

1 **Baba Kinaram and the Aghor Tradition**

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1 **The Background**

Legend has it that an enlightened saint of north India, Baba Kaluram by name, who lived in the holy city of Banaras at a place called the Krin-Kund, sometime in the eighteenth century, was in the habit of feeding chickpeas to the skulls lying in the cremation ground of Harishchandra Ghat on the bank of the holy river Ganges. Even today it is not unusual to find skulls in the sands of the river as many times they do not burn fully during the process of cremation and some of them end up either in the water or on the sandbank. Other times people give a 'water burial' to the corpse if it was the result of an untimely death. Even in those instances, the skulls often end up in the sands of the Ganges. Baba Kaluram's modus operandi was quite simple. He would call the skulls lying in the cremation ground to him, and when they came to him, he would give them chickpeas to munch on. One day, however, this practice of his was interrupted. Unlike the other days, the skulls did not come to him when he called. Baba Kaluram was an enlightened saint. He soon divined that another saint by the name of Baba Kinaram, had arrived on the scene, and using the Tantric practice of immobilization (*stambhan kriyā*), he had prevented the skulls from responding to Baba Kaluram.

Baba Kinaram walked over to him and, as they met, he asked Baba Kaluram to return to his place of residence instead of indulging in such a play. Both saints realized that they were in the presence of greatness. Baba Kaluram decided to test Baba Kinaram and told him that he was hungry. At this Baba Kinaram looked at the holy river Ganges and said: "Mother Ganga, give us a fish". Immediately, a big fish jumped out of the water. They roasted it on a pyre and ate it to their satisfaction. Next Baba Kaluram saw a corpse floating down the river and mentioned it to Baba Kinaram. Baba Kinaram looked at the river and said that it was, in fact, alive, and not a corpse. At this Baba Kaluram asked him to call it to them if it was alive. He called out to the corpse to come to the shore, and it came to the riverbank. Baba Kinaram went to it, asked it to get up and the corpse stood up as a living young man. Baba Kinaram asked him to go home. When he went home everyone was amazed to see him alive. His mother brought him back to Baba Kinaram and gave him the young man to be in his service, since he had brought him back to life. Her thinking was that the life that she had given to her son had already ended, this new life was bequeathed upon him by Baba Kinaram, and therefore it was best spent in his service. Baba Kinaram accepted him and named him Ramjiyavanram (one who had been brought to life by the grace of God). On seeing all this Baba Kaluram is said to have revealed his true form to Baba Kinaram (as Guru Dattatreya), and then brought him to the holy monastery of Krin-Kund where he initiated Baba Kinaram into the Aghor tradition.¹ Baba Kinaram began to live at the Krin-Kund Sthal from that time on. This event is said to have happened around the Hindu Vikram Samvat year of 1754 [c. 1697] (Shastri 1959, 139; Chaturvedi 1973, 102-3).

Baba Kinaram is a well-known and respected saint of Banaras. He is said to have founded the Kinaram Sthal in Kashi which flourishes to this day, in the Ravindrapuri locality. In fact, he is credited not only with rejuvenating the Aghor tradition in the seventeenth century, he is also admired for bringing a seamless integration of *saguṇa* Ram-bhakti element of the Vaishnava tradition (devotees of lord Vishnu) and the *nirguṇa*-yoga and the Aghor tradition (devotees of lord Shiva and the Goddess Shakti) of the mystical quest, as reflected in his life-stories and poetry.² He is respected not only as a person of great mystical achievement, but also as a social reformer and poet who selflessly worked for the benefit of Society. To serve others he established eight different monasteries, four that belong to the Aghor tradition, and four that follow the Vaishnava tradition. His hagiography mentions that he traveled extensively – from Bengal in the east to Baluchistan in the west – covering also the Himalayas in between. If true, that might account for a variety of words and expressions including Urdu words and elements of Sufi imagery in some of his poetry. There abound numerous legends about him in the city of Banaras and in the states of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh Gujarat and Maharashtra, folk musicians sing poetry composed

¹ A possible date for this initiation has been mentioned as c. 1757 (VS 1814) (Chaturvedi 1972, 692). This seems a little doubtful as Baba Kinaram gives the date for his *Viveksār*, a treatise on the Avadhūta tradition, as 1755 (VS 1812) (Anand 1965, 33).

² The terms *saguṇa* and *nirguṇa* form a part of the Hindu spiritual vocabulary. They can refer to the attributes of the divine, and they can also refer to the traditions based on the veneration of those attributes. *Saguṇa* implies, in the context of the divine, as having attributes, such as a form. These attributes, however, all emerge from the three *guṇas*: *sattva* 'purity', *rajas* 'activity, passion', and *tamas* 'darkness, ignorance'. *Nirguṇa* refers to a conception of the divine which is formless, or without attributes.

by him on various occasions, the *sant-sampradāya* (also *santamat*, tradition of the saints in India) holds him in the highest esteem as a saint of the most sublime mystical accomplishments, and people from all walks of life visit his monastery every day seeking succor from social, physical and spiritual ills. He presents a uniquely syncretic personality as a saint, yogi, reformer and poet. In the first part of this book we discuss his persona, his social and spiritual contributions, and briefly look at some of his writings within the social and political milieu of his time. In the second part of this book, we present a translation and commentary of his most famous work on yoga and self-realization, the *Viveksār*.

1.1 Aghora, Avadhūta

A brief discussion of the terms Aghora and Avadhūta will be helpful here. It is not easy to define the word Aghora. It is often asked whether ‘Aghora’ is a sect, or a path to enlightenment, or even a position or state achieved after experiencing illumination. Even the different terms used for its practitioner – Aughar or Aghori – exhibit some uncertainty.³ From a historical perspective, it is evident that many of the practices of the Aughar seekers such as living in the cremation ground, holding a skull in their hands, eating out of the skull-bowl etc. are not different from the practices of the erstwhile Kāpālikas, as is amply evidenced by the survey done by scholars like Lorenzen (1972). It is also clear that this mode of spiritual practice is ancient by the example that Gombrich cites of the cremation ground dwelling Shaiva ascetic Mahakal who was converted to Buddhism (Gombrich 2002, 158-60). The antiquity of the term Aghor is attested to by the *Vedas*, such as the hymn 10.85.44 of the *Ṛgveda* which describes a terrifying God Rudra who rules benevolently over herbs and provides blessings. The *Taittirīya* and *Vājasaneyī Samhitās* of the *Yajurveda* mention Rudra’s auspicious form where he is said to be united with his feminine aspect called Śivā.⁴ According to Törzsök (2012) even before the pre-tantric Shaivism the word ‘Aghora’ was important because the Aghora mantra of the *Vedas* is amongst the five mantras of the *Pāsupatasūtras*. These five were later adopted by the *Śaiva Siddhānta* where, then, the Aghora mantra became associated with the south looking face of Shiva. Again, the invocation of the Vaidik deities ‘Aghora’ (the undreadful or benign), ‘Ghora’ (the dreadful) and ‘Ghoratara’ (more dreadful than the dreadful) became assimilated in the persona of the goddess in the *Śākta* tantras (Törzsök 2012, 2). Names such as ‘Aghoraghaṇṭa’ can be found in the literature of the eighth century poet Bhavabhūti, but they are not stated as belonging to the Aghora sect, rather, they are called a Somasiddhāntī

³ Gupta mentions in her thesis that the word ‘Aghar’ is less pejorative than the word ‘Aghori’ (1993, 2). Briggs had a similar opinion in his detailed study (1938, 71, 224). Other scholars regard this as a regional linguistic differentiation where “in Panjab they are called ‘Sarbhāṅgī’, in Madras ‘Brahmaniṣṭha’, in Bengal ‘Aghorī’ and in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, ‘Aughar’” (Chaturvedi 1972, 687).

⁴ *aghoracakṣur patighnyedhi śivā paśubhyah sumanāh suvarcāh* (*Ṛgveda* 10.85.44), translated as “Not evil-eyed, no slayer of thy husband, bring weal to cattle, radiant, gentlehearted” (Griffith 1896, 465); *yā te rudra śivā tanūr aghorā pāpkāśinī* (*Taittirīya Samhitā* 4.5.1.1), translated as “That body of thine, O Rudra, which is kindly, Not dread, with auspicious look” (Keith 1914, 195). The same verse from the *Vājasaneyī Samhitā* (16.2) is translated by Griffith as “With that auspicious form of thine, mild, Rudra! Pleasant to behold” (Griffith 1899, 140).

or a Kāpālīka (see Wilson 1901). However, since the term *siddhānta* is associated with this form of the tradition, it can be called a path to enlightenment. In the literature published by the Kinaram tradition, it is also called a position or state that one achieves after attaining illumination. In its most general sense, 'Aghora' represents an ancient set of practices, founded on the spiritual principle of non-duality, and expressed in the social practice of non-discrimination. This Sanskrit word implies "that which is not terrible or frightening" (Barrett 2008, 5-6), although it can sometimes be used also for "that which is extremely terrible or frightening", thus implying the opposite of its commonly understood meaning (Chaturvedi 1972, 686). At the present time, amongst the Kinarami Aghars, it is often looked at as a religious path to awakening which includes yoga, tantra, *bhakti* 'devotion', and *seva* 'service to others'. The contemporary changes in this tradition reinforce the idea that service to leprosy patients and other disadvantaged segments of society are as efficacious as the erstwhile practice of inhabiting cremation grounds, riverbanks, isolated places, jungles and mountain caves, to attain enlightenment (Barrett 2008, xiii). Following the principle of non-duality, this practice of the Aghars is informed by the conviction that the *Brahman*, the supreme godhead or the creator of this universe, pervades every atom of the universe and therefore, everything is pure and divine. The notion of purity and pollution associated with ingestible substances, and high and low in social interactions, are a product of the human mind, not a creation of the divine.

In the literature published by Baba Kinaram's tradition, two 'houses' of Aghars are mentioned:

Two 'houses' of the Aghars are well known - Himālī and Gīrnālī. Lord Shiva's abode in the Himalayas makes it the place of origin of the Aghor tradition. A scholar has written that it is a common perception amongst Aghars that Gorakhnath was the founder of their doctrine. This is the Himālī 'house' [...] Gorakhnath's influence was very strong in the 'Gorakṣa nation' of Nepal. With passage of time the practitioners of this tradition came down to the plains. Since they came from the Himalayas, they were known as Himālī.

The other venerable master of the Avadhūta doctrine, Dattatreya, incarnated as the son of Ṛṣi Atri and Anasuya. He is considered an incarnation of Viṣṇu. His region lies to the south of the Vindhya giri mountains [...] Avadhūta saints regard the Gīrnār mountain as a most sacred place. At the Gīrnār mountain peak there exist the sandals of Śrī Dattatreya as well as the Kamaṇḍalu pilgrimage spot [...] Therefore, the Aghars who belong to the tradition of Śrīdatta's place are known as Gīrnārī. (Chaturvedi 1973, 76-7)⁵

We do not find such a distinction between the Himali and Girnali 'houses' of the Aghor tradition in scholarly literature, we can even consider these terms as sectarian in nature, but this distinction seems evident, and of some importance, in the city of Banaras. In the year 2021 when the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh Yogi Adityanath came to meet with the *Pīṭhādhiśvar* (head or chief monk of a monastery) of the Kinaram Sthal, Baba Gautam Ram, the

⁵ Unless otherwise specified, all translations are by the Author.

press published this news event as ‘a meeting of two *Pīṭhādhiśvars*’. It was highlighted that these are two distinct traditions where Yogi Adityanath belongs to the ‘Nath’ tradition, while Baba Gautam Ram belongs to the ‘Aghor’ tradition.⁶

Another conception of the two parallel streams stems from the distinction between the ‘Aghor’ and the ‘Kānpaṭā’ (split-eared) practitioners (Briggs 1938, 30-1; Chaturvedi 1972, 688; White 1996, 99-100). As we have seen, there are many different religious groups with whom Aghor practices are said to be associated. These include the Pashupatas, the Kapalikas, the Bauddhas, the Siddhas, the Naths, the Vaishnavas and more recently, with those who belong to the tradition of the saints (the *santmat*). Historically, there has existed a significant amount of exchange of ideas, practices and even personnel between these groups. For example, the Kapalikas could be either Shaiva or Buddhist, though by around the fourteenth century they largely got absorbed into the Nath and the Aghor traditions (Lorenzen 1972, 53), or that “all manner of Śaivite and Siddha clans, lineages or sects [...] funneled themselves into the Nath suborders” (White 1996, 99-100). Some texts mention that the nine Naths who formulated the group were originally Buddhist Siddhacāryas who converted when the roof of their monastery collapsed. In the tradition of Maharashtra, these nine Naths are also equated with the ‘Nine Narayanas’ of the Avadhūta sampradāya founded by Dattatreya (White 1996, 74, 106, 396 fn. 64). Thus, the category of the ‘Naths’ became a kind of confederate assimilation for various kinds of religious practitioners. Even though they may have been subsumed under that category, it does not mean that the various groups gave up their earlier practices. Thus, based on the guru-disciple relationship, there came to be several parallel strands of practices within, and alongside, the Nath tradition. For example, Jalandharnath, the guru-brother of Matsyendranath, was an Aghor, while Matsyendranath was a Kānpaṭā ‘split ear’ yogi (Briggs 1938, 67; Dwivedi 1981, 7, 75). Matsyendranath is said to have systematized *haṭhayoga* in the Nath tradition, itself an amalgamation of the Yogini Kaula and the Siddha Kaula systems. Even under the title of *haṭhayoga* we have at least two variants. One variant which is propounded by Gorakhnath, comprises of six limbs (*ṣaḍāṅga-yoga*).⁷ The other variant emanates from Dattatreya, who is the son of Ṛṣi Markandeya, and his system comprises of eight limbs (*aṣṭāṅga-yoga*). Some of these yogic streams describe their practices as those of an ‘Avadhūta’, which is how Baba Kinaram describes the tradition that he delineates in the *Viveksār*.

We saw above that while describing the Himali and Girnali ‘houses’ the words ‘Aghor’ and ‘Avadhūta’ have been used as synonyms. This is because for the saints they really are synonymous, but some scholars also understand them to be so (see Chaturvedi 1972, 695; Gupta 1993).

The term *avadhūta* comes from the root *dhu* plus *ava*, meaning ‘shaking of’, ‘removing worldly ties’. The Avadhūta is thus an ascetic who has

⁶ See *Aghor, Nath Sampradaya Come Together*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xTRTjhSxpX8&t=9s>.

⁷ Gorakhnath is credited with having authored many books. In some of them, such as the *Siddhasiddhāntapaddhati* (1981, 68) he propounds the eight-limbed yoga. But in others, such as the *Gorakṣaśatak*, he describes the six-limbed yoga.

shaken off worldly existence, having achieved liberating knowledge. (Rigopoulos 1998, 51 fn. 48)

The sixth chapter of the *Siddhasiddhāntapaddhati*, a text attributed to Gorakhnath, also lists the attributes of an Avadhūta as a yogi who is free from all bondage, and has supreme control over the mind, the body, and all the senses (Shrivastava 1981). It is a state where

pleasure or pain, virtue or vice, friend or foe does not affect him. To him fragrant sandal paste is of the same value as mud. This state is described as the 'Avadhuta' state. (Mallik 1954, 19)

The Avadhūta tradition seems to have been founded by Dattatreya, and its echoes can be found in the *Upaniṣads*, amongst the Buddhist Siddhas in their *dhūtāṅga* practices, as also amongst the Naths. In the *Turiyātītopaniṣad*, for example, Brahma asks Vishnu to explain to him the path of the Avadhūta, and Vishnu does so, explaining that such a person rises above the notion of the created world and abides in the non-dual way of life (Acharya 1971, 541-3).⁸ In the *Darśanopaniṣad*, which forms a part of the *Sāmaveda*, sage Sāṃkr̥ti asks the great yogi Dattatreya about the path of yoga.⁹ Dattatreya explains it to him and ends his discourse with the non-dual state of existence (Ayyangar 1938, 148). Kinaram states clearly that he gained knowledge of the Avadhūta path from Dattatreya. The popular understanding of Dattatreya as a God-figure embodying Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva probably emerged from the Puranic lore, but his antecedents go far back, and scholars point to the existence of two Dattatreya figures, one a mythical one, and the other, a historical one who authored several works around the twelfth-thirteenth centuries (White 1996, 141; Rigopoulos 1998, 45). But Dattatreya has also been described as an Aghori (Briggs 1938, 75). In fact, as Rigopoulos points out, he might have been the first Aghori:

According to a popular tradition, Dattātreyā is the eternal guru of all Nāthas and Śiva is the first Nātha. In this way Śiva himself is made into a disciple of Dattātreyā! Datta is also said to have been the first Aghori. (Rigopoulos 1998, 105 fn. 35)

The descriptions of the appearance (naked or clad in a patched garment made of rags) and philosophy (free of the notion of the pair of opposites, right or wrong) of an Aghar and Avadhūta are such that it becomes apparent they are one and the same. There can, of course, be more than one kind of Avadhūta, such as the Brahmāvdhūta, Śaivāvdhūta, Virāvdhūta, and Kulāvdhūta, and of these, the characters enumerated for the Virāvdhūtas, according to the tradition, with long unkempt hair; wearing *rudrākṣa* 'elaeocarpus ganitrus' or bone necklaces; remaining naked, wearing a *kaupīn* 'loincloth' or even saffron clothes; smearing ashes or red sandalwood paste on their body; carrying a stick, deerskin, axe, leg of a cot, hourglass drum,

⁸ Olivelle dates *Turiyātītopaniṣad* to the fourteenth or the fifteenth century (1992, 9).

⁹ Flood dates *Darśanopaniṣad*, as a part of a group of *upaniṣads* called the *Yoga Upaniṣads* to around 100 BC to 300 CE (2000, 96).

cymbals; smoking *gānjā* 'marijuana' and drinking liquor, fit Aughaṛs very well (Chaturvedi 1973, 76).

Dattatreya's lore is so widespread that it is hard to deny his influence, either via the Puranic lore or via the texts said to be authored by him, on the various yogic and tantric streams present in India. But it is the syncretic nature of Dattatreya that is of importance to us while looking at the tradition initiated by Baba Kinaram. Dattatreya, beginning with his birth as the son of Ṛṣi Atri and his wife Anasūya, was later thought of as an embodiment of Vishnu as a yogi with Tantrik characters in the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, and then conflated into the *trimūrti* 'three faced' of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva (Rigopoulos 1998, 27, 29, 249). It is because Dattatreya can simultaneously be a Shaiva, Shakta or Vaishnava yogi can we perceive the sub-stream of Shakta Tantrism within the *haṭhayogic* Nath tradition, as well as the Vaishnava element within Kinarami Aughaṛs, mediated via the *sant* tradition (Shankar 2011, 154).

1.2 Baba Kinaram's Literature

Unlike the writings of Gorakhnath or Kabir or Tulsidas, Baba Kinaram is not so well known, justifiably, because not all his creations have been discovered. Nevertheless, there exists literature to be discovered if one is willing to look. The mystical poetry penned down by the followers of the *santmat*, the tradition of the saints from the seventeenth century onwards, represents such a pool of literary creations which has, as yet not been fully explored. In 1959 when Acharya Dharmendra Brahmachari Shastri published his study on the *Sarbhaṅga Sampradāya* the world of Hindi literature saw a whole world of literature from such unknown or overlooked saints. While it is true that many of the saint poets of the *Sarbhaṅga Sampradāya* were probably not as educated or proficient in the *chanda-śāstra* (treatise on the rules of poetry) as the luminaries like Tulsidas, what those saint poets produced, and the impact they had on the rural and urban masses amongst whom they lived, is significant. Amongst them, the name of Kinaram is very well known.

Scholars in India describe the Aghor tradition as a link between the Dattatreya tradition and Gorakhnath's tradition (Chaturvedi 1972, 690). The organic intermingling of the Aghor and the Nath traditions leads them to share a significant amount of their ideas and practices. It is also true that the language of the whole *sant sampradāya* shares a common vocabulary which surges forth from Gorakhnath but finds distant connections also in the songs of the Vajrayāni Buddhists. The words related to the subtle body, the sequence and elements of the emergence of the creation, the male and female aspects involved in such creation, the body as a tiny holographic representation of the cosmos, the necessity of acquiring full knowledge of the body, the importance of the guru on the spiritual path, they are all shared by saints of the *santmat*. Baba Kinaram's poetry also reflects this shared vocabulary, leading to the belief that his philosophy does not seem to be very different from that of the saints of the *sarbhaṅga sampradāya*, it is very much a representation of it (Chaturvedi 1972, 687).

Baba Kinaram is an intriguing personality, both as a saint and as a poet, in many ways. While he is more of a saint than a poet, it is from his poetry that we get to know about his religio-philosophical convictions. Judging by his portrayal in his hagiography, we can even call him an activist saint,

who, according to his published hagiography, seems to have come up with a unique way of passive resistance by getting himself arrested on purpose, going to jail, then creating havoc within the jail to force the rulers to negotiate with him. He was a saint who not only blessed people, he could also curse them with equal facility if he thought that was what they merited. As a poet he presents a remarkable confluence of philosophy and sentiments of various traditions in one single place and persona. Some of the texts attributed to him have a strong yoga and Nath flavor to them, while other texts display a strong *saguna* element where most prominently he shows his bhakti, his devotion to Ram, but also simultaneously praises Hanuman and Vishnu and Shiva. Still other poems attributed to him display a markedly Tantrik and transgressive element, and a few *padas* 'stanzas' reflect his amity with Islam. Add to this mix a plethora of oft repeated legends of performing various kinds of miracles, and we get a quintessentially syncretic personality in text and in deed who defies categorization yet excites curiosity. He also makes a fascinating study of how the finer and distinct strands of the Aghor, Tantrik, Nath, and Bhakti traditions have unfolded or coalesced at the cusp of what we call the medieval literature in Hindi.

1.3 Baba Kinaram's Legacy and Message

In addition to his literary contributions, Baba Kinaram is credited with a resurgence of the Aghor tradition in our time. He has brought together in word and deed the Vaishnavas and the Shaivas and the yogis and the Tantriks. His writings seem to have inspired numerous saints of the sarbhaṅga sampradāya, Naths and yogis, and his monastery displays non-ostentatious harmony with people of all religions and castes. At Krin-Kund, at the sacred pool with healing powers, on any given day a large percentage of the families who visit to take a dip are Muslim. This is not accidental. Aghor philosophy is fundamentally opposed to discrimination based on caste, class or religion, even gender, and Kinaram has inspired many to go beyond such parochial notions.

Baba Kinaram was a *Siddha Mahātmā* 'enlightened saint'. He had neither attraction nor repulsion towards anyone. But he was also a *karmayogi* (a yogi who believes in performing good deeds), he was generous to his devotees, he was very aware of the needs of society. The tradition that he started which, according to some people is now known as that of Kinarami Aughars, is progressing both with his message and his mode of ascetic practices. Aghor, which was once regarded as totally detached from society, is now well integrated with it. This new current appears to flow smoothly with the time in which it finds itself. It is with the intention to throw some light on the life and legacy of Baba Kinaram that we present in this book a translation and commentary of his *Viveksār*.

1.4 Aghoreshwar Mahaprabhu Bhagwan Ram

Inspired by Baba Kinaram's legacy of service Aghoreshwar Mahaprabhu Baba Bhagwan Ram Ji of his lineage, founded the Kusht Seva Ashram (Leprosy Service Hospital) in Banaras which has served leprosy patients in the hundreds of thousands. To understand the present state of Baba Kinaram's

tradition, it is necessary to mention a few words about the life of Bhagwan Ram Ji who, during the days of his *sādhana*, was known simply as Aughar Baba. When he attained enlightenment, established the society named Shri Sarveshwari Samooh in 1961, and constructed the leprosy hospital at Parao, Varanasi, he became known as Avadhūt Bhagwan Ram. With the success and spread of his social programs, newspapers and devotees began to address him as Aghoreshwar Mahaprabhu Bhagwan Ram. Most of his long-time devotees, though, just referred to him as Sarkar Baba. He was initiated at the Krin-Kund Sthal by Baba Rajeshwar Ram in 1951, performed austere practices in the cremation grounds and Ganga's riverbank from the city of Banaras to the city of Bastar, quickly attained spiritual success at a very young age, and chose to put the Aghor tradition into social service.

