CHAPTER 5
Prannath and His Nijananda Sampradaya

With medieval religious movements in India are associated diverse traditions. Kabir, Dadu, Tukaram, Ravidas, Guru Nanak and other bhakti saints advocated a measure of synthesis between Indian and Islamic religious traditions, but their teachings were largely within the Hindu framework. The Vaishnavas, particularly the Krishnaites remained confined to Brahmanical philosophy, even as they had close interaction with some sufi silsilahs. While the non-islamic sants and devotional cults generally attached an independent lineage to a specific deity or a founder guru, the Islamic religious sects, though diversified, traced their lineage eventually to a single historical founder, namely, the Prophet of Arabia. Further, the bhakti cults have been studied, in general, in socio-religious contexts whereas the Muslim religious traditions have often been located in the contemporary politics as well. ¹ In these studies, the name of Prannath and his important religious cult which he himself called Nijananda Sampradaya,

¹ For the study of various bhakti movements, see, Schomer and McLeod (eds.), The Sants; Kabir by C. Vaudeville, Savitri Chandra Shobha, Social Life and Concepts in Medieval Hindi Bhakti Poetry; John Straton Hawley, Surdas: Saint, Poet And Singer; N.N. Bhattacharya (ed.) Medieval Bhakti Movements in India; For the Muslim religious movements, see, S.A.A. Rizvi, A History of Sufism in India, 2. Vols; S.A.A. Rizvi, The Muslim Revivalist Movements During the Twelfth And Thirteenth Century in India, and The Muslim Revivalist movement During the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries in India; M. Mujeeb, Indian Muslims.
has so far been neglected. In the following lines, we will notice this important religious tradition.

The Nijananda Sampradaya was distinctly a Krishnaite cult, but it borrowed heavily from the Islamic Ismailis also. At times, as a matter of fact, it becomes difficult to categorize it as “Hindu” for the master of this tradition, Prannath identified it as “Islam” and “Iman”. The followers of Prannath, identified as Prannathis by some modern scholars, deserve notice for their zeal to establish a new religion and proselytize the entire world. The cult was founded by Devchand during the seventeenth century in Jamnagar, Gujarat but his disciple Prannath is more venerated by the Prannathis, perhaps, because of his special missionary efforts and achievements. Devchand derived his knowledge of the Truth from Bhagvat Purana and learnt it from Vallabhi gurus still preached the unity of Vedas and Quran. In the course of time, as we shall see later, the ideology of the cult under the guruship of Prannath also imbibed the beliefs and patterns of Nizari Ismailis without hesitation. Prannath claimed to have evolved a monolithic religion by diffusing the Ismaili, Sunni, Christian and Hindu faiths.

Our primary source of information for the life of Prannath and the origin and development of Prannathi cult is Beetak of Swami Laldas. This

3. S.A.H. Abidi, Sufism in India; p. 112; Motilal Jotwani, 'Mahamati Prannath and Mahatma Gandhi' in Ranjit Saha (ed.) Jagani Sanchayan, p. 427. Prannathis are also known as Pranamis among contemporary followers.
is a hagiographic text written by a disciple of Prannath. Because of the specific structure of the *Beetak*, it is not possible for us to describe in coherent way the biography of Prannath. Instead, we will notice that such information is intertwined into the details of the cult that Prannath founded. The idea of *Guru, Guru*-disciple relationship and the rituals that commanded a significant following over vast geographical regions in India and also in Arab, mirror the personality of Prannath. Among several other things the *Beetak* also helps us see how Prannath reformulated the notions of *qayamat* and *Kali Yuga* in order to justify his claims of being an incarnation of not one but several divinities of many religious traditions simultaneously. Prannath tried to incorporate the diversified concepts into one faith which he espoused and called Islam. It was probably due to his radical religious ideology that Prannath and his followers confronted resistance from the both the Muslims and the Hindus of his time.

**Swami Laldas and his *Beetak***

There has been a tradition of writing *Beetaks* on Prannath by the important members of the cult. There are seven such *Beetaks* and that of Laldas is considered to be the most sacred. It is believed that the Prannathis concealed their literature from public view for a long time for reasons, perhaps, known to those who preached the faith.⁴ We have used the edited and published copy of *Beetak*. The editor Matabadal Jaiswal based his study on the mutilated original script and the copy compiled written by

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⁴ P.S. Mukharya, 'Sant Prannath and Pranami Sect' in N.N. Bhattacharya, (ed) *Medieval Bhakti Movements in India* p. 114. We would comment on this issue later after discussing the ideology and its bearing on politics.
Beerji. There is sufficient evidence within the Beetak that Laldas himself used to write and transcribe Beetak. In many places, we find him delineating the preachings of Prannath or copying the texts belonging to different sects.

The tradition accepts that the author of the text, who was a disciple and close associate of Prannath, composed the Beetak after the death of his Guru. Laldas was a revered businessman of Kathiawar. He had flourishing trade in Thatta. He had ninety nine ships. He was known as Lakshmana Seth in the business class. When Prannath visited Thatta, Laldas approached him through a Prannathi Chatura:

चतुरे आए अरज करी, लाल चाहे करी दीदार।
लक्ष्मण उनका नाम है, हे तालिब धनी निरघार।

(Chatura came and requested, Lal wants to meet you; His name is Lakshman, he is wealthy.)

He was initiated by Prannath into his cult and henceforth, Laldas began to propagate his faith actively. He accompanied his guru to all the places he

5. Matabadal Jaiswal in his editor's note informs us about the problems he had to face in identifying and selecting the reliable copies of the Beetak. He believes that any transcribed copy could not be used without verification because the transcribers, in many cases, are not successful in preserving the language and the script of the original text. He visited many places and temples in Gujarat and got a mutilated original script from a Prannathi Krishna Priyacharya in Anand. Reviewing the different copies of Beetak critically, he found the true copy written by Beerji the most reliable. See, Beetak of Swami Laldas, Editorial note, p. 25-38.

6. Beetak, Section 37, verse 28 and Section 39, verse 39.

7. Laldas did not reveal his identity in Beetak. The name of his parents is not known even in the tradition of Prannathis. He refers to his wife, Lal Bai and daughter, Shayam Bai at one place in Beetak. The descriptions of Laldas's economic condition are based on the information in Shivmangal Ram, Swami Laldas Krit Beetak Ka Madhya Kaleen Bharatiya Itihas Ko Yogdan.

visited and assisted him in every task. Having full command over Arabic
and Persian, he used to recite Quran and hadiths whenever it was needed:

कुरान हदीसा बौंचने बैठत है लालदास.⁹

He composed Beetak consisting of verses which read like an epic. It
is divided into seventy one sections (Prakarans) and contains four thousand
three verses in all. It describes the biographies of the founder gurus
Devchandji and Prannath, their visits to several places and their meetings
with the eminent dignitaries, political or religious. The continuity in the
text is maintained throughout by narrating the events in a sequence,
revolving around these gurus.

