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Kabir. Scholarly Commentaries on Un–Critical Texts?

I can understand that a translator of Kabir may look for a nice song and does not bother about its authenticity. But let us not start writing commentaries on Kabir and fifteenth–century Banaras quoting those songs.

Interaction in the oral tradition and corruption in the scribal tradition have created a sort of nebulous environment wherein it becomes very difficult to find the original version of the songs of 15–17th century Bhaktas. Five hundred years after Kabir was born in Banaras and after at least 80 years of scholarship, do we have any certainty that the songs attributed to him and published in critical and uncritical editions and translations are by Kabir? I doubt it more and more. Between Kabir and our computer age lie 150 years of oral transmission (which never stopped) and nearly 400 years of scribal transmission. We have no oral recordings of Kabir scolding his audiences, and I take it for granted that he did not write down his compositions. What we have are manuscripts in which his popular repertoire was written down first by travelling singers, and later, in a more respectful and professional way, by devoted scribes. But what do we have of Kabir in those repertoires?

Rajasthan is a treasure–house for manuscript hunters. There have not been too many floods, rulers were patrons of art and literature, and several sects guarded their manuscripts jealously. Was that an imitation of the thoroughness of the Jain bhandars? Or the result of a sect's devotion to *the* book, as embodiment of the divine word? One such sect is the Dadupanth (Dadu: 1544–1603). In the Dadupanthi temples and private collections today we find thousands of precious Bhakti material in manuscripts. But the Dadupanth did more. From 1600 AD onwards the sect became a nucleus of literary activity: scribing and compiling were a meritorious activity and 20th century scholars could profit from it. No doubt, the compilation of the *Ādi–granth* of the Sikhs is a milestone in the history of religious literature in early 17th century North India. But perhaps equally important were the compilations (*Pañc–vāṇī, Sarvāṅgīs*, *Guṇagañjanāmā*, etc) made at the same time by the Dadupanth in Rajasthan.

1. *Editions of Kabir's Songs*

There is no consensus among scholars about the authenticity of any of the songs attributed to Kabir. With due respect for the oral traditions which survive

till the present day, my approach to the problem of authenticity starts with a search for the earliest manuscripts. Even if this approach, in the case of Kabir, may not give us 100% certainty about which songs are authentic and which are definitely not, at least it can question the claims made in the current editions. I argue that with certainty we can only say that the version of Kabir's songs found in the 17th century manuscripts is the version commonly used and sung by singers in those days. And secondly, the songs which occur in most repertoires, in different regions, have a better chance of having been composed by Kabir. Three kinds of collections of his songs have been preserved in northern India: the 'Eastern' or *Bījak* tradition, the 'Western' or Rajasthani tradition, and the *Ādi–granth* or Panjabi tradition.

1.1. *The Bījak*

There are three different recensions of the *Bījak*, associated with the different branches of the Kabir–panth:

1.1a. The 'Bārābānkī' *Bījak* is the most widely known and is part of the *Khās granth* in the Kabir Chaura in Banaras. It was first published in 1950 by H. Shastri and M. Shastri in Barabanki (U.P.)[1].

1.1b. The *Fatuha* version of the *Bījak* occupies an intermediate position, in content and arrangement, between the Barabanki edition and the next one.

1.1c The Bhagatahi version has fewer verses than the Barabanki version. Manuscripts of this tradition were the basis for the edition prepared by Shukdev Singh, *Kabīr–bījak*, Allahabad 1972. The earliest manuscript consulted by the editor is dated 1805, but it is my guess that there may be 'hidden treasures' in Bihar, awaiting the earnest researcher. The Shukdev Singh edition of this tradition of the *Bījak* is only the beginning of a critical edition.

