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# Images of Kabīr

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## Introduction

## Editor's Preface

An international symposium commemorating the six-hundredth anniversary of Kabir was held in Heidelberg in 1999. This symposium was an opportunity to bring together recent research on one of north India's greatest devotional poets. There was no intention to re-open the debate on Kabir's date. The idea of a symposium was first suggested by Kedarnath Singh. Almost all the papers presented on the occasion are included in this volume, with the exception of contributions read by Purushottam Agrawal (whose paper appeared in the meantime in *Hindi*, 1, 2000), Mridula Ghosh and Linda Hess. Namwar Singh's paper was previously published in *Indian Literature*. The Sahitya Akademi's kind permission to reprint it here is gratefully acknowledged.

Ulrike Stark cooperated both in the organisation of the symposium and in the preparation of this volume, with spirit and efficiency. Claudia Ramsbrock helped patiently with the typing of the manuscript. The symposium was generously funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, the Stiftung der Universität Heidelberg, and the Deutsche Bank. The editor gratefully acknowledges their generous aid. The gathering was hosted by the Internationales Wissenschaftsforum of the University of Heidelberg. The hospitality of this institution as especially represented by its Executive Secretary, Theresa Reiter, is gratefully remembered.

The editor has refrained from trying to make the various modes of transcription used by the authors unassailably uniform. For pre-modern names, diacritic marks have been given; for modern names, this has been left to the discretion of the authors. Names and other words current in English generally appear in their English spelling. Urdu and Persian words have been transcribed according to the system used by John T. Platts (*A Dictionary of Urdū, Classical Hindī, and English*, 5th impression, repr., London 1974).

## A Contemporary Legacy of Kabir: A Hindu Sufi Branch and its Relation with the Kabir-Panth

Thomas Dahnhardt

Various examples testify to the liveliness of Kabir's legacy over the past centuries up to the present day. This paper draws attention to a curious case of interreligious relationship that began to unfold at the turn of this century, involving Hindus and Muslims. In particular, we are concerned here with an intersection of the spiritual tradition of the Kabir-panth, with the teachings of a Sufi *ṭarīqa*. The latter was known for its strictly orthodox interpretation of Sunni Islam in accordance with the ways of the prophet Muḥammad, viz., the indigenous Mujaddidiyya branch of the Central-Asian Naqshbandiyya the name of which is derived from Shaikh Aḥmad Sirhindī (1564-1624) hailed by his followers as the 'renewer of the second millennium' of Islam (*mujaddid alf-i ṣānī*). The confluence of elements from these two directions resulting in a distinguished spiritual discipline since the last decade of the nineteenth century, has led to the gradual formation of a new Sant *paramparā* that in many ways amalgamates into the wider framework of the north Indian *nirguṇa* bhakti tradition, albeit in a modern environment. The natural and spontaneous way in which it was able to attract a considerable following into the folds of the *satsaṅg*, from where they continue to spread their supposedly simple and straightforward teachings, suggests the extent to which such a message still appeals to many contemporary Indians, independent of their social origins or religious affiliation.

But let us take a closer look at the circumstances involved in this case. An exhaustive analysis of the internal and external reasons that determined the passage of the esoteric heritage of the Naqshbandiyya Mujaddidiyya into a particular Hindu environment would involve a study that lies beyond the scope of this paper. We shall, however, try to single out some of the circumstances that led a recognized authority of that generally rather conservative Sufi order, set in the urban and rural environments of the Doāb, to initiate a young Hindu of the local Kāyasth

community into the discipline and methodology of the *ṭarīqa*, even if this is complicated by the scarcity of reliable sources. By sifting the information contained in the numerous hagiographic accounts, it will be understood that the initiative for taking such a bold step lay primarily with Shāh Faḡl Aḡmad Khān (1838-1907), a locally respected *shaiḡh* and 'ālim originally belonging to a small village close to the *qaṣba* of Kaimganj in Farrukhabad district. His spiritual genealogy goes back to Shaikh Aḡmad Sirhindī through the order's renowned eighteenth-century authority at Delhi, Shaikh Mīrzā Maḡhar Jān-i Jānān (d. 1781) who himself appears to have counted a number of Hindus among his disciples.

