CONTEXTUALIZING THE PAST: THE SAINT AND 'HIS' ENVIRONMENT

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Saint Eknāth is one of the most popular saints of the Marathi speaking people of Western India. His poetical works have been hitherto noted by many scholars of Marathi literature, as well as by historians. Based mainly on the analysis of the hagiographies, histories and the saint's own literary works this article is an attempt to contextualize Eknāth's legacy with the historical environment he lived in. By doing this I hope to show that particular attention paid to the environment around a historical figure significantly broadens our means of understanding the past.

Key words: saint, environment, past, Deccan, Marathi

Introduction

This article endeavors to present some observations on how the local environment and its various constituents can help us in understanding the figures of the past, more specifically the saints. We will attempt to shed light on this problem with an example of a saint from pre-colonial Western India. With respect to the chosen period, it is the historical locale that will be examined – the one described or textually recorded in the past – while it is also the locale of present-day memories and sacred monuments that I visited during my fieldwork.

The reason to look closely at the locale and find its traces in the content of the textual material at hand lies mainly in the fact that its examination brings many contexts to the textual legacy that pertains to our saint and by extension also to the society he lived in. During my ongoing research on the history of

saint-worship in South Asia, I have frequently encountered a need to re-examine the textual sources (namely saint-poetry and hagiographies), for without an idea about the spaces and places these texts address – and their authors moved across the understanding of both – the authors and their texts seemed somewhat incomplete to me. Apart from their literary qualities, these texts can also be considered useful historical texts capturing many ideas, intentions, moods, reflections, etc. of the period in which they were composed. The local environment inevitably exerted a certain influence on the process of their composition; it offered inspiration, or better, framed their authors' perceptions that they afterwards transmuted to writing. Therefore, in order to grasp these ideas, intentions, moods etc., the necessary task for me was to examine the local environment of and around these texts (including a personal visit as well). Thus, this article is an attempt to illustrate the connections between the historical figure of one saint, his literary legacy and the locale.

The call for a deeper examination of locales, regions, and their particular cultural varieties at various points of time is not new in academic writing about South Asia.[1] Concentrating on a certain region or area and a later application of the gained knowledge to other regions and wider regions – by comparison or otherwise – is certainly a productive method of research. On the other hand, while it is challenging to examine the nature of certain historical processes, events, social and religious movements, beliefs and practices directly at their very source and within their closest circles, it is also risky to regionalize the sources of our knowledge ad absurdum. The goal of this essay, however, is not in addressing the correct understanding of the dynamics between the particular or regional and the general or cross-regional, but rather to see both as represented in the environment. The latter can be sought in particulars as well as in universals, and mostly, it has a telling value. It is this value in which we will be interested here.

The activities of saints usually pertain to social and religious aspects of people's lives. In turn, the social and religious life and its representations appear, apart from other things, to be characterized by interactions. An environment which allows interactions may be understood in several ways, defined with respect to its function, structure, persistence, and so forth. For our purposes, we define it as spaces and places that one moves across, interacts with, learns about, and most of all, experiences. The social environment of South Asia, whether in the past or at present, has been often described in terms of interactions between the religious communities of Hindus and Muslims. As

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[1] Some of the excellent recent approaches to regional studies can be found in FELDHAUS, A. Connected Places: Region, Pilgrimage, and Geographical Imagination in India, 2003, also GUHA, S., Environment and Ethnicity in India 1200-1991, 1999.

modern research has shown, it is incorrect to view these communities essentialistically, for such a view would hardly correspond with the reality we experience in South Asia today or to the texts of its past.[2] On the other hand, as we will see, even such an essentialistic division of the South Asian society was not altogether unknown to the South Asians in the past.[3] Another goal of this essay is thus, using an example of one saint from pre-colonial South Asia, to present 'his' environment with respect to the interactions between the representatives of Hinduism and South Asian Islam and see of what character 'his' social and religious interactions were. By doing this we hope to demonstrate that although the environment and the saint's literary legacy point towards the society that did not understand itself in essentialistic terms, yet in certain situations some of its representatives, such as the saint, could display similar understanding. After all, are we today always cognizant of the endless varieties that form our perception of the world ridding our judgment of all essentialism?

Saints in Pre-colonial South Asia

There are numerous published and unpublished texts treating the pre-colonial saints of South Asia from various perspectives. Opinions on the precise definition of their activities, cults and heritage may differ, yet certain generalizations can be made. The saints – whether belonging to one of the motley streams of Hinduism, or similarly varied streams of South Asian Islam, or to some other South Asian religion – appear to considerably dominate the religious practices and beliefs of the pre-colonial South Asian believer. This is not to say that in their religious practices South Asians were solely preoccupied with the worship of these extraordinary people. They presumably followed the long-established religious activities connected, for example, to the daily worship, or to the rites of passage, and these activities were also shaped by the particular family and regional customs. However, the social and religious role of the holy men is hard to overlook in the sources about the period: be they contemporary local histories and hagiographies or usually orally transmitted saint-poetry that was later textually edited. Thus it seems that in pre-colonial times the popular religious knowledge, the ritual or semi-ritual practices as well as the aims of the daily life, often became associated with the locally recognized saintly figures.

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[2] STEWART, T. In Search of Equivalence: Conceiving the Muslim-Hindu Encounter through Translation Theory, pp. 364-365, also pp. 371-372.

[3] With the help of political reasons it is not strange also to South Asians of the present.

It is around the end of the first and the beginning of the second millennium A.D. that these holy men gradually started to appear on the religious scene (i. e. in the textual materials that document this period), attracting many followers and challenging the status of the so-called 'orthodox' keepers of scriptural or doctrinal tradition. Naturally, it is better to take the 'appearance' of saints as a metaphor indicating their appearance in texts,[4] more particularly vernacular texts.[5] The saints, in contradistinction to religious scholars, usually became the proponents of local popular traditions, or from an elitist point of view, less important traditions, and these traditions gradually began to be articulated in the vernaculars – the dominant literary vehicles of the medieval period.[6] The saints certainly did not emerge as representatives of any unknown religious stream because there must have been saint-worship in India before medieval times. Any such worship might have borne different characteristics or it might have worked in slightly different patterns than the one that has been documented; nevertheless, the tradition of the guru, the preceptor, the one, whose feet are to be touched, whose word is to be followed, and finally who conveys the divine blessings and behaves as a saviour, is certainly of earlier date than the second half of the first millennium A.D. It is a different problem that during the Indian Middle Ages (roughly 1000-1700), possibly also due to the rather rapid interface with the rest of the world through the medium of Islamicate culture, saint-worship in South Asia made so radical a step ahead as to completely influence the religious life and rhetoric of the times. The scholarly analyses of the past decades describe this point in terms of the '*bhakti* movement' and 'popular Sufism' of which the saints were the most prominent spokesmen.[7]

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[4] No doubt, texts tell us about the ṛṣīs, gurus, yogis etc., but at the same time those figures were represented in concordance with Brahmanical scriptural tradition. I am not aware of any extensive scriptural evidence documenting activities of popular saints from the era before the second half of the first millennium A.D. The Brahmans, i.e. those, who composed most of the pre-medieval texts, it seems were not interested in recording the popular traditions and related religious teachings.