The process of social service that Baba Kinaram had initiated in his own lifetime worked according to the nature and enthusiasm of the abbots who came after him. It was Sarkar Baba who really initiated and executed a program to first serve the leprosy patients in the city of Banaras and its hinterland, and then he began to work to end the scourge of dowry in Hindu marriages, near-bankruptcy of poor people during death rituals, to educate poor children, and to promote the status of women in society. His charismatic personality and the faith of his devotees established his organization as a genuine social service organization, and his own persona as that of a true saint. Although his own guru, Baba Rajeshwar Ram, wanted him to take the seat of the Krin-Kund after him, Baba Bhagwan Ram resisted that idea, and leaving the age-old tradition of Krin-Kund intact, he developed the new strain of Aughar *sādhus* under the auspices of Shri Sarveshwari Samooh. All the prominent saints of Baba Bhagwanram Ji's disciple tradition have not only established their own ashrams, but the sentiment of service with which he had initiated medical treatment, education, performance of marriage and last rites at a minimal cost etc. are all evident in these new ashrams too.

It was Baba Bhagwanram Ji who, to alleviate his guru's concern about who would succeed to the seat of Krin-Kund Sthal, established Gautam Ram, a young boy of nine years, in the year 1978, as the next abbot of the Sthal. Baba Bhagwanram had also initiated the task of renovating the Krin-Kund Sthal during the lifetime of his own guru Baba Rajeshwar Ram. That project has really taken off under the leadership of Baba Gautamram Ji. After Sarkar Baba passed away in the year 1992, Baba Gautam Ram initiated his own program of development and integration of the Sthal. The *samādhis*¹⁰ of the old Krin-Kund, the wooden seat of Baba Kinaram, and the yogi's fire (*dhūni*) established by him still exist, but the rest of the Sthal has transformed completely. Its campus has become much more open and other than the *samādhi* of Baba Bhagwanram Ji, other buildings have been constructed to accommodate the ever-growing number of devotees. Even more important than this construction, however, is that the Sthal conducts medical camps; the school in Baba Bhagwanram Ji's birth village, Gundi, had already been constructed several years ago and they are functioning smoothly now; a food distribution area, *annakshetra*, has been opened in the city of Banaras to feed the poor. All the ashrams associated with the Sthal also distribute clothes and blankets to the needy during the winter months, they

¹⁰ In Yoga, *samādhi* refers to a deep state of meditation with the mind successfully fixed on the divine being. It can also refer to a saint's act of leaving his body. Very commonly, it also refers to place of entombment of a holy person.

hold treatment camps, and they make every attempt to cooperate in fulfilling the needs of all the sections of society. Even the monastery in Baba Kinaram's own birth-village of Ramgarh has been renovated, and now the whole area is stipulated to be developed as a pilgrimage and tourism center. Baba Kinaram was never the one to just sit in one place, his eleventh abbot of the Krin-Kund Sthal Baba Gautamram Ji maintains that tradition but continues programs of social service in a much more organized and comprehensive way. During the COVID-19 pandemic they made such an extensive effort to feed people and provide the minimum basic amenities, that the Prime Minister of India Honorable Narendra Modi himself wrote a letter of appreciation to the Sthal for its contribution. Today, the Sthal looks very different from what it used to be in the time of Sarkar Baba's guru Baba Rajeshwar Ram. Its programs are now very broad, and it is moving towards becoming an all-India phenomenon [figs 1-2].

2 Hagiography, and Baba Kinaram's Life Story

Coming to grips with the biography of a saint is not an easy task. This is because unlike men and women who have a 'normal' sensory perception of the world, the saints, by their very achievements, transcend this limitation. Therefore, in the estimation of those who adore or venerate them, their capabilities are understood to be super-human, often god-like, and beyond the pale of common human understanding. This pattern seems to apply to all sacred persons all over the world, irrespective of their religious affiliation. Such sacred persons, invariably, have a certain pattern to their lives which is discernible, and which is common to the realm of the enlightened. For their devotees, the component of 'holiness' in their sacred persona often hinges on their capacity for the 'miraculous', as the presence of a higher power is always presumed. With specific reference to the hagiographies in India, drawing upon the work of Callewaert and Snell (1994), certain common patterns can be enumerated as: 1) they may not be historically accurate, or they may even be fanciful, but they reveal not only the core of the tradition, but also how the tradition propagates; 2) such hagiographies are mostly reverential; 3) they are an attempt by the hagiography writer to be in the company of the saint (*satsaṅga*); 4) An attempt to mould the knowledge and perception of the reader towards the specifics of the tradition; 5) a certain portrayal of the tradition in 'competition' with other traditions; 6) as the interest in the saint grows, later hagiographies, paradoxically, have more details than the ones which are closer chronologically to the lifetime of the saint; 7) legitimization of the theological authority, most likely the guru. Given such common patterns, there exists a tension between the quest of the researcher for the historical truth, and the quest of the devotee to revel in the 'mythological' company of their venerated saint.

We can look at several examples that corroborate these patterns. One of the most striking examples comes from the writings on the life of saint-poet Kabir. Gangasharan Shastri, who used to be the administrative head of the Kabirchaura Math in Varanasi, writes with devotion that Kabir was neither of the Kori caste, nor was he initiated into Islam. He was a 'self-manifested' (*svayambhū*) *puruṣa* 'primaeval man', a yogi of infinite lifetimes (Shastri 1991, *Prastāvanā* 17). About the moment of his birth, he writes:

An auspicious voice boomed from heaven, “stop wherever you are! Now the sun has risen. Everyone will receive the light of peace. The sun named Kabir has set foot on the earth from the east”. (1991, *Prathamāloka* 2)

Further, he describes the scene of Kabir’s arrival on earth,

It was absolutely silent above the sacred Lahartara lake of Kashi at mid-night of the full moon of the month of *Jyēṣṭha* on Monday. The ghosts and the spirits were dancing. In the midst of them Lord Shiva was blowing on the horn whistle. Just a little distance away was the hut of Swami Aṣṭānanda, where he was chanting on the name of Ram seated in his yogic posture. Suddenly a brilliant light from the orb of the sky pierced the clouds and descended on the lotuses on Lahartara lake and turned into a newborn baby. All the directions became illuminated with light. Its halo permeated all across the lake. On it the lotus blossoms began to bloom. The water creatures commenced their love-play. In every corner of the earth an absolute peace was felt. People began to chant on the name of Ram in their minds spontaneously. (1991, *Prathamāloka* 3)

Shastri then relates the story how the weavers Neema and Niru were miraculously led to that place and they picked up the child, how Lord Vishnu’s Narasimha form intervened to prevent the circumcision ceremony for Kabir, how Kabir is a part incarnation of Vishnu, how Kabir defeats Gorakhnath in debate with magic and then gives him the name Ramrakshadas, how when the crowds of devotees began to disturb his meditations he filled a bottle with Ganges water, then drinking it as if it was alcohol, walked through the bazaar with his hand on the shoulder of a prostitute devotee etc. Shastri relates in some detail Sikandar Lodi’s attempts to kill Kabir. He recounts that the sultan had him tied in chains and thrown into the Ganga to drown, but as soon as his body touched the water, all the chains broke, and he emerged on the riverbank seated on a deerskin. When this attempt failed, sultan Lodi had him locked in a hut, and the hut was set on fire. Everything turned to ashes except Kabir, who came out of the ordeal with a divine glow on him. The sultan made a third attempt. He had a huge pit dug and buried Kabir in it. Within a moment Kabir came out of it. As his fourth attempt, the sultan tried to have Kabir trampled under the feet of a crazy elephant, but once again, the man-lion incarnation of Lord Vishnu scared the elephant away (Shastri 1991, 151-5). According to Shastri, Kabir was born in the Vikram Samvat year 1456 (c. 1399) and left his body in the Vikram Samvat year 1575 (c. 1518). These dates inform us that Kabir lived for about 120 years. While not necessarily agreeing with this total age, Lorenzen writes that it is “almost certain that Kabir flourished in the last years of the fifteenth century and first years of the sixteenth” (1991, xii).

Even though these stories and the glowing descriptions about the divinity of saint Kabir may sound like myths to a person from outside the tradition, we can almost feel the devotional ecstasy as Shastri describes each of these moments in detail. In the process of recounting these events, Shastri also brings together the folk-stories that, most likely, the devotees of the Kabir tradition are already familiar with, and therefore their faith becomes reinforced in the retelling of these stories. These stories leave no room for anyone to think other than that Kabir was a divine incarnation, in no way was he just a normal human being.

We see a similar pattern in the hagiography of *sant* Dadu Dayal. His birth, or incarnation, has also been portrayed as miraculous. Although Callewaert has painstakingly demonstrated in his research that the first iterations of Dadu Dayal's hagiography say that he was born in the house of a cotton-carder, later recensions portray a story where he was found floating in a river on a lotus by a Brahman merchant of Ahmedabad by the name of Lodiram (Callewaert 1988, 19). The Hindi Book *Śrī Dādūvānī* presents an elaborate story where Lodiram is informed of the child's arrival the day before. And when he takes a dip in the Sābarmatī river he sees the boy on the lotus and picks him up. When he does that *devas-kinnaras-gandharvas* (all superhuman, semi divine beings) came forth and began to sing his glory. They began to rain down flowers and saffron. Celestial nymphs began to dance and sing his praise. The whole ambience was steeped in the music of divine instruments. At the age of seven, near the Kankariya pond, an old mahātmā blessed him and bequeathed divine knowledge on him. He reappeared when Dadu was eleven years old and asked him to benefit the humanity with his sermons. Daduji began to travel. In this period, at Sikari, he had a forty-day spiritual conversation with emperor Akbar, and through a miracle, showed himself seated on a divine throne. He arrived at Naraina once he restarted his travels. He spent seven days in solitude there, and on the eighth day a cobra appeared next to him and indicated that he should follow him. Dadu followed him and the cobra disappeared at the root of a large Shami tree. Dadu took this to be an indication, sat down in a lotus position, and entered deep Self-absorption. In this state divine rays began to emanate from his body and suffused the environment with their luster. By divine inspiration King Narayandas arrived on the scene and witnessed this event. He also saw that there were several beings moving around Dadu who had either the face of a human but the body of an animal, or the face of an animal but the body of a human. After three days Dadu came out of his absorption and uttered the 'Satyaram' mantra. In Vikram Samvat 1660 (c. 1603) when the time came for him to give up his body, four divine beings arrived from the sky carrying a palanquin. The next day Daduji got on it and went to his holy home (*Śrī Dādūvānī*, sd, 8-17).

In Dadu's hagiography too, the miraculous events reinforce his divine status, lending more force and creditability to his message. The ideal of Hindu-Muslim unity that he followed was more effective because of his 'other-worldly' stature. The disdain for wealth and prestige which he demonstrated in his lifestyle was inspiring to his followers. Since he traveled considerably, his peregrinations also inform his followers of the sacred geography that he is associated with.

Now, let us take a look at the life of *sant* Jñāneśvara. His life is a little different from the examples we have listed so far, perhaps because even though he advocates Krishna-devotion, he and his ancestors are said to have been initiated in the Nath lineage (Ranade 1933, 29-30). Late in their life, their parents Vitthalapant and Rakhumabai had four children at an interval of two years each.¹¹ The firstborn was Nivṛttinātha in Vikram Samvat 1330 (c. 1273), then Jñāneśvara in VS 1332 (c. 1275), next Sopānadeva in VS 1334 (c. 1277), and last Muktābāi in VS 1336 (c. 1279) (Ranade 1933, 31;

¹¹ In Hindi texts, the name of Vitthalapant's wife is written as Rukminibai (see Varma 2005).

Varma 2005, 4).¹² In comparison to hagiographies we saw earlier there is no description of any special light in the sky, or the appearance of a miraculous flower, nor was there any other kind of disturbance in the nature. Even so, their births ‘can’ be regarded as a miracle because they were the children of a *saṁnyāsī*. Varma writes that both Vitthalapant and his father-in-law had a dream that Vitthalapant should marry Rakhumabai so that a divine child could be born through her agency (Varma 2005, 2). But after this marriage, when they did not have any children for a long time, Vitthalpant’s monastic tendencies took over and, contrary to his prescribed duties, he left his wife, went to Kashi, lied about his marital status to his guru and took monastic initiation from saint Ramananda. The result was that his heart-broken wife took to a life of hard penance where she would rise every day at the holy hour, take a bath in the Indrani river, performed circumambulations of the sacred fig tree (*Ficus religiosa*) till the afternoon, recited god’s name constantly, and devoted herself to god (Pangarkar 1933, 49). This penance continued for twelve years. And then a miracle happened. Her husband’s guru saint Ramananda started on a pilgrimage to Rameshvaram, and made a halt in her village of Alandi. By chance Rakhumabai saw him and bowed in respect. Kind by nature, Ramananda blessed her to have sons. At this, Rakhumabai could not help but laugh, and Ramananda asked her the reason. She told him that her husband had taken the monastic vow, so there was no chance of having children. Moved by her plight, saint Ramananda asked about her husband, and realized that his disciple Chaitanyashram was her husband. He went back to Kashi and sent her husband back to become a householder again. Vitthalapant accepted this order of his guru, but when he returned to his village, the orthodox Brahman’s excommunicated him for the crime of returning back to the life of a householder after having taken the monastic vows. Vitthalapant and his wife spent their life in great difficulty, but these four children were the progeny of such parents who were free from worldly attractions and who had already performed penance to purify themselves to have them. However, when the Brahman community refused to reassimilate them, Vitthalpant and his wife went to Prayag and took *jala-samādhi* (gave up their body in water). Now the four children became orphans and helpless, but the eldest son Nivṛttinātha had already been initiated at the age of seven into the Nath order by Gorakhnātha’s disciple Gahininātha, when at Tryambakeshvar a lion had appeared while Nivṛtti was visiting the sacred place with his parents. He initiated his younger brother Jñāneśvara into the Nath order. All four of them lived a hard life, but they tried to help others, and to show the nature of reality to the orthodox Brahmins of their community by performing miracles. Jñāneśvara composed the commentary on the *Bhagavadgītā* which became known as the *Jñāneśvarī* at the age of fifteen, and then another text known as the *Amṛtānubhava*. In the twenty-first year of his life he took *samādhi* (voluntary entombment in a meditative trance), and after a few years, his siblings followed suit (for a discussion of the dates, see Ranade 1933, 31-3).

Similarly, when we look at the life of saint Namdev, many kinds of miracles become readily evident. For example, there exists the idea that Namdev was

¹² Ranade cites two traditions of the dates for Jñāneśvara and his siblings. The other tradition, which he mentions as the Janābai tradition, lists these dates as: Nivṛttināth born in c. 1268, Jñāneśvara born in c. 1271, Sopana was born in c. 1274, and Muktabai was born in c. 1277 (1933, 31).

not 'born', he was found floating in a mother-of-pearl shell on the Chandrabhaga river. At the time of his birth, taking him to be an incarnation of Sanatkumar, the gods Indra, Kubera, Varuna, Brahma, Shiva, Vishnu, all made it rain flowers on the earth, and the whole sky was filled with the melodies of divine music. It is a known folk-story that when he was about eight years old, his mother sent him to the Vitthal temple with an offering of milk. The naïve boy sat there, singing to the lord to drink the milk he had brought, and in the end, the statue had to respond, reach out, and drink the milk offered by him (Machwe 1990, vi, 12). When Namdev went on a journey of north India with Jñānadev, they arrived at the village called 'Koladaji' in Marwar, and they felt very thirsty. They saw a well, but it was very deep. Jñānadev assumed his subtle form, went inside the well, and drank his fill. Namdev sat by the well instead, and began to chant the name of Vitthal. A little while later water bubbled up to the surface of the well (Sharma 1957, 99-100). Other well known miracles associated with him are his bringing a dead cow back to life when he was ordered to do so by the Sultan; when Brahmans prevented him from singing *bhajans* in front of the temple, he went to the west of it, and the whole temple turned towards him; God himself took the form of a merchant to come to Namdev's house and give wealth to his family; *sant* Jñānadev's giving him a vision even after he had taken samadhi; the conversion of the stone named Ghondoba in Namdev's house into gold etc. Like other saints in India his dates are not clear, but one strong possibility is that he was born in c. 1270 and left his body in c. 1350 (Machwe 1990, vi, 12-20).

These descriptions of the saints in India make it clear that these individuals were regarded as different from the common people, and that they had the ability to perform many deeds that were not possible for everyone to undertake. If we look at other religions, there too, it is the same conception that prevails. If we look at Christianity, we find that the saints are able to heal people miraculously, perform exorcisms, after death some of them have a smell of flowers that emanates from their body instead of the odor of putrefaction, they can bring dead people back to life, they can walk on water as they walk on earth, they can transform a little food into an abundance of food, they talk with birds and animals, they can fly, and they can speak in unknown languages. Let us look at some examples of such miracles. When St. Francis Xavier (c. 1506-1552) came to Cochin, it is said that he either healed a grievously ill young man or resurrected him from the dead. In Goa, a brother of his who was on his deathbed, became well just by seeing him again. A young lad who, people said, was possessed by demons, was cured after listening to St. Xavier read from the scriptures (Stewart 1918, 339-40). In the eleventh and twelfth centuries Christianity was struggling in Europe. At that time St. Anthony of Padua (c. 1195-1231) was sent to the town of Rimini in the state of Romagna to convert and spread the word. When no one showed up to listen to his sermon, he went to the place where the Marecchia river falls into the Adriatic Sea and called out loudly to the fishes to listen to his sermon. Instantly, there was commotion in the sea and uncountable small and large fish gathered at that place. St. Anthony began his sermon and it seemed as if the fishes nodded their heads in understanding. Thousands of people gathered there when they saw this scene. The fishes left that place only when St. Anthony finished his sermon and asked them to leave. The people gathered there were not only amazed at this scene, they fell at his feet and accepted him (Keller 1899, 13-19). Amongst the women saints, St. Catherine of Siena (c. 1347-1380) provides an

extraordinary example. Her parents had 25 children, of whom she was the twenty-fourth. Right since childhood she had a deep faith in Jesus Christ, and she believed she had been married to him. With this belief she felt indefatigable strength and energy, she could read despite being illiterate, she could fly up the stairs, and she spent her life caring for the suffering. She was so used to fasting she gave up eating almost altogether, but instead of wasting away from such fasts, her energy grew many folds (see Raymond 1960).

With this pattern as our frame of reference, we can consider the stories popular about Baba Kinaram with the understanding that genuine historical information about medieval saints is extremely difficult to arrive at, and since “hagiography abhors a vacuum”, it is not surprising that certain popular stories are applied also to his life. Scholars have found that the more recent the hagiographical writing, the more likely it is to have details filled in, and it will not be that different from the life-stories of other saints (Lorenzen 1995, 183). We find that all saints are shown to travel in their hagiographies in India. From the examples of the saints we have mentioned here, we see that *sant* Jñāneśvara went through his peregrinations, and with him, it is mentioned that *sant* Namdev also traveled on a pilgrimage of north India. It is also beyond doubt that Namdev went to Panjab, the village named Ghuman in Panjab is said to be intimately associated with him. *Sant* Jñāneśvara’s elder brother Nivrittinath was his guru, and the kind of peripatetic nature which is reflected in the characters of Matsyendranath and Gorakshanath in the *Yogisampradāyāviṣṭi*, can also be found in the characters of the *sādhus* of the Aghor and the Nath traditions. We find many verses which are very similar to those of Gorakhnath in the verses attributed to Kabir, and although he is never thought of as belonging to the Nath tradition, his travel stories are strikingly widespread. Some believe he traveled to Samarkand, Iran, Turkey, Mekka-Medina, Egypt, Jerusalem and even to Rome in Italy (Shastri 1991, 113-15). It is mentioned in the *Yogisampradāyāviṣṭi* that Matsyendranath visited the Hinglaj temple (Yogi 1924, 57-64), as it is mentioned also in the hagiography of Baba Kinaram (Singh 1999, 67-8).¹³ It is possible that in the same way that ascetics perform the sacred circumambulation of both the banks of the Narmada river even today, there was a tradition amongst the Aghor and Nath ascetics to perform pilgrimage of the *Śakti Pīṭhas* from Kamakhya in the east to Hinglaj in the west in the past (Hausner 2007, 105). There is, of course, a difference in the narrative style of the two saints. While the story shows Matsyendranath establish his yogic superiority over all the protectors of the Goddess, Baba Kinaram’s story shows him as a humble pilgrim performing his meditations with devotion. In the hagiographies of Kabir and Baba Kinaram, we also find a story involving alcohol and a prostitute. When Kabir became famous and crowds began to throng his place, he thought of a plan to free himself of this situation. He put the Ganges water in a bottle and drank from it as if it was alcohol, with his left hand on the right shoulder of a prostitute who was his devotee, he walked through the bazaar. This made the people think that Kabirdas had ‘fallen’ and he became free of the crowds

¹³ The event of Baba Kinaram visiting the Hinglaj temple is found only in more recent literature. It begins to be mentioned in later literature published by the Samoooh in the *Aghorācārya Mahārāja Śrī Kinārām Jī Ki Sankṣipt Jīvana Citrāvalī* and after that, in the *Aghar Rām Kinā Kathā*. But, his visiting Hinglaj is mentioned by Shobhnath Lal in 1973 in his essay published in the journal *Rtambharā*.

(Shastri 1991, 67-9). This exact same story was published in the 1953 article in the *Aaj* newspaper about Baba Kinaram. A similar story, about drinking alcohol by Baba Kinaram, is stated in the context of his attempt at demonstrating true asceticism to *sant* Tulsidas (Katave 1949, 125). If we take a broad look at the miracles performed by these saints, we find that *sant* Jñāneśvara made a buffalo recite the *Veda* (Varma 2005, 9; Pangarkar 1933, 101), *sant* Kabir also does the same with a buffalo (Shastri 1991, 137), and Baba Kinaram makes a donkey recite the *Veda* (Chaturvedi 1973, 88). *Sant* Jñāneśvara had brought back to life a person by the name of Sacchidanand, who later put the *Jñāneśvarī* in writing (Pangarkar 1933, 118-19). Kabirdas, at the asking of Sheikh Taki, had brought back to life a corpse floating in the river and had named him 'Kamal' for he was brought back to life by God's power (Shastri 1991, 101). He also resuscitated Sheikh Taki's dead daughter and named her 'Kamali' (Lorenzen 1991, 51).¹⁴ In a similar way, Baba Kinaram had brought back to life a corpse floating in the Ganges river when Baba Kaluram had asked him to do so, and had named him 'Ramji-yavanram' because he was brought back to life by Ram's grace (Chaturvedi 1973, 103). *Sant* Namdev is also said to have brought to life a dead cow, when the sultan had asked him to do so (Jog 1990, 3).

A miracle story that is especially narrated for Baba Kinaram is found also in the life story of Kabirdas, and a certain *saṁnyāsī* Aughar Nath who is said to have been present 950 years ago at the Aughar Nath ki Takiya in Banaras (Gupta 1993, 62). This is the story recounted for Kabir. He arrived at the Balakh town during his travels. The sultan there, by the name of Ibrahim, used to imprison all saints and monks and used to make them grind the flour mills. He did the same with Kabir. On arriving in the jail Kabirdas asked all the monks to stop grinding the mills, and instead chant the name of Ram. When the monks did that, all the mills began to grind flour by themselves. Simultaneously, the prince and princess of Balakh became crazy and the buildings in the town began to shake. Sultan Ibrahim ran to Kabir and sought his forgiveness. Kabir forgave him and had all the monks released. Since that time Kabir acquired the appellation of 'One who frees the jailed' (Shastri 1991, 109-11). The story of Baba Kinaram is presented in this manner. Taking his disciple Bijaram with him, Baba Kinaram headed west towards Gujarat and arrived in Junagadh, a principality ruled, at that time, by the designates of the Mughal empire. The ruler used to unjustly imprison monks and mendicants to manually operate the flour mills. On arrival at Junagadh, Baba Kinaram stayed outside the town and sent Bijaram to procure alms for them. When Bijaram entered the town and began seeking alms he was spotted by the guards and put into jail. When he did not return till late in the evening, Baba Kinaram found out what had happened in his state of deep meditation. He decided to do something about it. He, too, went into the town and began asking for alms. Soon he was imprisoned. There were 981 grinding mills in the jail that the prisoners had to operate to crush the grain into flour. He, was also assigned a mill. Baba Kinaram asked the mill to start working. It did not. So, he tapped the mill with his stick and all the 981 mills in the jail began to work by themselves. The guards were astounded, as were the prisoners. The guards ran to the

¹⁴ The stories of bringing back to life Kamal and Kamali are found only in the literature published by the Kabirpanth. The purpose of these stories seems to demonstrate that Kabir remained a celibate ascetic all his life (Lorenzen 1991, 50).

king and informed him of what had happened. The ruler was suitably impressed. He invited Baba Kinaram into his palace and offered him a plateful of gems and precious stones as a gift. Baba Kinaram put a few of them in his mouth, tried to chew on them, and spat them out saying they were neither sweet nor salty. The ruler realized that this mendicant was made of a different stuff and asked how he could be of service. Baba Kinaram told him to free the *sādhus* and to give about half a kilo of flour in his name to any mendicant who came into town. The ruler accepted this request and by the grace of Baba Kinaram, his family prospered (Chaturvedi 1973, 102). This event is supposed to have happened around the Vikram Samvat year 1724 (c. 1667. Chaturvedi 1951, 629; Shastri 1959, 138).