1.2. *The Rajasthani or 'Western' Tradition*

Travelling singers classified the songs of their performances according to the *rāg* and scribes kept that *rāg*–label when copying manuscripts. One of the earliest, *rāg*–oriented collections made in the Dadupanth is the *Pañc–vāṇī* or 'Songs of the Five'. These five highly respected Bhaktas in the early Dadupanth are: Dadu (1544–1603), Kabir (ca. 1398–1448), Namdev (ca. 1270–1350), Raidas (ca. 1450–1520) and Hardas (floruit ca. 1600?). This repertoire, classified in

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[1] For more details see Vaudeville (1974: 56) and Vaudeville (1993), who concludes: "The *Bījak* itself has come down to us in two main forms: a longer and a shorter form. Yet, even in its shorter form the text cannot be accepted as totally genuine, as shown by Parshuram Chaturvedi and other Kabirian scholars: the *Bījak* not only includes a number of meaningless and obviously corrupt verses, but it also contains numerous references ot the elaborate cosmogony and religious beliefs peculiar to the sectarian Kabir–panthis themselves" (pp. 132–133).

clusters under a particular *rāg*, comprised more than 1000 songs. Later, several compilers put down the huge collection on paper, and it became known as the *Pañc–vāṇī*. Scores of manuscripts with *different versions* of the *Pañc–vāṇī* are today even found in the manuscript collections in Rajasthan, Panjab and Banaras. The songs of Kabir in the *Paṇc–vāṇī* are the so called 'western recension' of his songs. It is not only the enormous size of the collection, exixting at first only in the memory of singers, that makes the *Paṇc–vāṇī* an amazing feature. What baffles us even more is the fact that different singers, possibly in different places, had memorized five repertoires that were very different in size and in the order of songs, and clearly had variant 'readings'. As a result we do not have only one *Paṇc–vāṇī* recension, but several, each one relying on a different oral tradition.

Looking at the consistent order (Dadu, Namdev, Kabir, Raidas and Hardas) in all the *Paṇc–vāṇī* manuscripts, scholars like P.N. Tivari thought that the numerous *Paṇc–vāṇī* manuscripts go all back to a single, scribal archetype, compiled by one of the learned disciples of Dadu, perhaps even under the guru's direct inspiration. He thought that this archetype served as the basis for all later copies, most of the 17th century. Such an idyllic thought, cherished by text–critics up to the present day, must be given up. The *Paṇc–vāṇī* manuscripts we have cannot go back to one archetype or to a single compiler. There must have been several *Paṇc–vāṇī* compilers, each working separately either on the basis of existing manuscripts or in direct contact with the oral tradition. A critical analysis of these manuscripts takes the researcher much further into the period of oral transmission than was possible for e.g. S.S. Das (1928) or Parasnath Tivari (1962). Because of a plainly direct link with different musical traditions, we find variants introduced during the musical transmission along with those due to scribes[2]. This consideration makes it imperative that we look again at the 'western recension' of Kabir's songs.

The *Kabir–granthavali* recension used by S.S. Das and P.N. Tivari essentially coincides with the *Paṇc–vāṇī* collection of the Dadupanth. Unfortunately, in both editions the oldest manuscripts have not been used.

1.2a. The S.S. Das 1928 edition is a reprint of a manuscript claimed to have been written in 1504 "during Kabir's life–time", with a few variants found in another manuscript quoted in a footnote[3]. I have serious doubts about its date, and it is unlikely that all the 403 Pads attributed to Kabir are his.

1.2b. A better edition of the Rajasthani manuscripts was prepared by

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[2] This hypothesis was first formulated and tested in our edition of the songs of Namdev. See Callewaert & Lath, 1989. We applied the same method in the edition of the songs of Raidas: see Callewaert & Friedlander, 1992.

[3] The text of the S.S. Das edition is reprinted in Vaudeville (1982) as KG1: 811 *sākhīs* (pp. 3–53), 403 *pads* (pp. 113–223) and *ramainī* (pp. 395–409).