[5] The textual evidence suggests that the popular saints do not appear in (or compose, and hence come out of oblivion) the texts earlier than the seventh century. See LORENZEN, D. N. Legend, p. 353 and also CHAMPAKALAKSHMI, R. From Devotion and Dissent to Dominance – The Bhakti of the Tamil Āḷvārs and Nāyanārs, 2004.

[6] For the analysis of the process of vernacularization of the literary culture in South Asia, see POLLOCK, S. The Cosmopolitan Vernacular, 1998, and also POLLOCK, S. The Death of Sanskrit, 2001.

[7] See for instance SHARMA, K. Bhakti and the Bhakti Movement, 1987, SCHOMER, K., MCLEOD, W.H. (eds.) The Sants (Studies in Devotional Tradition in India), 1987, PANDE, S. Medieval Bhakti Movement, 1989, LORENZEN D. N. (ed.). Religious Movements in South Asia 600-1800, 2004, RIZVI, S. A. A. History of Sufism in India (Vol. I-II), 1978, THIEL-

It was mainly the people, not any institution, who recognized and acknowledged the saints. The latter were hence an example of teachers of religion at a local, but not necessarily subaltern level. Within Hindu communities they presented an alternative to the status of the Brahmans, to whom the position of the religious teacher belonged by birth and among Muslims they were an alternative to ulama, who were mainly academically eligible for their status. The saints differed from both, Brahmans and Ulama, in their approach to the scriptures, ritual obligations, patterns of social hierarchy, and therefore constituted a relatively strong opposition to the seldom challenged status of the religious professionals. Having regard for the teachings the saints propagated, the environment they addressed and the traditions they drew from, their 'individualism' is predominant, yet it would be a mistake to understand medieval saints only from the point of opposition to the ideological mainstreamers. Even representatives of intellectual and political elites became their devotees and incorporated their message into the broader tradition. Moreover, some of the medieval saints were Brahmans or highly educated Islamic scholars themselves.[8] A similar statement can be made about the literacy and the literary activities of the saints. Although many of them were remembered as saint-poets and some of them as scholars there can be anticipated an equal if not a higher number of those who were just folk religious figures without any formal education. The latter saints naturally had fewer chances to remain in people's memory, except the really outstanding figures among them.

Therefore, there can be several determinants according to which we are able to classify and describe the pre-colonial saints of South Asia. It always depends on the angle from which we address them, be it their literary achievements, their social-communal work, their adherence to or discordance with the doctrinal and scriptural tradition, and consequent social-ritual practices, or their innovative approach to religion itself. Quite a substantial part of our academic judgment depends on the sources. In the case of pre-colonial saints of South Asia, with regard to primary materials, we must mainly rely on contemporary or later saint-poetry, hagiographies, and histories. However, one part of our material, saint-poetry, has been exposed to fluctuations of semi-recorded oral tradition, and other parts, hagiographies and histories, could have

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HORSTMANN, M. (ed.). Bhakti in current research, 2001-2003: proceedings of the ninth international Conference on early devotional literature in new Indo-Aryan languages, 2006.

[8] For instance Eknāth – the saint whose life and surrounding environment we are discussing in this study – was a Brahman and had to suffer strong opposition to his activities from the fellow members of his own caste. Similarly, Sayyid Muhammad Gesu Darāz was also respected as a religious scholar, but had to withstand the political opposition of sultan Firuz Bahmanī.

easily fallen prey to the mistakes of scribes or interpolations of later editors.[9] What is more, contemporary or later hagiographers and historians documented past according to their own standards subscribing to the actual goals of their writings, i.e. in the case of saints to their panegyric. In this regard our knowledge of pre-colonial saints will always remain limited, and should therefore be understood rather as directly linked to 'what people's memory preserved, and believes it to be correct' than to any adamant historical knowledge.

This is the point to which we can add our assumption that an understanding of the environment where the saints were active will enhance our chances of understanding them. It is mainly because this environment exerted an influence on their lives, which in turn could be reflected in their own writings, or the writings about them. So it seems that contextualizing the saints with what was around them will offer another set of sources. They may suggest the reasons that the saints exposed in formulating their opinions. They may also suggest an explanation of any information found in the hagiographies and saint-poetry, as well as they may help explaining some of the beliefs and practices of their present day devotees. Moreover, since the environment of saint-worship is often still a living organism and it is here where the memory of the saints has been kept, it offers yet another place where we may also look for hints that would help us in understanding the saints themselves and the environment of their times.

Eknāth: His Life and Environment

The saint of our paper, Eknāth (c.a. 1533-1599), lived in the region of Marathi Deccan[10] during the second half of the 16th century, during the reign of Nizām Shāhs of Ahmadnagar. Apart from mutual conflicts among the regional powers of the Deccan, this era is also characterized by the rise of the regional consciousness and regaining of political positions by 'Hindu' elites. In academic writing Eknāth's saintly activities, as it has been mentioned, have

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[9] Regarding these problems see for instance HAWLEY, J. S. Author and Authority in the Bhakti Poetry of North India, 1988, and CALLEWAERT, W. M., SNELL, R. (eds.) According to Tradition. (Hagiographical writing in India), 1994.

[10] Deccan (Daksina, Dakkhin, Dakhan...etc.) meaning literally South, is the name used for the Indian region prevalently corresponding to modern Indian states of Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, and Karnataka. It is a historical region always understood in specific terms of opposition to North India or Hindustan (Ganga-Jamuna doab). By Marathi Deccan I mean the part of this region where the Marathi language has been dominantly used, and traditions (social, religious, literary...etc.) in this language have been created and followed. This part roughly corresponds to the present day state of Maharashtra.

been understood in terms of the Maharashtrain (Marathi) *bhakti* movement.[11] The emphasis on devotion, the exclusion of official religious representatives, the internal experience, and the comparatively easy means of reaching the religious goal via emotions, remembrance of God realized mostly through the singing of devotional songs or repetition of the God's names – all of these characterize *bhakti*. Bringing those who followed the teachings of *bhakti* on the common platform of devotion, *bhakti* movements significantly altered the socio-doctrinal lines that divided the devotees into different religions or sects. It does not mean that the sectarian or religious differences disappeared, but because of *bhakti* these differences could be understood differently. Such, it seems, was the main religious framework, or as it were, the religious environment that determined the activities of Eknāth.