In the year 1915 Gadadharsinha Bhriguvanshi published an essay in the prestigious Hindi literary magazine *Sarasvati*, titled "The Founder of Aghor Tradition Baba Kinaram". Describing this episode of the grinding mills in the jail in his essay, he cited

The devotees sing this episode in this manner [we provide only an extempore English translation of the Hindi verses]:

Having visited Badri(nath), Mukteshvar, Nepal, also Rameshvar and Jagannath.

He covered Shrinagar then went to Ujjain, on to Junagadh where monks were not welcome.

The king made everyone grind the grain, He never understood their deep sentiment.

When Ramkina arrived at that place, the mills all moved by god's grace. The king ran to him saying bravo, bravo, He bowed to him and praised a lot.

With his hands folded he wanted to please him, (Baba Kinaram) had all the monks freed.

The king asked for the path to salvation, Kinaram told him to chant Rama, Rama. (Bhriguvanshi 1915, 44)

Another miracle story which has a very long history, but which has been added to the lives of many saints, is generally stated in the context of demonstrations of power between the *sants* and the sufis. In the life story of Baba Kinaram, this story is mentioned when he met with Bhikha Sahab (approx. c. 1713-1763), a disciple of Gulal Sahab. This is how the story is presented:

In the Bhurkura village of Gazipur district there lived a well-known saint by the name of Bhikha Shah. His hut was made of mud, as was the boundary wall of his dwelling. Baba Kinaram was going towards the Bhurkura village. On the way he saw an animal and patted its back. Instantly it turned into a tiger. Baba Kinaram began to ride it for his journey. When he arrived at Bhikha Shah's hut, he was brushing his teeth sitting on the boundary wall. When he saw Baba Kinaram coming to him riding a tiger, he ordered the wall: "You move forward too". The wall broke from its place and began to move forward. Baba Kinaram scolded the wall, saying: "Why are you breaking up? Stop right there!". The wall stopped moving where it was. A shudder went through it and it made Bhikha Shah fall, hurting him in the process. He got up and greeted Baba Kinaram. Baba Kinaram caressed his body and the wound from falling was healed instantly. (Singh 1999, 48)

The same story is mentioned also in the *Bhīkhā Sāhab kī Bānī aur Jīvan Caritra* (1909, 2) except that in this version the tiger riding saint is a certain 'Mauni Baba', a saint who remains silent. Here, when Bhikha Sahab sees Mauni Baba arriving on a tiger, he feels that a saint of that caliber needs to be welcomed properly, and therefore, he asks the wall to move forward so he could meet him halfway. Predictably, at the culmination of the story Mauni Baba falls at the feet of Bhikha Sahab.

This tale has seen substantial research. The first example of riding a tiger (or lion) and using a snake as a whip is cited from Abhayadatta's Vajrayan Buddhist Siddha text *caturaśītisiddhapravṛtti*, in the character of Siddha Dombipa. This text is dated a little before the twelfth century (Digby 1994, 103). Riding on the tiger and also on the wall is mentioned in the story of the meeting of *sant* Jñāneśvara and Changadev. Changadev arrives riding on a tiger and *sant* Jñāneśvara, who was sitting on a wall with his siblings at that time, makes the wall move forward (Kincaid 1919, 89). Tales of riding a tiger and riding a wall are also found towards the end of the sixteenth century in the Sikh *Janam-Sākhī*s, where, generally, Guru Nanak Dev has a meeting with the Nath Siddhas. Such tales are amply present in the Islamic sources also, first as individual stories of riding either the tiger or the wall, and then together, as stories of competition. Khawaja Khizr's figure wearing green clothes, riding a tiger with a snake as his whip is easily recognizable in Islam. Even in Christianity, the tale of Saint Mamas of Morphou in Cyprus is popular, because he never used to pay taxes. When he was summoned to the palace in Nicosia for this offense, he arrived riding on a tiger, holding a lamb in his arms (Digby 1994, 103-8). These illustrations all seem to point that these tales are tropes that become continually added to the lives of the favorite saints of the devotees. However, modern studies of hagiography do not dismiss the more 'mythological' material as mere fantasy, but rather they point out that such narratives have a value in showing how the revered figure is viewed by his or her followers.

2.1 The Life of Baba Kinaram

It is extremely difficult to narrate Baba Kinaram's life based on evidence, especially those of the documentary kind. That is why the kind of stories that we have already discussed above, form an integral part of the rest of his life story. What we 'can' ascertain from these stories is the way the devotees and the populace think about him. A sketch of his life, in various degrees of detail, has been published in Hindi by scholars like Acharya Parashuram Chaturvedi (1972, 690-5), Dharmendra Brahmachari Shastri (1959, 137-40), Acharya Gopinath Kaviraj (1963, 197-8), Shobhanath Lal (1973, 62-9), Gaya Singh (2006, 118-56) as well as by the Kinarami tradition (Chaturvedi 1973, 99-103; Singh 1999; Shri Sarveshwari Samooh s.d. *Citrāvalī*) in several books. Gupta has outlined in English the history of Baba Kinaram and his tradition as gathered from these sources, but has also embellished it with oral narratives (1993, 126-37).¹⁵ We, provide here a life-narrative of Baba Kinaram based on the sources published by his tradition.

¹⁵ Gupta traveled a lot in India and came up with some interesting insights about the diversity and historical development of the Aghor tradition. But her initial experience at the Kinaram Sthal was not as expected from what she had seen 16 years ago. The Aghars she found

He was born around the year 1601 according to the Gregorian calendar, although the date of his birth, and even of his passing away, are not clear in scholarly literature. According to the tradition, he was born in the Vikram Samvat year 1658, month of *Bhādrapad*, on the day of *Kṛṣṇa caturdaśī*. The village of his birth is still known as Ramgarh which lay in the old Banaras district in the state of Uttar Pradesh, but now lies in the Sakaldiha revenue district (Singh 2006, 118). He was the eldest of three sons, the names of his two younger brothers were Gayand and Jasant (Chaturvedi 1972, 691). His parents belonged to the caste of Raghuvanshi Kshatriyas, a caste which had a dominance in that region (Chaturvedi 1972, 690; Shastri 1959, 137). Right since his childhood, Baba Kinaram had no interest in either marriage or a domestic life. He could often be seen singing devotional songs with his childhood friends. At that time marriages were performed at a very young age and their son, Kina, had been married at the age of twelve.¹⁶ What did he know about marriage at that age? His wife was younger still, and so after their marriage she had remained at her natal home for three years till such a time that she would come of age to be a wife. The night before his bride was to be brought back home, their fifteen years old son began to insist on eating rice and milk. This was a particularly inauspicious demand because the very next day a party from his village was going to depart for his wife, Katyayani Devi's village, for the marriage ritual of *gaunā*, to bring the bride into his household.¹⁷ A mixture of rice and milk is eaten only on the occasion of death rituals in that part of India, and therefore, demanding to eat that dish on that auspicious occasion was rather disturbing. Since Akbar Singh had received this son in his old age of 60 (Singh 1999, 29), they had already performed a ritual to avoid the evil eye and to thus assure his longevity and good health by selling him to someone and then buying him back, an act which in the local Hindi language is called *Kīnanā* 'to buy', thus giving him the name 'Kinā', meaning 'bought'.¹⁸ They tried to dissuade him from his demand but the boy Kina would not budge. Ultimately, they gave up and Kina ate what he wanted to, cooked rice mixed with milk. The next day as the marriage party was getting ready to leave, news came from his wife's village that his wife had passed away the evening before. There would be no *gaunā* ceremony now. This series of events flabbergasted Kina's parents

were less exotic, seemingly not transgressive at all, rather middle class, and efficient in how they maintained the grounds. This discrepancy in how the researcher wanted them to be, and how they actually were, colored the tone of her narrative. Her extensive fieldwork led to interesting observations.

¹⁶ Some texts, like the *Aghorācārya Bābā Kinārām Sthal kā Sankṣipt Paricaya*, 5 from within the tradition, and *Kalyāṇ* (issue of August 1937, 628) from outside the tradition, mention that he was married at the age of nine. Such attempts by the parents to get their son interested in worldly affairs is evident also in the life-story of Malukdas. He, too, had been married, but both his wife and his daughter died, and thus he was relieved of this responsibility (Orsini 2023, 105).

¹⁷ The details about the names of Akbar Singh's wife as Mansa Devi, and Baba Kinaram's bride as Katyayani Devi are noted in the literature published by the tradition in *Jīvan Citrāvalī* (Brief Pictorial Life-History); Singh, *Aghorācārya Bābā Kinārām Jī*; and Singh, *Catuṣpadī*, 121-2.

¹⁸ Baba Kinaram's name 'can' have another meaning too, a double meaning which may be in keeping with his Aghor persona of being indifferent to edible and non-edible substances. As a Sanskrit noun, *kina* means meat (Monier-Williams [1899] 1956, 285.1). However, since it is marked 'L' in Monier-Williams, it is probably to be found only in lexicographies, rather than in an extant text. If at all such a meaning has relevance for Baba Kinaram's name, it would reflect the Aghor undercurrent of his activities, as when his hagiography portrays him as encouraging the Maithil Brahmins to eat fish.

and the folks in his village. First the assumption was that Kina's eating of rice and milk might have caused this tragedy, but they soon realized that the wife had already passed away, 'before' Kina had started asking for rice and milk. In effect, he was performing a death ritual for his wife. But how did he know? His parents now began to realize that there was more to their son than they had ever imagined.

So, when his parents again began to put pressure on him to get married, he experienced intense detachment from domestic life and left his village to arrive at village Karo in Ghazipur district where lived Shivaram, a saint of the Ramanuji sect.¹⁹ As the name implies, saints of this tradition are Vaishnavas, those who worship Lord Vishnu, in particular, his incarnation as Lord Rama. Although not much research work has been done on him, Saint Shivaram is known to have authored at least one major yoga and devotion treatise called *Bhakti Jaimāl* (The Garland of Devotion) (Lal 1973). He was well known and respected in the region. Young Kinaram asked to stay with saint Shivaram and sought spiritual initiation from him. Saint Shivaram did not initiate him immediately. He let young Kinaram live with him, who began to serve saint Shivaram as his guru. Young Kinaram served him for a long time with great devotion and, pleased with his service, one day saint Shivaram decided to give him initiation.

That morning, as they walked towards the river Ganga for their bath, saint Shivaram asked young Kinaram to carry his ritual objects, his water pot, his tiger-skin rug etc. to the riverbank while he himself went towards the fields. As the young Kinaram walked towards the riverbank, saint Shivaram watched him from behind the bushes and what he saw astounded him. He saw that even before Kinaram arrived at the riverbank, the water of the river rushed forward and after having touched his feet, withdrew back to its normal course. Touching a holy person's feet is a mark of respect in India. At that time saint Shivaram understood that young Kinaram was the right candidate for his initiation. He gave the initiation to young Kinaram at the riverbank, holding the river Bhagirathi as a witness to this sacred event (Lal 1973, 66).

Young Kinaram continued serving his guru as before, but it did not last forever. What brought the matter to a culmination was that saint Shivaram's wife, whose name was Sona Bai, passed away. When saint Shivaram decided to marry again, the idea did not sit well with his disciple Kinaram, who had always served her as if she was his own mother. Kinaram communicated to his guru that if he would take another wife, he would seek another guru. At this his guru got irritated and asked him to feel free to do so. Kinaram took this as permission from his guru to go forth in the world, and he set out once again (Shastri 1959, 137). However, there is a second version of the story that makes this scenario a little more complicated. Shobhnath Lal focused his research on Baba Kinaram's guru saint Shivaram. His conviction is that Baba Kinaram spent the first 65 years of his life with Shivaram, and then if he left, it would have been for some reason other than his guru's second marriage. According to the descendants of saint Shivaram, there is no indication that he ever performed a second marriage. Since Baba Kinaram had already spent such a long time within the Vaishnava tradition, he

¹⁹ Some texts also refer to him as saint Shivadas.

would have been more likely to look for a Vaishnava guru as an alternative, not an Aghor guru, as happened in the due course of time (Lal 1973, 66-7).

Lal posits two possible reasons for the change that occurred in Baba Kinaram's life (1973, 67-8). I paraphrase his Hindi text here. The first reason could be that Baba Kinaram had already begun to worship the goddess without informing his Vaishnava guru. Even today there exists a temple of Goddess Kashtaharini Bhavani (the goddess who eliminates sorrow) about 4-5 miles distant from the village Karo where he used to live with his guru. Baba Kinaram would remain in his guru's service all day till the guru went to bed at night. After that, he would walk those 4-5 miles to the temple of the goddess and perform his daily veneration there. He would return before his guru woke up in the morning and continue to serve him as before. After some time saint Shivaram got to know of this fact in his state of deep meditation, but he did not express it to Kinaram. Having cogitated on this matter for a few days he told Kinaram not to accept any *prasād* (divine gift, usually food) if the goddess appeared before him. This is how it did happen. When the goddess appeared before him, he remembered his guru's words, but when the goddess insisted, he had no option but to accept her *prasād*. Having accepted that divine gift, the tranquility of his mind experienced a change. Saint Shivaram got to know of this too, and he asked Kinaram to go ahead and find his own path, assuring him that the path he forged would continue to live with his name after he is no more.

The second possible reason for why Baba Kinaram changed his path could be that having served his guru for such a long time Baba Kinaram expressed a wish to go on a pilgrimage. Shivaram readily agreed but he prohibited Kinaram from visiting the temple of Goddess Hinglaj.²⁰ During the course of his pilgrimage Baba Kinaram arrived at the place of Goddess Hinglaj, and remained there in meditation for a considerable length of time. Pleased by his devotion, the goddess appeared before him and gave him her *prasād*, which according to Lal, was alcohol. It is said that from that time on he became more attracted to the *Shakta* 'goddess' worship, rather than the worship of Lord Vishnu as a Vaishnava. So, when he returned to his guru, he asked his permission to change his path, and saint Shivaram gave him that permission.

Since comprehensive information on Baba Kinaram is hard to find, we consider every piece of information that can help us piece together a holistic picture of him. Lal's narrative is of interest from that point of view. It may be true that saint Shivaram never performed a second marriage. However, the reasons he posits for Baba Kinaram's change of faith do not sound convincing. While it is possible that Baba Kinaram did worship the goddess,

²⁰ According to Shobhnath Lal this particular goddess is said to be born as the eighth child, a baby girl, to Devaki and Vasudev, the parents of Lord Krishna in the epic Mahabharata, when they were imprisoned by Devaki's brother Kṛṣṇa in a prison. The reason was that it had been forecast that Kṛṣṇa would be killed by Devaki's child, and so he had already killed her seven newborns in the prison cell. This eighth, baby girl, had slipped from Kṛṣṇa's hand as he tried to smash her against the prison wall, and disappeared with a thunderous noise (1973, 68). Lal's view of this goddess is very different from the more commonly known story, because according to references such as the *Tantra Cūḍāmaṇi* and the *Bṛhannīlantantra*, the Shaktipeeth of Hinglaj is famous because the Goddess Sati's top of the skull fell there (see Sahu 1987, 436). Lal posits that the temple of the Goddess Hinglaj is probably on Mount Abu in Rajasthan. The Goddess Hinglaj does play a major role in Baba Kinaram's life, but her temple that Baba Kinaram visited, according to popular understanding, is in present day Baluchistan in the Las-bela region. Her Muslim devotees call her by the name of Bibi Nani.

whether secretly or not is a matter of discussion, the question arises, why would he do that if he had full faith in his Vaishnava guru? His later life history reveals without any doubt that he remained equally devoted to his first guru even after he had attained all sorts of spiritual powers. So, if his guru's second marriage was not the real reason why Baba Kinaram went on his own path, we may need to look for another reason for it.

As he recommenced his journey, he arrived at the Naidih village where he found an old woman crying bitterly.²¹ When he asked her the reason for this, she revealed that her young son owed cultivation revenue to the reigning landlord. Since her son was unable to pay his dues, the landlord had tied him under the blazing sun and was torturing him to get his money. Baba Kinaram pleaded to the landlord in the name of humaneness to let the young man go. The landlord told him to receive his alms and then be on his way. There was little he could do to facilitate revenue collection from the young man. At this, Baba Kinaram asked the landlord to dig the ground where the young man had been tied, and to take all the money that he wanted. The landlord went along as a humorous interlude and began to dig at that place. Soon he came across piles of money, even more than what was owed to him! At this he realized that Baba Kinaram was no ordinary mendicant and fell at his feet. Baba Kinaram freed the young man whose name was Vijay and asked the old woman to take her son away. The old woman now realized that she was in the presence of a true saint and refused to walk away with her son. She said that since Baba Kinaram had saved his life, her son now owed his life to him, and therefore, Baba Kinaram should take him along. Baba Kinaram tried to dissuade her, but she had made up her mind for the future of her son. In the end, he had no option but to take her son on his travels. Later, he named Vijay as Bijaram. This Bijaram became Baba Kinaram's successor and an accomplished Avadhūta saint in his own time. Most texts point out that Bijaram belonged to the 'Kalwar' caste, a low caste in the hierarchy, to emphasize that Baba Kinaram did not discriminate between people based on caste, which is a prominent feature of the non-dual Aghor tradition and the *santmat*.²²

Taking Bijaram along, Baba Kinaram came to Junagadh. Here, the ancient holy mountain of Girnar has been a sacred spot for different faiths for a long time. Followers of the Jain, Dattatreya, Gorakhnath, as well as the *Shakta* 'goddess' traditions all have their venerable sites here. There are five peaks, of which the Dattatreya peak is the highest, and there are 10,000 steps to climb to that spot.²³ Baba Kinaram left young Bijaram at the foot of the mountain and climbed up to perform his meditations (Shastri 1959, 138; Chaturvedi 1973, 101). He meditated there for a long time and

²¹ This village is also spelled as Nayakdih (Chaturvedi 1951, 691) and Naigdih (Ramal 1957, 756; Shastri 1959, 138).

²² Gupta (1993, 189) interprets the story of Bijaram and Ramjiyavanram (which we have mentioned in the context of hagiographical stories of Kabirdas and Kinaram) as transactions of pollution which the Aghoris have the power to digest. In the case of Bijaram, taking the word 'Bija' to be a bill of sales, she writes that Kinaram did not accrue any pollution because he 'bought' Bijaram. However, none of the standard Hindi dictionaries list the meaning of the word 'bija' to be a bill of sales. In the case of Ramjiyavanram, she states that Kinaram did accrue pollution because he brought a dead person to life. Death in Hinduism is regarded as an event of extreme pollution.

²³ In 2020 the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated a ropeway that takes the pilgrims 850 meters up to the Ambika Devi temple in 10 minutes (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Girnar>).

was rewarded with a vision of Guru Dattatreya himself. This meeting completely changed his life. This incident is illustrated in the *Citrāvalī* (s.d., 10, fig. 13). Baba Kinaram saw a mendicant with his water pot holding a large piece of flesh sitting on the Aghor Shila, one of the five peaks of the sacred mountain. This mendicant is said to be the Ādiguru Dattatreya who, on spotting Baba Kinaram, bit off a piece of this flesh and threw it in the direction of Kinaram.²⁴ Baba Kinaram consumed it as a *prasād* and instantly he was rewarded with the gift of far-vision. Guru Dattatreya then advised him to work for the benefit of humanity.

Baba Kinaram has written in the *Viveksār* that Guru Dattatreya had met him to rid him of the tribulations of this world, and that the Avadhūta philosophy that he propounds is knowledge that he has gained from him. Writing in 1951 Acharya Parashuram Chaturvedi had noted that this meeting of Baba Kinaram with Guru Dattatreya can only be taken as symbolic because Dattatreya is a figure mentioned in the Puranas who is said to be the son of Muni Atri, and someone who went about in an Avadhūta form. Nor is there any strong indication of a connection between the Aghor tradition and Dattatreya according to him. However, Dattatreya is said to have founded the Avadhūta tradition, and in *Viveksār* Baba Kinaram is quite clear that he is propounding the Avadhūta philosophy in his treatise. Shastri has mentioned that Baba Kinaram belonged to the Jūnā Akhādā (Shastri 1959, 140). The revered deity of that *akhādā* is Dattatreya (Gupta 1993, 61; Krishna 2020). If Baba Kinaram did belong to the Juna Akhādā, then his devotion to Dattatreya can be understood easily. Gupta writes astutely that the Nath tradition laid down the grounds for the *sant* traditions as well as the sarbhāngi sampradāya. She also points out that in Maharashtra and Gujarat Dattatreya is an important deity for the Naths, especially those who want to aspire to become Avadhūtas (Gupta 1993, 53, 83). A text attributed to Gorakhnath, datable to possibly after the thirteenth century, the *Siddhasiddhāntapaddhati*, certainly has a whole chapter on the nature and characteristics of an Avadhūta, and as we will see later, the philosophy explained in *Viveksār* is very similar to the one put forward in the *Siddhasiddhāntapaddhati*. All these strands of text, tradition and philosophy do make the Avadhūta path a part of the Aghor tradition as understood by his *paramparā*.

His meditation at the Girnar mountain had borne ample fruit. Baba Kinaram climbed down the mountain to Junagadh, and then made his way north towards Uttarakhand in the Himalayas with Bijaram. He is said to have meditated there for quite some time. We do not have much information about where Baba Kinaram went in the Himalayas in those days, but stories from outside the literature published by his tradition reinforce the folk belief that he spent time in these holy mountains. This is illustrated in an experience narrated by Shriram Sharma Acharya, the founder of the Gayatri Tirtha in Mathura. He was traveling in the high Himalayas with a yogi

²⁴ Joshi (1974, 280-1), whose book is written in the Marathi language, treats the story slightly differently. He says that Guru Dattatreya, who appeared as a matted-hair ascetic wearing a deerskin, gave Baba Kinaram some fruits and tubers to eat. His text is also unequivocal about Baba Kinaram's initiation by Guru Dattatreya. He writes that Guru Dattatreya whispered the Aghor Mantra in Baba Kinaram's ear, put his hand on Baba Kinaram's head, and that led to a surge of divine energy (*śaktipāt*) in him. In the morning Guru Dattatreya performed the circumambulation of the Girnar mountain with Baba Kinaram, then asked him to first go to the Himalayas, and from there, to Kashi.

whom he had named Virabhadra. They had departed from a village named Kalap which lay beyond the area of Tapovan above Gomukh, the mouth of the river Bhagirathi which later becomes the Ganges. As they neared the mountain Gaurishankar, they saw a cave made of ice. We paraphrase his Hindi text here with explanations in parenthesis:

At one place we saw a cave made of ice. From it emanated the sound of 'Har-Har-Mahādev' (Glory to God Mahadev Shiva). It was not the sound of a practitioner chanting their mantra audibly. It sounded as if someone was taking a bath. Acharyashri became amazed and asked, 'Is there a waterfall in this cave too? It sounds as if a *tapasvī* (an ascetic seeker who performs hard practice) is taking a bath.'

He was told: "No. It is not a *tapasvī* but a *taponiṣṭha vibhūti* (an illustrious virtuoso of the austere ascetic practice) whose name is Baba Kinaram. After relinquishing the physical world, it is here in this region of the Siddhas that he is enjoying his time in a delightful way".