Parasnath Tivari (1961)[4]. In his zeal to consult as many versions as possible, the editor collected also the verses of Kabir found in printed (uncritical) editions. Of the 11 'kinds' of sources only four are manuscript 'recensions': 1) the *Paṇc-vāṇī*; 2) two Niranjani manuscripts; 3) the *Guṇgaṅjanāmā* (manuscript of 1796 AD, see further, 2.6) and 4) the *Sarvāṅgī* of Rajab. The earliest manuscript consulted by Tivari is dated 1684[5]. There are several much earlier manuscripts available now and if, according to my hypothesis, the *Paṇc-vāṇī* compilations do not go back to one written exemplar but to several different compilers during the period of the oral tradition, we should be able to go much further back in time into the period of oral transmission than Tivari was able to do. He also failed to consult another important Dadupanthi *Sarvāṅgī*, viz. the one compiled by Gopaldas in 1627. Finally, in his edition he classified the *pads* in 16 thematic *aṅgas*: the Rajasthani manuscripts very clearly give the repertoires in a classification made according to *rāgs*.

1.3 In the *Ādi-granth* (compiled in 1604) 243 *sākhīs* and 217 *pads* of Kabir are given. These verses have been brought together and printed by R.K. Varma, *Sant Kabīr*, Allahabad, 1947, "with a fantastic amount of copying – or printing – mistakes", as is claimed in Vaudeville (1982)[6].

2. *New Manuscript Material (not Consulted by P.N. Tivari for the* Kabīr-granthāvalī*)*

The pioneering work done by Tivari deserves great praise and respect. However, thirty years after his publication we have now access to much more – and more ancient – material. I list below the early manuscripts I am aware of and what I could collect myself on microfilm. I invite scholars to communicate with me if they have additional material useful for a critical edition.

2.1. *The Fatehpur Manuscript of 1582*[7]

This manuscript – the earliest known to me with *pads* of Kabir – appears to have been based on three earlier repertoires, and is at times copied carelessly. The folios are numbered continuously but the *pads* are numbered in three sequences. There are 411 *pads* in the manuscript: 262 by Surdas (but 23 are

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[4] In Vaudeville (1982) a reprint is given of the 737 *Sākhīs* (pp. 54–97) and the 200 *pads* (pp. 224–280). In a personal communication Prof. Vaudeville told me she did not do any editing of Tivari's text for this reprint, but I often found the reprint quite different from the Tivari text.

[5] In his edition, p. 60, Tivari refers to his manuscript as No. 3 in the Vidya Bhushan collection, Jaipur. In the catalogue of this collection prepared by G.N. Bahura that manuscript is numbered No. 12; see Bahura, 1961, pp. 21–29.

[6] See p. xviii, n. 13. The editor reprints the Pads of Kabir in the *Gurū Granth* on pp. 281–392, "with some minor editing" (personal communication).

[7] Edited by Bahura, 1982.

repeated and they actually are only 239) and 149 by, among others, Namdev, Kabir, Raidas. All of these *nirguṇ* saints appear in the second of the three repertoires, which forms an independent section of *pads*. Out of the 181 *pads* in section two, only 15 are of Kabir: *only* when compared with e.g. the 11 *pads* of Namdev. If one thinks in terms of popularity, one may have expected more *pads* of Kabir in a repertoire of this kind.

In order to illustrate the differences in each repertoire, I quote below Pad 8 in the Tivari version (p. 7; see Callewaert & Op de Beeck, p. 303) and compare it with the version in the Fatehpur manuscript, Pad 87, p. 143 (in italics) and with the version in the *Ādi–granth* (p. 327, Pad 21 of Kabir). Because of the inversion in the order of lines and half–lines in the *Ādi–granth* repertoire I print that version separately.

\- = *identical reading*

रांम भगति अनियाले तीर जेहि लागै सो जानैं पीर । Tivari
राम वान अनीयारे - । जहि - - - - । Fatehpur Ms.