Moreover, it was from Shāh Abūl Ḥasan Zaid Fārūqī, the recently (1993) deceased head of the Mujaddidī convent in the old city of Delhi which developed around the sepulchre of Shaikh Mīrzā Maḡhar, that I first learnt about the existence of this particular group of Hindu devotees. I was told that they used to pay regular visits to the tombs of the *ṭarīqa*'s revered ancestors in order to derive spiritual benefits from prolonged meditation sessions at that place. Although Abūl Ḥasan himself denied having Hindus under his tutorship, a possibly compromising statement, his open attitude towards these visitors, who were allowed unrestricted access to the precincts of the *khānaqāh* and the tombs of the lineage's forefathers, provides a strong indication of contact between the two spiritual families in question.

All this stands in stark contrast with the alleged hostile attitude toward Hindus that some modern scholars have attributed to Shaikh Aḡmad and his followers, a claim that has gained some currency since the period of growing nationalist feelings among India's educated urban Muslim class in the 1920s.

As became evident from the study of some mid-nineteenth-century manuscripts and letters in possession of a Mujaddidī Shaikh of Bhopal, a descendant in the line of Shāh Faḡl Aḡmad Khān, it was one of the *ṭarīqa*'s earlier masters, Sayyid Maulānā Abūl Ḥasan Naṣīrābādī (d. 1856), a leading Mujaddidī authority in the Awadh region holding the title of *quṭb al-zamān* or 'pole of his time', who explicitly entrusted one of his disciples with the task of recruiting Hindus as disciples. In a letter written shortly before his death, he states:

By the grace of God, through your most intimate essence a new world will be illuminated. Some from among the *ahl-i hunūd* [Hindus] will come to enjoy your company, and since they possess the required qualities, do not refuse them the incomparable treasure of our spiritual heritage....<sup>1</sup>

In another letter, he adds while referring to the same point:

... this matter will constitute the proof of your being a 'pole of right guidance' (*quṭb al-irshād*); ... if your spiritual energy (*tawajjuh-i khāṣṣ*) will reach the infidels and those who have departed from the right path (*kuffar wa fāsiq-i rāh-i mustaqīm*), they will attain to the perfection of faith (*kāmil-i imān*)....<sup>2</sup>

This task, which was left unaccomplished by the Maulānā's immediate successor, was eventually fulfilled by Shāh Faḡl Aḡmad Khān. In winter 1891-2, he met Rāmcandra Saksenā, a young Hindu student from an impoverished Kāyasth family that had lost its ancient zamindari privileges in the area around the *qaṣba* of Bhogaon (dist. Mainpuri, U.P.) in the aftermath of the 1857-8 uprising, and started giving him his spiritual attention. It was, however, only four years later, in 1896, that Rāmcandra was granted full initiation into the order by making his vow of allegiance to the Muslim *pīr* (*bai'at*) thus receiving the secret *zīkr*.

From that moment onwards till the death of the Shaikh in 1907, Rāmcandra kept receiving instructions and spiritual guidance (*hidāyat*) in the *ṭarīqa Mujaddidiyya*. Some time later, this master-disciple relationship culminated in the conferment of full licence and the rank of deputyship (*kullī ijāzat o khilāfat, ācārya padvī*) that entitled Rāmcandra to perpetuate the initiatory chain (*silsila*) in the predominantly Hindu environment independent of his disciples and family members.

<sup>1</sup> Makātib-i Sayyid Shāh Abū 'l-Hasan, letter no. 1 (manuscript letter collection in possession of Shah Manzur Ahmad Khan at Bhopal, M. P.). Cf. also *Damīma-i ḡālāt-i māshaikh-i Naqshabandiyya Mujaddidiyya*, Aligarh: Matba' Aḡmadī, 1943, p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Makātib-i Sayyid Shāh Abū 'l-Hasan, letter no. 3; *Damīma*, p. 11.