In the pre-colonial period we find South Asia under Muslim political dominance and thus exposed to the considerable activities of the representatives of Islam, be they political elites, ulama, Sufis, administrators, jurists, merchants, or common folk. Naturally, confrontations, or rather interactions, with the representatives of distinct religiosities occurred and partly framed the socio-religious environment of the period. This, in turn, inspired various social reflections of the contemporary situation, and the saints also took part in them. With respect to the modern academic debate concerning these interactions,[12] let me make it clear that anywhere in this text where I use the terms Hindu and Muslim (or Hinduism and Islam), I am always aware of their multifarious implications and that their monolithic understanding deforms the understanding of those to whom they refer, and brings about many historical and cultural misinterpretations.

Saint Eknāth in his literary works quite distinctively captured the pre-colonial environment dominated by the Indo-Muslim elites, and what is more, in his life-story we can trace direct contact with various Muslim figures. Therefore, when thinking about the environment that frames the perception of the saints, I have found it useful to concentrate on him. Looking closely at the places and spaces Eknāth moved across will, thus, not only reveal complementary information about him as a saint who is widely worshipped even nowadays, but it will also enable us to see the variety of the noted social and religious interactions of the pre-colonial Marathi Deccan.

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[11] See e. g. KULKARNI, K. P. Marathi – 983-1600, pp. 19-20, or ZELLIOT, E. Chokhamela and Eknath: Two Bhakti modes of Legitimacy for Modern Change, pp. 136-156.

[12] CHATTOPADHYAYA, B. Representing the Other? Sanskrit Sources and the Muslims (Eighth to Fourteenth Century), 1998, GOTTSCHALK, P. Beyond Hindu and Muslim – Multiple Identity in Narratives from Village India, 2000, GILMARTIN, D., LAWRENCE, B. B. (eds.) Beyond Turk and Hindu (Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia), 2000, EATON, R. M. (ed.). India's Islamic Traditions 711-1750, 2003.

Eknāth is generally understood as a traditionally educated Brahman with somewhat unconventional opinions. R. D. Ranade, later followed by Eleanor Zelliot, called him a saint-integrator.[13] The latter adjective was attached to Eknāth because of his efforts to negotiate between the classical Brahmanical knowledge and social practices and the *bhakti* philosophy. He is counted among the most important Vārkarī[14] saints of Maharashtra as well as the only Vārkarī saint who significantly mentioned Muslims in his writings. Though his reflections on Muslims certainly do not form a substantial part of all his written works, and he is not the only Marathi saint mentioning Muslims, it is his life-story and the way he chose to capture the Muslim presence in the Marathi Deccan in a literary way that makes this testimony noteworthy. Eknāth is also well-known for his radical thinking that bears the marks of a social reformer. As conservative as he was, for instance, in his opinions regarding social structure, he was able to severely criticize contemporary society and its manners.[15] He was also an ardent propagator of the Marathi language and its use for religious purposes, and for this reason he had to face strong opposition even in his own family, because language, apart from other things, was the point of disagreement with his own son Haripandit.[16]

We have basically three main sources of materials to consider that inform us about the environment of Eknāth's activities with particular attention paid to his interactions with the Muslims: his literary treatment of Muslims, the hagiographical information, and the related information provided by historians. All of them are directly related to the environment of the saint's activities. We will therefore provide available information about Eknāth's life and attempt to contextualize it with the environment that it introduces. Then, by using examples from his literary works, we shall try to emphasize the connection between what he wrote and where he lived as seen from his reflections on the Muslims, which is the main purpose of this study. A very complex personality, an educated intellectual touching in his works on several controversial topics, an undoubtedly influential saint, Eknāth is still very much remembered and worshipped in Maharashtra. Let us now look at how the environment he lived in could have participated in creating the perception outlined above.

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[13] RANADE, R. D. Mysticism in Mahārāshtra, p. 256, and ZELLIOT, E. Eknāth's Bhāruds: The Sant as Link Between Cultures, p. 91.

[14] Vārkarīs is the name for the followers of the mainstream *bhakti* cult in Marathi speaking area. For more on Vārkarīs, see in the classic work of DELEURY, G. A. The cult of Viṭhobā, 1960, or BAHIRATH, B. P., BHALERAV, P..J. Vārkarī sampradāy uday va vikās, 1988.

[15] Compare e.g. Śrīeknāthī Bhāgavata, 13: 472-475, and e.g. Śrī Eknāth Gāthā, poems No. 3795, 3863, 3743, 3744 etc.

[16] Śrī Eknāthī Bhāgavata, 1: 129-130, Śrī Bhaktalīlāmṛta, *adhyāy* 23.

Saint Eknāth was born to the family of *ṛgveda* Brahmans of Paithan (Skt. Pratiṣṭhāna) – an ancient city lying on the left bank of the sacred River Godavari in the Marathwada region of the present-day Indian state of Maharashtra. It is generally believed that the famous Vārkarī saint Bhānudās – the one who according to a legend brought the image of god Viṭhṭhal from Vijayanagar kingdom back to the land ruled by the Bahmanī sultan - was Eknāth's great grandfather.[17] Bhānudās therefore could provide an inspiration for young Eknāth's devotional views, and we may say that despite the family's social role as Brahmans, it also carried on the heritage of Vārkarī *bhakti*. On the other hand, Eknāth, born into a Brahman family of Paithan had excellent conditions for becoming a religious scholar, and indeed, apart from the family, it was the ancient city itself that could offer appropriate conditions to help him develop his scholarly erudition.

The earliest reference to Paithan appears to come from Ashoka's Empire, and Paithan was later connected to the dynasty of Sātavāhans. Colloquially, Paithan is known as Dakśina Kāśī [Southern Kāśī or Vārānasī of the Deccan] and references to the town appeared in the *Purānas* and *Jātakas*.[18] Ancient as it was, Paithan hence served for many centuries as a place of pilgrimage (*tīrtha*) and at the same time also as the center of traditional Sanskritic learning. The city hosted several scholars and held its fame precisely because of scholarship.[19] Naturally this made it a seat of Brahmanic orthodoxy. Paithan also had an important economic function in the region. It was a center of trade facilitating the transfer of goods from the coast farther on to the subcontinent and vice versa. All of these characteristics defined the city also in the pre-colonial period. Moreover, due to Paithan's importance as a cultural and administrative center, the city's social and religious environment seem to have been heterogeneous. Apart from the scholars, it sheltered also administrative staff of the sultanate as well as a few settlements of Islamic holy men.

Coming from Paithan offered several opportunities for an educated Brahman. The elites at the courts and in the administrative offices of the local

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[17] KULKARNI, K. P. Marathi – 983-1600, p. 23. According to this legend the image of god Viṭhṭhal was taken from the city of Pandharpur – the most sacred city of all Vārkarīs – to the city of Vijayanagar by its raja who was a devotee of Viṭhṭhal. Eknāth's great grandfather Bhānudās resolved to return Viṭhṭhal to his original place.

[18] For the history of the city see MORVANCHIKAR, R. Paithaṇ darśan, pp. 8-15, see also BHANDARKAR, R.G. Early History of the Dekkan, down to the Mohammedan Conquest, pp. 23-24. Regarding the various use of the epithet Dakśina Kāśī consult FELDHAUS, A. Connected Places: Region, Pilgrimage, and Geographical Imagination in India, pp. 160-161.