तन महिं षोजौं चोट न पावौं ओषद मूरि कहां घंसि लावै ।
\- *मन षोज चोठ न पाउ । वौषद मूरि धसि कहा लगा ।*

एक भाइ दीसैं सब नारी नां जांनौं को पियहि पियारी ।
\- - - - - *ना जानै कोई राम पिआरी ।*

कहै कबीर जाकै मस्तकि भाग सम परिहरि ताकौं मिलि *सुह* ।
कहत - - माथै - ना जानौं कोई लेइ -।

Ādi-granth

कत नही ठउर मूलु कत लावउ ॥ खोजत तन महि ठउर न पावउ ॥ १ ॥
लागी होइ सु जानै पीर ॥ राम भगति अनीआले तीर ॥ १ ॥ रहाउ ॥
एक भाइ देखउ सभ नारी ॥ किआ जानउ सह कउन पिआरी ॥ २ ॥
कहु कबीर जा कै मसतकि भागु ॥ सभ परहरि ता कउ मिलै सुहागु ॥ ३ ॥

These variants clearly illustrate, as explained above, how a text was handled by singers. In nearly all the *pads* by Bhagats quoted in the *Ādi–granth*, the refrain is given as first lines in the Rajasthani manuscripts, where it is called *ṭek*. In the *Ādi–granth* the refrain is called *rahāu*; it usually comes after the first stanza.

2.2. The *Paṇc-vāṇī* manuscript in the Sanjay Sharma collection, Jaipur, dated 1614 is not only the earliest *Paṇc-vāṇī* manuscript known to me, it is also an encouragement to go searching for manuscripts and use them for new critical text editions. Here there are also some interesting features in the selection of the *pads*. Not less important is the fact that quite a few of these *pads* are *not* found in the Tivari edition of the 'western repertoires'. In this 'Sharma' *Paṇc-vāṇī* collection there are even *pads* that are found *only* in the *Bījak*, not in the other Rajasthani manuscripts!

2.3. Other *Paṇc-vāṇī* manuscripts. In considering them one has to keep in mind that the earliest manuscript used by Tivari is dated 1684.

* Dadu Mahavidyalay, Jaipur, No. 12, dated 1636, fo. 140–191.
* Dadu Mahavidyaly, Jaipur, No. 2, dated 1676, fo. 70–130.
* Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, No. 875, dated 1675, fo. 165–236.

2.4. *Independent Collections*[8]

v: City Palace Jaipur, No. 34 (1658); fo. 140–220 (also fo. 488).
c: City Palace Jaipur, No. 3322 (1660 and 1669), fo. 7–35.
j: City Palace Jaipur, No. 1853 (1681); fo. 1–72.
u: Vidya Bhushan Sangrah, Jaipur, No. 12 (1684). As many as 60 different works on 330 folios are given in this manuscript. On fo. 1–20 we find the *sākhīs* of Kabir, and on fo. 213–262 the *pads* of Kabir (see also fo. 319). I studied in detail the repertoires of Namdev and of Raidas, which are quite different from the 'standard' *Paṇc-vāṇī* repertoires.

2.5. The Dadupanthi *Sarvāṅgīs* are collections of *pads* and *sākhīs* of more then one hundred Bhaktas, classified thematically. Unlike the *Paṇc-vāṇī* collection, where *pads* are grouped according to the *rāg* to which they were sung, the *Sarvāṅgī* collections take the *pads* out of the *rāg* context (although the *rāg* is given with each *pad*) and bring them together according to the theme the compiler thought was emphasized in that particular *pad*. If we accept – as I do – the hypothesis that the compilers did not have access to manuscripts in which all the varied literature they quoted was preserved, we have to admit that these compilations are a unique product of a 17th century, extraordinary memory. A memory found in a scribe with an immense devotion. If we accept that a copying tradition may, in a work of compilation, undergo fewer intentional changes than in a more sectarian record, it becomes evident that the *Sarvāṅgīs* are very important for a text critic wishing to study Kabir and other poets quoted by them.