Prannath, who did most for the dissemination of the cult Nijananda
Sampradaya, was born in 1618 in Jamnagar (Nautan Puri in Beetak); his
father was Keshav Thakur and mother was Dhan Bai:

सम्पत्ति सोलह सी पचहतार, आसी बदि चौदस नाम।¹⁰
प्रथम जाम और वार रवि, प्रगटे धनी श्री धाम।
केशव पिता ढाकुर कहियत, माता बाई धन।

(In Samvat 1675, on fourteenth day of Ashivini month, on Sunday at the
dawn, the enlightened was born in Shri Dham (Jamnagar.)
His original name was Mihir Raj and Prannath was the title conferred upon
him by his devotees.¹¹ Laldas mentions him as ‘Shri Raj’, ‘Meheraj’ and

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⁹. Ibid, V. 16.
¹⁰. Ibid, Section 13, verse 35 and Section 11, verse, 23.
¹¹. For details of his biography, see also, Shtv Mangal Ram, Swami Laldas Krit Mahamati
Prannath Beetak Ka Madhya Kaleen Ithias Ko Yogdan, p. 55-60; The article by P.S.
Mukharya, ‘Prannath and Pranami Sect’. in M.M. Bhattacharya (ed.) Medieval Bhakti
Movement in India p. 115-16. A number of articles in Ranjit Saha (ed.) Jagani
Sanchayan, published by Prannath Mission, Delhi, also furnish details of Prannath’s
biography.
'Mahamati' in *Beetak*. 'Mahamati' however became the most popular epithet of Prannath and in almost all the modern writings, he is generally addressed as Mahamati. He was a Kayastha by caste and his father had a flourishing business in Jamnagar. He came in contact with Devchand, the founder of *Nijananda Sampradaya*, at the age of thirteen and became his intimate disciple.

After the death of Devchand, Prannath and other eminent disciples of the deceased *guru* decided to confer *guruship* on his son Bihari. Soon, however, in the wake of internal dispute, Prannath was expelled from the cult. Subsequently he was invited by some dissenters to take over the leadership of the cult. Prannath exploited these circumstances and established a cult of his own though the name and lineage of the cult of Devchand was still retained. So was the underlying belief in the idea of *guru*.

The concept of *guru* was known to the people of India since ancient times but the reverence of *guru* as a divine figure and a passionate devotion for him appears to be a feature of medieval Indian culture.\(^\text{12}\) Studies of various medieval religious cults reveal one or the other spiritual personality as the object of devotion by the followers of that cult. The concept of *guru* has also been renewed gradually under the influence of Buddhism and Islam.\(^\text{13}\) The notions of *guru*, *satguru* or *pir* also distinguished the identities

\(^{12}\) Jan Gonda, *Change and Continuity in Indian Religion*, (p. 229-36); Vishal Mangalwadi, *The World of Gurus*, p. 1-14; These scholars survey the history of guruship in India since Vedic age when *guru* implied a teacher till the modern period when he became a living holy man and the founder of a cult of his own with distinct beliefs and behavioural patterns. They believe that the characteristics of Vedic *guru* were not lost but were adjusted to the changing milieus and circumstances.

\(^{13}\) Daniel Gold, *The Lord as Guru*, p. 173; Jan Gonda *Change and Continuity* p. 278-85; S.A.A. Rizvi, *Sufism*, Vol. I. p. 97-101. The author suggests that the organization of the sufi *silsilhas* was primarily dependent on the *pirs* who transmitted mystical experience to their disciples. The *pirs* were endowed with divine grace.
of the cult, the lineage of the *guru* or *pir* being the scale of assessment. The institution of guruship is believed to have emerged during the *bhakti* period as a protest against the Brahmanical dominance.\(^{14}\) In the Prannathi cult, it was also influenced by the *Nizari Ismaili* notion of a living *imam*. The concept of *guru* in Prannathi cult witnessed different stages of evolution wherein the position of *guru* gradually acquired increased sanctifications.

The founder *Guru* Devchand was born in Amarkot in Sind on 11th October 1581 A.D. in a Kayastha family:

> सम्प्र् सोले सों अड़तीसे आसी सुद चौदास को।\(^{15}\)
> जनयिदिन श्री देव चन्द आए प्रगटै मारवाड़।

His father was Matu Mehta and mother was Kunwar Bai. His father was an affluent merchant. Laldas informs us that the *guru* was endowed with the anxiety to realize the essence of human existence right from his childhood:

> जब वय बरस अग्नार तब मन उपज्या ये विचार।\(^{16}\)
> मैं कौन कहूँ थे आइयां, कहूँ मेरा भरतार।

(At the age of eleven, the thought came to his mind; who he was and from where did he come; who was his protector?)

Devchand wandered in search of the Truth and lived in the company of Hindu and Muslims ascetics and mystics. He found a little relief in the

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14. Daniel Gold, *The Lord as Guru*, p. 3-6 and Vishal Mangal Wadi, *The World of Gurus*, p. 17-20. These scholars believe that the *sants* of the medieval period generally hailed from low-castes and rejected the caste distinctions. They were acknowledged by the large number of people thus became the *gurus*. The studies of other scholars on *sant* tradition, like those of Lorenzen, C. Vaudeville and McLeod also suggest that the *Guru* had assumed power by opposing the Brahmanical system of beliefs.


company of a Vallabhi saint Hardas, whom he also accepted as his guru:

(Wandering he reached the city of Bhujnagar; Haridas lived there, received his company; he was Radha Vallabhi and performed the task of awakening the soul.)

Hardas conferred a mantra upon Devchand, who then served Hardas with absolute servility and dedication. The Guru thus pleased referred his disciple to a superior Guru Balmukand:

(Hardasji then said I hand you over to Bal Mukand, you serve him and secure bliss.)

Henceforth, Devchand, under the lordship of Vallabhi preachers attended the discourees on Bhagwat. Devchand was, however, not fully convinced of the truth of the positions of the Vallabhaites and on many occasions, he was critical of their views. However, the intense passion for Krishna and Bhagvat enlightened his soul and one day he visited Braja in his dream and he had a vision of Lord Krishna. He realized that Lord Krishna himself was his true preceptor. In yet another dream, the Lord again appeared and blessed him. When Devchand asked the Lord about his destination, the Lord revealed that he had decided to transmigrate in his (Devchand's) body:

17. Ibid, Section 3, verse 13-14.
18. Ibid, verse 68.
(Devchand asked him where would he go; I have come to stay in your person.)

The Lord granted him the 'Tartam', a *mantra*, that became the ritualistic symbol of Prannathis. Devchand began to initiate disciples by giving 'tartam' *mantra* to them after which the adepts promised to be loyal to him and faithful.

This was an important stage in the history of the cult and the concept of *guru* was later further defined and elaborated by Prannath. The cult of the Prannathis thus owed its origins to Vallabha-cult wherefrom Devchand, the founder-*guru*, adopted the idea of guruship. The *guru* for attaining knowledge was then indispensible in the cult. The making of *guru* on part of Devchand was thus no exception; it was sanctioned by the tradition.

Devchand also derived his authority as *Guru* by his personal experiences which he gained through his services to various other *gurus*. The *Beetak* postulates the need of a *guru* for the survival of the cult. After the death of

19. Ibid, Section 6, verse 34.
20. Richard Barz, *The Bhakti Sect of Vallabhacharya*, p. 3-16 Maya Burger, ‘The Hindu model of social organization and the *bhakti* movement: the example of Vallabha’s *sampradaya*’ in McGregor (ed.), *Devotional literature*, p. 56-64; The spread of Vallabha-*sampradaya* in Gujarat and the insistence on the crucial role of *guru* lend support to this description of *Beetak*. The popularity of Vallabhacharya and the final scriptural authority to Bhagvat puran in Gujarat, Sindh and Orissa leave us in no doubts that Devchand was influenced by this cult.
21. Vishal Mangalwadi, *The World of Gurus*, p. 16-17 and Peter Brent, *Godmen of India*, p. 31. Both the scholars suggest that the *guruship* in medieval religious life could be acquired by propagating the personal mystic experiences authoritatively. Jan Gonda also writes in this context that a person of any caste who is believed to be in close communion with the Supreme Power may become a *guru*. See, Jan Gonda, *Change And Continuity* p. 280. Devchand could justify his claim as *guru* in these terms also as we have already illustrated his communion with Lord Krishna.
the founder-\textit{guru}, therefore, his disciples, Prannath being amongst them, decided to entrust the responsibility of guiding the cult to the deceased guru's son, Bihari as a matter of heredity:

\begin{quote}
किन को वैठायें इनपर, किनका करें अख्यार \footnote{Beetak, Section 13, Verse 27.}\footnote{Ibid, Section 28, V. 50.} \\
निसवत नसल की, बिहारी जी सरदार।
\end{quote}

(Who should be enthroned, whom should we follow; Lineage is divinely inspired, Bihariji is the leader.)