[19] JOSHI, P. M. The Bahmanīs: Social and Economic Conditions, p. 218.

and regional rulers formed a transcultural environment[20] that offered opportunities to all those who proved beneficial for the contemporary system of political rule and its administration. Brahmans, as a literate class par excellence, often served as administrators, or advisors for the ruling polities of the pre-colonial Deccan.[21] On the basis of the study of medieval juridical writings, the historian Kane suggested that Eknāth's father, Suryanārāyan, most probably corresponds to Suryapandit, the guru of pandit Dalpat Rāī, who in turn was the famous legislator and Vazīr of the first sultan of the regional sultanate in Ahmadnagar - Ahmad Nizām Shāh.[22] Additionally, a contemporary historian, Ferishta, asserts that Ahmad via his father, a Muslim neo-convert, Nizām ul-Mulk Hasan Bahrī, was a descendant of Kulkarni Brahman.[23] Now, I do not want to say that Eknāth's family had kept extant contacts with government officers or that young Eknāth could in any way observe his father's possible contacts with the aristocracy of Nizām Shāhs. Yet, if Suryapandit was the same person as Suryanārāyan (and the region and time more or less point to the correctness of such an assumption) then Eknāth's apprenticeship years in Daulatabad - a prominent royal fortress of the Ahmadnagar sultanate (see below) and the notions about Muslims in his works that surpass any other reference to them from amongst the Vārkarī saints - are not surprising nor exceptional, but rather uncover the possible reasons why the saint paid attention to social and religious problems that the pre-colonial society had to face.

According to hagiographers, Eknāth passed his years of spiritual and educational apprenticeship in Daulatabad. He was there in the service of his guru, who, according to the regional lore, was employed as an officer at Daluatabad fort.[24] Although it is not clearly stated in hagiographies, the modern

[20] "Transcultural elites" is a term coined by Phillip Wagoner and it explains how the people of different cultural backgrounds participated in the elitist environment of the period. See WAGONER, P. B. Fortuitous convergences and essential ambiguities: Transcultural political elites in the medieval Deccan, 1999.

[21] EATON, R. M. A Social History of the Deccan 1300-1761 (The New Cambridge History of India), p. 91, pp. 144-145.

[22] KANE, P. V. History of Dharmashastra, p. 862, see also KATRE, S. M. Sanskrit and Prakrit, p. 5.

[23] BRIGGS, J. (trans.). Firishta, Mahomed Kasim – History of the Rise of Mohammedan Power in India, Till the year A.D. 1612, p. 116, p. 130, Kulkarni is a common name of 'deśastha brāhmaṇs' of Marathi speaking Brahmans of the Deccan plateau. Kulkarnis served mainly as accountants.

[24] Śrī Bhaktalīlāmṛta, for Daulatabad (Devgiri) see 13-61, for employment of Eknāth's teacher see 13: 107-114, c.f. Śrī Keśavkṛta Ovībaddha Śrī Eknāth Caritra, 1:11, 2: 35-39. Another hagiographer, Kṛṣṇadās, says that earlier Eknāth's teacher served in Ahmadnagar (Amadāvatī 1: 62, Āmadā nagar 2: 2), and only later (but without Eknāth) he went to Daulatabad (4: 101-104). For employment of Eknāth's teacher see 3: 23-29. For the references to Kṛṣṇadās' work see

authors often agree that Eknāth's teacher was a *killedār* [an officer in charge of the fort] of Daulatabad.[25] This is another link that connects the saint to the sultanate environment. However, what seems interesting is that it is not the records of the sultanate that bring us this information but a popular view mentioned in possibly all of his biographies. Eknāth is simply generally believed to have spent time in the service of a sultanate's officer, who, according to this tradition, was also a Brahman and a saint.[26] Mahipati, one of the prominent hagiographers of Marathi saints from the 18th century, even records a story where Eknāth, on behalf of his busy teacher, leads Daulatabad's garrison against the attack of an enemy![27] Moreover, hagiographers further write that the saint had also held in high esteem the guru's guru who met him in the form of a Muslim *malanga faqīr*.[28] Now, if such kind of environment – where a Brahman saint from Paithan serves at a prominent sultanate fort another Brahman who is believed to have been in charge of that fort and a disciple of a *faqīr* – has been preserved in people's stories and recorded by hagiographers, do we have any additional sources that would widen our view of this environment?

Daulatabad, being one of the most strategic army posts in the region that guarded an entrance to wider Deccan, was primarily a place of power. It was the power that pertains to kings with their military retinues as well as the power of kings of spiritual worlds, i.e. saints.[29] Even the name of the location speaks

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Pratiṣṭhāna caritra – Śrī Kṛṣṇadās Jagadānandanandankṛta Śrī Eknāthmahārājānce ovībaddha caritra.

[25] See for instance PATOLE, A. Śrī Sant Eknāth Mahārājānche Caritra, p. 26, PAITHANKAR, A. Śrī Eknāth Caritra, p. 14, DHANDE, C. Sant Eknāth, p. 4, QURESHI, D. Fort of Daulatabad, p. 57. However, save hagiographies, there is no historical evidence that would support this claim. Ansari gives a list of Daulatabad's *killedārs* but it unfortunately concerns only those from the 17th century onwards, see ANSARI, A. R. Medieval Daulatabad Complex: A Cultural Study, pp. 501-503. Yet, he also credits Eknāth's teacher with the *killedārship* of Daulatabad (p. 593). On the other hand, contemporary Muslim historians like Ferishta or Tababa are silent on this point. Thus it seems that the answer to this question, apart from the search of additional sources, very much depends on what we understand the word '*killedār*' to mean. During my discussion with the prominent historian of Maharashtra A. R. Kulkarni, he pointed out that not all officers called by the names such as *killedār*, or *havaldār* in the pre-colonial textual sources actually occupied such posts. The word *killedār* could in colloquial speech easily refer to one who was employed at the fort and did not precisely describe his actual post (personal communication, August, 2005).

[26] KHANOLKAR G. D. Marāṭhī Vaṅgmaykoś, p. 92, GOSĀVĪ, R. R. (ed.) Śrīsakalasantagāthā, pp. 21-26.

[27] Śrī Bhaktalīlāmṛta 13: 109-120, cf. Śrī Keśavkṛta Ovībaddha Śrī Eknāth Caritra, 2: 34 – 50.

[28] Śrī Bhaktalīlāmṛta, 13: 174, Śrī Keśavkṛta Ovībaddha Śrī Eknāth Caritra, 3: 16, also Śrī Bhaktavijaya, 45:106.