The figure of Shāh Faḡl Aḡmad Khān emerges thus as representing a significant stage in the particular development of this Mujaddidī branch after Mirzā Jān-i Jānān and Sayyid Abūl Ḥasan Nāṣirābādī, for it was his interpretation of the attitudes assumed by his predecessors that paved the way for an inclusion of Hindus into this supposedly puritanical Sunni order. It comes, therefore, as no surprise that later Hindu hagiographies praise him as the revered *Ḥuḡūr Mahārāj*. The importance of his role becomes clear from the following paragraph by one of the Shāh's more sober biographers:

Possibly, *Ḥuḡūr Mahārāj* was the first authority of the Naqshbandī *silsila* who has divulged the secret spiritual science (*gupta ādhyātmik vidyā*) pertaining to the saints of Islam without discrimination of any sort. Although he himself adhered to the Islamic faith he was completely free from religious bias. He never indulged in any controversy regarding different religions nor did he ever reprimand anybody for his religious affiliation. Whenever he came across any sort of criticism of any religion, he felt extremely displeased and consequently tried to avoid the company of such persons. His saying was that in every man the spiritual component (*ṭarz-i rūḡāniyat*) is one and alike, while the manners of social life (*ṭarz-i mu'āsharat*) are multiple. He paid equal respect to all sacred traditions and used to repeat that spiritual life begins essentially beyond the limits of institutional boundaries pronouncing himself against any exterior noise and battle....<sup>3</sup>

We learn from other sources that Shāh Faḡl Aḡmad Khān's first and foremost Hindu disciple at some stage was ready to convert to Islam, but was prevented by his master from doing so. This anecdote is illustrated in the sources in the following fashion:

One day, a fellow Muslim disciple asserted in the presence of Rāmcandra that no spiritual progress could be achieved on the Naqshbandī spiritual path (*sulūk*) without adhering to the tenets set out by the Islamic Law. The *Mahātmājī* replied that in this case he was

ready to embrace Islam. When learning about that conversation, [Shāh Faḡl Aḡmad Khān's] eyes turned red in anger and he immediately left the scene. A short while later, on his return, he asked Rāncandra: What sort of reprobate told you this? Having calmed down, he then explained that the sort of knowledge he was concerned with does not depend on any particular religious observance (*mazhab*) since pure spirituality lies far beyond the religious sphere....<sup>4</sup>

The attitude thus described recalls closely the feelings and ideas expressed by the *nirguṇa* Sants since Kabīr and Guru Nānak. And, perhaps not too surprisingly at this stage, it is reported that one of the most frequently recited verses by the Shaikh on such occasions is one attributed to Kabīr:

*Jāti na pūchai sādhu kī, pūcha lijiye jñāna /  
kāma karo talavāra se, parī rahān do miyāna //*

Do not ask about the caste of a sadhu, ask for his knowledge,  
Accomplish your task with the sword, leave the sheath where it is.

All this leads to the assumption that Shāh Faḡl Aḡmad Khān's radical drift away from the *shari'a* oriented outlay of the discipline, followed by the Naqshbandī Mujaddidī authorities ever since Shaikh Aḡmad Sirhindī, goes far beyond the cautious approach adopted by the Shāh's predecessors. At first sight, one may be tempted to argue that the impact that modern Western ideas left on the mentality of the educated Indian middle class by the end of the nineteenth century could be held responsible for the change in attitude of these authorities. But although the importance of this factor should not be outrightly rejected as altogether insignificant, in view of the particularly Indian circumstances, I was convinced that other reasons too were involved here.