During the guruship of Bihari, we find Prannath much concerned with the ideals of Devchand. Though he had to respect his \textit{Guru} by all means and disciples were to be initiated by the \textit{Guru} himself, Prannath also recruited his disciples independently. He also pleaded to initiate the non-descrits in the cult. The inclusion of a \textit{sudra}, Dhara and his kinfolks in the cult was one such attempt which was resented by the \textit{Guru} Bihari. Bihari then grew apprehensive of Prannath's behaviour which resulted in the following directive for him:

\begin{quote}
एक तो नीच जात को सुनावो नहीं तारतम\footnote{Ibid, Section 28, V. 50.} \\
दूजो राण अस्त्री को, तीजों कहें हम तुम।
\end{quote}

(First, donot recite \textit{tartam} to the low caste, second is the widow and thirdly, not to everyone.)

Prannath refused to listen to the instructions; he rather rebelled and believed that Bihari had deviated from the path of Devchand. The dissensions became irreconcilable and a number of the members of the cult then proclaimed that Devchand, infact, dwelt in the person of Prannath. It was he who actually deserved the seat of the \textit{Guru}:
At this point of time, all the devotees consulted, in whose heart Devchandji dwells, weigh it now.

His entitlement to guruship was further reinforced by his claim that:

हम आए हैं अरस से मेरे हैं परवरदिगार 25

(I have come from heaven and being sent by God.)

He was also seen as the messenger of God, (Rasool):

हम देखा रसूल खुदाए का, तुम ल्याओ तिन पर इमान 26

(We have seen the messenger of God, you accept his faith.)

He also treated himself as an incarnation of Jesus (Ruh Allah) which he had received through his Guru Devchand.

ए निघ जो ल्याइया, रुह-अल्लाह चौथे आसमान 27

तिन सैंती प्राप्त भई त्रिगुण सिस्ट पहचान ।

(The fortune brought Ruh-Allah from the fourth sky: the knowledge of the Trinity was revealed through him.)

The guru thus acquired a new height, ennobled further by adding the notions of Imam Mahdi:

रसूल, मोहन, रुह अल्ला और मेहदी इमाम 28

ये चारों एक तन है ताकों नाम इस्लाम।

25. Ibid Section 12, Verse 3.
27. Ibid, Section 43, Verse 16. For the notions of Trinity, see Arnold Toynbee, An Historians Approach To Religion, p. 130 and a comparative study of the concept of Trinity in Christianity and Brahmanical Traditions, See Adnan Aslam, Religious Pluralism In Christianity And Islam, p. 178-81.
28. Ibid, Section 2, Verse 27.
(The Prophet, the devotee, Ruh-Allah and Mahdi Imam are one and they all are called Islam.)

The concept of Guru in the Prannathi tradition was thus manifestation of many religious traditions. In the verse also we hear the echoes of wahdat-ul-wujud.

We have seen that Devchand first served the human gurus with devotion. These gurus headed different branches of their cults as we have seen that Hardas and Balmukund propagated Vallabhi faith in Gujarat. Secondly, the Guru came to be identified as the divinity itself and Lord Krishna descended in the person of Prannath who then became the living human god. Pabhuji, another living Guru in Western Rajasthan came to be identified as the divinity in the similar ways as we find in the case of Devchand. Thirdly, the belief of the coming of Ruh-Allah and Imam Mahdi in the person of Guru Prannath showed the impact of the ideology of the Nizari Ismailis. The Nizari Ismailis acknowledged a living and physically present Imam. Lastly, identifying Prannath as Buddha also suggests influence of a yet another religious tradition. In a number of verses, his devotees eulogized him as Buddha:


30. Daniel Gold, *The Lord As Guru,* p. 55-77. The author quotes Namdev's poetry to show that Vitthal, a living guru of Krishnaite cult at Pandharpur was worshipped as Lord Krishna himself.


Maharaj then said that there was none in this universe; Budha was the person who could have convinced me.)

The Sufis, like Tantric Buddhists, attempt to trace the lineage of their *pirs*, through chains of succession, to Ali and the Prophet. The Prannathi tradition, by reverting the Prophet and Buddha in the person of Prannath presented its larger religious context. The status of *Guru* Prannath as Buddha, Lord Krishna, the Prophet and Imam might have ensured trustworthy teaching and coherence to the larger community.

There is still another probability which needs notice. We know that in Hinduism, Buddha is conceived as one incarnation of Lord Vishnu. Prannath, when settled permanently in the court of Panna under patronage of Chhatrasal came to be worshiped like Lord Krishna. It could then be presumed that Prannath as Buddha was also situated within the Hinduism.

The divine attributes of Prannath were simply not metaphors. The divinity was, in fact, attained through the faith of the devotees, which in turn depended upon the authority of the *Guru*. The *Guru* after attaining knowledge through personal experiences and through grace of his *gurus*,

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35. P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmasastras*, Vol. II, part 2, p. 721. and Gavin Flood, *Hinduism*, p. 116. Gavin Flood believes that texts are never neutral and so may be the *Puranas* telling the incarnation of Vishnu. The descent gods were included curiously in the literature as and when needed.
36. *Beetak*, p. 402-99 (आठ फहर का चौथा) contains the description of eight divisions of a day, each part of the day was assigned a specific ritual, like bathing of Prannath, dinning, *kirtan*, resting and discourse etc.
justified his claims of divinity by utilizing the scriptures like the Vedas, Quran, Tafseer and The Testament, old and New.\(^{37}\) **Beetak** contains innumerable references wherein we find that the Guru attempted to convince the aspirants by borrowing the illustrations from these sacred scriptures. He had mastered the knowledge of these scriptures and had realized the Truth. This knowledge be utilized for crushing the arguments of his opponents and also to satiate the intellectual impulse of the aspirants.\(^{38}\)

**Nijananda Sampradaya : Rules and Rituals**

Prannath's expulsion from the cult marked a new phase in the history of Prannathis. Some eminent members of the cult now entrusted the guruship to Prannath. A man of vision and authority he assessed the situation of flux and change in Gujarat. There existed numerous communities, Jain merchants, the Hindus preaching Shaivism and Vaishnavism, the Indian converts known as Bohras and Khojas, the Parsis, the Christians and the other Muslims.\(^{39}\) The change of Bohra leadership from Yaman to Gujarat had created problems within the Ismaili sects.\(^{40}\)

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37. Vishal Mangalwadi, *The World of Gurus*, p. 17 and Peter Brent, *Godmen of India*, p. 26-31; These scholars believe that the scriptures were used or misused to defend or justify the claims of a guru. He was to be trusted because of his divinity that represented irrationality on part of the devotee, and the devotees were expected to be faithful because he offered an escape from illusion through his knowledge and it indicated rational element. Prannath was thus a perfect living Guru in whom the Lord had incarnated.

38. **Beetak**, Section 33-35 describes the polemics in Haridwar where the religious preachers of different Mathas and sampradaya had assembled for Seminar. He also argued with the Muslim orthodoxy in Bhav Singh's court and in Aurangabad and succeeded to a great extent in convincing many of them. See **Beetak**, Section 51-53.


