symbolic representation of spiritual birth is facing north, death facing south. This is in line with Hindu cosmology of north as the abode of the Gods and eternal life and south as the direction of decay and damnation.

Residential buildings, store rooms and working quarters followed. The *samādhīs* of former *mahānts* were set up and decorated. Considerable land is connected with the Dhām which was appropriated from the Grām Pañcāyat and which has been successfully defended against other claimants. This construction work was made possible through donations which were instigated through extensive promotion tours of Viśva Mahānt Sarjū Dās. Nowadays, the leading members of the *panth* are in Government positions or run Non Governmental Organisations. Besides, there is a substantial number of Non-Resident Indians among the Śiv Nārāyaṇīs. Some have maintained their allegiance to the Dhām through high monetary remittances. The cosmopolitan constituency of the *panth* made Sarjū Dās adopt the title of Viśva Mahānt. Although a illiterate, he feels even at the age of eighty fully capable to run the Dhām, and his authority is unchallenged. However, his closest disciples have taken precaution for a smooth transition after his demise, and in 2003 Candravār Dhām got registered as a trust.

Viśva Mahānt Sarjū Dās, like the few high officials of the *panth*, is an ascetic. His biography combines misery and mysticism with a tremendous spiritual and social radicalism. Born into a family of landless labourers who had to perform forced labour (*begār*), his alienation from worldly life began when his father died and his mother left him behind. He joined the company of sadhus and Sants, and was a Nāgā monk for a long time. He grew up a radical and became, according to his own words, a revolutionary (*krantikārī*). He was involved in several agricultural labour movements in the countryside. Out of compassion, he returned to the religion of his forefathers.

57. Communication by Sukhdeo Singh on 4.3.2001 and discussion with Viśva Mahant Sarjū Dās on 16.2.2002.

(29) According to him, Svāmi Śiv Nārāyaṇ was born to abolish caste. The Kṣatriya origin of Svāmi Śiv Nārāyaṇ is reconciled with the Dalit membership of the *panth* through the inversion of the Aryan theory of race. The Camārs were originally Kṣatriyas of the Surjavamśī lineage, a theory which is widespread among the Camār. Svāmi Śiv Nārāyaṇ and his present day followers are of the same stock. Not only that, for Viśva Mahānt Sarjū Dās the Dalits are morally superior to the *savarna*, because they embody equality as preached by Svāmi Śiv Nārāyaṇ. The dignity and equality of man are derived from the theological concept that every man partakes in the divine essence.

This does not mean that his Dalit brethren need no rectification and enlightenment. He fights a crusade against alcohol and intoxicants, the vices of untouchable culture. He does it with every means possible: Slogans condemning liquor are painted on the walls of the (hostel) *dharamśālā*.⁵⁸ Drunkards are thrown out of the Dhām by him personally, and he preaches untiringly against the vice of drinking. Teetotalism and vegetarianism are integral parts of Viśva Mahānt Sarjū Dās's teaching. This is derived from the theology of Sant Dharm which relies on the mystical union of individual soul and universal soul (*ātma* and *paramātma*). The divine essence has its equivalent in the human soul. The body is depicted as the vessel of divinity and therefore it should not be adulterated by impure substances. Only the divine bliss should intoxicate man, not alcohol. The mystical insight should light the fire within the human body, not the consummation of alcohol and meat.

Sant Dharm is juxtaposed to Hinduism, which for Viśva Mahānt Sarjū Dās is hollow ritualism. Outward ritualism and the suppression through the caste system go together. Sant Dharm is inwardly oriented. It does not need the veneration of Devīs, as any mother, sister, and daughter by her inherent nature replaces the goddess. Bhakti as loving devotion should be directed towards the members of one's family. Children should be fed with healthy and good food. They should be clothed and educated. Husband and wife should lead a pure, pious life in devotion to each other. The inward purity should also be outwardly reflected and vice versa. Mere life reform as practiced and preached by Buddhism is not enough. The spiritual quest is not fulfilled by the five commandments (*pañc śīl*).⁵⁹ Navayāna Buddhism is for him a social and not a spiritual religion.

(30) Bhakti is for Viśva Mahānt man's spiritual union with God as well as his decent living on earth. Bhakti is a life in dignity, equality and mutual help. The Śiv Nārāyaṇ *panth* should contribute their share in money, grain and clothing to the Dhām and Viśva Mahānt Sarjū Dās will provide them with spiritual guidance, food and shelter. Those who are not willing to give are not initiated. But the poor and pious are fed and clothed. His greatest concern is appropriate hospitality. As he set up *dharmśālas* already, he wants to improve the sanitary conditions. Within a global world, the foreign *panthis* should be adequately housed. Good and tasty food he finds still badly missing. His storerooms are filled with grain and pulses, he owns plates and glasses, but there is no one to prepare tasty food.

58. On our first visit in 2001 the slogans were freshly painted. In 2002 the monsoon had washed them away, and while whitewashing the walls they were not applied again.

59 These are: 'not to kill, not to steal, not to tell a lie, not to indulge in sex immorality and not to indulge in drinking,' in Bhimrao Ambedkar, *The Buddha and His Dhamma. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches*, vol II, Bombay: Government of Maharashtra, 1957, p.293.

