

Experiencing the ‘Unstruck Sound’ in the Yoga of the Sants

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My research revolves around the North Indian bhakti traditions of early modernity and concentrates on the analysis of religious ideology. I also deal with selected aspects of Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophy, pertaining especially to the tathāgatagarbha (buddha nature) doctrine.

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My paper will focus on some theoretical aspects of the yogic ‘unstruck sound’ (anahad nād/śabd) practice and its soteriological importance, as reflected in selected writings of the North Indian Sants. Inherited from the Nāths, this practice was given paramount importance, and following or ‘catching’ the ‘unbeaten’ or ‘boundless’ interior sound was equated with attaining the supreme deity. Although in some strands of the Sant tradition this practice was deprived of its (haṭha) yogic context, it has retained a soteriological function. The aim of this paper will be to investigate the changes made to the anahad nād practice in the bhakti-oriented context of the Sant tradition, using the works of Kabīr, Dariyā Bihārvāle, as well as Dādūpanthī and Rādhāsvāmī authors as examples. I am particularly interested in the way the later Sant tradition, as represented by the Rādhāsvāmīs, understands the process of grasping the inner sound without the use of corporeal yogic techniques and, subsequently, how it redefines the role of yoga and yogīs.

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