The population was also occupationally organised into Vanias, Seths and Mahajan, each possessing considerable authority and wealth. The Portuguese in the region had also established their churches in Ahmedabad and Surat and the Cults of Vallabhacharya in the name of his son, Vitthlashwar Gosain were acquiring dominance. Interaction with the people of widely diversed faiths, inspite of chaos and confusion, allowed inclusion of dynamic ideas that helped these communities to adjust to the changing environment. The economy of Gujarat was also developing through internal and external trade, horse-supply, cotton manufacturing and trading and timber works.

The bond between the guru and disciples also developed a feeling of fellowship among the disciples. They formed a social group which Laldas called Satha. The members of this social group were assigned a sanctified identity of the sampradaya which Prannath called Nijananda Sampradaya:

निजानन्द है सम्प्रदाय, ए उत्तर प्रकाश प्रकाश.....
धनी देवचंद जी निजानन्द, तिन प्रकट करी संप्रदा तेह।

(The sampradaya is Nijananda and its question-answers would enlighten you; Wealthy Devchandji created this sampradaya.)

41. The cult of Vitthaleshwar Gosain had also procured imperial farmans for preaching their faith in Gujarat and the three Jesuit Missionaries also secured the imperial sanction to establish churches in Cambay, Surat and Ahmedabad during 1595 and 1615. See, M.S. Commissariat, (ed.) Imperial Farmans in Gujarat, ICHR, 1990, p. 22-23 and 27. The transient state of affairs is also reflected thoroughly in Beetak. The predominance of Kabir-panth, Nanak-panth, the cult of Shambhu Nath, Vallabhi margi, the group of Vitthaleshwar Gosain, the authority of firangis and their interference in the religious affairs of the cult, the conversion of some Prem Das to Christianity and of masses to Islam, The conflicts with in Ismaili Sects as we will discuss in the chapter is apparent in the descriptions of Beetak.

42. Beetak, Section 36, V. 82 and 83.
The relationship between the guru and disciples was asserted by initiation of a mantra known as ‘tartam.’ The ‘Tartam’ was formally conferred upon the aspirant and then only one was initiated into the Sampradaya:

तारतम सुन्या तिनमे पुरे मनोरथ काम।

(Who soever heard the ‘tartam’, his desires were fulfilled and tasks were completed.)

The acceptance of Devchandji as the inspired teacher enabled the establishment of Nijananda Sampradaya. It then demanded some kind of organization in terms of rules and regulations, prohibitions and rituals.

Once the disciples had been consecrated, they had to observe certain prohibitions as prescribed by the Guru:

परहेज कराया चार बात का ए कबूल कर लेत।
एक हराम कहया मौस को दूसरा हराम सराब।
तीसरे औरत विरानी तज्जै सो पाई हयाती आब।
चोरी भूल बोलना इनका छोड़ा उदरक।

(They were directed to abstain from four things, they had to take a vow; meat was first unlawful, second was wine; third was to discard other's...)

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43. Daniel Gold, ‘Clan and lineage among the sants: Seed, Substance and Service’ in Schomer and McLeod (eds.) The Sants; Peter Brent, Godmen of India, p. 108. Vishal Mangalwadi; The World of Gurus, p. 16, C. Vaudeville, ‘Sant Mat’; Santism as universal path to sanctity’ in The Sants, p. 33. Apart from these many other scholars who discuss holy men or, religious cults refer to initiation through mantra. ‘Tartam’ was divine inspiration, as we have seen earlier, which the founder-Guru Devchandji had received directly from Lord Krishna.

44. Beetak, Section 9, V. 44 and see also, section 28, V. 58.

45. McLeod, ‘The Development of Sikh Panth’ in Schomer and McLeod (eds.) The Sants, p. 229; Peter Brent, Godmen of India, p. 47. Peter Brent in general and McLeod in context of Sikh Panth find it necessary to constitute a body of rules and regulations for the development of panth as institution.

46. Beetak, Section 22, V. 15-17.
wife, He who renounces these things receives the elixir; To give up thievery and telling lies was wise.)

These prohibitions might have been imposed in conformity to the social life in the region, namely, Gujarat, where the cult was being given a definite shape. Any devotee who did not follow these constraints was treated as non-believer. Though general attitude of the Guru was to keep the devotee attached to the cult and he restricted the punishment for defaulters to rapprochement. The mistakes were rectified in most of the cases but instances of expulsion were also not rare. Among the rituals of the cult, darshan or didar of the Guru was important. The devotees were blessed by seeing their master ritually though he was available on many other occasions:

राज नित्य देवें दीदार.......

Kirtan was another routine ritual. The Guru along with his devotees performed kirtans. The nature of songs sung in the kirtans is not reflected any where in the text. The descriptions of kirtans as a well-organised rituals in the court of Panna suggest that these might have been very interesting. There were many groups of devotees, largely females, who sang devotional bhajans with accompanyist musicians:

47. Romila Thapar also suggests that religious articulation in the daily routine life draws more heavily on social resources than on the philosophical or theological. See her article, 'Syndicated Hinduism' in Sontheimer and Kulke, (eds.) Hinduism Reconsidered, p. 55.
48. In Vallabhi sampradaya, Darshan of Swaroop was a routine ritual. The devotees were blessed by the vision of Lord Krishna, image at fixed intervals in a day, in the morning at five a.m. for instance, see Barz, The Bhakti Sect p. 48. The ritual was performed by Guru Prannath in the cult who was conceived as another Krishna.
49. Beetak, Section 11, verse, 54.
(Now I tell that in this chance who sing, they come dancing and entertain by singing.)

These *kirtans* attracted people towards the cult. The believers attended them as part of their routine whereas 'non-believers' also joined when they heard of their merits:

एक दिन कीर्तन में, राणा आया करन दीदार [51]

(One day in *Kirtan*, Rana (Raj Singh) came to see him.)

Religious discussions and discourses were another important practice. Laldas called it *charcha*. Spiritual sermons and preachings of the Guru during the *charcha* were intended to awaken the soul of the audience:

तुम पाया चर्चा में, अपनी भूल गई भूल [52]

चर्चा देखी अधिक, असल अंकुर का मूल।

(Gained pleasure in the discourse and forgot his own existence; as he heard more discourses, he found the seed of the truth.)

The discourses were well-oriented and impressive. People were attracted to attend these discourses, which created conditions for them to join the *Sampradaya*:

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50. Ibid, Section 4 in Part 2, V. 20. C. Vaudeville understands in terms of Kabir's *sakhis*, the *kirtan* as a Vaishnava practice. See her article 'Sant Mat' in Schomer and McLeod (eds.) *The Sants* p. 35. She however believes that the community singing of Kabir's *padas* during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries played an important part in revival of *bhakti* that borrowed the ideas also from tantricism, Sahajiya and Nath-panthi traditions. We are not concerned, like Vaudeville, if these *padas* were original or interpolated. See C. Vaudeville, *Kabir*, p. 54. *Kirtan* was also instituted as a regular practice by Chaitanya also. See Prem Lata, *Chaitanya Mahaprabhu* p. 74.

51. *Beetak*, Section 47, V. 95.

52. Ibid, Section 22, Verse 5.
The discourses were primarily meant to attract the people; through these were asserted the authority and superiority of the Guru:

When Devchandji deliver sermons, none retains the capacity to speak.

As their cult was in the formative stage, the gurus emphasized much on charcha and these discourses have frequently been referred to by Laldas. The impressive discourses posed threats to other dominant cults such as Vallabhacharya of Vitthal Gosain. Laldas mentions that these discourses were peculiar to the cult; were unknown even in the Islamic world. When Prannath delivered public lectures in Muscat he encountered stiff resistance as people there were not aware of charcha:

None in their country conducts discourses; none comes to this land to deliver lectures; this is the seed of the East that you get the divine feat.