The social wing of Candravār Dhām is the ĒDr. Ambedkar Health Centre and School. It was founded by Dr. Parasnāth, a Śiv Nārāyaṇī and homeopathic doctor, at the end of 1980s. He pursues Dr. Ambedkar's social tenets but disapproves of his conversion to Buddhism. Buddhism is for him a social gospel, not a spiritual religion. As already mentioned, the high school is built on a plot adjacent to the Dhām. On our visit in 2001, the school had around 600 students and a staff of fifteen teachers. It put special emphasis on female education. Not only Dr. Ambedkar's three tenets: 'Educate, Organise, Unite', were preached but many of the burning social issues like atrocities against Dalits, dowry murder and rape as an instrument of subjugation and reglementation were mentioned.

On my visit a year later, the school buildings were barred.⁶⁰ The Dr. Ambedkar school had been hit by an intrigue between two Dalit factions which had lead to the brutal interference of police and administration to close the school. Since more than a year, the students have been sitting outside in the open. The number of students and teachers has dwindled to half of its former size. Dr. Parasnāth has been fighting a courtcase before the Highcourt in Allahabad since then. Viśva Mahānt Sarjū Dās was disgruntled: He would have solved the problem directly with the persons concerned. But at the age of eighty, he does no longer feel fit for a retaliation in the Nāgā style.

On my third visit to Candravār Dhām, we discussed the matter extensively with Dr. Parasnāth.⁶¹ For the last one and a half year he has been busy to get the school reopened again. He was so involved in those matters (31) so that he could neither attend the Gurū Granth Dīvas nor the Dr. Ambedkar Parānirvāṇ Dīvas. In 2003, both commemoration days fell on the 6th of December. The school organised a small function. The picture of Dr. Ambedkar was put up, garlanded and light wavedritually before it (*āratī*). In marked contrast to Kanpur, no picture of Buddha was put up next to Dr. Ambedkar. This shows the different approach to the Dr. Ambedkar movement which clearly differs from Navayāna Buddhism.

This small meeting stood in marked contrast with the big gathering on the occasion of the 'Gurū Granth Jayantī Samaroh' which was attended by 3000 Śiv Nārāyaṇīs. The celebrations took place under a huge tent which was put up in front of one of the lodge. The *gaddī* was set up there. It began in the afternoon at 5 pm with prayers and teaching by Viśva Mahānt Sarjū Dās. The night celebrations started with prayers, too, and then speeches by leading members of the *panth* who expressed their

⁶⁰ Also during my second visit to Candravār Dhām from 15th to 19th February 2002, I was not alone. Pintoo Singh and Rajendranath Ahervar were kind enough to accompany me. I again enjoyed the hospitality of the sisters of St. Francispur. Pintoo and Rajendranath were kindly welcomed at the *math*. For the hospitality extended to us, I would like to thank Viśva Mahant Sarjū Dās and Upmahānt Bholanāth.

⁶¹ I was accompanied by Raja Ram Jaisvār, a senior educational officer at the Jhansi Polytechnique. We enjoyed the hospitality of Candravār Dhām. A local medical practitioner, Dr. Srivastava was kind enough to solve our transport problems. He gave us his car for the time of our stay.

opinions about the social and political discrimination of the Dalits. It had the character of a political meeting rather than a religion function. It was interrupted by a meal and closed by the main speech of Viśva Mahānt Sarjū Dās. Then the *mohanbhog* was brought but only offered to the Gurū *anyās*. Viśva Mahānt Sarjū Dās gave initiation to the new disciples while whispering the *mantra* into their ears. The meeting closed by 2 am on the 7th December early morning with prayers and singing. Simultaneously worship was offered at the *samādhi* of Svāmī Śiv Nārāyaṇ.

Bhakti as a specific mode of religiosity can't be brought under one heading. Even among Dalits, it is too heterogeneous. Besides, and that holds true for all Dalit *jātis* and not only for the so called Śūdra poor, Bhakti was never practiced exclusively. It blended with *saguṇ* forms of devotionalism, especially in the veneration of the Devī. The Śiv Nārāyaṇīs, Kabīrpanthīs and Raidāsīs created their temples and iconographic representations of their specific Sants although their founding fathers were iconoclasts. *Saguṇ* forms of devotionalism penetrated the *nirguṇ* understanding. The distinction between Hindu militancy and Bhakti devotionalism, between Śūdra and Dalit poor, as projected by Nandini Goptu, does not hold true. There were wide variations in radicalism, life style, public representations, and social practice between the different Bhakti *saṃpradāyas*.

There is a discrepancy between an esoteric teaching of Svāmī Śiv Nārāyaṇ which is very much in line with Upanishadic concepts of world denial and renunciation, and the social practice of the Śiv Nārāyaṇīs in Kanpur whose eating and drinking habits exhibit untouchable culture. Viśva Mahānt Sarjū Dās fights for a *śuddhi* life style. This is for him at the core of Svāmī Śiv Nārāyaṇ's teachings. He combines a Brahmanical-Sanskritic transformation of life style, in the sense of M.N. Srinivas, with Dalit assertiveness. Dr. Ambedkar's social gospel is fully accepted in the Dhām as well as in the school. In contrast with Kanpur, where Buddhism is an (32) intrinsic part of the Dalit movement, in Candravār this is absent. Buddhism is not amalgamated with Sant Dharm, as in Kanpur among the educated Śiv Nārāyaṇīs. In Candravār Dhām, Buddhism is considered to be a social gospel, not a path to salvation.

The shifting meanings of a textual tradition within the realm of an oral tradition are obvious. Although the Gurū Anyās does not mention caste at all, there is general agreement that Svāmī Śiv Nārāyaṇ was born to abolish caste. This is paradoxical insofar as even within the Śiv Nārāyaṇ *saṃpradāya*, there was neither connubium, nor commensality between the different *jātis*. They only partook in the communion, the *mohanbhog* of the sect.

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