[29] Very interesting in this regard are Dalulatabad's connections to *tantrikas* and alchemists and their power to change the matter to gold. Apart from Hindu views of Daulatabad as an important center of early medieval tantric alchemy, we encounter also traditions where a Muslim saint

for it; whether it is in Sanskrit – Devgiri [the hill of God] or in Persian, Daulatabad [the abode of fortune/wealth]. Since the times of Yādavas, the fortress and the city have also played the important role of a cultural centre. Let us not forget that the Yādavas were ardent supporters of Marathi culture, and it was during their rule when Marathi as a regional language rose to prominence.[30] Later, the Muslim sultans took over and the city's previous character was enriched by the inflow of newcomers from the north: for it was again the power that led sultan Muhammad Tughluq to the effort of establishing a new capital of his Indian empire in the Deccan. With respect to the locality of Daulatabad, we should not forget to mention its almost twin-city of Khuldabad [heavenly abode]. Lying just a few kilometers to the north, it had been a prominent Sufi center of Deccan for many centuries.[31] Moreover, the sacred *śaivite* site of Grishneshwar (that hosts one of the twelve most sacred phallic representations of god Śiva – *jyotirlingam*) and the famous center of ancient Indian hermits – Ellora – again lie in the vicinity of both Daulatabad and Khuldabad. Thus, in Eknāth's times we encounter rather a complex socio-religious interface present in the very locality of Daulatabad and its vicinity that is crucially connected to the life of our saint. Depending on the intentions of concrete authors, Daulatabad could be understood by such authors as Bilgrāmī and Shabzawarī as an important center of the sultanate or Sufis, and other authors, such as Gangā Rām, would see it as the seat of great Yādava rajas and their Brahmans.[32] Such an environment seems to be the natural result of a commonly shared space between the inhabitants of this locality and its powerful pathos. So Manpurī Prasād – a local poet who devoted part of his poetry to the praise of Daulatabad – could write that '*vīr* and *mīr*', i.e. Hindus and Muslims, forget their controversies in this sacred city.[33] Thus the traditional view of Eknāth's life in Daulatabad does not seem to be too disparate from this other material that displays the complexity of the social and religious interactions woven around this city. But the years of the apprenticeship passed and Eknāth went back to Paithan. There, other events of

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Muntajib al-Din Zar Zarī Zar Bakhsh [the giver of the essence of gold] turns water to gold which suggests mutual use of the identical motif in both Hindu and Muslim reading of the city's traditional image. See ERNST, C. W. Eternal Garden (Mysticism, History and Politics in South Asian Sufi Center), pp. 236-237, see also GREEN, N. Who's the King of the Castle? Brahmins, Sufis and the Narrative Landscape of Daulatabad, pp. 28-29, and WHITE, D. G. The Alchemical Body (Siddha Traditions in Medieval India), pp. 104-106, p. 112, p. 114.

[30] TULPULE, S. G. Language and Literature – Marathi, p. 59, see also BHANDARKAR, R.G. Early History of the Dekkan, down to the Mohammedan Conquest, pp. 126-127.

[31] For particulars see ERNST, op. cit.

[32] GREEN, N. Who's the King of the Castle? Brahmins, Sufis and the Narrative Landscape of Daulatabad, pp. 21-37.

[33] ANSARI, A. R. Medieval Daulatabad Complex: A Cultural Study, pp. 317-318.

his life provided a possibility for the rise of other traditions connected to Eknāth's interactions with the environment, and particularly with Muslims.

Mahipati recorded the following story. Once, Eknāth, already residing in Paithan, went to take a bath. After bathing himself according to the prescribed ritual of *snāna* in the holy River Godavari, he trod his way home. A Muslim (*yavan*)[34] sitting on the road spat on the freshly bathed Eknāth. Yet, such a deed did not annoy the saint. As it was during lunchtime, Eknāth, after reaching his own house, took a sanctified meal (*prasād*) and went to the Muslim's residence. He thought that the latter would feel ashamed for his own action, which he actually was, and so they reconciled.[35] A more widespread version of the story runs that Eknāth, when encountering the spitting Muslim, peacefully bathed again. This same scenario got repeated for several days. It took many spittings and many baths until the Muslim, humbled by Eknāth's endurance, fell down at the saint's feet to apologize. Eknāth responded that actually it is he, Eknāth, who should be thankful since he had so many chances to bathe in the holy river. Such an attitude completely changed the inward state of the Muslim and he became Eknāth's follower. The latter incident of Eknāth is well known and often quoted in popular biographies of the saint.[36] Yet, there's still a continuation of it. The local tradition holds that the Muslim was actually a Muslim holy man of Paithan named Siddhi Alī Bābā[37] (sometimes Siddhi Walī Bābā or Siddheśvar Bābā) and he is known especially because of his affinity to Eknāth. The locals believe them to be friends and the noted incident was a part of a divine play between these two saints. According to this lore, after their encounter, both agreed that the dust made by the procession that would celebrate Eknāth would settle on the Bābā's *dargāh* [tomb of a Muslim saint] in the future.[38] However strange the belief in such an agreement appears to be, this is what literally takes place during the festival commemorating Eknāth's birth, because the procession on the way to Eknāth's resting place (*samādhi*) has to pass by the Bābā's *dargāh*. The belief, thus, seems to be a later development that stems from the lore about the relation between Eknāth and

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[34] However, cf. Śrī Keśavkṛta Ovībaddha Śrī Eknāth Caritra, 27: 16-38, from which it is not clear that the villain was a Muslim.

[35] Śrī Bhaktalīlāmṛta, 22: 108-123.

[36] PANGARKAR, L. R. Eknāth Caritra, pp. 86-87, PAITHANKAR, A. Śrī Eknāth Caritra, pp. 66-67, DHANDE, C. Sant Eknāth, pp. 13-14, also interview with Jivan Singh — a devotee of Siddhi Alī Bābā, August 2006, Paithan.

[37] Cf. DHANDE, C. Sant Eknāth, p. 13.

[38] Interview with Jivan Singh, August 2006, Paithan, J. J. Roy Burman offers a slightly different version, but I was unable to find anyone who would verify it. He adds that "the procession carrying the palanquin will step on the leaf-plates where people have consumed food" during the urs of Bābā'. See BURMAN, J. J. ROY. Hindu-Muslim Syncretic Shrines and Communities, p. 88.

Siddhi Alī Bābā. The procession celebrating Eknāth's birth and the connected rituals, that occur nowadays, in a way connects the past with the present. Whoever Siddhi Alī Bābā could be, and however he could enmesh in the life of the Paithan's saint, he remains in the environment associated with Eknāth, even today.