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53. Ibid Section 25 Verse 10. The charcha or lecture sessions were also a part of Vallabhi cults. The tradition was inherited by Devchand who himself was influenced by the religious discourses on Bhagvad Purana. The lectures as a regular schedule of the Cult was also adopted by Shah Tahir, a Nizari religious leader in Imam Shahi political regime in Bijapur. The Nizari pir also delivered impressive discourses that attracted the king, the elites and the common masses. The influence of Nizari Ismaili sect might have also inspired the Guru of the cult to follow this practice. For reference of Shah Tahir, the Nizari pir see, Farhad Daftary, The ismailis, p. 438. The devotees were attracted towards these ritualistic discourses as the sermons were interesting. (चरचा में तीन होते हैं।)

54. Beetak, Section 2, 17.

55. Ibid, Section 25, V. 47 and 48.
It emerges that there existed extreme rivalries amongst various cults and Charcha was thus a tool of the cult to propagate the faith.

Apart from the Guru, the disciples were equally engaged in the task of religious awakening. They accompanied their Guru on his religious tours and arranged the stay of the master along with his flock. The newly initiated disciples of different cities and towns also facilitated their trips by supplying them the necessities. The growth of their institution depended on a close Guru-disciple relationship. After initiation, the disciple virtually lost his individuality and came to be identified with his Guru. The disciple in order to receive the Guru's bliss had to render personal services to him.

It was customary practice in the cult to assist the Guru in his routine activities. Devchand, as a disciple, used to cook for his guru. The domestic activities were obviously not needed for spiritual guidance but a disciple maintained a close contact with his guru in this manner. The experience of the divine guru living so closely was a bliss. The disciple therefore rejoiced in the state of servility:

आदर सों रसोई करी, न्हवाए मेहराज।
बैठाए रसोई मिनें, आरोपाए श्री राज।
(He cooked food due to respect, gave bath to the Lord; seated him in the kitchen and served him food.)

Devchand, Bihari and Prannath received the servile submission by their devotees. These gurus were always offered lavish food and

56. Ibid, Section 2, V. 4 informs that the fellow devotees also brought new disciples by convincing them. The Guru used to feel happy by this pious act of his disciple.
57. Ibid, Section 18, Verse 28.
clothing. Collecting the ingredients, cooking and serving the guru brought to the disciple the blessings of the Lord. There was no discrimination among the devotees on account of the sex. The female devotees also contended for their Guru's blessings and were equally engaged in rendering such services:

बहूं भाँण भाई की, अज बाई है नाम।

सेवा लई सर ऊपर, करे हमेसा काम।

We also find these female devotees giving bath to the Guru or sponging his body by towel. The devotee was thus assessed in terms of his/her services he/she offered to the guru. The allegiance to the Guru, apart from the personal services demanded total obedience. Prannath obeyed the commands of his Guru. He even went to Arab land where he stayed for four years at the instruction of his Guru. Prannath also instructed his disciples to preach the faith in the ways he suggested. They were ordered to leave a place at a very short notice on some occasions. The disciples never refused to go to a place where his life could be put at stake:

गोवर्धन के मन में डर रहे मुसलमान।

पोहोरा अवरंगजेव का जिन कोई सुने न कान।

(Govardhan feared the Muslims; It was the rule of Auranzeb who does not listen to anybody.)

58. Laldas reiterates seva as an essential element in guru-disciple relationship. In Vallabha Sampradaya, Seva to Lord Krishna was performed in temples. We presume that the disciples who considered their living guru as manifestation of the divinity also served him similarly. Devchand learnt this practice as a disciple of Vallabhi guru and it therefore became the tradition of the cult. M.N. Pearson also mentions the ritualistic offerings at the shrines of Nizari pirs as an adoption of idolatry practices of the Hindus. See his book Rulers and Merchants in Gujarat, p. 27. The devotion to living Iman or pir might have also been a source of inspiration of servility among the disciples.

59. Beetak, Section 9, V. 6.

60. Ibid, Section 37, V. 6.
The Guru also responded to the devotional disciple compassionately. He also respected his disciples in great zeal:

ब्रह्म सिस्त है मोमिन, ताँए महम्मद दिया पैगाम।
(The believers are the creation of Brahma and therefore he has delivered the message to Muhammad.)

This relationship between the disciple and the guru, defined by Laldas as the principal feature of Prannath cult is akin to the nature of the relationship that existed between the two in other medieval bhakti cults. The relationship has generally been viewed as the one between the master and his servant, the king and his subject.

The Guru of Prannathis was a master, a spiritual guide. The Guru dispelled the maya or illusion and darkness and emancipated the disciples from ignorance and infatuation:

तुम माया से काढ़ने, हम आए इन काज।
तुम छोड़ो मुरदार कों, याद करो श्री राज।

61. Beetak, Section 14, V. 27 and see also, Section 43, V. 17. The devotees, either men or women were chosen by the God to the task of prophecy. The inclusion of women in the cult as equals was a dynamic feature. Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi's Bhishti Zewar, in the views of its translator Barbara Daly Metcalf is a text that challenges the conventional notions of women in the Muslim societies. She writes that the text written in colonial period 'illustrates a new concern for bringing mainstream Islamic teachings to women' and it is a departure from the traditional view in which women were not expected to have more than a minimal acquaintance with these teachings. See her book, Perfecting Women, Introduction; Prannath should be given greater credit for his efforts in this field. Thanwi reflected his protest in literature in a later period but Prannath actually got women involved in religious preaching in practice. The intense indulgence in bhakti was, however, not exception in Indian devotees. The Buddhist bhaktin Avvaiyar during the sixth century B.C., though faced problem, was a noted character. For details of Avvaiyar, see, Uma Chakarvarvi, 'The World of Bhakti' in Kumkum Roy (ed.) The Women in Early India, p. 229-327.

62. Beetak, Section 18, V. 30.
(We have come to relieve you of illusion; leave the worthless world and remember the Guru Shri Raj.)

The disciple was also guided in realizing the self as a means to realize the Supreme. Laldas frequently used the term 'आतंक जगावन' which was possible only through the Guru. He also guided his disciples in obtaining mystical experiences through different means, like kirtans.

Moreover, the Guru in Beetak also acted as a patriarch. If on the one hand he was authoritative in issuing instructions, he was affectionate in taking care of even the physical health of the disciples on the other. When Devchand noticed deterioration in that Prannath’s health due to his intense indulgence in penance, he instructed that he may seek relief by attending some worldly affairs:

इन्हें काम दीजिए माया का, तब पीछे हटै चित।

Prannath, as Guru, was also equally desirous to secure pleasure for his devotees. He explored all the possible ways to serve his devotees in response to their services:

सेवा करें मोमिन की, ए मनोरथ उपजल।

कोन भात कीजिए, इन्हें की सेवा हु।

त्यों चरचा ज्यादा करें, खुसाल होए मोमिन।

(I shall serves the believers, this feeling arises; in what ways I should serve them; he delivers sermons and believers are pleased.)

Arranging necessities to the disciples was also the responsibility of the Guru. Lack of funds was a cause of worries to the Guru. Prannath was

63. Ibid, Section 12, V. 40.
64. Ibid, Section 15, V. 3 and 12.
directed to join the office of diwan in the court of Jamnagar by Guru Bihari and thus arrange funding for the cult:

(earning from there, the people of the cult could be served. He consulted Bihariji and accepted the post of diwan.)

A close affinity between the Guru and the disciple is also discernible in our text. This was perhaps a unique feature of the cult. The devotee had the right to express his resentment if he felt that he was wrongly rapproached by the Guru:

(I will not go to listen the discourse; He rapproached me, what sins he had seen in me.)

Dissensions amongst the disciples were also to be resolved by the Guru for maintaining the cohesion within the community. Prannath once intervened to sort out a difference between his two eminent disciples Govadhan and Laldas.