Acharyashri had already read very well about Baba Kinaram. This saint may not have started the Aghor tradition, but he is the most well-known one in this tradition. He was born approximately 400 years ago. Almost all amongst the seekers of the tantra and the yoga paths had received guidance from him at one time or other. His birth and life were extraordinary even 400 years ago. He was an Aghor by birth, and he had great devotion towards Rama, the exemplary hero God (of the epic *Rāmāyaṇa*). (Pandya, Jyotirmaya 2013, 334)²⁵

Although even this description seems from beyond the realm of the physical plane, we have cited it here because it is not to be found anywhere in the publications of the tradition of Baba Kinaram. After completing his meditations in the Himalayas for a significant amount of time, Baba Kinaram is said to have come back to Kashi, where he met Baba Kaluram on the banks of the river Ganges at the cremation ground of Harishchandra Ghat near Kedarnath Ghat.²⁶ This event is dated c. 1697 (Vikram Samvat 1754) (Shastri 1959, 139). We have read that Baba Kaluram tested him in various ways by asking for fish as food and making him bring the corpse of a young man back to life. Satisfied with all the tests that he presented before him, Baba Kaluram brought Baba Kinaram to the Krin-Kund and gave him initiation (Chaturvedi 1973, 103; Shastri 1959, 139).²⁷

About ten days after their meeting, at Baba Kaluram's behest, Baba Kinaram called his devotee Raghavendra Singh and asked him whether he

²⁵ Within Baba Kinaram's tradition it is believed that even after taking *samādhi* in Kashi, Baba Kinaram still gives his *darśan* (divine vision) to devotees in places like Jagannathpuri, Gangasagar, Girnar and other holy places (Chaturvedi, *Aghar Bhagwān Rām*, 89).

²⁶ Shastri 1959, 138; Chaturvedi 1972, 692; 1973, 102; Singh 1999, 39.

²⁷ It is believed that it was Guru Dattatreya himself who had appeared before Baba Kinaram in the form of Baba Kaluram (Joshi 1974, 281) to initiate him again, and after the initiation, he had disappeared (Shastri 1959, 139). Singh (1999, 107) records that Baba Kaluram stayed with Baba Kinaram for one year at the Krin-Kund Sthal, and then he left his physical frame. Joshi's version mentions that Baba Kinaram began to live under a tamarind tree at the Krin-Kund. Baba Kinaram is said to have been only 19 years old when he was given the holy seat of Krin-Kund (S. Mishra 2004, 40; Singh 2006, 120). But this must not be true, because if so, Baba Kinaram would have received the seat of Krin-Kund even before he met Baba Kaluram, according to the dates ascribed to that meeting by the scholars.

would donate the land for Krin-Kund. Raghavendra Singh agreed happily and donated 10 *bīghā* (a measure of land which could be from a quarter to a third of an acre) of land that belonged to him, as well as the ritual *yantra* (ritual geometric design) of the Goddess Hinglaj. Baba Kinaram praised Raghavendra Singh for his generosity and built a hut with his disciples in the southern area of the Kund. After one year when Baba Kaluram took *samādhi* (left his body), Baba Kinaram entrusted the maintenance of the Krin-Kund to Ramjiyawanram, and with Bijaram, set out on his travels again (Singh 1999, 104-7). In the memory of his first guru Baba Kinaram established four Vaishnava monasteries, three of them in the present-day state of Uttar Pradesh namely Mārufpur, Naidih, Parānāpur and the fourth one at Mahuār, which is in the present-day state of Bihar. In the memory of his Aghor Guru, Baba Kaluram, he established the four seats at Krin-Kund, Ramgarh district Banaras, Deval in district Gazipur and Hariharpur in district Jaunpur (Chaturvedi 1973, 103) [fig. 3].

There are other interesting episodes in Baba Kinaram's life where his social consciousness and the need to fight against injustice shows through. For example, he is said to have saved the life of a young Brahman widow from being killed with her newborn child in the town of Surat (Gupta 1993, 135); or when he helped the residents of the town of Kohalin who had been ravaged by the Pindaris (Singh 1999, 46-7). As for the miracle stories associated with him, there are many. Since they can be found elsewhere, instead of reproducing them here, we just list a few of them: with reference to *sant* Tulsidas, there are at least two stories. In one of the stories, he provides a holy vision of Shri Ram, Sita, Lakshman and Hanuman in his ashram to Tulsidas, and demonstrates to him how to be a carefree *sādhu* (Katave 1949, 125). In the second story, when a woman is told by Tulsidas she is not fated to have children, Baba Kinaram blesses her to have four, thus giving rise to the saying, "Kinaram does, that which Ram does not" (Gupta 1993, 132).²⁸ When his own guru-brother Govardhandas did not invite him to a ritual feast, Baba Kinaram turned all the vegetarian food into non-vegetarian, but when Govardhandas showed his own miracle, he gave him the name of Lotadas (Mukherjee 2008, 237). When Maithil Brahmins ask him to, he brings to life a dead elephant, and then advises them to eat fish from that point on (Gupta 1993, 133). It is said that when Baba Kinaram returned to his village after his first extensive tour, he began the work on the construction of a well. Somehow, the bricks for construction fell short. At this he asked the workers to use dried cow-dung cakes to build the well wall. It happened so. The well exists even today, and it is said to have medicinal properties (Chaturvedi 1973, 88; Singh 1999, 101-2) [fig. 4].

Krin-Kund, the sacred water tank at Kinaram Sthal, has a story of how it acquired its sacredness. Once, when Baba Kinaram was spending the rainy season at Krin Kund, a woman arrived with her child who was suffering from the *sukhandī* 'rickets' disease. She implored Baba for help. Moved by compassion, he took some grains of rice, charged them with a mantra, and threw them into the water of the pool. Then he asked the woman to bathe her child in that water, reassuring her that her child would get well (Gupta 1993, 132). This healing will continue as long as the river Ganges flows in Kashi (Banaras), it will even help infertile women conceive. This blessing of

²⁸ Stories of the simultaneous existence of Tulsidas and Baba Kinaram can be traced in Marathi books also. See Joshi 1974, 279-81, and Shastri 1977, 452-8.

Baba Kinaram has been helping hundreds of children every year. Their family comes to take a dip in the Kund in a prescribed manner, and then they offer the ritual gift of fish and rice at the *samādhi* of Baba Kinaram (Singh 1999, 108). Having mentioned some of the miraculous events in Baba Kinaram's life as published by the tradition, let us look at three stories in detail to understand the socio-spiritual milieu of their conception.

2.1.1 Cremation-ground Practice with a Yogini

Gupta has explained her understanding of the distinction between Brahmanical Tantrism and Nath Tantrism, where the latter subsumes the category of Aghars. Explaining how Brahmanical Tantrism operates in a rather circumscribed space, she points out that the ritual space of Nath Tantrism is much less circumscribed (1993, 70). Scholars can debate this idea. We present here a story which illustrates at least the idea of transgressive practice in Baba Kinaram's life. This story requires some details, so we are translating it as narrated, reportedly by Bijaram:

Baba Kinaram had set up a hut close to a cremation ground near the town of Munger where he was spending the rainy months. At midnight his hut and the nearby cremation-ground both became illuminated with light as a yogini in auspicious yellow clothes, with beautiful hair, wearing wooden sandals, descended from the skies. She bowed to Baba Kinaram and stated simply her intention to perform practices with the *sahaja* sentiment.²⁹ Baba Kinaram looked at the yogini, asked her who she was and where she had come from. The yogini replied: "I live in the Goddess Kali cave at Girnar. I got the inspiration, and I was attracted towards you. I arrived at your hut travelling through the sky. Please activate in me that which I seek through your practices so I may achieve the completeness which I lack now".

Due to heavy rains people had left a corpse destitute in the field. Four stakes spaced sufficiently apart were put in the ground on the riverbank and the feet and hands of that corpse were tied to those stakes with ropes made of grass. The corpse was then covered with a red cloth and its mouth was opened. The Yogini and Kinaram Maharaj united seated on the corpse. Maharaj Kinaram continued to chant the mantra while the yogini commenced sanctifying the grains of puffed wheat and putting oblations of them in the mouth of the corpse. This practice continued only for a little while, the ground split open with a loud noise, and from the depths of the earth emerged the God of the cremation ground, Sadashiv, with Parvati in his embrace, seated on the Nandi bull.³⁰ In a very sweet voice he said: "May your *Sahaja sādhanā* [practice] be successful. Live long. Your path to enter the

²⁹ The word *sahaja* has many shades of meaning in Hinduism and Buddhism. I note some of them here from Callewaert 2015: 1. Adj. Innate, natural, easy. 2. Adv. Easily, spontaneously. 3. Naturally. 4. A mysterious, ineffable transcendent state ("which is the goal of Tāntric *sādhanā* [...], a state of absolute 'non-conditionment', spontaneity, freedom [...] In Tāntric parlance, *sahaja* is practically identical with *mahāsukha*, 'perfect Bliss'. But, according to all schools of Tantra bliss is the nature of the Absolute [...] The Absolute is realized by us when we realize our self as perfect Bliss").

³⁰ In Tantra, Shiva is regarded as the Mahakal, the lord of the cremation ground. Parvati is Shiva's feminine half. Shiva's vehicle is the bull who is named Nandi.

cosmic skull bowl in the *Sahaja* form is now open. Remember me, I will always arrive at the opportune moment”.³¹

The yogini and Maharaj Kinaram got off the corpse and bowed to him. The bull Nandi, the lord of the cremation ground riding on him, they all disappeared in the sky even as they looked. There was a vibration, and the corpse turned into a stone. That corpse is still visible sometimes in the middle of the Ganges. If a *sādhak* ‘practitioner’ sits on it, or if a practitioner comes in contact with it, they receive the powers to make their spoken words come true, to become invisible, and to fly in the sky. The yogini was satisfied. She saluted Maharaj Kinaram, took her leave, and went in the west direction (Singh 1999, 81-3).

So far, we have read stories that have a positive and happy ending. But not all stories end happily, and that ending may be the lesson imparted by these stories. Now we read two stories which recall the boon that Lord Shiva had given to Bhasmasura, because a boon does not necessarily always lead to a salubrious conclusion.³² The first story that we present here deals with the practice in the cremation ground. This story is notable because it highlights why tantric practices are kept secret, why the notion of a *vīra bhāva* (a heroes mental frame) is required, why a guru does not put their disciple on the path of ascetic practice without initiation, and how, it is the guru who must face consequences if the *sāadhanā* prescribed for a disciple does not end well.

2.1.2 The Quest for Lord Bhairava’s Power

One time Baba Kinaram was staying in the Neemtalla cremation ground of Calcutta (now Kalikata). A young man by the name of Hiran Mukherjee began to visit the cremation ground to be in his service. After some days when Baba was about to leave for Gangasagar, Hiran asked him for the Bhairava mantra. Baba Kinaram was always generous. He gave Hiran the mantra with the warning that he would need to be very brave while chanting the mantra in the cremation ground. Come what may, he should not leave his *āsan* without completing the prescribed number of chants. Hiran assured him that he was a very courageous person, and Baba Kinaram left for Gangasagar.

In the evening Hiran Mukharjee took his position in the cremation ground and began to chant the mantra. He had to complete 3,000 chants. By the time he completed 1,000, he saw a juggler and his wife come into the cremation ground riding on a black buffalo, carrying two chickens. They got off the buffalo, the juggler tied it to the *Peepal* (*Ficus religiosa*) tree in the cremation ground and began to prepare for dinner. He put the wood together to make a stove, put a big pot on the fire, killed the two chickens and cut them into pieces, and then put them in the pot. But the pot was not full. He looked around. There was nothing else, so he killed his own buffalo, cut it into pieces, and put it into the pot. Surprisingly, the pot was still not full. He commented to his wife that perhaps a cremation ground spirit was playing tricks, stealing meat from the pot, he would have to find another creature to

³¹ Dwivedi mentions that of the four kinds of joy in the tantric Buddhist tradition, viz. *prathamānanda*, *paramānanda*, *viramānanda* and *sahajānanda*, the last one is the supreme joy and is called *sukhrāj* ‘the king of all joys’ (1981, 86).

³² On Bhasmasura, see Mani 1975, 127.

fill the pot. So, he took out a big knife and Hiran Mukherjee saw him coming towards him. In panic, he threw away his rosary, left his *āsan*, and ran like the wind. After some distance he looked back and saw that the juggler was still coming after him with the big knife. Wherever Hiran went, he saw the juggler following him. Now he could not sleep at night, and he could not be at peace during the day. In this condition of insanity, he died six months later. His kith and kin did not cremate his body, they put it in the river to be washed away.

After some time, Baba Kinaram heard of this incident. He focused his attention on Hiran and located his body. Vultures and crows had picked the body of the meat, and the head had become separated. Baba Kinaram took that skull and turned it into a skull-bowl. He used that bowl to perform the practice of the Bhairavi circle, thus liberating Hiran Mukherjee of the curse that had accrued to him because of his failed practice. If he did not do that, it would be the guru who would have to bear the consequence of that curse (Singh 1999, 74-6).³³

2.1.3 Misuse of the Key to the Treasure

One time Baba Kinaram was living in a hut on the bank of the river Yamuna in Dhavadi village, Kanpur district. A man named Raghu used to remain in his service all the time. He would clean his hut, wash his clothes, bring flowers for his worship. One day when Baba Kinaram felt especially pleased with his service, he asked him: “What do you want Raghu?”

Raghu told him that he was a poor person, and that he wanted the ‘key to the treasure’. At this Baba Kinaram took out a six-inch long piece of wood from his *dhūnī* and handed it to him. He instructed him to put the wood to the ground and ask of it whatever he wanted. Saying this, Baba Kinaram left.

Raghu tested this ‘key’ immediately. He went outside and put the wood to the ground and asked for food to eat. Immediately the earth parted, and various kinds of delicious dishes came up. Raghu ate to his heart’s content. Now that he had the key to the treasure, Raghu’s life changed. Instead of working he began to spend all his time with friends in idle dalliance. It was not long before he became addicted to alcohol, marijuana and prostitution. He became very involved with a prostitute by the name of Shobhani. She asked Raghu for a sum of 5,000 rupees for a night. Raghu was not very good to look at, and he walked with a limp. Since the time that he had got the key, all his indulgences had made his memory of Baba Kinaram dull. Shobhani lived in the Kanpur town and they were both seated on her rooftop terrace. In desperation for her company, with his judgment clouded with alcohol, Raghu put his wooden key to the surface of the rooftop terrace to ask

³³ A similar story is found in the translation of Aghoreshwar Mahaprabhu Bhagwan Ram’s book *Aghoreśvar Samvedanśīl*, translated from Hindi into English as *Compassion of the Aghor Master* (1984, 139-40). In this story there is a cremation ground at the confluence of the Son and Ganga rivers, near the locality of Neelkanth Tola. On the full moon night, the tonsured ascetic was performing a rite making oblations in the fire with meat, fish, alcohol, black sesame seeds and many other materials when he felt as if there was a big black buffalo standing there about to attack him, breaking the boundary of the zone of protection that he had established. But tonsured ascetic kept on with his oblations and a little while later he felt as if light from his nails had killed that buffalo, which was now floating down the river. In this instance, the ascetic achieved the supernatural power he sought. His performance was a success.

for the money that she had demanded. He forgot that Baba Kinaram had asked him to put the wood to the ground every time he needed something. The next instant that terrace made of wood and clay split open with a thunder, the beams supporting the roof broke, and they both fell to their death buried under the rubble from the roof. Misuse of the key Baba Kinaram had given him made Raghu open the door to his death with his own hands (Singh 1999, 72-4).

In his lifetime Baba Kinaram is said to have interacted with two Mughal emperors, Shahjahan and Aurangzeb, a Mughal Nawab of Junagadh (about whom we have already read above), and two Hindu kings in Varanasi, Maharaj Balwant Singh and his son Chetsingh. Let us take a quick look at two of these names, those of Shahjahan and Chetsingh.

2.1.4 Emperor Shahjahan and the Fort of Kandahar

It is a popular story that during his travels to Kandahar, Baba Kinaram had blessed the Mughal emperor Shahjahan to take the possession of the fort of Kandahar from Shah Abbas of Persia without strife. In the absence of documentary evidence, we cannot say for sure whether Baba Kinaram ever actually met Shahjahan, but Shahjahan did, indeed, take possession of this fort in a curious manner in the year c. 1638. Monshi Eskandar Beg, the Safavid historian for Shah Abbas of Persia, recounts that around the years 1588-89 Uzbeks took control of the region of Khorasan, and the princes in control of Kandahar took refuge with emperor Akbar around the year 1592, bringing the fort into Mughal possession. But, after thirty years Shah Abbas of Persia annexed it (Monshi 1930, 2: 1191-7). Shah Safi, who succeeded Shah Abbas after his death, did not favor Ali Mardan Khan, the governor of that fort. Consequently, Ali Mardan Khan surrendered the fort of Kandahar to the Mughals.

2.1.5 The Ruler of Kashi Chetsingh

Chetsingh sat on the throne of Kashi till the year 1781 (S. Mishra 2004, 30). During the first part of his reign he constructed a new fort with his name at Shivala. In that fort he also built a Shiva temple (Gautam 1975, 28). On the day of the consecration of this Shiva temple, Baba Kinaram was not invited. He arrived nonetheless. When Chetsingh tried to throw him out, Baba Kinaram cursed him that the fort would go into the hands of foreign powers, the king would have to run away, only pigeons would roost leaving their droppings in this temple, and all those present there would remain childless from that point forward. The King's paymaster of the army, Bakhshi Sadanand was also present and he saw all that had happened. He met with Baba Kinaram later and sought forgiveness. Baba Kinaram is said to have absolved him and told him that his lineage would continue as long as they keep using the name 'Anand' (Singh 1999, 93).

King Chetsingh's rule became uncertain when the British colonial administrator Warren Hastings, who served as the first Governor General of Bengal from 1772 till 1785, came on the scene. On 15 April 1776 the British East India Company took the management of the areas ruled by Chetsingh under its control with a new decree. On 7 July 1781 Warren Hastings

came on a visit to Banaras. Chetsingh pleaded his case to no avail, in fact, he was humiliated publicly (S. Mishra 2004, 31). He tried to resist the British incursion but was unsuccessful, and he had to flee the fort. The fort and the temple all came under Warren Hasting's control. The temple began to suffer severe neglect and ultimately in its desolation it became full of bird droppings (Gautam 1975, 28).³⁴

Baba Kinaram's episode with Chetsingh does not appear to be imaginary. Bakshi Sadanand, to whom Baba gave the blessing, was the ancestor of Sampurnanand, after whom the Sampurnanand Sanskrit University of Banaras is named. His son, Sarvadanand, founded a theater company by the name of Shri Nataraj and enacted a historically researched play called *Chet Singh*. The play shows that Baba Kinaram made this curse, and that Bakshi Sadanand was its witness (Sarvadanand 1957, 50) [fig. 5].

We have not included all the stories that are prevalent about Baba Kinaram, but this sampling provides us with a good idea of his prowess in the people's minds. From a religio-spiritual point of view, his persona is that of the Lord Shiva, easy to get pleased, generous without a fault, not a very affectionate person since he is a detached ascetic, but always full of compassion, and terrible when he gets angry. From the point of view of caste generated social hierarchy, he is completely free in the classic Aghor fashion, and in opposition to the Vaishnava style of life. He has no problem eating meat, drinking alcohol, or smoking Ganja, nor does he have any difficulty associating with people of all categories, because he does not find anything which does not have the divine element in it. Everything and everyone are all the same to him because he sees beyond their outer form and, if necessary, he can transmute matter. His boons given to his devotees or disciples can do good to them, but only if they use it judiciously. Misuse of such gifts brings about a swift divine retribution. But there is one thing that Baba Kinaram does care about, and that is true asceticism and inclusiveness in saintly life. That is a cornerstone of the ideal that his life presents.

It is in the context of this ideal that we see his Aghor-Avadhūt, siddha-yogi persona which gives him infinite strength to protest social injustice, whatever form it may take. He could have stayed quiet when his guru-brother did not invite him, but then how would he have awakened Govardhandas' social consciousness? If he had not helped the young Brahman widow, or the people of the Kohalin town, how would he have demonstrated the social responsibility of a *sant*? Had he not asked the Maithil Brahmins to eat fish, how would he have found a solution to the prevalent social hierarchy? How would he have demonstrated a saint's compassion if he had not built a well at Ramgarh, or blessed the Krin-Kund with healing powers? By showing him superior even to Tulsidas, devotees affirm the sanctity of Shiva's living and walking human form, the Aughar *sant*, in his own city Kashi. His practice with the yogini demonstrates the limitless potential of tantra. And the

³⁴ After this curse the royal family of Kashi continued only with adopted children. Since that time no Aughar ascetic or devotee accepted food or water from the royal family of Kashi. At the time of Aghoreshwar Mahaprabhu Bhagwan Ram Ji, the then King of Kashi, Vibhutarayan Singh, had requested him to absolve the family of the curse. Aghoreshwar Mahaprabhu had told him that this task will be done by the 11th abbot of Krin Kund when he would complete 30 years of his age. In 1978 Aghoreshwar Mahaprabhu consecrated the nine-year-old boy Siddhartha Gautam Ram as the 11th abbot of Krin-Kund. He completed the task of absolving the royal family of Kashi of their curse on 30 August 2000 by partaking of fruit and water in their palace. <https://iswaqt.com/kinaram-kashi-rnaresh-shrapmukt/>.

stories of Hiran Mukherjee and Raghu inform us of the necessity of self-control when using the gifts imparted by a saint. The stories of his interaction with Shahjahan and Chetsingh provide examples of a *sant* keeping watch over the exercise of political power by the ruling elite. In all these stories Baba Kinaram appears to take everyone along while fulfilling social aspirations. This is the inspiration that the devotees derive from these stories.

Two scholars, Gupta (1993) and Barrett (2008) have written about the Aghor and the Kinarami tradition after extended research. Gupta's research stresses that Baba Kinaram's Aghor tradition can be understood only through the medium of the Nath tradition. This is because the conception of an Avadhūt is well-explained in Nath literature, they also believe in non-duality, do not believe in the caste system, and at least one of their lineages has Dattatreya as their Guru. The practices of the erstwhile Kapalikas who became assimilated with them, are perceived even in the Nathpanth. It is true that the way Baba Kinaram's tradition has presented his life-story, resembles that of the Nath yogis. There is value in this assertion, but this viewpoint is more helpful for understanding the historical development of the Aghor tradition. The Aghor and the Nath traditions are so organically interwoven that it is extremely difficult to separate each one of their strands. But, since it is dependent upon the guru lineage, the present form of Baba Kinaram's tradition is not reflected adequately by only the Nath tradition. In his tradition Matsyendranath and Gorakhnath are respected, but there is no memory of them as a Guru figure. The fact of Dattatreya being venerable to both the traditions, in fact, makes them parallel traditions that keep intermingling. If we look at the life and conduct of Aghoreshwar Mahaprabhu Bhagwan Ram and the disciples who have followed him, it is not that of the Nath yogis at all, it is very much that of a *sant* who is socially conscious. In her research Gupta adopts a social-science perspective and using the socio-political analytical tool, looks at the history of the Aghor tradition as a protest against the then prevailing misuse of religious and political power. It includes the struggle inherent in the caste system. This point of view is very useful for conducting social analysis, but she sees the personality and tradition of Baba Kinaram as a process only of establishing Kshatriya domination against other forces, she finds the activities of Baba Kinaram and his followers as comparable to the court of a political ruler (1993, 132). It is in confirmation of this viewpoint that she writes most of the members of this tradition are Kshatriyas. It is difficult to accept this conclusion. All the scholars, since the time they have begun to write about Baba Kinaram, have affirmed that his tradition includes people from all castes (Gaur 1938, 739; Shastri 1959; Chaturvedi 1972). Barrett had also confirmed this caste pluralism during his research. In fact, commenting on Gupta's conclusion Barrett indicated that her research was rather heavily influenced by male religious authorities, and the mediation of her male upper caste research assistants. That is why she could not grasp the expanse of the followers of this tradition. Had she interviewed more householders, especially female devotees, her research would have been deeper (Barrett 2008, 10).