A detailed comparison of the two *Sarvāṅgīs*[9] shows that both works are

[8] The sigla in 2.4 are those used in our editions of the *pads* of Namdev and of Raidas.

[9] The complete text of the Gopaldas *Sārvaṅgī* has been edited by me in 1993, while a study of the text of the Rajab Sārvaṅgī, and a translation of some of Rajab's Sakhis, was published in 1989.

independent products of compilation, differing both in the amount and choice of the material and in the way it has been arranged. The titles of Gopaldas' 121 chapters generally differ in wording and length from the 144 chapters in Rajab's work. Gopaldas quotes from 182 Bhaktas, Rajab ony from 88. Arranging his literature thematically, Gopaldas has much more variety within one chapter, quoting at times as many as 30 different Bhaktas and 100 *pads* in one chapter. Like Rajab, Gopaldas gives plenty of space to the five important gurus of the tradition, quoting extensively from Dadu, Kabir, Namdev, Raidas and Hardas, the Bhaktas of the *Paṇc-vāṇī*.

2.5a. The *Sarvāṅgī* of Gopaldas is the only of the three (see 2.5b; 2.6) vast anthologies of Nirgun Bhakti literature made in the early Dadupanth which is dated with certainty: the colophon at the end of the work states that Gopaldas completed this immense compilation of 364 folios in 1627, at the age of 37. Clearly, its transmission was intended to be scribal and not oral. The material is arranged thematically, and not musically, although each *pad* has its *rāg* label. Of Kabir, Gopaldas quotes 360 *pads* and 609 *sākhīs*.

2.5b. The *Sarvāṅgī* of Rajab was probably compiled around 1620. I have not yet counted the *pads* of Kabir in this compilation.

2.6. *The* Guṇagaṅjanāmā *of Jagannath*

This manuscript[10] has 216 folios and is dated 1796. It is noteworthy that the earliest version of this text (or a selection from it?) is found in a manuscript (No. 2, in the Dadu Mahavidyalay, Jaipur) dated 1676, fo. 521–536 (594 *dohā–soraṭhā*). In a later manuscript a large version is given: folios 329–450 in a manuscript of 1809 in the same library. Giving the contents of manuscript No. 154 (dated 1944, "copied from a manuscript of 1796"!) in the Vidya Bhushan Sangrah, Jaipur, Bahuraji lists 162 poets. Both the contents and the authorship of this work, not studied so far, deserve special attention. I have not yet been able to look at Kabir's *pads* in this manuscript.

3. *Towards a New Critical Edition of the Wester Repertoires of Kabir?*

3a. Repertoires and *rāg*as

A consideration about 'musical' variants in the text is a very important clue pointing to a development of Kabir's songs in different recensions during the oral period. Indian musiçians used to sing clusters of songs classified according to *rāgs*. It would appear that first the singers sang a particular song in a particular *rāgs*; then they grouped together the songs which were to be sung in the same *rāg*. Consequently, a *rāg* is like an identity card for the earliest period of oral

[10] Dadumahavidyalay, Jaipur, No. 14b; see film No. 10, p. 33 in Callewaert: 1980.

transmission. The same song, however, could be sung according to different *rāg*as. As a result we find songs classified under different *rāg*as in different manuscripts. This variation in classification is obvioulsy not due to a scribe's intervention, but stems from the oral period itself, when the songs were in the hands of the singers. Subsequently, the songs were transmitted under different *rāg*as and appeared as such in the manuscripts. Thus, looking at the *rāg* pattern we are able to make a preliminary classification of the musical recensions.

When we construct a tentative stemma on the basis of the similarity in the order in which the songs were arranged under the heading of a *rāg*, or on the basis of the order of lines in the different manuscripts, then our effort will continually be contradicted by the dissimilarity of the oral and scribal variants. The result is a blurred and confused pattern, if any pattern at all appears.