The guru-disciple relationship in Nijananda sampradaya was thus not exactly as the one between the master and his servant or between the

65. Ibid, V. 14. There has been a tradition in the sufi khanqahs and dairas to go for earning in the period of crisis. The capable disciples earned and it was used to feed the fellow devotees. Many of Suhrawardi pirs had accepted the positions in the imperial and provincial courts.

66. Beetak, Section 24, Verse 23.
king and his subjects.\textsuperscript{67} It also resembled the relationship that subsisted between a \textit{pir} and his \textit{murid} in sufi orders.\textsuperscript{68} The \textit{pir} looked after the spiritual as well as the material needs of his disciples. Prannath apart from imparting spiritual knowledge, also guided his disciples in formulating the strategies to fight the evil spirits of the unbelievers. On many occasions, when the disciples faced difficulty in convincing the orthodox Muslims, he guided them to change the dress codes; to be friendly or hostile. He even taught them deceitful ways to win their foes:

\begin{quote}
छल बल से माया छल रूप है तिन छल ही से जिताए।\textsuperscript{69}
\end{quote}

(illusion is deceitful and uses tactics and power, so win over it with tactics; The demons were conquered deceitfully by the Gods, Harji Vyas told me the fact.)

This dimension of the cult distinguishes it and its \textit{Guru} from the other contemporary religious cults. The ambition of the religious heads of any cult was obviously propagation of their faith. Conception of all other faiths as evil of demon-like Kaliyuga and their redemption seems to be a salient feature of the cult. The role of Prannath as spiritual guide and his

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{67} G.S. Tulpule, \textit{Mysticism in Medieval India}, p. 122-23; and Daniel Gold, \textit{The Lord As Guru}, p. 16-17. Tulpule describes the relationship as the one between master and servant whereas Daniel Gold interprets it as the relation between feudal lord and his subjects.
  \item \textsuperscript{68} S.A.A. Rizvi, \textit{Sufism}, Vol. I, p. 92 and 98. In context of Suhrwardi \textit{silsilah}, Rizvi writes that Shaikh Jalaluddin Tabrizi served his \textit{pir} Shaikh Shihabuddin Suhrawardi with great devotion for seven years, p. 199. This may be conceived that Prannath, borrowing Ismaili ideas in a great measure, also borrowed the Sufi idea of guruship. We will see later that a \textit{pir} of \textit{Nizars} had a close connections with of Suhravardis in Gujarat.
  \item \textsuperscript{69} \textit{Beetak}, Section 46. V. 125.
\end{itemize}
struggle for establishing the supremacy of his cult will be discussed in the following sub-section. At the moment, we restrict our discussion to different features that facilitated its growth. The Guru, the disciples and the rituals associated with the cult attracted new disciples.

The membership to the cult was not limited to any particular group. Any aspirant coming with faith could be consecrated. Caste and sex produced no barriers. The Satha of Prannath comprised of people from different jatis.\(^\text{70}\) It acquired a large following cutting across caste distinctions though it aroused criticism many times. Kayastha, Bhatia, Soni, Pohokaran, Joshi, Thakur and sudra were perhaps Hindu disciples. The references of occupational caste structure do not discriminate between the Hindu or the Muslim. Sahukar, Chaudhary, Dukandar, dalal, kansara and vaid were his disciples. Then there were pathans, gazis, Nizaris, Yamanis or Nasiris. They were from elite and affluent group, who fed and financed the cult and there were the followers who depended even for their bare necessities on the cult.

Prannath directed his special efforts to initiate those who possessed enough resources human, political or economic, that could strengthen the social base of his cult. Laldas frequently refers to many newly initiated disciples who accepted the faith along with their entire clan. Gangji was one of the foremost disciples who embraced the faith with all his kinfolks:

\[
\text{पहले दीन इस्लाम में, गांगजी धरे कदम?}^{71} \\
\text{सेवा देव चन्द्रजी की कदमों सोंपी आतन।} \\
\text{कहो तिनका कबीला, जो दाखिल इस्लाम।}
\]

\(^{70}\) In almost all the sections, Laldas enlisted the names of new adherents as and when they joined. The names and castes of the fellow members in Satha are ininumerous and can easily be discerned in almost all pages if Beetak.

\(^{71}\) Beetak, Section 9, V. 1 and 2.
(Gangji entered the religion of Islam first of all; served Devchandji and surrendered his soul; I describe his clan who embraced Islam.)

The clan comprised of Gangji’s mother, wife, daughter-in-law, sons, sister, sisters-in-law, neighbours and their relatives. Prannath himself convinced his affine group and descent group to join the cult. Agarwara Bania community under Rajaram also became adherents:

अगरवारे बणिए मिनें, आया राजा राम।
समेत कबीले अपने, सेवा करी तमाम।

Dhara, a sudra also accepted the discipleship with his clan. Laldas himself joined with his social group. Govardhan, a merchant engaged in trade extended financial support:

सब खरबने लगा साथ में, सुफ़िल जनम करने।

It is believed that when Prannath finally settled in Panna he was accompanied by five thousand adherents. The money for the huge expenditure for the cult was supplied by a disciple who lived in Merta:

तब फुरमाई श्री राज ने आवत खरच साथ में से।
मेड़ता का साथ है, सो भेजत है हम।

72. Ibid, V. 3
73. Ibid, Section 31, V. 51. The bania community in Surat were the wealthy merchants fearing forcible conversion during Aurangzeb’s period. It is believed that eight thousand bania headmen left Surat when some qazi in the region forcibly converted a bania. See, M.N. Pearson, Rulers and Merchants in Gujarat, p. 122 and J.F. Richards, The Mughal Empire, p. 176; These baniyas, if not all, some might have joined Prannathi cult along with other kinfolks and added to the resources of the cult.
74. Ibid, V. 51.
75. Ibid, Section 15, Verse 30.
76. Ibid, Section 58, V. 129. The expenditure of the cult was significantly great to arouse suspicion in the minds of the nobles of Chhatrasal. They also disclosed their doubts to Chhatrasal, who investigated Prannath about his resources. Prannath in the above citation was responding to the question of Chhatrasal.
(Shri Raj informed (Chhatrasal) that the followers feed the cult; there is a follower in Merta who feeds the cult.)

Among, the adherents were a large number of sarrafs, shop keepers, money lenders and other rich people who could easily bear the expenses of the cult.

The Guru further contacted the religious elites. With the exception of lecture sessions, Prannath generally invited the mullas, the qazis, the gosains or the Vallabhi leaders. The names of these people we will notice later. There was thus special attempt to convert not the ordinary individuals but those people who commanded authority over the spiritual life of masses by Prannath. We will also see below how the political elites, both Hindus and Muslims were approached. Laldas has listed the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb, some of the dominant nobles of his court, Jaswant Singh, Rana Raj Singh, Bhav Singh, Chhatrasal, the Raja of Ramnagar and other local elites of Mandsor, Garha, Akot, Aurangabad, Sidhpur and Junagarh among those who were approached by with a message to join his cult.

Prannath, though not selective, made attempts to build a strong base for his cult by consecrating the influential and resourceful people who could, in turn, mobilise the masses towards his cult. The expansion of the cult began with the conversion of the blood relations of the founder guru Devchand, but his disciple Prannath brought in its fold a large number of people including the political elites of diverse creeds. The Nijananda Sampradaya was thus a group of people of diverse background. The Prannathis evolved their own rules, values, morals and social codes to regulate their life styles.
Prannath and the Ismailis

There seems to be an obvious influence on Prannath’s cult of the Nizari branch of Ismailis who were already there in the areas of Prannath’s activities. Indeed, Prannath calls his cult as Islam and often invokes metaphors from Islamic traditions and history, as in the following verse:

हजरत ने हिजरत करी लेने को मका......