In fact, as I discovered while digging out other documents preserved with the family of Rāmcandra's descendants, both Shāh Faḡl Aḡmad Khān and Rāmcandra Saksenā had for a long time been in the company of a locally revered Hindu saint affiliated to some Dharmdāsī branch of the Kabīr-panth, a certain Svāmī Brahmānanda who lived on the

<sup>3</sup> Bāl Kumār Khare, *Mahān Sūfī Sant Hazrat Shāh Faḡl Aḡmad Khān: unkā dharmik evam sampradāyik ekatā*, Varanasi 1982, p. 85.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

banks of the Ganges at Fatehgarh and whose age, the popular legend goes, was well over a hundred years. Although the texts do not comment about the nature of the relationship that existed between the Kabīr-panthi Svāmī and the Mujaddidī Shaikh, it became clear that the two met regularly during the period from 1867 to 1896, either at the Svāmī's simple shelter on the river or, later on, at the Shaikh's residence at a *madrassa* in nearby Farrukhabad. Shāh Fazl Aḥmad Khān's frequent use of verses currently attributed to Kabīr is, however, strongly indicative of the influence of the latter. Equally revealing was the discovery that Rāmcandra's family kept alive a long-standing tradition of maintaining intimate ties with authorities of the above-mentioned *panth*, which were outwardly reflected in the pious atmosphere of Rām-bhakti practised in his mother's family. Since his early childhood, Rāmcandra had been entrusted by his father to the tutorship of Svāmī Brahmānanda, who provided the boy with the fundamental notions of the Hindu dharma. When he was almost fourteen, his Svāmī initiated him formally into the Sant *paramparā*. His instructions in the doctrines of the Kabīr-panth were to prove essential for the elaborations made by Rāmcandra in the later stages of his life and were brought to conclusion by the Svāmī's granting him unlimited authority to initiate and instruct new members of the order in the knowledge of the *sampradāya*.

Thus equipped with the authority of both a Hindu and an Islamic esoteric tradition, Rāmcandra, after the death of his two masters in the first decade of the twentieth century, began to act as an independent authority, at first hesitantly and with some reservations, but gradually gaining in confidence and proposing his own synthesized version of the two disciplines.

In the late 1920s, after Rāmcandra's retirement from government employment in the local district tax office, his *satsaṅg* expanded from an initially intimate group into a fairly large audience of followers and devotees eager to listen to the simple speeches delivered by their *guru mahārāj* and to catch his glance, reputedly charged with a powerful current of spiritual energy.

Obviously, this sort of cross-cultural experiment that attracted members of both communities from among the local population, did not escape the attention of the orthodox establishment. The hagiographical

accounts abound in stories about how both Rāmcandra and his Muslim *pir* were publicly harassed by Farrukhabad's enraged mob led by a group of influential local Brahmins and *ulama*, some of whom we are told in the typical hagiographical imagery, later repented—a few even decided to join the ranks of Rāmcandra's and the *pir*'s disciples. It is nevertheless understood that at some stage the situation assumed quite unbearable proportions at least in the case of Shāh Fazl Aḥmad Khān, since the biographers (Muslim) report that the frequent disturbances by angry traditionalists forced him to return to the more secluded environment of his native village.

In the years prior to his death in 1931, Rāmcandra, anxious to preserve his lifework for posterity, compiled a series of works that condense his thought and his teachings in a unique blend of Sufi and Tantric Kabīr-panthī theories and methods. These form the textual base on which this Sant discipline rests till today and constitute the core around which the *sampradāya* established by him and his master developed among his successors. Hence, they furnish us with the most important source for an analysis of the lines and modalities along which it developed.

The bulk of these texts was originally written in a fluent Urdu style that betrays the early education of this Kāyasth according to the pattern prevalent in the olden days when fluency in both Urdu and Persian were part of the standard requirements for members of this caste that enabled them to exercise their traditional role as clerks and scribes in the Mughal administration. However, most of these works were later rewritten or translated into Hindi, partly by the master himself and partly by his only son, Jag Mohan Nārāyaṅ, to enable a wider circulation among Rāmcandra's mainly Hindu disciples less acquainted with Urdu, especially in the post-Independence period. Interestingly, this process was accompanied by an absorption of the discipline's Islamic component into a Hindu context, since much of the original Sufi vocabulary expressed in Arabic and Persian was now rendered in a Sanskritized version more faithful to the Kabīr-panthī component with its largely Tantric terminology.