There is yet another Muslim saint of Paithan, whom, according to another local tale,[39] we find appearing in Eknāth's life. It is Maulānā Sāheb. Hindu visitors of the Siddhi Alī Bābā's shrine have shared with me the story in which Maulānā Sāheb offered a meat dish to Eknāth in order to enrage him. However, through the power of Paithan's most prominent saint, the meal turned into sweet rice and did not, therefore, conflict with his vegetarian diet. The miracle, of course, proved Eknāth's superiority. Now, the turning of a meat dish into a vegetarian one is a common fable to be met with in the South Asian stories. More interesting is the fact that though Maulānā Sāheb's *dargāh* was apparently built on the remnants of the former temple,[40] Burman reported that many Maulānā's devotees are local Hindus and the highest Hindu attendance of his *dargāh* takes place precisely during the mentioned festival associated with the name of Eknāth.[41] On the other hand, there are Muslims who participate in this festival (Eknāth *saṣṭhī*) – the descendants of Marathi Vārkarī Muslim saint Śekh Mahammad of Shrigonda, who hold Eknāth in high esteem.[42]

What kind of environment could then Eknāth experience? There were basically two dominant localities connected to his life – Paithan and Daulatabad. Both were important cities, cultural centers of the adjacent and also the wider region. The former could be associated with the old world of classical Indic knowledge, enriched in medieval times by the representatives of Indo-Muslim regional power and their politico-economic interests. The second, though also of ancient and even mythical roots, yet flourishing in Eknāth's era due to a politically successful regional sultanate, was along with Khuldabad apparently the dominant military and cultural stronghold of Islamicate society ruling the Marathi Deccan. These two cities, however different they were from a certain point of view, can be considered, with respect to their social composition, typical cities of pre-colonial Deccan. Each of them depended on its position in the wider geo-political interests of the regional elites, but on the other hand they offered the space where traditions were kept and the new

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[39] Quite a different view of Maulānā Sāheb you can find in PAGDI, S. Sūfī Sampradāya, p. 63.

[40] This is seen from many artifacts (such as pillars) formerly belonging to the Hindu temple that were used in the construction of *dargāh*.

[41] BURMAN, J. J. ROY. Hindu-Muslim Syncretic Shrines and Communities, pp. 84-85.

[42] Interview with Abdul Qāsim Mahārāj from Wahira, a cousin of Shubās Mahārāj - the leader of Muslims who regularly visit Paithan. Wahira, Bid district, Maharashtra, June 2005. On Śekh Mahammad see DHERE, R. C. Ekātmateche Śilpakār, pp. 77-107.

cultural impulses accumulated. Eknāth's presence in these cities can be also sought for in his literary reflections. If these reflections were carefully examined, they may give us an additional glimpse of the environment he experienced. And if the information obtained will be added to that coming from hagiographies, historical writings, and the mentioned present-day testimony (tales and practices associated to Siddhi Alī Bābā and Maulānā Sāheb), then possibly a more complete picture of Eknāth and his environment will emerge.

At the beginning of this essay, I have stated that looking at the environment which saints experienced and moved across may help us to understand better the traditions spun around them, and also, to understand the writings of saints, if these are available. We have seen that whether it is the hagiographical testimony, historical evidence, or a story that forms a certain part of present-day beliefs and practices, each of our materials carries at least a small element of the environment around the saint. Out of our sources we certainly cannot reconstruct the environment of the past in its entirety, and this is also not the goal of our exercise with these sources. In order to explain my point, I would compare the environment to a mosaic. It is like a picture composed of many different pictures, which at the lowest level of their composition are composed of varicolored stones. Our perception of this mosaic does not necessarily need to be clear, since it always depends on the angle of our vision, on the light, and so forth. Now, the environment of the past is very much a broken picture. We have to put together badly shaped parts of often faint or corrupted colour. With respect to Eknāth and the environment of the 16th century Deccan, we have decided to look for these parts mainly in the available textual sources (hagiographies, historical writing, and as we are going to do, in Eknāth's saint-poetry). The present-day living heritage of particular practices and stories that are believed to have happened (like those in the case of Siddhi Alī Bābā and Maulānā Sāheb) may be, I believe, also helpful when joining the different parts of the mosaic of the past. Such stories are interconnected with local beliefs and practices, and, therefore, provide an indirect confirmation that whatever incident was their origin, we may presume a certain contact of our saint with that event, since it has been remembered and celebrated. Let us, though, discuss Eknāth's literary works and then attempt to put together the mosaic of the environment of Eknāth's past.

Eknāth: Literary Legacy and Environment

Amongst the thousands of verses and about a dozen of literary works attributed to the saint there are several of Eknāth's literary allusions that address Muslims in particular. None of them are long, but they suggest that the saint felt the need to address them as a particular socio-religious group, and he did it in several ways. Most of these verses were written in the Hindustani language, i.e. the language commonly used by the Muslims in pre-colonial India (or better in one of its dialects known to Eknāth). Eknāth's decision to use this language[43] shows that he was cognizant of the addressee of his verses. This, in turn, displays Eknāth's choice to interact with the Muslim part of the social environment around him. His verses see Muslims from various angles. Eknāth either articulates the criticism of those of their religious doctrines, myths, beliefs, and practices that he associated with Islam as he had come to know it from the social environment around him, or he expresses genuine appreciation, or (with respect to Muslim religious figures) points towards social evils like beggary and affectation. The verses address Muslims by different names, i.e. *faqīr, maulānā, musalmān*, or *Turk*, yet sometimes it seems that Eknāth, in spite of recognizing the differences between their bearers, clusters them all together into one specific religious group. Among the shortest direct allusions to a certain Muslim is the mention of Dāval Malak, who is known in Maharashtra as the legendary 'Sufi-doctor'. Even today he is worshipped by a minor part of Maharashtrians that come from all social strata.[44] Eknāth's reference to Dāval Malak is concerned with the superstition Eknāth probably experienced when observing the locals of Paithan and the surrounding areas. In similar vein as Eknāth criticizes the worship of the local minor deities and various popular devotional groups of the times and is ironical about the activities of the folk astrologers, fortune tellers, medicine sellers, and other professional beggars;[45] he also mentions the blind belief of some Hindus in the

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[43] There exist opinions that doubt Eknāth's authorship of all non-Marathi poems, (See CROW, R. W. The bhāruḍs of Marāṭhī sant Eknāth, p. 325 (footnote no. 81)). However, this has never been appropriately argued. Moreover, the problem of Hindustani compositions does not concern only Eknāth since there were several other Marathi saint poets to whom Hindustani verses were also attributed (e.g. Tukārām or Rāmdās).

[44] DHERE, R. C. *Ekātmateche Śilpakār*, pp. 147-150. According to Dhere Dāval Malak (Shāh Dāval Malik) corresponds to the disciple of Shāh 'Ālam Chishtī from Gujarat (a state adjacent to Maharashtra). Ibid., p. 147. Rizvi mentions certain Malik Dāwar al-Mulk who was employed as an official in the service of the sultan. However, he doesn't mention his medical skills, but only the wide popularity in Gujarat because of his good work in the administration of the state. RIZVI, S. A. A. History of Sufism in India (Vol. I), p. 283.