सेहर मदीना सूरत, तहाँ सेती चले जब।

महाजनों मदत करी, सो साथ सेवा चले तब।

कुरान हदीसों में कहीं, सबी ऊपर सिफत बुजारक।

(Hazrat migrated to Medina for occupying Mecca; the city of Surat became Medina where he reached; the emigrant disciples also supported who accompanied him; The sayings of Quran and Hadiths were treated as the superior most.)

And also as follows:

और इनके कुरान में अपनी पेहेचान?  

ऐ पैगम्बर हक का, तुमें भेजे ऊपर इस्लाम।

ऐ निघ जो ल्याइया, रह अल्लाह चौथे असमान।

(And in there Quran, there is proof of our identity; he is the messanger of the Truth, Islam has sent him above all; the destiny has brought down Ruh Allah from the fourth sky.)

It is thus not inappropriate to give a brief resume of the Ismailis.

Jafar al Sadiq was an eminent Imam of the Shi'ite Cult. Jafar al Sadiq’s description of Ismaili tradition is based on Asghar Ali Engineer’s The Bohras, and Farhad Daftary’s, The Ismailis.

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77. Beetak, Section 11, Verse 54, Section 14, Verse 15 and Section 2, V. 27.
78. Ibid, Section 3, Verse 1-3.

* The description of Ismaili tradition is based on Asghar Ali Engineer’s The Bohras, and Farhad Daftary’s, The Ismailis.
death witnessed a great split between the Shi'ites; those who accepted Musa Kazim, the younger son of Jafar al Sadiq as Imam came to be known as the Twelvers or Ithna Asharis and those who accepted Ismail, the elder son of Jafar al Sadiq were known as Ismailis. The appointment of Imam in Ismaili tradition depended on nass. After the eighteenth Imam Mustansir, Ismailis again split into two sects and the two sons of Mustansir established Nizari and Musta'lian traditions of Ismaili faith.

All the Shi'i sects except that of Ismailis, since their inception, could not organize effectively. The Ismailis, with a secret religio-political mission evolved a well-knit organization. The Imam being the highest authority amongst the Ismailis, he could be the only legitimate ruler and we notice that the first Fatimid ruler was Imam al Mahdi who assumed power in North Africa or in Maghrib. The concept of Imamate was deliberately developed amongst the Ismailis. They believed that Imam was the supreme leader without whose existence, the world of the faithful could not exist. He was the absolute authority for interpreting Quran and teachings of Islam and his authority was final.

The Ismailis divided the entire world into twelve jiziras, each being placed under a da'i. The Ismaili missionaries utilized the intellectual atmosphere of Baghdad and produced a synthesis of Islamic and Greek thought. Many of the Imams wrote many important works on esoteric interpretations of Quran. The interpretations were based on esoteric (batin) aspect of Quran where Zahir or exotic was the apparent meaning being given reasonable emphasis.

The disintegrations of Ismailis as Nizaris and Mustalians resulted in weakening the control of the Imam at headquarters. The Mustalians controlled the functioning from Yaman and Nizaris obeyed the Imam placed
in Persia. After the decline of Fatimids in the thirteenth century, the Ismailis had to take shelter in different countries and in remote areas of the world. Indian sub-continent and specifically Gujarat became the centre of Ismaili immigrants. The Mustalian converts of Gujarat came to be known as Bohras and the Nizaris were again stratified into Khojas, Satpanthis and other lesser sub-sects. The Nizaris in different parts of the world not only broke their allegiance with the Fatimids but the Imam also lost his authority. In India, the Nizari sects, independent of any central authority utilized various Indian languages and ideals.

The Nizari pirs in India became the Imam of various sub-sects. Though no reliable literary evidence is available, the ginas inform us that Satgur Nur was the earliest pir who was sent to propagate Nizari faith in India. He founded Satpanth during the eleventh century. The Nizaris kept on splitting into sects and sub-sects following the issues of succession. Imam Shahi sect of Nizaris during the fourteenth century was further divided into Muhammad Shahis and Qasim Shahis. The Qasim Shahis sought the political support in the Nizam Shahi kingdom in Deccan and Muhammad Shahis kept preaching in the name of Satpanthis.

The Nizaris in India paid attention to Indian ways of life and used certain symbols of Hindu mythology in order to explain various aspects of their Ismaili doctrines and teachings. The doctrine of Imamate was, for example, expounded within the Hindu framework, presenting Nizari Imam as incarnation of awaited saviour or Mahdi in terms of Vaishnavaites doctrines. The notions of cyclic time and Kali Yuga were incorporated into

the *ginas* and Ali was seen as the tenth *avatara* of Vishnu. All the *imams* in succession to Ali were assigned the same authority and power in fighting the evils of Kali Yuga. It is important for us to note here that this dimension of cosmology was the peculiar feature of Muhammad Shahis. Also significant is the information that Muhammad Shahi Nizaris gradually disappeared after general persecution of the Shi'ites in Deccan and Gujarat by Aurangzeb during the seventeenth century.

The ideology and career of Prannath may now be understood with greater clarity in the light of Ismaili background. Even as the Ismaili sects diversified into smallest units confining their devotion to their immediate *Imam* or *pir*, they still retained the basic doctrinal theories. Inspite of their differences, the interaction and connection amongst them was maintained by the *sufis*, both in Persia and also in India. 80 The Shi'ite sects often observed *taqiya* or secrecy to avoid persecutions by their rival sects and orthodox Sunni elites. Thus, in many cases, they preached Nizari faith in the name of Sunni or Twelver Shi'ite faith as the latter was tolerated in India by the Mughals due to political considerations. 81

For these reasons, the Prannathi ideology, though seems largely Satpanthi, may not be treated in isolations to other Shi'ite sects. Let us take a reference from *Beetak* wherein Prannath addressed as Shri Raj had been seen in seven forms:

80. See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis*, p. 454-58 and 462-70. Daftary mentions the names of eminent *sufis* in Persia who attempted to bridge the gap between the Sunnis and Shi'ites and also amongst the various Shi'ite cults.

81. Ibid; it is found that the Mughal rulers tolerated the Twelver Shi'ites because it was the ruling Safavid dynasty in Persia which declared Twelver Schism as the State religion p. 488; It was also because the expelled Mughal Emperor Humayun received shelter in the Safavid kingdom and he brought many Shi'ite Muslims to his court after regaining his power in India,
Nija cult has gifted seven manifestations of Shri Raj.

In seven manifestations of Prannath, we may trace the seven pillars of Ismaili faith on which their esoteric interpretations were based. Jesus, Moses, Ibrahim, Prayer, purity, devotion and the Prophet contained the hidden meaning of the Truth. In our text, as we have seen earlier, Prannath as Jesus, Devchand, Lord Krishna, the Prophet, Imam Mahdi, Buddha and himself revealed and explained the hidden meaning of Indian and Islamic scriptures.

The notions of purity implying cleansing of sins was, perhaps, also borrowed both from Vallabhaite way, known as Pushti marga and from Satpanthi idea of removing the sins. In Vallabha cults, nine ways of curing the sins were recommended that included listening about the God, performing kirtans, remembrance, pad-seva, archana, servitude, dasya-bhava, sakhyabhava and self-dedication. All these features are available in the ritual and behavioural patterns of the cult. The disciple depended upon his Guru as mandatory in cleansing and purifying his sins:

82. Beetak, Section 15, Verse 15.
83. Engineer, The Bohras, p. 54-55. The author refers to noted scriptures of Ismailis authored by the Imams in describing these seven pillars. Adnan Aslan elaborating the ideology of a modern Shiite scholar Sayyid Hossein Nasr corroborates the argument for conception of human divines in Quran. It is postulated that God of Quran is the God of humankind. To send the divine light to every nation, he sent messangers to every nation though the names of these messangers may not be given in Quran. Therefore, the expansion of Islamic faith over the entire world may approve the messangers like Buddha and avatars of Vaishnava faith. These messangers delivered the same Truth of Allah though the messages differed theologically depending upon the socio-cultural contexts of different communities. For this discussion, see, Adnan Aslan, Religious Pluralism p. 187-88.
(He made humble request before Shri Devchandji; remove all my sins from all my sensory organs.)