The singers walking along the roads of Rajasthan around 1550 probably drew their repertoires from a common source. But this is different from the source which has given us the repertoires preserved in the *Ādi Granth*. When we compare the *rāg* structure in the *Ādi Granth* with that in the Rajasthani repertoires, we find considerable differences. The Panjabi singers handled a text of Kabir which was musically and morphologically very different from that of their colleagues in Rajasthan. For his critical edition of the songs of Kabir, Parasnath Tivari finally selected 200 songs. Of these, 121 are found in the *Ādi Granth* also, and only 55 out of these 121 common songs, are classified under the same *rāg* as in the Rajasthani manuscripts. Out of the 35 common songs under *rāg gauḍī* in the Rajasthani tradition, 31 have the same *rāg gauḍī* in the *Ādi Granth*. Further *rāg āsāvarī*: 8 out of 23 have the same *rāg*; *rāmkalī*: 3 out of 6; *bhairū*: 8 out of 11; *vasant*: 4 out of 5. For the other *rāg*as, nothing in common! On the other hand, most songs of Kabir I lokeed at in three Rajasthani manuscripts are classified there under the same *rāg*, and I am tempted to propose that the songs which have the same *rāg* in the Rajasthani manuscripts *and* in the *Ādi Granth* as well are likely to have belonged to a very early common source. Can that 'early common source' be Kabir himself?

One important point can be made at this stage: we can no longer call the *Ādi Granth* the oldest available version of Kabir's songs. What we find in the 17th century Rajasthani manuscripts is a variant which may well be as old as the musical version from which the Panjabi singers drew their inspiration, if not older. At what muddy or sandy crossroads did singing families go their own way, and at what point in history, we do not know, but the division certainly set in quite early.

If Kabir ever sang his songs, they became very soon the property of singers who handled them according to their own inspiration, musical genius and particular dialect. Singers may well have combined several versions, and passed on to their students new textual combinations. We may assume that it was mostly the capable singers, those who were most poetic and creative, who prevailed. We notice the consequence of this in the stemmatic chaos before us. If there is a way to find any order in it, it is by looking at the earliest manuscripts, and by looking in great detail at the very earliest available *Panc–vani* manuscript I recently discovered.

3b. 'Language' and a critical edition of Kabir's songs

Traditionally language has been considered a reliable clue for arriving at the authentic version of a text. Many text critics have used it to define the genuineness of an expression, a line or a whole song. They have also used it as a norm for modifying a text. Songs of Kabir which are found under the same *rāg* in all our manuscripts, and presumably belong to an early layer in the oral tradition, are linguistically quite a mixed bag. The strategy has been to define certain songs or lines as 'authentically of a poet' by defining what his language was and then to exclude those lines or songs which did not conform with that linguistic pattern. This rule can hardly be applied to Kabir, first because the text definitely underwent linguistic changes in the hands of singers travelling from one region to another (where they adapted their repertoire linguistically to suit the local audiences); secondly, even in Kabir's oeuvre as we know it now, there is a great difference between the vocabulary used for these *sākhīs* and that used for the *pads*.

In Callewaert & Op de Beeck (1991: 49ff) we have discussed the 'unique occurrences' of words in the complete *Paṇc–vāṇī* corpus and we published the results of the counts made with the aid of the computer.

a) One could be tempted to speak of a 'Kabirian' language, if one considers the numerous words used only by Kabir. Looking only at the *pads* of Kabir in the *Kabīr–granthāvalī* (Tivari 1962), we find that Kabir used 4,756 different words in 200 songs. They constitute the 36% of the words used in the *pads*. And there is more that might support the theory of a 'Kabirian language': looking at both the *sākhī* and the *pad* sections in the *Kabīr–granthāvalī*, we find about 3,000 words not found anywhere else in the *Paṇc–vāṇī* corpus I discussed above (Dadu, Kabir, Namdev, Raidas, Hardas). (In Kabir's *Bījak* there are about 2700 words found nowhere else in the available corpus).