[45] You can find more on these figures in CROW, R. W. Jr. The bhāruḍs of Marāṭhī sant Eknāth, pp. 254-309.

miraculous powers of the Sufi doctor from Gujarat. *"They worship the mace of Dāval Malak and once in a year become faqīrs! After the procession is over Hindus eat the leftovers of Muslim sweets!"*[46] Additionally, in this Eknāth's verse we have the evidence of a new-born popular Sufi cult that has persisted well into the present. The saint's criticism suggests the intensity of the cult's 'marketing' that he must have experienced.

It was precisely the *faqīrs* – Muslim religious mendicants, understood both, negatively and positively – that often represent Muslims in Eknāth's poetry. He praises *malanga faqīr*, which is possibly an allusion to his guru's guru, but also other *faqīrs* who have patience on their spiritual way, control of their senses, and break the quarrels of lust and anger, kill the filth of the five elements, keep the knowledge of a guru in their *zoḷī* (mendicant's bag) and always respect the guru.[47] On the other hand, he ironically criticizes beggars in the guise of *faqīrs*, who pretending to be spiritual, care for nothing but food. There are several Eknāth's poems devoted to this problem; however, he does not seem to see in this type of Muslim *faqīr* anyone else other than a hypocritical beggar, and in the same way he criticizes some *brāhmaṇs, sannyāsīs, jangams, mahānubhāvs, yogīs* or even *sants*.[48] In the poem called '*Darveś*,' the saint speaks about who the holy men (irrespective of their religious fold) actually should be. Using the examples from Hindu mythology, Eknāth despises those overwhelmed with sexual desire. *Darveś* – a Muslim mendicant is just one of those who can get trapped in the claws of unrestrained ego. It is the '*darveś* of heart' whom the saint favours.[49] It may be possible to read Eknāth's allusion to *Darveś* as a genuine experience, but there is hardly any way to be sure about such an interpretation. Of interest is also the poetical piece called *Hāpsī*. The latter is a Marathi word for an Abyssinian slave, or a noble in the service of the sultans of the Deccan.[50] It is as if Eknāth in this poem tried to explain to a *Hāpsī*, who is called Muhammad in the text (which is a pun on this name), what is the character of God's actions in the world; how he takes the different forms in his famous incarnations (*daśāvatār*), and what that play is all really about. Indeed it is a play of a creator with the creation or rather the creator with himself. But

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[46] Śrī Eknāth Gāthā, poem No. 3892.

[47] Śrī Eknāth Gāthā, poem No. 3944, poem No. 3948.

[48] See for instance Śrī Eknāth Gāthā, poem No. 3891. The word '*sant*', widely used in New Indo-Aryan languages, more or less conveys the meaning of English word 'saint'. In order to avoid confusion, except the works that contain word '*sant*' in their title, I have used English word 'saint' throughout the text of this essay. More particularly on '*sants*' see SCHOMER, K., MCLEOD, W.H. (eds.) The Sants (Studies in Devotional Tradition in India), op. cit.

[49] Ibid., poem No. 3951.

[50] For more on them, see EATON, R. M. The Rise and Fall of Military Slavery in the Deccan, 1450-1650, pp. 115-135.

as God could come as a fish, man-lion, or Rām and Kṛṣṇa, he can also come as Muhammad. Eknāth is very clear in his meaning, in this case, saying that he is eager to meet Muhammad.[51]

The most important text of Eknāth with regard to Muslims is no doubt his *Hindu-Turk samvād* – a debate between a Hindu and a Turk. The name Turk, as it is clear from the text, stands for Muslims generally and not for ethnic Turks. In Indic texts it was interchangeably used with the other terms designating Muslims, such as *yavana,* or *mlechha.* This usage of the name Turk owes much to the geopolitical role of the Turks in South Asia.[52] The academic public has already noted the importance of *Hindu-Turk samvād* among the texts that document the gradual establishment of bipolarity in the social-religious rhetoric of South Asia.[53] From the language point of view, the text written in both the Marathi and Hindustani languages belongs among the exceptional poetical compositions created in the Marathi Deccan that endeavored to present religious and social insights to a multilingual audience. 'Hindu' speaks Marathi and seems to be represented by the Brahman.[54] One wonders what Eknāth really meant by making Hindu a Brahman. The text could be considered as bearing autobiographical features, but I think he just expressed the situation where seemingly the only coherent group with the established textual and ritual tradition, and the group that thus could represent the indigenous Indian religion, were for Eknāth only Brahmans. On the other hand, the 'Muslim' in Eknāth's debate speaks one of the dialects of Hindustani and he is a representative of a lay South Asian Muslim believing in the doctrines of *faqīrs,* practicing his religious duties under the supervision of a local *maulānā,* worshipping in *dargāhs,* and being very familiar with the Hindu world views.[55] This is probably the Muslim of Eknāth's surrounding environment.

Hindu-Turk samvād is a literary confession of how Eknāth felt Hindus and Muslims met in their ways of life. It is not always a positive evaluation, rather a satirical depiction of the weak points of both the actors in the debate. But the saint-poet does not take the side of either of the two debaters. He equally scolds

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[51] Śrī Eknāth Gāthā, poem, No. 3943: 10.

[52] Another word used for Muslims in the dialogue is *musalmān,* but it appears only in the specific context of Islamic proselytism. For the particular discussion regarding the description of Muslims in Indic texts see CHATTOPADHYAYA, B. Representing the Other? Sanskrit Sources and the Muslims (Eighth to Fourteenth Century), 1998. For the geo-political contexts of the establishment of Turkish dominance in the making of the Indo-Islamic world see WINK, A. Al-Hind (The Making of the Indo-Islamic World), Vol. II, 1996.

[53] ZELLIOT, E. A Medieval Encounter between Hindu and Muslim: Eknāth's Drama-Poem Hindu Turk Samvād, pp. 171-195, LORENZEN, D. N. Who Invented Hinduism? pp. 648-649.

[54] Śrī Eknāth Gāthā, poem No. 3966:3.

[55] Consult the Muslim views found throughout the Hindu-Turk samvād, Śrī Eknāth Gāthā, poem No. 3966.

Brahman for his ritualism and rigid caste rules just as he refutes Muslim proselytism,[56] or practicing violence on animals. In that sense Eknāth has found a good way of making both religious groups aware of their shortcomings. Considering this, we should not forget that *Hindu-Turk samvād* was most probably meant for public performances and that its author wanted both sides of the religious spectrum to contemplate the mirror he has placed in front of them. Whatever heights of disagreement the encounter may have reached, it ended in mutual reconciliation and acknowledgment, shaped according to Eknāth's monistic (advaitic) conviction that *"In reality you and I are One."*[57]

The text of *Hindu-Turk samvād* reveals considerable information about Eknāth's relation to Muslims. He seems to have had quite a good knowledge of their doctrines, beliefs, and practices. We can find there references to the monotheistic doctrine, the social-religious practices, such as worship in *dargāhs* and the belief in the authority of spiritual preceptors (*pīr*) as well as the representatives of doctrinal Islam (*maulānā*). The allusions to 'Bābā Adam' and 'Māyā Eve' and the angels 'Jibrāīl, Izrāīl, Manakāīl, Nasakāīl and Mitakāīl' show that the fables from locally fashioned Islamic mythology were also not completely unknown to Eknāth. Even more interesting are the references to the mystical thought of *faqīrs*. Here we can meet with the opinion that Allāh is present everywhere, and anywhere, and is the knower and the known, which strongly reminds us of ecstatic Sufi thought. Conversely, the mention of Persian scripture, in connection with the exposition of the thought that God is likely to be hidden and the further emphasis of the fact that God is very close (also in a physical sense) to his devotee, show that Eknāth certainly wasn't unaware of the contemporary Sufi ideas.[58] Now the question may arise: from where did Eknāth obtain all this knowledge? Was his guru's association with the Muslim *faqīr* its origin, as Skyhawk tried to suggest?[59] Or was it a result of the saint's association with the places and spaces that were commonly frequented by Muslims of various proveniences?