Barrett conducted his research on the Aghor tradition from a particular point of view, that of health and treatment. His field of study was such that he 'had' to interact with people from every caste, class and gender. For this reason, his research expanse was greater. This is what led him to the meeting with 'old style' and 'new style' Aghor *sants*. It was the '*sant*' of the new style that had led to Gupta's disappointment during her first meeting. But

Barrett has also expressed well that every tradition experiences change in keeping with time and place, and such change is important to keep in tandem with social participation. Adopting a different stance from that of Gupta, instead of defining the Aghor tradition in terms of caste struggle, he looks at it as a socio-psychological state which transcends caste and untouchability, in the same way that the Aghor and Sarbhāṅg *sants* have defined their traditions. Taking cognizance of the efforts made to counter social and physical diseases by Aghoreshwar Mahāprabhu Bhagwan Ram Ji, Barrett agrees that the notion of purity and pollution remains associated with the Aghoris, but, very different from Gupta's method of analysis, how the service of treatment itself accords the status of a transmuter of power in the eyes of the patient (2008, 25-6). One can see that in this point of view there is no thought of honor, or position or kingdom, but the fact of curing people from disease accrues power automatically, rather than power gained through a struggle.

Thus, the picture that we get of Baba Kinaram is not just that of a saint who wrote poetry and meditated. He was a dynamic man, fearless, accomplished, and ready and willing to put himself forward to help other people if the occasion demanded it. He was not shy of teaching lessons to those who erred in their ways, but he was exceedingly kind in his behavior with everyone. He was an Avadhūta, an Aughar, who accepts all, who realizes the value of everything, and yet he remains detached from everything. Baba Kinaram's disciple, Bijaram, has recounted that Baba Kinaram took his *samādhi*, at will, on 21 September 1771. According to that text he had invited all his well-wishers to Krin-Kund, asked Bijaram for some alcohol and his *hukka*, took a few puffs from it, and then he let his life-force depart from the top part of his cranium. His *samādhi* was built at Krin Kund. It remains a holy place of spiritual succor to thousands every year [fig. 6].

2.2 A Question of Dates

It is usually difficult to assign reliable dates to medieval personalities in India, and Baba Kinaram is no exception. Scholars have assigned different dates for his birth as well as for his passing. We come across several sets of dates from three different kinds of sources which, in the absence of citation of the sources from where the authors got their information, it is not easy to make a sound conclusion about them. These are:

- 1601-1743, total age 142 years (Gaur 1938, 739-40)
- 1601-1771, total age 170 years (Singh 1999, 28)
- 1601-1826, total age 225 years (Singh 2006, 120)
- 1627-1769, total age 142 years (Bhṛiguvāṇshi 1915, 44; Chaturvedi 1973, 99, 103; Shastri 1959, 137, 139)
- 1684-1787, total age 104 years (Chaturvedi 1972, 690)

The first source of information about Baba Kinaram, of course, is the tradition that was initiated by him. There are two sets of dates according to the literature published by this tradition, meaning the literature published by the Shri Sarveshwari Samooh ashram at Parao on the outskirts of the city of Varanasi, and the Aghor Shodh evam Sewa Sansthan in the heart of the city of Varanasi, which is a part of the Krin-Kund monastery. The first set of dates, published in the year 1973 in the book titled *Aughar Bhagawān Rām*,

authored by Yagyanarayan Chaturvedi, states that he was born around the year 1601 (Vikram Samvat 1658) and left his body in the year 1769 (Vikram Samvat 1826) (Chaturvedi 1973, 99, 103). The Aghoracharya Baba Kinaram Aghor Shodh evam Seva Sansthan, Krin-Kund, published a book in 1999 titled *Aghorācārya Bābā Kināram Jī*, authored by Udaybhan Singh, which cites his birth date the same as the one mentioned in the Yagyanarayan Chaturvedi book, but mentions his passing away date as 21 September 1771, thus making this set of dates as 1601-1771. This book is said to be based on an old birch-leaf manuscript which was written in the time of Baba Bijaram, a direct disciple of Baba Kinaram (Singh 1999, 28). However, this manuscript was so old and had been in such a poor state of preservation that insects had eaten away sections of it, and it was so brittle that parts of it would crumble at a mere touch. So to extract full meaning from it, the author had to add words with reference to the readable material (26). An exception to this date from within the tradition was published by Gulabchand Anand, a disciple of Baba Jainarayanram, the 7th abbot of the Kinaram Sthal who had relinquished his body in the year 1923, and who had got the book *Śrī Poṭhī Viveksār* published while he was still alive. The fourth edition of this book published in 1965, then available at the Shri Jainarayan Satsang Mandali in the city of Varanasi, states that Baba Kinaram was born in the Vikram Samvat year of 1684, thus making his common era birth year as 1627 approximately (section Sankshipt Jivani, 1). Many scholars subscribe to this date in their writings.

The scholarly literature in Hindi (from where authors writing in other languages may have received their information either directly or indirectly) is our second source of information about the dates ascribed to Baba Kinaram. This literature subscribes mostly to the birth year of 1627 for him.³⁵ An exception within this second group is that of the learned author Ramdas Gaur whose book *Hindutva* was published in the year 1938 (Vikram Samvat 1995). He mentions Baba Kinaram to have been born around the Vikram Samvat year of 1658 (c. 1601) (Gaur 1938, 739), but he does not cite his source.

The third source of information are the popular books published outside of the direct tradition of Baba Kinaram. For example, the popular Hindi magazine *Kalyān* which became a literary resource for all Hindu things since it started publishing in the year 1926, has a brief biographical article on Baba Kinaram in its 12th year special issue titled “Sant-Ank” ‘the issue on saints’ published in August 1937. It lists Baba Kinaram’s birth year as Vikram Samvat 1684, month of *Caitra* (March-April) (*Kalyan*, 1937, 628).³⁶ This information was repeated in later volumes like the “Yogatattva” issue of the magazine (Khemka 1991, 385) [fig. 7].

So we have a range of years for how long Baba Kinaram might have lived. As is evident, opinions vary. To an extent, the published scholarly consensus seems to be that he lived for 142 years, although already in 1951 Parashuram Chaturvedi had noted this discrepancy and had tried to resolve it. According to him this difference in his lifespan could be a result of confusing dates given in Vikram Samvat as belonging to the common era calendar,

³⁵ Shastri 1959, 137; Kaviraj 1963, 197; Chaturvedi 1972, 690; Singh 2006, 118. Gaya Singh cites two more authors, viz. Dr. Kailash Mishra, ‘*Santkavi Darshan*’, and Dr. Radha Mohan Shrivastava, ‘*Bharat ki Sant Parampara*’, both of whom are in concordance with this date.

³⁶ This date is repeated in other popular publications such as: Mishra 1950, 244; Ramlal 1957, 755; Das 1987, 695; Pandeya 1976, 7. Joshi 1974, 280 simplifies the information by stating Baba Kinaram was born somewhere between the common era years of 1600 and 1620.

and vice-versa. He resolved the issue by taking Baba Kinaram's lifespan to be 104 years based on the article in the *Aaj* newspaper, not an impossible age to live to at that time, and accordingly came up with the dates of birth: c. 1684, and death: c. 1787, making the presumption that Baba Kinaram passed away in Vikram Samvat 1844 (Chaturvedi 1972, 690). Scholars like Shobhanath Lal agree with this estimation (Lal 1973, 63) and, as a strategy to ascribe a realistic life-span, this does not sound like a bad one. However, this strategy presumes that the possibility of a lifespan which is more than 104 years is unrealistic. This confusion in dates might be a product of Krin-Kund's specific tradition. Chaturvedi writes:

According to a Puranic story, the dom who had bought King Harishchandra, was named Kalu. That Kalu donated all the land around the Krin-Kund to the Aghoracharya. That is why, in the Vedic times, the population began to call whoever sat on that seat as Kaluram. Whoever occupied that seat was referred to as Kaluram [...] That tradition of Kaluram continued till the fifteenth-sixteenth centuries. And that is what transformed into the Kinarami tradition. Now whoever occupies this seat is known as Kinaram. (1973, 121)

In keeping with this statement, it is possible that during the long life-span for Baba Kinaram that has been discussed, there could have been more than one abbot of the Krin-Kund Sthal, who were all referred to as 'Kinaram'.

2.2.1 The Two Paintings – Khwaja Sahib

It may be as Chaturvedi writes. But the issue of Kinaram's dates becomes a little more complicated because of two oil paintings.³⁷ The first painting, at the Victoria and Albert Museum, has the generic title of *Khwaja Sahib* depicting the annual Urs festival of Mu'Inuddin Chishti at Ajmer.³⁸ The description of the painting on the V&A webpage reads:

This painting of a gathering of mystics was painted during the reign of the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan, probably between 1650 and 1655. It depicts Sufi saints and courtiers in the shrine of Muin ad-Din Chishti, the supposed founder of the order of Chishti Sufis in Hindustan in the 11th century. They are in the presence of dervishes who attempt to attain mystical states by ecstatic dancing, music, and chanting. Three Muslim saints are among them: Qutb ad-Din Bakhtiyar Kaki, who died in 1235, Muin ad-Din Chishti himself (he died in 1236) and Mullah Shah Badakshi who was still alive at the time the painting was done.

Mullah Shah Badakshi died in 1661 (Gadon 1986, 153). The painting was once in the collection of Warren Hastings, Governor General of India from 1774-85. The physical description of the painting says the hills in the

³⁷ I am grateful to Prof. Jack Hawley, Columbia University, for having brought these two paintings to my notice.

³⁸ *Khwaja Sahib*. <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O16063/khwaja-sahib-painting-unknown/>.

background are clearly recognizable as those in Ajmer. The occasion of the painting seems to be the

celebration of Zikr, or whirling dance, on the plinth of a building. In the foreground, a group of Hindu figures, members of various eclectic groups, are identified by minuscule inscriptions. These are twelve Hindu religious reformers ranging from the 15th to the 17th centuries.

The tiny inscriptions that the text mentions are names written in Persian/Urdu letters. Gadon (1986, 153-7) identifies these saints in detail, from left to right, as [fig. 8]:

(1) Ravidas (fl. 1470), a cobbler from Benaras, a member of the untouchable caste of leatherworkers, known for his great holiness and as a guru of Mira Bai, the Rajput princess who became a great *Krishnabhakti* poet; (2) Pipa (1353-1403), said to have been a Raja who abdicated his sovereignty and distributed his wealth among the poor; (3) Namdev (latter half of the 14th century) exemplifies the Maharashtran sant-Vaishnava tradition in his total devotion to the god Vithoba [...]; (4) Sena, a barber from the court of the Raja of Rewa, wrote hymns and according to popular tradition performed menial offices for holy men, believing that the service of *sants* was equivalent to the service of God himself; (5) Kamal, the reputed son of Kabir, was the founder of one of the twelve branches of the Kabir Panthis; (6) Aughar is not a personal name, but rather the name of a class of Shaivite ascetics, followers of Gorakhnath, who have not undergone the final initiation ceremony of the *Naths* of having their ears split; (7) Kabir, (first half of 15th century) was a low caste weaver of Benares, a great mystic and bold reformer whose verses in praise of God, sung in the language of the people, were widely known among the masses [...]; (8) Pir Muchhandar, the Panjabi form of Matsyendranath, is a mythical figure, known in the traditions of the *yogis* as their first teacher and also as the guru of Gorakhnath; (9) Gorakh (12th century) was the foremost guru of a Shaivite ascetic sect found all over India, Nepal and Tibet [...]; (10) Jadrup was a Hindu sadhu from Ujjain referred to at some length by Jahangir in his *Memoirs* [...]; (11) Lal Swami, popularly called Babalal Das Vairagi, a Hindu reformer and teacher. He is best remembered for his dialogues with Dara Shikuh which were recorded by the prince's secretary, Chandar Bhan, who was present at these interviews, perhaps acting as interpreter; (12) Identification of the twelfth man is problematical as the inscribed name is badly rubbed and only the latter part "... Swami" can be read. This might be Chitan Swami, the teacher of Babalal who is seated next to him, and if so this would follow the existing pattern here of representing disciple with his guru.³⁹

Writing in 1921, Binyon and Arnold were quick to point out:

In no case can it be assumed that we have here an authentic portrait of the saint whose name is written on each separate figure, but the

³⁹ Binyon and Arnold, in *The Court Painters of the Grand Moguls*, have the title of this painting as *A Dance of Dervishes* (1921, plate XVIII-XIX, 40). They suggest that the last figure could be Pir Panth Swami (72-3).

representations are remarkably true to type, and such faces may be seen in India even to the present day.

They provide further information regarding what was known about these saints then, and regard Kabir and Gorakh to be contemporaries. For the figure nominated as Aughar, they write:

Aughar is the name of a class of Saiva ascetics, who drink spirituous liquors and eat meat, the name is here applied either to a typical representative of the sect, which was reformed under the influence of Kabir, or to the reputed founder. (Binyon, Arnold 1921, 73)

These twelve Hindu saints on the predella of the painting are broadly divided into two groups, facing each other as if in a discussion, where Rai Das, Pipa, Namdev, Sena, Kamal, Aughar and Kabir form part of the group on the left, and Pir Muchhandar, Gorakh, Jadrup, Lal Swami and possibly Pir Panth Swami or Chitan Swami form the group on the right. Within this section of the painting the juxtaposition of the saints next to each other is not arbitrary. Gadon (1986, 156) notes that the group on the left comprising of Ravidas, Pipa etc. represents *sants* while the group on the right comprising of Matsyendranath and Gorakhnath etc. represents yogis, and that this grouping creates a little problem because the Aughar belongs in the group of the Shaivite yogis. In the painting the Aughar is placed behind Kabirdas, and between Kabir and his son Kamal, looking towards the group described as yogis here. He seems to be saying something while gesticulating with his right hand. The observation that Gadon makes is an astute one. Why, indeed, is the Aughar in the group of the *sants* and not in the group where the Nath yogis are represented, when the common understanding in western scholarship has been that Aughars belong to the group of Nath. It is relevant to note the attributes of the Aughar in relation to the figures identified as Matsyendranath and Gorakhnath, both of whom are depicted with the well-recognized earrings and *singis*, the small horns, which are worn as distinguishing sectarian marks by the Nath Yogis. The Aughar does not have earrings, his ears do not even seem to be pierced. He does not have a horn around his neck either. Gadon's perplexity, then, stems from the commonly understood Nath-yogi persona of the Aughar [fig. 9].

Looking at an enlargement of the figure of the Aughar in the painting behind whose right ear we can see the word 'Aughar' written in Persian/Urdu characters, he has a thick black beard, a monk's white robe with small patterns on it, and a cap which is somewhat similar to the cap that Kabir is wearing, perhaps indicating a philosophical similarity between the two of them, as hypothesized by Binyon and Arnold above. The cap is darker in color and has rows of stitches which form a simple design. If we read published descriptions of an Aughar ascetic, this is not really the typical attire of a seeker who is still walking on the path of enlightenment. They are often dressed in black or blue attire during their period of *sāḍhanā*. According to the Kinaram tradition, they begin to wear white robes only after enlightenment (Chaturvedi 1973, 53). If that is the case, it is not very likely that the figure in the painting represents "a typical representative of the sect". It is more likely, as Binyon and Arnold surmise, the figure of "the reputed founder". This is pertinent because all the figures in this part of the painting are established, recognized and popular personalities. Putting

just a representative of the tradition in the painting would not fit the pattern. Now, the only person who is embellished with that kind of an accolade when it comes to the Aghor tradition, of being its 'reputed founder', is Baba Kinaram. He is known as the seventeenth century rejuvenator of the Aghor tradition, and he is equally known as a personality in whom the Vaishnava and Shaiva streams of Hindu devotion come together.⁴⁰ Shastri is unequivocal in stating that after Dattatreya, it was Baba Kinaram who popularized and diffused the Aghor tradition amongst the tradition of the *sants* (1959, 139). Acharya Parashuram Chaturvedi considers it beyond dispute that Baba Kinaram is the *sant* who popularized this tradition the most (1972, 690). There is no other figure in the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries, before or after Baba Kinaram, who can be regarded as the founder of the Aghor tradition. Looking only at the sectarian symbols, those Naths who trace the line of their gurus to Jalandharnath also do not wear earrings even after full initiation, and they call themselves Aughar (White 1996, 100), but that is not the case for Baba Kinaram. Nowhere in his hagiography as published by his tradition in Banaras do we come across the word Nath, and he has not described himself as a follower of Gorakhnath or Jalandharnath anywhere.⁴¹ Today we know that the Aghor/Avadhūta tradition propounded by Baba Kinaram has many similarities to the non-dualism propounded in texts attributed to Gorakhnath, as also by Kabir, but, in addition, Baba Kinaram is regarded as one of the most prominent Aughar saints of the *sant* tradition (*santmat*) in north India. The Avadhūta path that he propounded certainly has yoga in it, but it also has bhakti 'devotion' as an essential element. The way of life it demonstrates, where Baba Kinaram exercises non-discrimination and selflessly helps people in need, can only be described as saintly.⁴² We do not find an easy explanation to account for the Aughar figure sitting apart from the Naths, when other paintings show them sitting with the Naths.⁴³ The painting is said to have been made between the years 1650-55.⁴⁴ The figure of the Aughar saint in the painting looks to be in early middle age, which would be the case if Baba Kinaram was born around the year 1601. Although his beard is black, when the painting is enlarged one can notice speckles of brown in it which might represent age.

⁴⁰ Mallinson notes that in the Mughal paintings these two streams of ancient celibate asceticism were probably represented by the Daśanāmī Samnyāsī and Rāmānandī ascetic orders amongst the Vaishnavas, and, for Shaivism, the Tantric adepts such as the ones who are called Naths today (2013).

⁴¹ Literature on the Shri Datta Sampraday in Maharashtra mentions Baba Kinaram. During his visit to the Girnar mountain it is said that Gorakhnath guided him (Joshi 1974, 280; Shastri 1977, 455).

⁴² Further back in time, Buddhaghosa's Vishuddhimagga describes in detail the practices of a cremation ground dwelling ascetic. In this context the words Avadhūta and Aghora denote the same kind of practitioner (Malavika 1966, 368).

⁴³ See Mallinson 2013, fig. 11, with reference to the *Tashrīḥ al-akvām* and the painting of Shambhunath with a young Aughar.

⁴⁴ Novetzke (2008, 50) has used the same painting as published by Arnonld and Binyon, but he mentions that the painting dates to early eighteenth century.

2.2.2 The Two Paintings – A Gathering of Holy Men

There is another reason why it seems to us that this figure represents Baba Kinaram. There exists another painting, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in the City of New York, titled *A Gathering of Holy Men of Different Faiths*, made about a hundred years after the first painting came into existence. It is a copy of the predella of the first painting, attributed to Mir Kalan Khan (born c. 1710-15, died c. 1770-75) (McInerney 2011, 607) when he worked under the emperor of Delhi, Muhammad Shah (r. 1719-48), and possibly his successors around 1730-55. Mir Kalan Khan is known in the art world as an accomplished copyist of earlier Mughal paintings, and this painting represents that skill of his. He has taken only the predella of the *Khwaja Sahib* painting and turned it into a new painting all its own. The background of the painting here is more verdant, more like an ascetic's hermitage in the jungle. We still have the two groups of saints on the left and the right, but a couple of saints have gone missing. From the left group saint Pipa has disappeared, and the group on the right has been significantly reconfigured. Not only have Babalal and his guru not been included, it seems that all the figures on the right have been given sectarian marks of the Nath tradition. Gorakhnath and Matsyendranath have the distinctive large black earrings, Jadrup has also been given large earrings, but his are white. He also has the Vaishnava *ūrdhva puṇḍra* on his forehead. This may be Mir Kalan Khan's way of giving Jadrup a Vaishnava-Nath identity, because ascetics other than Shaiva-Naths also wore hooped earrings (Mallinson 2013, fn. 61). There is a fourth figure seated behind Gorakhnath who has the small Nath horn around his neck. The horn can be seen around the neck of Gorakhnath as well, but not for Matsyendranath because both he and Gorakhnath have been given musical instruments which they seem to be playing. These instruments somewhat hide the front part of Matsyendranath's body, obscuring his *singi* [fig. 10].

The Aughar figure in this painting has experienced some changes too. Although he still looks pretty much the same as in the *Khwaja Sahab* painting, he has been embellished with sectarian marks. He now has an *ūrdhva puṇḍra*, the mark of a Vaishnava devotee, on his forehead, just like Jadrup, but he is not included in the group on the right comprising of Nath yogis. He is still on the left side with the saints. His left hand is now visible, holding a round fan, probably a *morchhal* (a peacock feather whisk or fan), but which looks like a *tālapaṭ* (a palm-leaf whisk), which might represent a Vaishnav symbol, although even Vaishnava-Naths have sometimes been portrayed with a fan in their hands (Mallinson 2013, fig. 9, fn. 77) [fig. 11].

When the painting is enlarged it seems not only that his right earlobe has been pierced, but that he has an ear-ring that runs from his earlobe, behind the ear, and enters the cartilage inside his ear, the top part of which is visible at the bottom of the inside of the ear. But the ear-ring is not the large, round one usually associated with Nath yogis. So what do we make of these changes to the persona of the Aughar? Clearly, he is being identified as a Vaishnava, and perhaps also as a Nath, going by the fan (see Losty 2016; Mallinson 2011, fig. 2) and the earring respectively. It is hard to say whether Mir Kalan Khan had a good knowledge of what Mallinson points out were the Vaishnava-Naths during the Mughal times and therefore has highlighted the Vaishnava aspect of the Aghor figure, yet he has given him special ear-rings to denote his special status. What we have presented here

is an unsubstantiated hunch based on logic. Further research is needed to ascertain if it has any historical validity.

3 Literary Appraisal

Baba Kinaram's poetry represents a fusion of the Aghor and the Vaishnava traditions. He is said to have authored many works of poetry but not all of them are available. The works published by Shri Sarveshwari Samooh include:

1. *Viveksār* (Vikram Samvat 1812 according to internal evidence, c. 1755)
2. *Gītāvalī*
3. *Rām-Rasāl*
4. *Rām-Gītā*
5. *Unmunī Rām*

The works attributed to him but not available include:

6. *Rām Capeṭā*
7. *Rām-Maṅgal*
8. A translation of the *Yoga Vasiṣṭha* in verses (Chaturvedi 1972, 694).

Of the published texts, *Viveksār* and *Unmunī Rām* are written primarily in *dohā* and *caupāi* meter, *Gītāvalī*, *Rām-Rasāl* and *Rām-Gītā* have *padas* which can be sung in tunes named *shabda pīlukā*, *bhairavī*, *bhairo* etc., and others in *danḍak*, and *cancarīk* meter.⁴⁵ While *Viveksār*, *Unmunī Rām* and *Gītāvalī* are regarded as representative of his Aghor and *nirguṇa* leanings, *Rām-Rasāl* and *Rām-Gītā* reflect his *saguṇa* Ram-devotion leanings, probably because of his first guru saint Shivaram of Karo village in present day state of Uttar Pradesh, who was a Vaishnava. Shivaram ji was a devout *Rām-bhakta* 'devotee' who is said to have penned his own magnum opus on yoga and devotion titled *Bhakti Jaimāl*, a book inspired by Tulsidas, which is said to have had more than 900 chapters. That book has now gone out of circulation and is rather hard to find. As scholars have noted, there exists a strong element of yoga in Vaishnavism.⁴⁶ Shivaram, a well-established Vaishnava saint of

⁴⁵ Within these published texts *Viveksār* has 126 *dohā* or two-line distichs, 74 *caupāi*, and 10 *chappaya*, making it a total of 210 verses (Chaturvedi 2010). But this number depends upon the method of counting one uses. In the February 1975 edition of the *Viveksār* published by Shri Sarveshwari Samooh, each line of a *caupāi* is treated as separate *caupāi*, bringing their count up to 142. Similarly, every two lines of each *chappaya* has also been counted as a *chappaya* in its own right, bringing the number of *chappayas* up to 30 (Chaturvedi 1975). The number of verses in this edition, then, becomes 298 total. *Unmunī Rām* has 217 *dohā* and one *savaīyyā*, making it a total of 218 verses. *Gītāvalī* has *padas* named *śabda* which are seven in number, six *pada* each in *rekhatā* and *dandak*, 2 *pada* each in *sorāṭhā*, *kavitta*, and *bhairavī*, and one *pada* each in *śabda pīlu kā*, *pada Sindh bhairavī*, and *śabda sinh bhairavī*, making it a total of 29 *padas*. *Rām-Rasāl* has 25 *padas* in *śabda bhairo*, 50 *padas* in *dandak*, and 6 in *cancarīk*, making a total of 81 verses. *Rām-Gītā* has 8 *padas* of *kavitta*, 5 *padas* of *savaīyyā* and 3 *padas* of *chappaya*, making it a total of 16 verses. The total number of verses that we find in Kinaram's texts is about 900 (S. Mishra 2004, 79). In terms of sheer numbers this is not a lot when compared to the numbers of verses in *Gorakh-Bānī*, *Kabīr Granthāvalī* or *Sundardas' Granthāvalī*, but it is enough to give us plenty to understand Baba Kinaram's philosophy and way of life.