One of these works, *Tattva prabodhanī* ('The awakening of the subtle centres'), reveals that Rāmcandra perceived as his main task

simplifying the discipline in a natural process to counteract the decreasing spiritual capacities of humanity in the course of history. In his view, this was to be achieved through a cautious but continuous externalization of the ancient esoteric doctrines in order to guarantee their utility for the people of every era while at the same time ensuring their survival for generations to come. A key element in this development consists, in the author's opinion, in a renewed approach towards the 'science of the subtle centres', referred to alternatively as '*ilm-i laṭā'if*' or *cakra-vidyā*, a cornerstone of the Tantric tradition and the old Nāth-*sampradāya* as well as that of the *ṭariqa Mujaddidiyya*. Assuming that this could form a common or at least compatible base, he perceived the possibility that it could therefore ideally act as the vital link between the two traditions. In the introductory chapter of this work which, as the title suggests, deals extensively with this topic, Rāmcandra affirms:

After careful investigation, the great spiritual authorities of both traditions [Hindu and Muslim] have perpetuated this science over the centuries in order to preserve the treasure of its perfecting realization; in ancient times this did not require a detailed explanation regarding the colour, name, shape, property and sound vibration of each of these subtle centres; due to the innate virtues of their disciples, they did not feel the need to leave any written testimony or to engage in any further discussion of their knowledge, but transmitted it through direct experience; if ever necessary, they integrated this by the means of subtle hints that are hardly intelligible in our times....<sup>5</sup>

According to the author, this pattern was current in India during the Vedic and post-Vedic period and remained valid long after, and he continues:

In the Upaniṣad, the entire transmission of knowledge occurred through subtle hints (*ishāra*) expressed in the form of question and answer between disciple and master. The oral teachings of Janāb Kabīr

<sup>5</sup> Rāmcandra Saksenā, *Tattva prabodhanī*, Fatehgarh 1971, pp. 23-4 (1st Hindi ed. Fatehgarh 1941).

Janāb Kabīr, Nānak Ṣāhib, Dādū Ṣāhib and Tulsī Ṣāhib Hathrāsī still follow to a large extent this pattern....<sup>6</sup>

This last paragraph hints at an element of continuity which Rāmcandra perceives as connecting the ancient tradition of the Veda preserved by Brahmin orthodoxy with the medieval Sants right down to Tulsī Hathrāsī (1763-1843) who flourished in the region around Agra. But later Rāmcandra discloses some important information regarding the perception of the tradition into which he inserts himself as the last link in a long chain:

Thereafter, the process of disclosing through explicit descriptions and major details the hitherto hidden secrets [of the doctrine] has been undertaken by the blessed personalities of Janāb Alīmaqām Rāy Ṣāhib Śāligrām Sant, Janāb Devī Ṣāhib Sant Murādābādī and Paṇḍit Brahmaśankarjī Ṣāhib. But the way Mahāriṣi Śivbratlāl—may the *Paramātma* grant him the fruits of his efforts!—has taken up the challenge of unfolding it in an extremely rich and detailed way explaining its sacred and hidden secrets (*muqaddas o poshida bhed*) without any hindrance in front of the entire world, has so far remained unmatched.<sup>7</sup>

The author's tribute to these nineteenth- and twentieth-century Sants provides evidence for the sources that are likely to have inspired Rāmcandra in the development of his own *satsaṅg*. The evidence indicates that these are oriented along the lines of other, perhaps similar contemporary devotional currents and are helpful in understanding the immediate context that qualifies his role as a modern *sant*. The first name mentioned is that of Rāy Śāligrām alias *Huṣūr Mahārāj* (1828-98) who was the successor of Śiv Dayāl Siṅgh (Soāmijī, 1818-78) as the head of the Rādhāsoāmī community at Agra. A Kāyasth by birth like Rāmcandra, he organized the *satsaṅg* founded by his predecessor building up an efficient administration of its affairs, setting up rules and regulations for the devotional practices and editing and publishing the records of the oral

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

teachings delivered by his *satguru* thus providing a solid doctrinal and institutional framework for the growing number of adherents to the community.