Here we come back to the environment. I have argued elsewhere that the impact of Sufism on Eknāth via the person of *malanga faqīr* does not

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[56] It is interesting that only when Muslim proselyte activities were referred to the word *'musalmān'* appears in Eknāth's text. This confirms our view that Eknāth did distiguish between the names he used for Muslims: *musalmān* being the one tied to conversion.

[57] *vastutā ek amhī tumhī* (Śrī Eknāth Gāthā, poem (Hindu-Turk samvād) No. 3966: 60).

[58] Hindu-Turk samvād, 3966: 11, 24-25, 37. Did Eknāth refer to Alī Hujwīrī's 'Unravelling of the Hidden'? Did he mean the Qur'ān's verses often quoted by the Sufis that God is closer than the jugular vein? Did he meet with the philosophy of Ibn Arābī's 'hamā ūst'? We can only guess, but Eknāth's insights and argumentation correspond with the prevalent Sufi ideas on the subcontinent.

[59] SKYHAWK, H. VAN Ṣūfī Influence on Ekanāthī-bhāgavat: Some Observations on the Text and its Historical Context, pp. 67-79.

correspond to the sum of information known about the latter, who was indeed an obscure figure.[60] Therefore, it seems much more feasible to see in the saint's observations of Muslims that the knowledge that he gained he did so rather by social contact than by a religious instruction. Cities like Paithan and Daulatabad offered plenty of chances to do so. *Hindu-Turk samvād* could just have been inspired by an actual debate between similar kinds of actors trying to prove their religion to be better than the opponent's.[61] Moreover, what precludes the consideration of the possibility that Eknāth indeed conversed with *faqīrs*, Sufis, *maulānas,* or other Muslims of pre-colonial Paithan and Daulatabad? His texts clearly reflect this interaction, for they are directly addressed to these religious figures. Many of Eknāth's other compositions, namely *bhāruḍs*, suggest that he was a keen observer and commentator of the society of his times, and it was therefore natural for him to want to know more about the variety of religious thought and practices enjoyed in various circles of devotees or religious professionals. The language used when addressing Muslims, Hindustani, again reveals the familiarity with the polyglot culture of the pre-colonial Deccan, and direct reference to the surrounding environment. Furthermore, the prolific author he was, Eknāth also wrote a few satirical versions of official government documents.[62] The Persian words used there point both to his contacts with government officials, which in neither Paithan, nor in Daluatabad, would be anything unusual, as well as to his familiarity with their usual content, which displays another part of Eknāth's connections and inspirations in the world around him dominated by a Persianized administration.

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[60] DEÁK, D. Maharashtra Saints and the Sufi Tradition: Eknath, Chand Bodhle and Datta Sampradaya, 2005. The references to Sufi ideas in *Hindu-Turk samvād* are only allusions and, save for the one instance of a certain Śāhāmodīn Ālī (see below), nowhere in his texts has Eknāth quoted any Sufi authority or any other authoritative text. Except '*phārsī*', which I read as a Persian scripture (*he phārsī pāhī tumhī paḍhā*), in *Hindu-Turk samvād* there is only a reference to the mentioned Śahāmoddīn Alī, but we are not told who he was, and the saint of such a name is unknown to Maharashtrian Sufism. It may be far-fetched to expect Eknāth reading the Persian and Arabic in their particular script, but not impossible. However, in Eknāth's works, except *Hindu-Turk samvād* and the poems mentioned above, we do not find other direct references to the well-known Muslim/Sufi ideas; therefore, I think it viable to understand Eknāth's knowledge about doctrinal Islam only as peripheral, and mostly 'street-originated'.
[61] Cf. ZELLIOT, E. 1982, p. 174.
[62] CROW, R. W. The bhāruḍs of Marāṭhī sant Eknāth, pp. 351-359. See also GUHA, S. Transitions and Translations: Regional Power and Vernacular Identity in the Dakhan, 1500-1800, p. 26.

Concluding Remarks

Looking at the saint through the lens of environment, Eknāth appears very much integrated with the world around him, and the known incidents and stages of his life, by their character, also correspond to the milieu he moved within. This is particularly important to understand because such figures as the saints are usually presented in terms of their extraordinariness and exclusivity. We are often told about the miracles and the deeds that elevate them above the common man, and hence are prone to forget that these people, though doubtless extraordinary, were firm parts of the ordinary world. So, when looking at the past, and trying to grasp the evidence that allows us to imagine a world long gone by with approximate certitude, it would be a mistake to avoid the past's ordinariness.

Eknāth, and his lifetime can be viewed from several academic angles: be it social history or religious studies. The literary legacy he offered helps us in reconstructing the social and religious atmosphere of pre-colonial Deccan, and the information found in hagiographies or provided by historians enables us to contextualize this legacy with the world around him. What is more, it is not only his manner of integration with that world that has been revealed in these texts, but also the plentiful social and religious strands forming the pre-colonial socio-religious interface. The latter is displayed in the memories and representations attached to sacred as well as to civil places, such as Paithan or Daulatabad, and also in the socially flexible royal (state) administration, negative or positive encounters between representatives of different religious standpoints, or in the basic human relations such as that of a teacher and a disciple. Yet, how would the mosaic – to return to our simile – of the environment that Eknāth experienced during his life look like? It would possibly be a motley picture of the day-to-day life of a saintly Brahman from Paithan treading the path towards his destination across the ways, moods, and interactions of the local society. That society, in cultural as well as in political terms, appears to be an integral part of the regional Indo-Muslim sultanate of the Deccan. It could also be a picture of an intellectual trying to understand the world around him, within the common categories of his times (and they could also be those of '*hindu*' and '*musalmān*' at times understood essentialistically and at times not). But it could also be a picture of an extraordinary man, who living through an ordinary world of pre-colonial Deccan, achieved his goal and, therefore, entered the memory of the people that always inspired him. They, in turn, passed this memory over to the next generations, so that even now it is very much alive and still forms an extraordinary part of people's ordinary lives.

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