⁴⁶ See Raghav 1963 and Dwivedi 1978, 13. Talking about the various traditions that became assimilated into the Nath fold, Dwivedi mentions the tradition of Kapil Muni from whom emerged

his time, seems to maintain that yogic aspect of Vaishnavism intact.⁴⁷ It can be presumed that Baba Kinaram learned the skills of expressing his mysticism in verses from his first guru, Baba Shivaram, and then refined it, and mixed it with the words and concepts of other traditions that he came across during his peregrinations.

If we were to categorize these five texts according to the genre of their verses, we could say that primarily *Viveksār* is a mystical-yoga text, *Unmunī Rām* is a philosophical and intellectual text, *Gītāvalī* is a Tantrik and social text, and *Rām-Rasāl* and *Rām-Gītā* are devotional texts. Here, we will focus on just two texts – *Viveksār* and *Gītāvalī*. Towards the end of this introduction, however, we will cite some examples of Baba Kinaram's literary prowess from the other texts.

3.1 *Viveksār*

Viveksār is regarded as his most prominent composition which illustrates his Avadhūta doctrine.⁴⁸ This text was composed on the banks of the river

the Kapilanis. In the *Bhāgavat* Kapil Muni is well known as a teacher of yoga and *vairāgya*.

⁴⁷ The 1965 version of the *Viveksār* published by Gopal Chandra Anand cites verses from *Bhakti Jaimāl* which are all about the perception and piercing of the subtle *cakras* within the body as can be found in the texts of Gorakhnath. An example should suffice here: *Aṣṭāṅga yoga jin sādhyo, lagī samādhi akhaṇḍa, Ulaṭi pavana tin bāndhyo, caṛhi vāyu brahmāṇḍa* (*Śrī Poṭhī Viveksār. Saṅkṣipt Jīvanī*, 10 no. 1). Translation: One who becomes proficient in *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* achieves the undisturbed state of ecstasy. That person holds the reversed breath which reaches up to the highest reaches of the cosmos (or the cranial vault). The text elaborates: 1. (*mūla cakra* – the base *cakra*) *caupāi | Nau cakran kara karahū bakhānā, sunahu nṛpati tum param sujānā. | Mūla cakra vaśa gudā majhārā, cāri patra janu agini aṅgārā. | Tāhi kamala mahā yoni trikonā, tā mahā puruṣ basai gahi maunā. | 'rā' akṣara jasa dīpak jotī, tehi mahā puruṣ kānti udyotī. Nāma Gaṇeśa aruṇa tana soī, tāhi lakhat baṛa paṇḍit hoī. | Mānasasik pūjā tahavā kījai, laḍuvā dhūpa Gaṇeśahi dījai. | Ajapā jāp tahā pāca hajāra, eka cakra kara asa byohārā |* (*Śrī Poṭhī Viveksār, Cakra-Varṇana*, 10). Translation: I describe the nine *cakras* to you, listen O wise king. The first *cakra* lies at the base of anus, it has four petals bright as fire. In that lotus exists the vaginal triangle, where resides the male element quietly. It has the letter 'Ra' bright as the flame of a lamp, in that reflects the beauty of the male element. Its name is Ganesh, its body is like the Sun, only a very wise one can perceive it. Perform mental worship at that point, offer sweet *laddoos* and incense to that Ganesh. Perform the chanting of the un-chanted or silent *jap* at that point five-thousand times. This is the right practice for the first *cakra*. We can see immediately in these verses a comingling of traditions. The notion of the *cakras* is not new, *Upaniṣads* mention it, Gorakhnath has talked about it. But while Gorakhnath's literature mentions six *cakras* (Barthval 1960, 36 no. 105), Shivaram delineates nine of them. Nine *cakras* are mentioned in the *Yogarājopaniṣad* (*brahmacakra, svādhiṣṭhānacakra, nābhicakra, hṛdayacakra, kanthacakra, tālucakra, bhrūcakra, brahmarandhracakra, vyomacakra*. See Acharya 1971, 544-5). Buddhists, on the other hand, usually mention just four. Shivaram mentions the *ajapā jap*, as does Gorakh. But Shivaram thinks of Ganesh at that *cakra* and is partial to offering incense and *laddoos* (traditional Indian sweets) to him, while Gorakh does not mention this. Shivaram also mentions the letter 'Ra' and the *yonī* triangle in which resides the male element, at that *cakra*, while Gorakh, does not say anything about it. Generally, in the *Sāmkhya* system of philosophy, *puruṣ* represents the unexpressed male element, while the *prakṛti*, the manifest female element, denoted by the triangle, represents the vulva or the *yonī*. In Baba Shivaram's exposition, the male element is expressed as Ganesh, son of Shiva and Parvati in the Hindu pantheon.

⁴⁸ Baba Kinaram writes: "*yah saṁsāra asāra ati pāca bhūta kī vāri. tātē yah avadhūta mat vi-racyō svamati vicāri*" (*Vivēksār, phal stuti*, verse 8). The word 'Avadhūta' is often used for realized practitioners in the field of Tantra, as well as in certain branches of Siddha Buddhism and the Nath tradition, though Gorakhnath seems to use it only for yogis. It has special implication with reference to the section on *kāyā paricaya*, or knowledge of the body, in *Vivēksār*. White documents that:

the fourteenth century *Śārngadhara Paddhati* goes so far as to classify the two major forms of yogic practice, the "six-limbed" practice and the "eight-limbed" practice, as "Gorakhnāthī"

Kshipra in Ujjain in c. 1755 (VS 1812). It is a short text on yoga-*sādhana* and bhakti and is divided into eight primary sections called *aṅgas* broadly similar in structure to *aṣṭāṅga* yoga (the eight limbs of yoga, although Kaviraj calls it a *ṣaḍāṅga* 'six-limbed' yoga text (1963, 198)), and a ninth section, *phal stuti*, on the merits of reading and practicing from this composition. Baba Kinaram himself regards it as a text on the eight-limbed yoga, for he mentions so in the section titled *phal stuti*:

O wise [disciple] I have described the eight limbs [of yoga] here. This is the essence perceived by Kinaram on meditating on the name.⁴⁹

The book is written in the form of a guru-disciple conversation, a style of discourse that, as Hajariprasad Dwivedi has pointed out, became so popular that it was used also in the traditions of Kabir, Nanak, Dadu (Dwivedi 1959, 88-9), the *Premamārgī* Sufis (Singh 2010, 3), and the *Ramanand Sampradāya* (Barthval 1960, 17). Baba Kinaram has conceptualized this text in a very methodical manner, teaching through a range of successive perspectives and themes. In each *aṅga* the guru describes a certain progressive step in yoga towards attaining union with the divine.

Baba Kinaram's prosody is well thought out and strong in this text. He has used only three kinds of verses, the *dohā*, *caupāī* and the *chappaya*. These three have been used to guide the conversation between the guru and the disciple with controlled velocity and simple beauty. We will see that he uses the *dohā* to display the emotions of the disciple or the guru, and to move forward the frame of the narrative from one scene to the next. It is through the *dohā* that the disciple asks questions to his guru, and it is through the use of the *dohā* that the guru replies to him in brief. Where the guru needs to expound on matters of principle or philosophy in an extended manner, he uses the *caupāī*, such as the designation of the various aspects of the body before the emergence of the creation, and their state after the world has been created etc. The *chappaya* verses are used only once in the text, in the *śūnya aṅga* (the limb of union, or nothingness), to describe the practitioner's experience of his cosmic form. The use of this verse provides an exhilarating experience to the reader as they go through the description.

The sections of the *Viveksār* are named *gurupada stavan* 'obeisance at the guru's feet', *jñāna aṅga* 'the limb of knowledge', *vijñāna aṅga* 'the limb of proficiency', *nirālamba aṅga* 'the limb of self-support', *samādhi aṅga* 'the limb of absorption', *ajapā aṅga* 'the limb of the un-chanted chant or the silent meditation', *śūnya aṅga* 'the limb of the Void, or nothingness', *rakṣā aṅga* 'the limb of protection' and *phala stuti* 'reflection on the merits of the text'. There are minor variations in the division of the sections of the *Viveksār* between the editions published in 1965, 1975, and 2010. The 1965 edition was published by the Shri Jainarayan Satsang Mandalī. In this edition the entire content of the *Viveksār* was divided only in eight sections, namely *satguru svarūpa varṇanam* 'description of the guru's form', *jñāna aṅga varṇanam* 'description of the limb of knowledge', *vijñāna kā aṅga* 'the limb of proficiency',

and "that of the son of Mṛkaṇḍa" (a reference to Dattātreya, inasmuch as it is this figure who reveals the yogic doctrine of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*) respectively. In the *Gorakh Upaniṣad*, Gorakh terms the former *akula* and the latter *avadhūta*. (White 1996, 141).

⁴⁹ *aṣṭa aṅga ehi māh kahyau samujhi lehu mativān
prāṇa pratiṣṭhā nāma lakhi Rāmakinā tattva jñāna* ||11||

nirālmba ko aṅga ‘the limb of self-support’, *śam ko aṅga* ‘the limb of absence of passion’, *ajapā ko aṅga* ‘the limb of the unchanted chant’, *sunna ko aṅga* ‘the limb of nothingness’, and *rakṣā ko aṅga* ‘the limb of protection’. In terms of section titles, *gurupada stavan* implies worshipping the guru’s feet while *satguru svarūpa varṇanam* means describing the form of the guru. The *jñāna aṅga* and the *jñāna aṅga varṇanam* mean the same thing. The only difference in section titles is between the *samādhi aṅga* and the *śam ko aṅga* where, the latter could mean restraint of the senses as well as the cessation of passion. The 1965 edition also does not have the section title of *phal stuti*, although the verses that fall under that section are still there. In the 1965 edition the title ‘description of the form of the guru’ comes after the first 23 *dohā* verses, pretty much at the very end, while the 1975 and the 2010 editions published by the Shri Sarveshwari Samooh, put the section heading right at the beginning of the verses. Although the section titles do not mention the eight limbs of *aṣṭāṅga* yoga, except the two sections of the *samādhi aṅga* and the *ajapā aṅga*, subject matter dealt with can be understood to have such a correlation on examining the text very closely. We discuss this aspect further in the section on the significance of the *Viveksār*.

The text, which begins by describing the process of creation of the universe, then informs the disciple about the constituents of the created universe as well as the constituents of the body. It then takes him on an internal journey towards *samādhi* where the disciple realizes his omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent state. Following this, in terms of the structure of poetry, something very interesting happens in the fourth *aṅga* called the *nirālmba aṅga*.

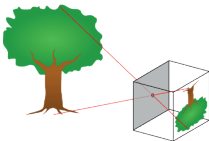
This section, the *nirālmba aṅga*, not only describes the proclivities of the subtle divine constituents within the body, but also, how they can be realized. This *aṅga* can be subdivided further by the subtle themes that its verses portray. The first theme relates to the true nature of these divine constituents of the uncreated universe (*caupāi* verses 156-65), the second theme is that of what animates them, or brings them to life in the body (verses 167-77), and the third theme is how they emerged in the cosmos (verses 180-90). However, the last two sets of themed verses, numbering 11, and 11 respectively, appear related internally in the logic of their expression. If we were to create three columns with the theme headings, verses in column one will relate directly horizontally to verses in column two, and verses in column two will relate inversely to verses in column three. Below is a graphic representation of this structure. For example, column 1 *Vivēksār*, first verse, number 156: Where the heart does not exist (with desire), there *Anūp* (the ever new, the formless god) resides in the *mahā man* (great heart or mind) [*hō to hṛdaya nāhī jahiyā. rahai anūp mahā man tahiya.*] relates directly to the first verse, number 167 in column 2: The life (or existence) of *man* ‘mind’ is animated by *pavan* ‘breath’, a wise one knows this [*man ko jīvan pavana pramānā. samujhi lehu yaha catura sujāna*]. This second column, in turn relates inversely to column 3, last verse, number 190: Breath is (caused) by *pavan* ‘air’, O disciple, this happens deliberately (or slowly) by itself [*svāsā pavana māha te hōī. he śīṣa akala atva gati soī.*].

We present a graphic image of this [tab. 1].

Table 1 The Internal Relationship of the *caupāis*

No.	Element	1. Uncreated Universe (156-65)	Relation	2. Placed in the body as (167-77)	Relation	3. The Cosmic 'Form' (180-90)
1.	The Mind	When the I-you duality does not exist; the "Peerless" stays in the Supreme spirit.	↔	The life of the mind rests on continuous breath; O wise one understand it well.		The Imperceptible blossomed with a companion; mind this mysticism gentlemen.
2.	The Air	When there is no sign of the navel; in the "Formless" dwells the breath special.	↔	Breath animates the Vital-breath; so I ask you to recognize the truth.		Surfaced Shiva from the Imperceptible God; settled in the seat – sans support.
3.	The Unstruck Sound	When I and you had no unstruck sound; it abided in the word OM.	↔	Then the 'Word' – its life next; it consecrates the (body with) Vital breath.		Shiva sired Time – weighty, immoderate; for dissolution of all good and bad.
4.	The Vital Force	When the Invisible God is not manifest; the Vital-air rests in the unmanifest.	↔	Second, such is the Vital-breath's life; without a doubt it is Brahman like.		Time triggered the Void Peerless; this awareness forms a splendid experience.
5.	The Soul	When the weft of the sky is not perceptible; the 'swan' resides in the imperishable.	↔	Brahman's life is of mystical transcendence; it is a being which is called Peerless.		From the Immortal manifested Shiva; conclude all scriptures and the Veda.
6.	The Godhead			Those who know the swan close in their heart; they achieve the supreme state.		Brahmā arose from light incandescent; ever fearless, with endless extent.
7.	Time Eternal	When the lotus is not yet born; in the void "Time" makes its home.	↔	The Imperishable one is not a sentient being; it is called the Peerless – so always recognize.		The "Eternal" revealed the Vital-breath; sang the essence of all theory and precept.
8.	The Void	Without the presence of the Peerless the world; stays in an attribute free void.	↔	Now the life of the Peerless is such; like the void and deep emptiness.		From the Vital-breath manifested the mind; it continues uninterrupted, everlasting.
9.	Lord Shiva	When deeds and actions do not exist; in Supreme Shiva then life persists.	↔	The life of the void that exists; like Shiva it eternally persists.		The "Word" resulted from the mind; said to be limitless, undefined.
10.	The Embodied Soul	When the light of the Moon does not shine yet; the sentient being is with the Invisible God.	↔	Shiva is not a sentient being the Avadhūt says; it is the Invisible God who is always detached.		Constant breath radiated in the "Word"; with which yogis keep detached from the world.
11.	The Invisible God	When the Suṣumnā is not yet formed; one with the void is the Invisible God.	↔	Listen to the life of the Invisible God; in the formless it has an eternal abode.		The breath comes from the Constant Breath; disciple, its motion is timeless.

The effect of such a relationship between the verses is almost like the inverted image through a pinhole camera, here the body, where what exists within the body does reflect what exists outside, but it is inverted in the refraction of its parts as it gets transmuted by the body.



However, this inversion is not a simple upside-down construction. No, the refraction and inversion is that of the subtle and gross formations. According to *Viveksār* it was the most subtle which first gave rise to forms that were more concrete at the beginning of creation. In transmutation inside the body, it is the concrete form first, and then the progressively more subtle elements deeper within. Metaphysically, it also indicates that our understanding of the world is upside down, in that, we focus more on the concrete

and less on the subtle, while in the etheric realm, it is the subtle that holds sway, the gross on the other hand, not so much.

The eighth limb of this text, the *rakṣā aṅga*, or the limb of protection, is somewhat unusual in that it implies the knowledge received and experienced by the disciple still needs to be protected, or the disciple may lose it. It is unusual because the generally accepted axiom is that once this state is reached, there is no going back – knowing the divine, one becomes divine. However, the eighth limb implies that if the disciples lose their sense control and way of life outlined by the guru, they can lose the knowledge thus received. The guru propounds four ways of protecting this knowledge: “Oh disciple, *ātam rakṣā* [‘protection of the self’] is easy to understand in four ways. Holding compassion, wisdom and thoughtfulness, keep the company of saints” (verse 255).

The guru then elaborates on these four elements by exhorting the disciple to take away *para pīṛā* ‘the pain of others’, distinguish between *saṅga-kusaṅga* ‘good and bad company’ and to eschew bad company, to have equal compassion for all beings etc. Then the guru exhorts against pride and ego in gaining such knowledge, imparting this awareness through a series of *koan* like paradoxical riddles which go in this way:

One who sang, sing did not, the one who didn’t, was the one who sang.
One who knew really knew not, one who did not, was the one to know.
One who saw, really did not, one who did not, really did see and so on.
(*Viveksār*, verses 269-82)

Thus warning the disciple about the pitfalls of knowledge-generated ego, and outlining the wise person’s way of life, the text moves on to the last section, *phala stuti* (merits of venerating the text), emphasizing that without a true guru, it is difficult to cross the ocean of the world.

3.2 *Gītāvalī*

While *Viveksār* and *Unmunī Rām* portray Kinaram’s yoga and *nirgun* thoughts, *Gītāvalī* reflects Kinaram’s Aghor persona. This is where we find his transgressive and *sāndhyabhāṣā* (*sandhabhasha*) poetry. This is also where we find more Urdu words and references to Islam. Unlike *Viveksār*, *Gītāvalī* is composed more in *padas* of various *rāgas* such as *pada Sindh bhairavī*, *śabda pīlukā*, *śabda gaurī kā* etc. A few examples will be appropriate here.

An example of *śabda* where Baba Kinaram references his Aghor guru Baba Kaluram, and highlights the rigors of a monk’s way of life, finishes his *pada* with a fine example of a *lokokti* ‘proverb’:

Everyone calls out Kina-Kina, no one gives Kalu(ram) a call.
Kalu and Kina have become one, it is Ram (god) who does all.
Of what use are a room and terrace, one small hut of woven grass is enough.
Of what use are fine woolen covers, a black blanket of five bits is enough.
Of what use are metal utensils, a small clay pot is enough.

Kinaram says it is not easy to be a fakir, setting foot on this path wrenches your gut.⁵⁰ (Kinaram 1987, 3 *śabda*)

After parting ways with his Vaishnava guru Baba Shivaram, Baba Kinaram had wandered to Girnar in Gujarat. One view says he was initiated there into the Aghor tradition by guru Dattatreya. The other says he was sent to Kashi where guru Dattatreya initiated him in the form of Baba Kaluram. Once initiated into this path Kinaram began to wander as a mad man with all the paraphernalia of a wandering ascetic. He writes in *śabda pīlukā*:

In the eyes of the world I became crazy.
Family and friends taunt me, I ate with fakirs leaving home.
A clay bowl, a loincloth, seat mat, a crooked stick, a *tilak* (sacred mark) on the forehead, I took a strange form.
Trusting the mantra of two letters, on pilgrimage I have not gone.
Kinaram who is crazy for Ram, says he found the wealth of the name of Ram. (Kinaram 1987, 3 *śabda pīlukā*)

Although honest in exposition and sweet in its Bhojpuri language description, going crazy for Ram is not exclusive to Kinaram. Kabir also writes, “when I became crazy I found Ram” (Das 2000, *padāvalī* 343). What is nice about Kinaram’s poem is that its Bhojapuri rendition gives it not a tone of authority, but the cry of a love-lorn child who tries desperately to find salvation, trying this, that and everything, till the time that he finds his loving deity.

Let us now look at an example of his transgressive Aghor poetry which is composed in *sāndhyabhāṣā* (described as the hidden or twilight language of the *sants*), because there is a literal meaning to this verse as well as a mystical meaning [tab. 2]. The metaphor of smoking cannabis as an indicator of meditation is striking.⁵¹

It can be difficult to understand this verse without the help of a mystical dictionary. Thankfully, we have the meanings here: *gānjā* = meditation / mantra / remembrance of God’s name; *amal* = purity / absorption; *sahaja sumati* = the natural / detached mind (or, wisdom of the Sahaja path); *kumati kaṭuka* = the bitter mind / the distracted mind / the duality-prone mind; *hukkā* = the body; *ḍaṇṭhā* = the backbone; *siddhi* = mystical success; *gānjā gyān* = the spiritual experience derived from meditation; *nīra vicār sār* = the distillate of reflection; *pāntahī* = the series of distracted thoughts; *amī* = absorption; *sār* = the essence; *bīja bikār* = thoughts that arise in the duality-prone mind; *tamākhū* = sense of self; *meri* = mix; *surati* = memory of the Guru’s words; *satī* = devotee; *mīn* = the mind. This list allows us to make a better sense of the verses that he wrote.

⁵⁰ The proverb that Baba Kinaram has used is *chaṭhī kā dūdh nikalnā*, is a Hindi proverb that signifies ‘to go through extreme hardship’, a meaning which is close to the English proverb ‘to be put through the wringer’. It signifies a state where a person is severely tested and faces overwhelming challenges.

⁵¹ Shastri 1959, 133 fn. 103 cites this poem where it has an extra line of text which is not found in the editions of *Gītāvalī* published by the Shri Sarveshwari Samooh: “*rākhī cīlam anal brahma gun khāt magan man lāī*”. The author has added this line here as is published in that footnote.

Table 2 The Metaphor of How to Smoke

Line No.	Verse	Possible Literal Meaning	Possible Spiritual Meaning
1.	<i>Gānjā piyāt sadā sukh dukh dali amal janāi.*</i>	Smoking marijuana regularly gives you a high and makes you forget daily strife.	Meditative concentration reveals constant purity beyond the duality of joy and sorrow.
2.	<i>Sahaja sumati ras dhūm leikaē kumati kaṭuka taju bhāi.</i>	Inhale the smoke with a calm mind, let its bitter mental convulsions dissipate.	Inhaling the joyful smoke of a wise mind, give up its convoluted nature.
3.	<i>hukkā kāyā madhi ḍaṇṭhā dhari cīlam siddhi dharāi.</i>	Insert the smoking pipe in the middle of the hookah, put on it a chilam well lit.	In the hookah of the body, straighten the backbone, put on it the chilam of mystical success.
4.	<i>Gānjā gyān āni dṛḍhā dhari param suprem caṛhāi.**</i>	Have a sound knowledge of your cannabis and press it lovingly but firmly into it.	Hold resolutely the grace of that knowledge and offer it with love.
5.	<i>nīra vicāra sāra kari rākhat pātahi te bilagāi.</i>	Carefully put in enough water, don't let it get into the smoking pipe.	Hold the water of the distillate of reflection, keep it free of category distinctions.
6.	<i>Amī sār sār ko levai bij bikār bihāi.</i>	Savor the subtle intoxication, leaving the seed granules aside.	Savor the bliss of spiritual essence, sifting away the corruptions arising in the mind.
7.	<i>tatva tamākhū merī śabda guru saras sadā sukhdāi.</i>	Mix the tobacco thinking of your Guru, this is always good.	Mix tobacco (the sense of Self) with memory of the Guru's word, always delectable and beneficial.
8.	<i>rākhi cīlam anal brahma gun khāt magan man lāi.</i>	Put on now the brightly lit fire which will give you the buzz.	Place on it the chilam of divine awareness, inhaling which one becomes intoxicated.
9.	<i>khaēcat bār bār nām mukh amal vimal ur chāi.</i>	Inhale this (smoke) repeatedly, you will feel the alegria take over.	Inhaling this (word) repeatedly, makes the whole pure heart absorbed.
10.	<i>Surati sarūp lagan mātayo man taju rasa viṣaē ghināi.***</i>	Let your mind be absorbed in this alegria, let all other loathsome subjects vanish.	Apply your mind to the surati (memory of the Guru's words), give up the loathsome indulgences.
11.	<i>nis bāsar ānanda satī gṛha mīna renu bal pāi.</i>	You will feel joy as a devoted smoker, your soul will receive the light.	There will be incessant joy in the house of the devotee, their mind receives the light.
12.	<i>Rāmakinā yah piye sādhu koī jehi nahi amal janāi.</i>	Kinaram says this is how a sadhu smokes, who does not yet know intoxicants.	Kinaram says this what a sadhu smokes, who does not yet know purity.