His name goes along with that of Paṇḍit Brahmaśaṅkar Miśra (1861-1907), reverentially called 'Maharāj Śāhib' by his followers, who represents the third link in the Agra line of the Rādhasoāmīs. A Brahmin from Banaras employed as a high-ranking government official, he joined the *satsaṅg* at Agra in 1885 and was one of its leading figures thirteen years later, following the death of *Huṣūr Mahārāj*. His *samādhi-sthān*, erected in the precincts of his former residence at Banaras near Kabīr-Caurā, became the site of an annual *bhaṇḍārā* for his followers. Mahāriṣi Śivbratlāl (1860-1940), to whom Rāmcandra appears to have been particularly indebted, was a disciple of Rāy Śāligrām, who established his own *satsaṅg* at Gopiganj near Banaras in 1922.<sup>8</sup> A contemporary of Rāmcandra described by Caturvedī as 'a very able and intelligent person', he was the author of a number of Urdu works about different doctrinal aspects and also comprising biographies of numerous earlier Sants besides an extensive commentary on Kabīr's *Bijak*. However, his teachings occasionally disagree with those of the masters of the mainstream Rādhasoāmī *satsaṅgs* at Agra and Beas (Panjab).

Although Rāmcandra's teachings differ from those of all the personalities listed above, both from the point of view of methodology and some important doctrinal points, the former apparently drew inspiration from Śivbratlāl's works in using brief tales to illustrate the teachings of some famous and popular Sants.

Finally, the only name mentioned by Rāmcandra in relation to the last stage of display of the spiritual doctrine which is not directly related to the Rādhasoāmīs is Bābā Devī Śāhib Murādābādī (1841-1919), considered by Caturvedī as the first promulgator of the *santmat-satsaṅg* adaptation of the older Sant tradition.<sup>9</sup> Although his connection with Rāmcandra is not clear, he seems to bear some relation with the earlier mentioned Sant Tulsī Śāhib Hathrāsī, even if the two never met.

<sup>8</sup> See Paraśurām Caturvedī, *Uttar bhārat kī sant paramparā*, Allahabad 1964 (1st ed. vs 2007), p. 801.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 811-18.

Curiously, all four Sants listed by Rāmcandra take us back to Sant Tulsī Śāhib. This somewhat enigmatic figure, according to some sources, was the spiritual tutor of the founder of the Rādhasoāmī tradition. He apparently represents the principal link between the medieval Sant tradition and its revival in the eighteenth century, which embraces most of the modern Sants. His main work, the *Ghaṭ Rāmāyan*, intended as a sort of esoteric comment on the eponymous epos, consists largely of instructive dialogues between the author and a certain Phūl Dās, a *panthī* in the Dharmdāsī line going back to Kabīr. According to Mark Juergensmeyer who has studied the Rādhasoāmī tradition, in style and content this composition follows so closely the *Anurāg-sāgar* ('Ocean of Love'), a doctrinal text current with the Dharmadāsīs who attribute its authorship to Kabīr himself, that it can be safely assumed that Tulsī used it as a model for his own composition.

Unfortunately, to date no reliable information regarding possible links or affiliations of this Marathi saint to one of the institutionalized *panths* is available that could perhaps confirm the continuity in the transmission of this spiritual heritage. Also the connection between the later representatives of the revived Sant tradition, whose teachings evidently bear signs of a previous Sant-matrix, with Tulsī Sant Hathrāsī or any other authority of a regular *paramparā* remains as mysterious as that of their predecessors in the medieval period. In this sense, the limited information I could gather from the sources available to me regarding Rāmcandra's master Svāmī Brahmānand's affiliation to the Kabīr-panth does not represent an exception but puts him in line with the often observed pattern that has these saints appear suddenly on the scene almost out of nowhere and without a traceable genealogy.

But there is a fundamental difference. Unlike most of his Sant predecessors, the *paramparā* initiated by Rāmcandra does have direct affiliation with a Sufi *silsila* that furnished its leaders with the necessary background for the elaboration of a true spiritual synthesis between the subcontinent's most widely diffused sacred traditions. This provides us concrete proof of the often theorized encounter between Islamic and Hindu spirituality within the folds of the Sants' teachings and thereby pleads for further investigations aimed at discovering traces of similar links to other lineages or spiritual communities (e.g. the Rādhasoāmīs).