b) An analysis of these 'unique occurrences' might have been useful, but there is a complication that blurs the definition of the specific language of Kabir. There is an impressive difference between even the *sākhī* vocabulary and the *pad* vocabulary in the edition of Tivari's *Kabīr–granthāvalī*: Kabir used 3,860 different words in his *sākhīs* and as many as 2,319 (60%) of these are not found in his *pads*. Similarly, he used 4,756 different words in his *pads* and of these 3,214 (67%) are not found in his *sākhīs*. Do we then have to define a Kabirian '*pad* language' and a Kabirian '*sākhī* language'? Could it be that the vocabulary of the *sākhīs* is different from that used for the *pads* because they are different genres? This feature is difficult to explain but it is not unique. We find a similar situation when we compare the vocabulary Dadu used in his *pads* with the vocabulary he used in his *sākhīs*.

c) As a final discouragement in our efforts to arrive at Kabir's language as distinct from the language adopted by other saints, we may have to abandon the hypothesis of a '*pad* language' and a '*sākhī* language'. There is no conclusive correlation when we compare the *sākhī* vocabulary of Dadu and of Kabir, or their respective *pad* vocabularies. Such a comparison (made with the aid of the

computer) gives us the following result: of the 3,860 different words used by Kabir in his *sākhīs*, 2,254 (58%) are not found in Dadu's *sākhīs*; of the 4,746 different words used by Kabir in his *pads*, 3,108 (65%) are not found in Dadu's *pads*. In other words; the *pad* vocabulary of Kabir is as different from his *sākhī* vocabulary, as his *pad* vocabulary is different from Dadu's *pad* vocabulary. What is then the specific vocabulary of Kabir[11]? Applying all these figures to the critical text context, the question is: how can we use the occurrence or non-occurrence of particular words or forms in Kabir's oeuvre to determine what line or song has a better chance of having been uttered by Kabir?

Summing up, even if we leave some statistical room for mere morphological variations in the vocabularies, I am inclined to suggest that we are too far away from Kabir to use language as a tool for critical text Language may not be a very reliable clue because there seems to be much similarity – or dissimilarity – between the vocabulaires of e.g. the *pads* of different poets as there is between the vocabularies of the *pads* and the *sakhis* of one particular poet.

There is as yet no way to find out whether the existing editions of the *Kabīr-granthāvalī* and of the *Bījak* represent the language spoken by Kabir. In any case, there is a striking difference in the vocabularies of both collections, as demonstrated by our counts. If there ever was a myth of Kabir's excellence in the use of a varied vocabulary, it is destroyed by the counts I made of the work of the other saints quoted in the *Paṇc-vāṇī*: there is as much variety in the vocabularies used by Dadu and the others. Finally, would you believe that in the *Kabīr-granthāvalī* (*sākhīs* and *pads*), 1 out of 18 words is a negation (*na, nahī, nāhī, nā, nāhi*)?

Conclusion

Writing about Kabir's theology, literary qualities or unique language is a quick way to produce an outdated article. With the manuscript material now at hand we can no longer rely on the existing editions. Very wisely, in her edition of 1974 C. Vaudeville reduced the number of *sākhīs* quoted in her 1993 translation, but I suggest we have to be even more severe. A fresh critical edition of the oeuvre of Kabir should be prepared using all the ancient manuscripts and applying the hypothesis on the oral variants in the manuscripts. With that hypothesis we can go further back in time in the Western or Rajasthani recension than P. Tivari managed to do.

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[11] For more details making more difficult the hypothesis that the specific vocabulary of a Bhakta can be defined, see Callewaert & Op de Beeck (1991: 49–51). According to our count each poet uses more than half of the words (between 53% and 68%) in his vocabulary only once, but that includes of course all oral and scribal morphological variants.

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