* Shastri 1959, 133 fn. 103 has the word *banāi* instead of *janāi*

** Shastri 1959, 133 fn. 103 has the word *barhāi* instead of *caṛhāi*

*** Shastri 1959, 133 fn. 103 has the word *māryo* instead of *mātayo*

Source: Kinaram 1987, 4 śabda danḍak; the eighth line in the poem is added from Shastri 1959, 133 fn. 103

In a verse of *śabda gaurikā*, Kinaram gives us a rare instance of criticizing folks based on their misguided practices, using another *lokoti* or proverb about the blind and the mute, and an idiom about explaining to others what one does not know oneself:

Saints, it seems like the world has gone mad.
Think about it in your heart, it is very strange.
One speaks wise words, performs ablutions, fire sacrifice and fasts, but has wickedness in his heart.
How do I recognize that which is so close, but he says is far.
With pride examines the skin and the bones, flesh, blood and feces in the body.
Eating all that he is called a pandit, but how can I be assured about it?
They read the Qur'an, the Veda and Puran, yet have no compassion in their hearts.
They boast their knowledge to others but themselves do not know the truth.
They kill animals as if non-divine, say it is the worship of the spirits and the goddess.
Yet they cannot perceive that imperceptible and feel anger in their heart.

It is like a blind man shows another the way, and a mute guides another with his voice.

Kinaram says without serving their guru, that ignorant one will perish.
(Kinaram 1987, 5 *śabda gaurikā*)

It seems that this verse may be incorporated in *Gītāvalī* because of the general attitude prevalent in the ambience of bhakti saints towards members of other traditions, a practice that started in the Hindi world with Gorakhnath, segued into Kabir's words, found prolific expression in the poetry of Sundardas of Dadupanth, and has trickled into Baba Kinaram's text. He is critical in this verse in a very general way towards 'all' who are erroneous without singling out any one community or tradition.

It is in the *Gītāvalī* that we also have evidence of Baba Kinaram's Islamic verses, perhaps written during his journey to Hinglaj in Balochistan. In rekhata meter, he writes:

Chanting the name of the Lord is a very difficult job O friends.
The sight of the eyes, the light of the Lord, is at the center of a loving heart.
At every moment his memory remains in the heart.
Like the wandering minstrels, Kinaram has an aching heart. (Kinaram 1987, 7 *rekhatā* 1)

Here is another verse, equally poignant:

O Official, creating havoc and sacrilege is the work of brutes, you seek the path of compassion.
The lord supreme is the greatest guide to the center of pilgrimage, the drum of his will shall be beaten.
Why such discrimination in this world full of air, Of truth, love is a reflection.
Kinaram's thankful yearning heart, passes time in God's kingdom.
[alternatively: Kinaram's yearning heart is thankful to have God's remembrance]. (Kinaram 1987, 11-12 *śabda*)

There are several other verses with similar sentiments, but these suffice as examples. Clearly, *Gītāvalī* itself, which has verses in praise of the *nirgun* god, as well as warnings about an indulgent way of life, as also all these variations of the mystical sentiment, is an excellent representation of Kinaram's syncretic persona, just like the guru Dattatreya he says gave him the knowledge of the *Viveksār*.

3.3 A Poem from a Picture at the Kinaram Sthal

At the culmination of this literary discussion, let us look at a poem which is in the style of the poem that we have cited from the *Gītāvalī*. Although this poem is not found in the published writings of Baba Kinaram, it could be seen at the bottom of a line drawing of him at the Krin-Kund Sthal before the recent renovation and construction work began. We feel that this is a poem written by Baba Kinaram, but since a name is not mentioned, it is difficult to say so with certainty. The poem throws some light on the self-description of an Aghor saint. Here too, in keeping with the use of twilight

language, we discern one kind of a meaning when we look at the words of the poem in the middle column. But the same words, in the right column, when looked at with the help of mystical vocabulary, provide a whole different meaning to us [tab. 3].

It seems to us that Baba Kinaram is describing his own form here [fig. 12]. The description of a large necklace of human bones and all the limbs of the body anointed with ashes from the cremation ground are appropriate for an Aughar, Avadhut or Tantra practitioner of the Shaiva doctrine who resides in the cremation ground. The red eyes could denote either a state of inebriation with intoxicants or because of the joy of *samādhi*. But when he talks about his fear inspiring lifestyle, we have to take recourse to mystic vocabulary to understand what he is really implying. At the surface level he seems to say that at his place the sacred fire never goes out because the flesh of deer, birds and fish is offered to it without a break. However, then, the last two lines seem disjointed from the rest of the sacred fire ritual when he says one should find the skull of a Brahman, and filling it with wine, drink from it deeply every day. But if we understand the mystic vocabulary implied here, where the sacred fire itself is the life-force coursing through the body which keeps the body warm, the deer is the mantra, birds are the inhalation and exhalation of the breath, fish represents the heart-mind-desire complex or the life-breath, and wine is the intoxicating state of deep mystic concentration the meaning becomes transformed. Once interpreted in this way these lines imply that every act of breathing is a ritual act of keeping the sacred fire alive in the body, where the mantra is remembered with every breath that one takes with full concentration. Now the last two lines reveal their meaning in relation to the preceding lines. They imply the cultivation of a mind imbued with the tranquil state of *samādhi*, which the seeker is advised to inculcate and imbibe deeply every day. This, it appears, Baba Kinaram is implying, is his true form.

Table 3 Find the Head of a Brahman

Transliteration of Original Hindi Poem	Translation with Mystic Vocabulary
<i>nara asthimāla, gala mē viśāla*</i>	Around the neck a large wreath of human bones
<i>bhasmaśmaśāna, saba aṅgavāna</i>	all the limbs anointed with ashes from the cremation-ground
<i>dṛga ati arakta, mānō hāṭṭṛpta.</i>	eyes very red, as if satiated (as if in a state of intoxication).
<i>tāsō kahō apanī rīti,</i>	So, I tell you our way,
<i>mosō rahata sabai bhayabhīta.</i>	all are fearful of me.
<i>homa agni niśdivasadhāma,</i>	The ritual fire remains alight day and night at our place (within the body),
<i>pāvaka bujha na āṭhau yāma.</i>	This fire never goes out in twenty-four hours (the fire of the life-force which never goes out).
<i>tāmāha mṛga khaga matsya māsa</i>	In that, the meat of deer (mantra/pranava), birds (breath), fish (the flow of energy as through the īḍā and piṅgalā channels), and meat (self-restraint and control of the tongue)
<i>madirā sahita homa hai tāsā.</i>	Is offered as an oblation with wine (which is normally an intoxicant, here the joy of concentration and Self-knowledge).
<i>bahuri vipra kī khoparī khojī</i>	Further, find the skull of a Brahman (here the symbol of spirit-consciousness and the mind of a wise person)
<i>bhari-bhari madirā pivata roja.</i>	Filling it with wine, drink deeply daily (remain in the ecstasy of samadhi daily).

* In the poem the word *asthimāla* is spelled as asthimala. In the author's opinion that represents just a typographical error

Source: From a picture at the Baba Kinaram Sthal in Varanasi, 2013

3.4 Kinaram and the Earlier Traditions in Literature

In *Viveksār* Kinaram seems to follow both the Tulsi inspired system of prosody (*chanda-gyān*) learnt from his guru Shivarām but uses it to expound upon the mystical knowledge of the body (*kāyā-paricaya*) and the recognition of the cosmos within it, leading to the state of omniscient *samādhi*. The philosophy he expounds is not new, in fact it is very old going back to the themes of the *Upaniṣads*, and Kinaram acknowledges this, that he has taken the essence of all the sixteen *Purāṇas*, the *smritis*, the Vedānta etc. and has assimilated them in *Viveksār*.⁵² The mention of Avadhūta ascetics, their world view based on non-duality and non-differentiation of categories, as well as their perception of their own Self as the *Brahman*, expressed in the sentiment as well as the mantra *so'ham*, is readily visible in the *Samnyāsa Upaniṣads*. These *Upaniṣads* can be dated to the first few centuries of the common era (Olivelle 1992, 10). We can readily tell that Baba Kinaram had studied many sources for his writings because in them we can find some ideas expressed by Gorakhnath, some that are attributed to Kabirdas, and even some which can be found in the writings of Tulsidas. The ideas expressed by Gorakhnath can also be found, to cite just one source, in the *Shiva Samhita* (see Mallinson 2007). It appears to us that the words of these saints must have been circulating widely amongst the ascetic societies of Baba Kinaram's time, and therefore, it would have been necessary for him to have a knowledge of these ideas. As Orsini writes with reference to saint Malukdas:

Malukadas's poem echoes almost verbatim a Hindavi couplet that a fifteenth century Sufi of Awadh, 'Abd-al Quddus Gangohi, had used to 'translate' a Persian utterance [...] Clearly, by the time Malukdas used them, these words had been 'already spoken' many times and were 'furrowed with distant and barely audible echoes of changes of speech subjects and dialogic overtones'. (2023, 99)

3.4.1 The Nath Tradition

Although the possibility of such synchronicity cannot be denied, the organic inter-relation between the Aghor and Nath traditions where the Yoga philosophy has been written about for centuries, renders it natural that besides the Samkhya philosophy Baba Kinaram delineates, *Viveksār* has a similar structure, and to a certain extent terminology, to some of the Nath literature. The Avadhūta doctrine forms an integral part also of the Nath tradition. This is evident in the text titled the *Siddhasiddhāntapaddhati*, attributed to Gorakhnath. This text has six chapters or *upadeśa* 'spiritual instruction', and the sixth *upadeśa* is about the Avadhūta yogi. This chapter deals in detail with the form, signs, and state of the Avadhūta yogi (see Shrivastava 1981). The *Siddhasiddhāntapaddhati* also describes what P.C. Divanji has mentioned as the *Pinḍa-Brahmāṇḍa* equation (the body and cosmos homology) in his introduction to Kalyani Mallik's book on the subject (Mallik 1954, vi), a subject which forms an integral part of the *Viveksār*. This equation can be traced historically back not only to the *Upaniṣads*, it is also

⁵² See *Viveksār*, *Phal-Stuti*, no. 267.

described nicely in the *Śiva Saṃhitā* (2.1-4,5). It seems very likely that Baba Kinaram was quite knowledgeable with its representation in Nath literature. The Sanskrit text *Siddhasiddhāntapaddhati* has six chapters which are listed as: *piṇḍotpattiḥ* 'origin of the body', *piṇḍavicārah* 'discussion of the body', *piṇḍasaṃvittiḥ* 'knowledge of the body', *piṇḍādhārah* 'the foundation of the body', *piṇḍapadayoḥ samarasakaraṇam* 'the union of the body with the supreme reality', and as mentioned above, *Avadhūtayogilakṣaṇam* 'the definition and form of an Avadhūta yogi' (Mallik 1954, 35; Shrivastav 1981, *Anukram*). From amongst these, the first chapter mentions the unexpressed *Brahman*'s emanation of desire, the emergence of creation, the birth of the body, and in it the bubbling up of the *so'ham* sentiment. In the second chapter we find the mention of the nine *cakras*, the sixteen foundations, the three points of concentration, the five firmaments etc. In the third chapter we find a discussion of the knowledge of the body and the discovery of the cosmos within the body. In the fourth chapter there is a discussion of Shiva and Shakti and the supreme state that can be achieved. The sixth chapter informs us of the nature, character and comportment of the Avadhūta yogi.

Of these, chapters one, three and six are of relevance to us. The *so'ham* mantra that Baba Kinaram informs us about in the *Viveksār*, finds an early expression in the *so'ham* sentiment mentioned in chapter one. The extensive Nath vocabulary that forms a part of the second chapter is not there in the *Viveksār*. The third chapter, which talks about the knowledge of the body, is detailed in its treatment of the geographic and cosmic elements that exist in the body, and importantly, where they are located within the body. Baba Kinaram has a list of such elements, but he does not go into their extensive details, nor does he specify their location in the body. He tells us that these things exist in the body, and then describes it for us in short in his own language. For example, in the third chapter *Siddhasiddhāntapaddhati* not only mentions in a long list the existence of the seven nether worlds, many other worlds, seven islands, seven seas, nine cosmic domains, the eight mountains, nine major and other minor rivers, stars and asterisms etc., but also specifies their location in the body, such as the *pātāla* in the big toe of the feet, *talātala* in the front part of it, *rasātala* in the back of the feet, *sutala* in the ankles, *vitala* in the thighs etc. (Shrivastav 1981, 93). Baba Kinaram does not go into such details at all. Writing only about the physical body he mentions the seven nether worlds are present in the body (see *Viveksār caupāi* 83) and moves on. The conceptions of the fourth chapter are not in the *Viveksār*. In the fifth chapter there exists the similarity of the necessity of the guru to achieve the supreme state. In *Viveksār* Baba Kinaram says that his guru made him experience the cosmos in his own body. Then, in the sixth chapter there is the similarity about the way of life of an Avadhūta yogi, who, he says, should practice non-discrimination and live alone absorbed in the Self. For traditions as organically intermingled as these two, it is not a matter of surprise to find this kind of similarity in the subject content penned by their respective saint poets. In fact, it would be a surprise if there was no similarity. For example, we have nominated the *Śiva-Saṃhitā* above. According to Mallinson's calculations (2007, x) this text can be dated to somewhere between the thirteenth and the fifteenth centuries because it borrows some verses from the *Dattātreyā Yoga Śāstra* (datable to about the thirteenth century), and because some authors in the seventeenth century

have quoted it in their writings. In this text also, in Sanskrit, we find the geographic entities mentioned as existing in the body.⁵³

We cannot say if Baba Kinaram had looked at any version of the *Siddhasiddhāntapaddhati* or not, but he was very well familiar with its subject matter. In fact, if we look deeply, the philosophy presented in the *Viveksār* is not only a Hindi simplification of the matter presented in Sanskrit in the *Siddhasiddhāntapaddhati*, but also an extremely condensed synopsis of the minute details and extensive explanations that the *Siddhasiddhāntapaddhati* goes into. It could be for such a reason that some verses in the *Viveksār* are similar to a few verses in the *Gorakh-Machhindra Bodh*, often called *Gorakh-Bodh* in short (datable to the fourteenth century according to Mallik 1954, 32), included by Pitambardatt Barthval in *Gorakh-Bānī*. This might also be the reason why it also has some similarity to what Kabir mentions in his *Ramainis* about the process of creation. We cannot say if Baba Kinaram actually consulted a printed or handwritten copy of the *Gorakh-Bodh*, or whether these were recited to him in some manner, but in terms of the structural framework, both, the *Macchindra-Goakh Bodh* and the *Viveksār* are texts with the guru-disciple conversation – and both emphasize the beauty of discovering the cosmos within one’s own body. Perhaps a few examples will be useful here. For the *Gorakh-Bodh* we have used Pitambardatt Barthval’s *Gorakh-Bānī*:

1. Baba Kinaram asks of Guru Dattatreya –

*man so kaun kahiya mohi svāmī; sab prakāra tum
antarjāmī. – (caupāi 102)*
*pavan so kavan nirantar kahiye; jehi tē yukti yatna sab
lahiye. – (caupāi 103)*
*kaun śabda so mohī samujhāvo; nirbhaya mārag jāni
lakhāvo. – (caupāi 104)*
*prāna kaun tasu hetu vicārī; so sudhi kahiya moha tam
hārī. – (caupāi 105) (Viveksār 1975, Vijñāna aṅga)*

What is the mind, O Lord please say; you are omniscient in every way. 102.

Please tell how is the constant breath construed; from which all insight and effort accrue. 103.

⁵³ *dehesmin vartate meruḥ saptadvīpaḥ samanvitaḥ, saritaḥ sāgarāḥ śailāḥ kṣetrāṇi kṣetrapālakaḥ. ṣṣayo munayaḥ sarve nakṣatrāṇi grahāstathā, punyatīrthāni pīṭhāni vartate pīṭhadevatāḥ. sṛṣṭisamhārakartārau bhramantau śaśibhāskarau, nabhovāyuśca vahnīścaḥ jalam prthvī tathaiva ca. trailokyē yāni bhūtāni tāni sarvāni dehataḥ, meruḥ samveṣṭya sarvatra vyavahāraḥ pravartate. Jānāti yaḥ sarvamidaṁ sa yogi nātra saṁśayaḥ* (In this body exist the seven islands and the Meru Mountain. There are also rivers, oceans, many realms and their rulers. There are sages and seers, pilgrimage places, abodes of the holy and their presiding deities. The movement of the sun and the moon, that bring forth creation and dissolution; as also the sky, air, fire, water and the earth [as the five elements of creation]. All the beings of the three worlds find their place in the body and play out their activities in the shelter of the Meru. The person who knows all this is a yogi without a doubt) (*Śivasamhitā* 2.1-4). *brahmāṇḍasajñake dehe yathādeśaṁ vyavasthitaḥ, meruśrīge sudhāśmīrbahiraṣṭakalāyutaḥ* (This body is a representation of the cosmic egg. In the same way that all the nations and the Mountain Meru exist in the world, so also the Meru exists in the body, and above it shines the ambrosia moon with its eight digits [Mallinson’s 2007 critical edition of the *Śivasamhitā* lists the digits of the moon as sixteen in this verse]) (*Śivasamhitā* 2.5).

What is the 'Word', please do explain; so wisdom of the fearless path I may gain. 104.

What is the vital air, what is its reason; make me aware, destroyer of dark delusion. 105.

While Gorakh asks Macchindra in *Gorakh-Bodh* –

*Svāmijī man kā kaun rūp, pavan kā kaun ākār
dam kī kaun dasā, sādhibā kaun dvār.* (Barthval 1960, 187 no. 7)

Swamiji, what is the form of the mind, what is the shape of 'air'.
What is the condition of the vital-breath, through which door are they controlled.

2. To these questions the respective guru's respond. In Kinaram's case the response is:

*man cañcal guru kahī dikhāi; jāki sakal lok prabhutāi. – (caupāi 113)
pavan svāsa yah baḍo sājogā; so tau sab din rahai viyogā. – (caupāi 114)
śabda jyoti jag sūnya prakāsā; samujhat mītai kaṭhin bhav
phāsā. – (caupāi 115)
prāna nivr̥tti sadā tēhi jānau; bhāva abhāva na ēkau mānau. – (caupāi 116)* (Viveksār 1975, *Vijñāna aṅga*)

The mind is fickle, the guru explains; all through the world its power reigns. 113.

The air, in the body is united as breath; from the world, it remains ever disengaged. 114.

The light of the Word lights the void of the world; knowing it erases the cruel snare of the world. 115.

Know the vital breath to be always free; beyond being or not, there's nothing it needs. 116.

For Gorakh, his guru's response is:

*Avadhū man kā suñi rūp, pavan kā nirālambh ākār, dam kī alekh dasā,
sādhibā dasavaē dvār.* (Barthval 1960, 187 no. 8)

The void is the form of the mind, the form of breath (air) is of its own support (*nirālamba*), the state of the vital-force is unsayable (*alekh*), and it is the tenth door which needs to be controlled.

There are a few more verses with such similarities, but then such striking similarity ends, although, since the subject matter is the same in both the texts, this similarity in content remains. We have given the details of the verses which are similar in the appendix. *Gorakh-Bodh* has 127 verses that focus, especially, on particulars of which *āsana* to sit on, which *cakra* to pierce etc. Kinaram, however, transitions into *nirālamb aṅga* and that actual experience of the divine through *samādhi* which we have mentioned before. Of the total number of verses in the *Viveksār* such phrase similarity exists only in about 12 verses. But what is very noticeable is that contrary to the notion that later *sant* traditions pay obeisance to Gorakhnath and regard him as their guru, nowhere in this text does Kinaram mention Gorakhnath.

Kinaram, the disciple, who has already paid his obeisance to his Vaishnava guru in the beginning of this text, states that this is a discourse between him and Guru Dattatreya. It could be that Baba Kinaram is trying to communicate that despite the similarities in the Nath and Aghor philosophies easily perceptible here, he is not a Nath! Perhaps this is his way of emphasizing that his philosophy hails from a much older tradition, that of the Siddhas who belonged to both the Shaiva and the Buddhist Vajrayana traditions, or of the Vaishnava yogis who may have descended from Kapil Muni.

In more recent times authors such as White (1996) and Mallinson (2013) have corroborated Dattatreya's association with the Avadhūta and Shaiva denominations. Even in the sixties when Pitambardatta Barthval had published the *Gorakh-Bānī*, he had noted that the *sabadīs* appeared to be the most authentic text that could be ascribed to Gorakhnath, and where the word 'Avadhū' as a short form of Avadhūta has been mentioned frequently.⁵⁴ In fact, in two sections of the appendix in that book we read the *Machindra-Gorakh Bodh* (Matsyendra's teaching to Gorakh) as well as the *Gyān Dīp Bodh* (*Gorakh-Datta Guṣṭī* [Dattatreya's teaching to Gorakh]). These two texts are in the appendix section and not in the main body of the book because Dr. Barthval had doubts about their authenticity as the words written by Gorakhnath. His reasoning was that Gorakhnath's conversation with mythical beings can only be an addition by a follower of the Nath tradition, not the original words of Gorakh. It is a very sound reason, but the *Machindra-Gorakh Bodh* which is often just referred to as *Gorakh-Bodh* appears in the oldest manuscript from 1715 that he could obtain. The ideas present in both the texts also hark back to the Buddhist Siddhas, and in both, Gorakh's teachers – Matsyendra and Dattatreya – refer to him again and again as Avadhū, as if he is a follower of the Avadhūta path. Thus, this word has been in the spiritual vocabulary of the yogis and saints in India, whether they be Buddhist Siddhas, Nath yogis, Aghor yogis or of the *santmat*, in such a prevalent and diffused manner that its inclusion in the Aghor tradition is not a surprise.⁵⁵ The similarities and overlaps between the Aghor and the Nath traditions render the use of this word as a shared natural vocabulary. Since in the *Viveksār* we have clear evidence of Baba Kinaram referring to Guru Dattatreya as someone who put him on the Avadhūta path, Acharya Chaturvedi's idea that only a later devotee, not Gorakhnath could have written the *Gorakh-Bodh*, does not appear entirely convincing.

⁵⁴ For example, *Sabadī*, 11 verses 28-9:

bharyā te tīram jhaljhalanti ādhā,
sidhē sidh mīlā re avadhū bolyā aru lādhā (28).

Those who are brimming with spiritual knowledge, are folks who maintain their gravitas, they do not show-off their knowledge. Those who are fickle and only half-baked, keep showing-off their knowledge at every place. The really awakened ones (Siddhas) do not even speak with them. A true and beneficial conversation is possible only when a Siddha meets with another.

nāth kahai tum sunahu re avadhū diḥ kari rākhahu cīyā,
kām krodh ahaṁkar nibārau to sabai disantar kīyā (29).

Nath (Gorakh) says, o Avadhū, keep your mind firmly under control. Once you are able to get rid of passion, anger, and egotism, you will find all the directions to wander in as if already traveled.

⁵⁵ Acharya Dharmendra Brahmachari Shastri has nominated the Siddha tradition of the Buddhists as the link between the Aghor and the *santmat*. In this connection he has mentioned the name of Acharya Avadhūtipa (1959, 37). In the same manner, Acharya Parashuram Shastri has mentioned the prevalence of the *Avadhūtimārg* amongst the Buddhists (1972, 27), and he has mentioned the presence of Avadhūtipa in the 10th century (1969, 25).