Rāmcandra continued to teach some of the old Sant themes having adapted them to the time in which he lived (e.g. no caste barriers, in favour of remarriage of widows, against ritualized idol-worship and the priestly monopoly held over it by the Brahmins, etc.). And in the process of the activation of the subtle centres he forged the Mujaddidī and the Tantric Kabīr-panthī teachings into a new practically oriented discipline (*abhyās*) by integrating both. By including the total of ten (5 plus 5) subtle centres (*laṭā'if*, pl. of *laṭīfa*) into the threefold cosmological hierarchy laid out by the Dharmadāsīs, Rāmcandra seems to favour the silent invocation (*zīkr-i khafī*) of a chosen formula (these can differ but the equal validity of both Hindu and Islamic formulas or syllables is stressed). This process of invocation follows a progressive pattern of increasing interiorization of the method, the efficacy of which is said to be based on the subtle sound vibration (*surati*) contained in the intimate essence (*zāt, bīja*) of the formulas, words, terms or syllables employed during the ritual of their repeated rhythmical recitation (*zīkr, japa*).

The use of the entire range of invocations comprised by this practical discipline (*abhyāsa*) is supposed to culminate after having gone through a series of contemplations or visualizations (*murāqabāt, samādhiyān*) in an unlimited vision of the Supreme Principle (*al-Ḥaqq, Zāt-i pāk, Paramātmā*) in the purely transcendent sphere of the *Satya-loka* or *Maqām-i Ḥaqq*.

Much stress is laid thereby on the responsibility held by the spiritual guide. His effusion of grace (*kṛpā dhārā, dayā* or *faiṣ*) lifts the neophyte's inner states (*ḥālāt*) in a sort of sudden attraction (*jazba, saḥaja ākarṣan śakti*) to the higher spheres of self in the spiritual dominion (*'ālam-i rūḥāniyya*), beyond the boundaries of the ego-tied soul corrupted by all sorts of vices and weaknesses (*fanā-i nafs*). Because of the relative ease which allows the follower of this discipline under the guidance of the perfect master (*pīr-i kāmīl*) to experience since the very beginning of his spiritual career such sublime degrees of inner beatitude as are usually reserved for the more advanced stages of the path, this *sampradāya* is called by our Mujaddidī-Kabīr-panthīs either *saḥaja-yoga* (the 'natural, spontaneous or easy yoga') or *ānanda-yoga* (the 'yoga of beatitude').

According to Rāmcandra and his successors, their discipline integrates the preliminary level of yoga represented by *haṭha-yoga*, which

remains concerned with the reintegration of the inferior, gross elements of the phenomenal world achieved through the unfolding of the subtle centres situated between the bottom of the back and the heart-region, into the more intellectual perspective of *rāja-yoga*, the royal discipline that contemplates the possibilities inshrined in the heart-region (*hrdaya-cakra, maqām-i dil*). This, according to Rāmcandra, is in consonance with the Mujaddidī wisdom regarding the five subtleties located inside the human breast (*maqām-i sinā*) which need to be reactivated or awakened through the repeated invocation of the sacred Name (*ism-i zāt o muqaddas*), directed gradually on each of these in order to accomplish their reintegration into, or union with, their celestial principles or archetypes associated with the cerebral region in the human skull.

Through this conception based on the science of the subtle centres, the ancient knowledge of India's sages is claimed to have remained accessible and alive well into the twentieth century to the benefit of both religious groups. In this sense, it appears to be no contradiction but rather a confirmation of the Sant line of ideas that parts of it have been preserved and perpetuated for centuries by the country's Muslim elite. Thus, Rāmcandra, the householder yogi from Fatehgarh, constructs a fascinating image of an integral path that is apt to lead those who follow it steadily under the supervision of the spiritual master towards the peaks of esoteric wisdom, weaving into each other the threads offered to him by virtue of his double initiation in imitation of the spirit of his famous fifteenth-century predecessor at Banaras, Kabīr the weaver.