3.4.2 The 'Pre Nath' Siddha Tradition

Exposition of the *Caryāpadas* as published by Dr. Prabodh Chandra Bagchi (1956), Mahapandit Rahul Sankrityayana in his *Dohā Koś* (1957), and by Acharya Parashuram Chaturvedi (1969) amply display the Tantric element inherent in there. Gorakh does not like Tantra. He especially does not like meat and wine and intoxicants. He says:

O Avadhūtas! Eating meat destroys compassion and righteousness, drinking alcohol brings hopelessness to the vital-force, using *bhāṅg* makes one lose knowledge and concentration, and such folks then cry in the court of the god of death. (Barthval 1960, 56 no. 165)

Baba Kinaram on the other hand, is more nonchalant in his acceptance of such things. We have already seen his verses in *Gītāvalī* on marijuana and tobacco which demonstrate he does not feel they are an issue of supreme importance. In fact, it seems that through his own twilight or mysterious language he uses those metaphors to draw in the addicts who might have otherwise fallen in unsavory circumstances.

These metaphors hark back to the days of the *Caryāpadas* where the Siddhas were quite happy to talk about them. For example, Viruvapad writes:

A female wine dispenser joins or enters two rooms. She ferments wine with fine bark. With a steady stillness she ferments the wine so that one with determination can become immortal. On seeing her sign on the tenth door the customer arrives immediately, and then he is not able to leave. The pot is small, the spout is thin. Virupa says, hold steady pour very carefully. (Chaturvedi 1969, 129 *caryā* 3, *rāg gāvadā Viruvāpādanam*)⁵⁶

And then, of course, there is the question of the feminine element. Gorakh's texts do not have such an element, and where he mentions women, it is always in an unpleasant way. The Buddhist Siddhas of the *Caryāpadas*, on the other hand, used the metaphor of eroticism to convey similar kinds of mystical ideas that Gorakh propounds in his texts. And while Baba Kinaram warns against overindulgence with the erotic element, his hagiography as written by his disciple Bijaram, clearly mentions Tantric practices with a female partner in the cremation ground (Shukla 1985, 78).

While the language of the *Caryāpadas* is *apabhramśa* and predates even Gorakhnath's Hindi, clearly, the themes elaborated therein find an echo not only in Gorakhnath's own texts, but also come down to Baba Kinaram and the sant sampradāya. The theme of intoxicants, however, is absent in Gorakhnath's texts except as a strict injunction against using them. Baba Kinaram's writings show an acceptance of such themes, but of course, he does not encourage their use. He simply turns the intoxicant addict towards a more fruitful path through metaphorical writings about what 'real' intoxication means.

⁵⁶ Chaturvedi mentions that Rahul Sankrityayana, in his essay titled *Hindi ke Prachinatam Kavi aur Unki Kavīṭayen* (The Earliest Hindi Poets and their Poems) "has tried to prove that not only the Nathapanthis like Siddha Gorakhnath, but in fact Ramanand, Kabir, Dadu even upto Radhasoami Dayal were all coins minted in the treasury of these 84 Siddhas" (Chaturvedi 1969, 106).

3.5 The Language of the Verses

Quick readers would also have noticed a minor dissimilarity in the words used for mystical terminology in Baba Kinaram's and Gorakhnath's texts. In the first example about the identity of elements in the body Baba Kinaram uses the word '*Pran*' while its equal in Gorakh Bodh is '*dam*'. In the second example while Gorakh hears simply that the mind's form is the void (*śunya*), Baba Kinaram receives a different answer – that the mind is fickle (*cañcal*). Gorakh hears that the 'air' is without support (*nirālamba*), Baba Kinaram gets the elaboration that the air is the breath (*śvās*). For the vital-force Gorakh is told that it is indescribable (*alekh*), Baba Kinaram gets the answer that it is the beatitude that is free and does not-lack for anything within itself. As we have seen before, Baba Kinaram gives the date for *Viveksār* as VS 1812 (c. 1755). The Hindi we see in *Gorakh-Bodh* looks close to standard Hindi though it is very likely it is based on a text of a much older vintage (see Dwivedi 1959, 221).

Stylistically *Viveksār* somewhat resembles the poetry of Tulsidas although the mesmerization that Tulsi achieves through his poetic genius is not the same here. It is not an epic story, rather, a tool to indicate the path or process towards self-discovery where poetry certainly exists, but there is no attempt at a display of poetic skills. We do notice the mellifluous tone of Baba Kinaram's poetry while *Gorakh-Bodh* is almost a crisp staccato of pithy one-liners. Both are a straightforward discourse on yoga and the teacher has no other purpose but to impart their knowledge to the disciple in the most lucid way possible. While Baba Kinaram's poetic rendition displays the rhythms generated by the rules of prosody, *Gorakh-Bodh*'s language appears somewhat free, uncommitted to the constrictions of such rules. Baba Kinaram maintains a very humble posture in his questions, referring to the Guru as Swami and *antarjami*. *Gorakh-Bodh* shows the same, but more as a curious student who interviews the guru to get the answers fast.

Although this similarity in philosophy and language is not unusual amongst the tradition of the saints (*santmat*), what is interesting in Baba Kinaram's writings is the harmonious comingling of the Nath philosophy with the Ram-bhakti at a time of intense religious and political flux in India. We can see some vocabulary that is similar to that of Tulsidas as well as Kabir, as is to be expected from a milieu of syncretic devotion.

Baba Kinaram's language has a mix of Braj and Awadhi. At times he also uses a mix of Khari-Boli. His texts have a certain natural and perceptible humane ethos which makes reading them easy. They also display clearly that they were not written for the purpose of entertainment, rather, to inspire a seeker towards an inner experience. His concern with mysticism, knowledge, yoga and devotion make him use, sometimes, words imbued with the vocabulary of pure devotion (*bhakti-śāstra*), and at other times, of *vedantic* mysticism. Sometimes he uses Sufi metaphors to express both the *sānt* and the *śringār-ras* of Bhakti:

Entering the palace of light (or beauty), experience it.
Kinaram says he found as he was, the unexpressed inexpressible.
(*Rāmgītā*, Rekhatā)

Savor the wine of love, live with a vision of your love.
It is like it rains ambrosia, or a shower of pearls. (*Rāmgītā*, Rekhatā)

As S. Mishra (2004, 176-7) has pointed out, we find three kinds of metaphors in Baba Kinaram's poetry. Let us take a quick look at them. First, there are the metaphors based on nature, where through the use of words of nature he expresses aspects of the spiritual world.

For example: "*haṁsa base so kahiṃyata gaganā. sadā ek ras ānanda maganā*" (The 'swan' resides in the sky. Ever absorbed in constant joy) (Viveksār caupāi 145). Also: "*kamal māhā bas kāl durantā. tehi jānat hai kou kou santā*" (The endless Time dwells in the body-lotus. One in a million saints gets to know it) (Viveksār caupāi 147).

The second kind of metaphors are based on words related to the family to indicate mysteries of spirituality. For example: "*piṇḍa māhā rah deva anantā. vidyā sahit avidyā kantā*" (In the body lives the God infinite. It is the lord [husband] of both knowledge and ignorance) (Viveksār caupāi 88). Another example: "*hṛdaya basai man param pravīnā. bāla, vṛddha nahī sadā navīnā*" (Heart is the adept mind's abode. Ever new, it never gets old) (Viveksār caupāi 139). The third kind of metaphor that we find is different from both of these, and is based on words of definition or numbers, such as the ones found in the literature of the Nath Siddhas:

*anahad abināśī mahā santat rahe abhed;
abināśī tab āpu mahā samujhi samāno ved. (Viveksār, dohā 198)*

The unstruck-sound and the Indestructible God
are one with the other, always indistinguishable;
in that condition the Indestructible One
remains within itself, say the Vedas. (Viveksār, dohā 198).

An example of number based metaphor: "*pāca tattva guṇ tīni lai karyau jagat ko tant*" (took five elements and three attributes, it made the weave of the world) (Viveksār, dohā 57). We find very few extended metaphors in his poetry, and when we do find them occasionally, with words like the *hukkā*, *suratī*, *gāñjā*, he indicates knowledge of the body, or meditation or yoga, as we have already seen above.

Perhaps because his life was close to the lives of ordinary people, Baba Kinaram has used a lot of proverbs and idioms in his poetry. We provide a few examples:

andhahi andhā ḍagara batāvai, bahirahi bahirā bānī.

It is like a blind man shows another the way, and a mute guides someone with his voice. (Gītāvalī, 1987, 6)

Kinārām phakīrī sahaja nahī paga dharate nikale dūdha chaṭhī kā.

Kinaram says being a mendicant is not easy, just stepping on the path is an ordeal in itself. (Gītāvalī, 1987, 4)

*paṛhai purāna korāna vedamata jīva dayā nahī jānī;
auran ko kahi kahi samujhāvat āpa marama nahī jānī.*

One reads the Qur'an, the Veda and Purāna, yet have no compassion in their hearts.

They boast their knowledge to others but themselves do not know the truth. (*Gītāvalī*, 1987, 6)

mṛgatṛṣṇā ke nīra jyō aru bhūtani ko nāca.

like waters of a mirage and a dance of the spirits. (*Unmunīrām*, 7)

*dhana dhāma sagāi lāgi gāvāi janma bitāi nara dhandhe;
mamitā raṅga rāte madake māte kaun dāva terā bandhe.
yahi vidhi dina khoyā bahu vidhi geyā āpu bigoyā tū andhe;
Kinārām samhārai samaya vicārai sata guru lāyo mana randhe.*

you lost your entire life in human pursuits like wealth and a home;
what play did you make being lost in wine and women.
In this way you lost your days in many kinds of futile pursuits
Kinaram says it is time to wake up and put your mind in your guru.
(*Gītāvalī*, 1987, 8)

We have provided here only a very brief vignette of the specifics of Baba Kinaram's poetry. For a comprehensive treatment of his literature see Sushila Mishra 2004, *Aghaorpanth aur Sant Kinaram*.

In *Viveksār* Baba Kinaram's verse composition is strong as well as imbued with *gravitas*. In most of his verses the count of the *mātrās* in the verses is without any errors. That is why when occasionally we come across a verse that does not follow this pattern, it becomes evident, because the lack or excess of *mātrās* interrupts the rhythm of the poetry. For example in verse number 67 the part "*tridhā śarīra bhed lai*" is only of 12 *mātrās* instead of being 13 *mātrās* long. This can be spotted in a few other verses, but this kind of shortness of *mātrās* can be seen in some verses even of Tulsidas. In verse number 100 the part "*nirañjan tāhi prasaṅg*" has one *mātrā* in excess. If the word *nirañjan* here comprised of only four *mātrās* it would be perfect. It is possible that Baba Kinaram is reading this word with an *anunāsik*, which will hold the *mātrā* count right. In verse number 223 the part "*anubhav hote hi śiṣya tab*" has one *mātrā* in excess because of the odd looking *hi*. It is possible that it is a later interpolation. In verse number 266 the part "*man gahi ik aṁś*" is two *mātrās* short. Perhaps it was intended to be "*man mẽ gahi ik aṁś*", which would have maintained the correctness of the *mātrā* count. In verse number 273, the part "*Rāmakinā tattva gyān*" is one *mātrā* too long because of the word *tattva* which breaks the rhythm.

To maintain the rhythm of the *mātrā* count sometimes Baba Kinaram changes the spelling of the words from their more accepted forms, as do all the saint poets in their *sant* literature. For example, the verses number 3, 28, 29 and 64 have '*koi*' as the spelling instead of '*koī*'. Only in three verses do we see him use the same word twice in different parts of the verse to maintain the rhyme, as the word '*koi*' in verse number three, '*hetu*' in verse number 155, and '*pāvō*' in verse number 236. But in contrast to this in verse number 199 when he composes "*nahī dūr nahī nikaṭ ati nahī kahū asthān*", then the part "*nahī kahū asthān*" becomes especially effective in maintaining the rhythm as well as the momentum of the verse.

What Baba Kinaram does not do in his poetry is that he does not go into technicalities of the inner mechanism of the subtle body as does Gorakhnath, nor does he berate other traditions. He also does not use obfuscated-meaning

verses frequently. In all the five texts and about 900 verses there are maybe three examples of them. He is not ostentatious in his use of the classical poetry rules of adornments, his poetry seems to flow effortlessly. He praises no master but God and guru, and he never writes just to entertain. His life, his text and his tradition also open a vast arena for further research and writing, not only for what Kinaram has written himself, but for the whole sarbhaṅga sampradāya whose texts lie largely undiscovered in scores of monasteries in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Bengal.

4 The Significance of the *Viveksār*

We have seen that the *sant* literature was not created in a vacuum. The traditions that existed before the *sants*, left their mark on them, and the *sants* in turn, utilized that heritage for their purposes. This is evident also in the literature created by Baba Kinaram. Curiously, though, in comparison with the Nath literature discussed above which all have detailed expositions of the various aspects of yoga – the *cakras*, the *āsanas*, the breathing exercises etc. – the *Viveksār* sets itself apart as a text of a different nature. Since Baba Kinaram says he is stating the eight limbs in the *Viveksār*, the reader expects a similar exegesis of the *aṣṭāṅga* yoga, but there is no mention of any of these yoga specific practices in this text. So, we can be certain it is not a text about *haṭhayoga*. There appears to be no one to one correspondence in its *aṅga* titles with other limbs of yoga either, although we could creatively imagine such a correlation with the eight *aṅgas* of the *Viveksār*, such as, for example, by deducing that the first *aṅga* – *Gurupada stavan* (veneration of the guru's feet) – could correspond with *yama* (restraint or moral principle) limb of yoga because it reflects Baba Kinaram's humble behavior towards his guru, and respect for the guru constitutes one of the highest moral principles in Hindu traditions. We could say that the first part of the second, *jñāna aṅga*, corresponds with *niyama* (moral ideals) because here we find the direction to detach oneself from those aspects of life which are not related to the Self, such as desire, anger, greed, pride and attachments. The third limb of yoga, the seat, posture or *āsana* for a practitioner of yoga does not exist in *Viveksār* unless we regard Baba Kinaram's description of objects that exist out in the world also in the body, in the latter part of the *jñāna aṅga*, as *their āsana* or the seat of location in the body. Similarly, there is no chapter or section on *prāṇāyāma* (breath or energy control) unless we treat the focus on the *so'ham* mantra while inhaling and exhaling, as a basic, but unstated, exposition of it. In the third, *viññāna aṅga* we could imagine the section on the nature of the subtle elements within the body such as the mind, air, the word, *prāṇa* etc. as presented in the text, as an exposition to direct attention to these subtle elements, and thus inculcate a sense of non-attachment with the physical body, which could correlate with *pratyāhāra* (detachment). We could say the very next section in the *viññāna aṅga* corresponds to *dhāraṇā* (concentration) as the location of the aforementioned subtle elements in the body are described. For *dhyāna* (meditation) we have maybe two verses in the same *aṅga* where the disciple performs an *anumāna* (inference) for twelve moments and instantly achieves meditational bliss as the fetters of the world fall away. But the very next, *nirālamba aṅga*, could extend the notion of meditation as the original state of the subtle elements is described, before the body was even formed. It is the sixth *aṅga*, called

ajapā, which truly focuses on the act of meditation. The fifth *āṅga*, that of *samādhi* can be indubitably equated with the limb of *samādhi* in yoga, as all physical activities come to a cessation within the body and there is only an experience of the unformed entity that creates the world. This experience is extended in the seventh *āṅga*, the *śūnya* or the limb of nothingness where the disciple discovers his presence in every atom of the creation. The eighth, *raṅgā āṅga*, explains the way to live of such an enlightened person, and the ninth *āṅga*, *phala stuti*, explains the merit of the text. So the fifth *samādhi āṅga* and the sixth *ajapā āṅga* are very clear in their correspondence with the way yoga is described in a classical way, the other *āṅgas* can be interpreted to mean one limb of yoga or the other. *Viveksār* is also not a *paddhati* handbook of ritual observations. There are no rituals mentioned in the text. It is also not a compendia of ascetic rules and customs, although there is strong suggestion about how an enlightened Avadhūta should conduct their life after enlightenment, towards the end of the text.

What the text does mention, is Baba Kinaram's devotion to his guru, that he has gained his knowledge from Dattatreya, the process of creation, the body as a microcosm, the elements of the subtle body such as the *ātmā*, *prāṇa*, *vāyu*, *kāla*, *jīva*, *Śiva*, *haṁsa*, *śūnya* etc., where each of these elements are situated in the body, what happens to them when the creation dissolves unto itself, the *so'ham* mantra, the need to continue with ones practice even after illumination, and the non-discriminatory lifestyle. These words are used to illustrate the coming into being of creation, and the nature of the supreme being when none of this remains. The words mentioned here do not correspond to the extensively elaborate exposition in the *Siddhasiddhāntapaddhati* except for the lifestyle of an Avadhūta ascetic, and the exposition of cosmic elements in the body.

Now we can see that despite the similarity of *Viveksār* with that of the Nath tradition, there also exist notable differences. This perception leads us to an important conclusion. In *Viveksār* Baba Kinaram has distilled the philosophy of yoga in a succinct and easily understandable manner, without providing any detail about the actual practice of yoga, which should be carried under an able guru's guidance. It also appears that in this small text Baba Kinaram is underlining his Aghor and *sant* identity, and he is creating a space for his followers to become a community. There is a reason why we say this. Since Baba Kinaram designates his text as a text of *aṣṭāṅga* (yoga), we can presume that he was aware of the yoga traditions prevalent during, and perhaps before, his time.

By all accounts, the most towering figure in treatises of yoga is Gorakhnath, the disciple of Matsyendranath. As White has demonstrated copiously, there are many texts which are said to have been authored by him, and he is said to have reorganized the yoga traditions of India which became known as the Naths. However, some of these traditions already referred to themselves as Naths after the name of lord Shiva even before the advent of Gorakhnath. The reorganization which Gorakhnath seems to have affected included such groups as the Pashupatas, Kapalikas, and Shaktas on the one hand, and Siddhas (Maheshvara and Rasa) as well as the Buddhist Siddhacharyas. But, simultaneously, or before Gorakhnath, there appears to have been another significant figure in the field of yoga practice, who is known as Dattatreya. His importance in the field of yoga can be interpreted from the fact that in several texts Gorakhnath is portrayed as having a conversation with Dattatreya. The well-known *Avadhūta Gītā* is an example

of this. Dattatreya is also the founder of a Vaishnava Avadhūta sampradāya (White 1996, 99).

This last fact is of some importance in the context of Baba Kinaram. We can see that Baba Kinaram is not only well versed with the *piṇḍa-brahmāṇḍa* equation (body and cosmos synthesis), but also that he knows that it antedates the *Siddhasiddhāntapaddhati*, although exactly when the idea emerged is difficult to say. But accepting the body and cosmos synthesis as a principle in his own writing imparts a much deeper historical depth to his literature as well as to his tradition. We do not know if he was associated with the Vaishnava Avadhūta sampradāya, but since he nominates Dattatreya as the teacher who brought him to spiritual succor, his allegiance to the teachings ascribed to Dattatreya may indicate his familiarity with Vaishnava Avadhūta sampradāya, and the commonality of this body and cosmos synthesis therein as an expression of non-dualist Samkhya philosophy. This may indicate that the Kinaram Aghor tradition *can* be understood outside the frame of the Nath tradition contrary to what Gupta has posited. Since Baba Kinaram established four Vaishnava monasteries in honor of his Guru, he is already referred to as Gosain Baba Kinaram by many. If he associated with members of the Vaishnava Avadhūta sampradāya, it may indicate why Mir Kalan Khan chose in around 1750 to depict as a Vaishnava the figure marked as an Aghor in the 1650 painting by an anonymous artist, if indeed these paintings depict Baba Kinaram, as we have discussed above. His Aghor, Tantra and Yoga based persona is already well-known in folk memory, and the stories of his initiation by Dattatreya circulate from Banaras to Maharashtra. All this portrays him in a much larger frame than that of the Nath tradition. In *Viveksār* Baba Kinaram has chosen very consciously not to get into the variations that exist in the Nath literature with respect to the conceptions of the number of *cakras* (6 or 9) or types of yoga (eight limbed or six limbed, see Shrivastava 1981, *āśīrvacan* 6-7). Even the word 'jogi' occurs only twice in his text. His focus only on devotion to the guru, intimate knowledge of the body, and the Avadhūta lifestyle, expressed in the language familiarized by the Nath literature, yet composed with the finesse of serious prosody, make his short text stand out in its own right. Since even *sants* like Kabir and Dadu have not only a reflection of these principles but even the language as found in the texts of Gorakhnath in their compositions, the reach of his own text becomes much more pervasive as it can be understood by very large numbers of people. Then, by creating something that is somewhat similar to the *Gorakh-Bodh*, and yet different from it, he indicates clearly that these are two similar, but parallel traditions. He emphasizes this fact not only by recognizing Dattatreya as his own guru, but also by revealing his identity in a form different from the prevalent medieval tradition – by 'excluding' the practices, metaphors, designation of *cakras*, the description of the Kundalini, the mysterious statements of language turned on its head (*ulaṭabāśīs*) etc. completely from his writing. His *Viveksār* is just not a yoga treatise as is commonly understood. In a manner he seems to be saying, yes, the principle of the body and the cosmos, as well as the truth based on them is eternal, but *haṭhayoga* is not the only path to arriving at that principle. It can be reached at also through the pathway of mind restraint through the *ajapā jap* 'the unchanted chant' and bhakti 'devotion'. An example of this kind of construction is clearly perceptible in the poetry of the Radhavallabh tradition poet Dhruvdās, where he chooses not to include a lot of stories about Krishna's play in his writings, but to focus

only on the descriptions of the sojourn in the *nikuñj*, the garden, as a complete and holistic representation of the joy of bhakti. Here, he delineates the parameters of his sect not by including the extensive material available in the wider sect, but by excluding it (Snell 1992, 247-58).⁵⁷ So far, we have focused on the philosophical exegesis of Baba Kinaram's tradition. But there is a verse in *Viveksār* which clearly indicates that through the medium of this text, he is trying also to create a community. In verse number 264 he says:

*bānī bahuta prakāśa hita Sitā Rāma samudāya;
yaha ravisāra viveka lahi samśaya niśā nasāya.*

The interpretation of this verse is that the Sita and Ram community have many teachings to shed light on the pursuit of spiritual illumination, but despite that, together with them, if one takes on the teachings presented in an encapsulated manner in this essence of discernment (the *Viveksār*), the depressing darkness of all their doubts becomes erased completely. We have read before that from a historical perspective we find Aghor practices, even Aghor practitioners, but we do not find a sect or sampradāya which is called Aghor. The little poem we read above about the self-image of an Aghor ascetic recalls Kapalikas by the metaphor of drinking wine from a skull bowl, but it still does not represent a sect. Through the medium of *Viveksār* Baba Kinaram seems to be heralding the inception of exactly such a community. We find an interesting pattern that emerges here. Jñāneśvar, a Nath yogi who was initiated by his elder brother Nivrṭtināth, a Gorakhnathi *sādhu*, and whose grandfather is said to have been initiated by Gorakhnath himself, composed his most famous text, the *Jñāneśvarī*, commenting on the Vaishnava treatise of the Sanskrit *Gītā* in Marathi verse that was accessible to the people of his time. Baba Kinaram, whose first guru was Vaishnava, and who is said to have spent a significant amount of time with him, seems to have distilled the teachings of the earlier Sanskrit texts like the *Shiva Samhita* and the *Siddhasiddhāntapaddhati* into the Hindi verse to make them accessible to the people of his time. However, *sant* Jñāneśvar did not start a sect in his time, Baba Kinaram seems to have done so.

From the perspective of the commencement of a sampradāya, *Viveksār* becomes not only a precious text, it becomes an invaluable text. To care for such a community and to inspire his disciples to serve others, he writes about continuously receiving the pain of others, so he can bring those to a resolution. This is easily achievable by an Avadhūta saint impervious to either pleasure or pain. Perhaps this is the reason why scholars have portrayed him as the most active proponent of the Aghor tradition after Dattatreya.

⁵⁷ Though not directly related to Baba Kinaram's *Viveksār* another example of using an earlier text to make a new point is clearly demonstrated in the study of the *Patañjala Yogasāstra* and the *Abhidharmakośa Bhāṣya* as presented by Philipp Maas in *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma and the Yoga of Patañjali*. Maas shows how Patañjali reused the Sarvāstivāda Buddhist theories of temporality as explained by the Buddhist master Dharmatrāta, discussed in Sanskrit in Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, composed probably in the fourth century CE, by modifying certain words and phrases slightly, and came up with an all encompassing philosophy of Yoga which subsumed ontological dualism (Maas 2017).