The Guru was thus the supreme authority in the cult. Prannath has been addressed as Meheraj, Shri Raj, Rasool, Hazarat, Mehemd and Imam. All these terms, no doubt, represent the leader of the cult but Prannath in later portions of Beetak emerges in the guise of Nizari Imam. His claims of Imamate aroused sharp reactions amongst the orthodox Muslims:

तुम दावा करत हों हमसे इमामत ॥

(You put forth your claims of Imamate in front of me.)

We know that the Nizari Ismailis were the only shi’ite sect to accept a physically present Imam who was regarded as the perfect incarnation of God. Moreover, Prannath’s conception of Imam was not opposed to the notions of the Prophet as Rasool or the messenger of God. The identification of Imam with the Prophet was again the Ismaili ideology. The dais of Imam Muhammad Ismail clearly stated that the prophethood of Ismail as seventh Natik was testified by the Prophet himself. Laldas further borrowed from

85. Beetak, Section 12, Verse 10.
86. Ibid, Section 53 Verse, 22.
87. Francoise Mallison ‘Muslim devotional literature in Gujarati’; Islam and bhakti, in McGregor (ed.) Devotional Literature p. 89 and see also, Daftary, The Ismails, p. 485. The Nizari doctrine of Imamate presents Ali as the tenth incarnation of Vishnu and then all the successive imams, vested with the same authority and status were conceived as incarnation of Vishnu. It is therefore reasonable to argue that Devchand and Prannath who first claimed to be an incarnation of Lord Krishna and then as Imam Mahdi borrowed from the traditions of Nizari Ismailis.
88. Asghar Ali Engineer, The Bohras, p. 42-44. The author defines the Ismaili doctrine of Natik where Prophet Muhammad was considered as sixth Natik and Muhammad bin Ismail was the seventh Natik. Ismailis thus found no difference between Prophet Muhammad and Imam Muhammad.
the Ismaili ideology in the following verse:

सूरज ऊपर वागरब, जाहेर हुआ इमाम | 89
ए मायने खोल के देखाए तमाम।

(The sun rose in the west and Imam appeared; He revealed all the meanings and exposed them to all.)

It is also known that Imam al-Mahdi established his rule in North Africa which is generally referred as Maghrib by the Ismailis. Gujarat also situated in Western India indicated to the appearance of Prannath as Imam emerging from Maghrib.

Thus Prannath saw himself as Imam and his cult as Islam in pure Quranic sense. Quran declares that Islam is not a name which denotes a particular faith; it rather implies the act of surrendering to the will of God. Therefore, every revealed religion or newly emerging faith can be named as Islam when it believes in total submission to God. This Islam, like the Quranic Islam also concerns itself to the religious history of mankind and preaches unity of all races, communities and religions. Prannath also aimed at the unity of the entire world by bringing the humanity under his faith:

विरोध सारे विश्व का, भागल इन बीतक | 90
सबों को पेहेचान होवहीं, पोहोचे कदम हक।

(The opposition of the entire world would be driven away through the discourses; all will recognize, and reach the feet of the Truth.)

89. Beetak, Section 56, Verse, 96.
90. Ibid, Section 10, Verse, 11. For notion of Islam concerning to upliftment of entire humanity, see, Adnan Aslan, Religious Pluralism in Christianity and Islam, p. 187-90
And also claimed his scriptures as containing the unity of all:

ए वही मुराद माहमद की, ए हज्जत कुरान उस्तवार।

शाए जमां सब बीजों का ए जो रबानी कलाम।

(This is objective of the Prophet, it is a proof from the just Quran; this divine book incorporates everything.)

But all this he insisted must be without using force:

तिन पर जोर जुलम ना कीजें, ना पकड़े कलमें को…….ी.

जोर से कीजें मुसलमान, तो साफ ना होए दिल उन

राजी न होवे इन पर तो क्यों पाये कदम मोनिन।

(Do not apply force to those who do not accept the Kalima; if you make them Musalman forcefully, their hearts will still not be pure; If they are not willing to accept, then how can they be Momin?)

Moreover, the distinction between zahir and batin was emphasized in Prannathi ideology in a great measure. Prannath thought that non-believers could not comprehend the hidden meaning of the doctrines and therefore did not embrace his faith:

एक तो नजर ऊपर की, दूजी बातिन की ना पंजेबान।

(One, the people in surroundings prevent and, second, they don't understand batin.)

It is also important that Prannath not only borrowed from the Nizari Ismaili doctrines but also adopted certain Ismaili ways of preaching. His

91. Beetak, Section 42, Verse 11-12.
92. Ibid, Section 45, Verse 71-75.
93. Ibid, Section 45 verse 107.
94. Engineer, The Bohras, p. 25-28. He discusses the two main functionaries of Ismailis, known as Madhun and Mukasir. Madhun was permitted to propagate smoothly and Mukasir would demolish all the arguments of his opponents. Prannath, as we find the mukasir in Ismail tradition, was an expert of the religions of his opponents so as to condemn their arguments and create doubt in their minds.
ideology was, somehow, depicted as provocative. Whosoever came in contact or was contacted initiated the discussion with an inquiry into Prannathi ideology. Prannath, instead of explaining his doctrines, generally began with asking about their faith. He then challenged their faith by raising the issues to the extremes when concerned persons found themselves incapable of responding to the queries. The people thus with doubts in mind towards their faith would intuitively be attracted towards him. The Guru would then convince the respondent by establishing the superiority of his own faith and the respondent would be finally initiated into his religion.

In his discourses with Chintaman Kabirpanthi, Harji Vyas, the Gosain, with the Qazis and other religious elites and with the religious leaders of various sampradayas, schools and mathas in Kumbha fair at Haridwar, we find Prannath behaving like a mukasir.\textsuperscript{95} He was obviously the Imam of his cult but the structure and size of the cult, and the capability of his disciples perhaps, demanded his direct involvement and the Imam himself performed the task of mukasir. We don’t come across a single reference wherein the respondent was not convinced. It does not imply that Prannath always succeeded in converting the convinced people. There were occasions when the respondent retreated with some excuses.

Those who did not adhere to the faith were rebuked for being entrapped in \textit{maya}. A person blinded with illusion could not seek the truth. Laldas writes about Prannath that he was surrounded by \textit{maya} till thirteen years and when worldly desires released him from the grip, he joined the faith:

\begin{footnote}
\textit{Beetak}, Section 21, V. 19-27; Section 34, 42 and 53.
\end{footnote}
(For thirteen years, he was in delusion, carrying the weight of ignorance.)

The term *laukik* is one feature of Vallabhacharya’s *Shudh Advaitvad* (pure non-dualism). This ignorance could be removed through the services of the *Guru* of the cult. It is however not necessary that concept of *maya* was borrowed from Vallabhi ideology. Various religious and philosophical traditions of India like Vedanta, Sankhya or Sankara and Christian traditions explore the cosmic relationship between man and matter (soil) and between *Atmana* and *Brahma*. It is referred as *Akshara* and *Aksharatita* in *Beetak*. In different philosophies, the *Karma* and *maya* are seen as forbidding the man to attain godhood. The illusion, for Prannath also, was like a curtain that had hidden the Truth. The people forgot their ultimate destination under the influence of *Maya* (हमको इन माया ने भुलाये दिया धाम). The ignorance could be cured only with the help of Prannath. The *atman* was not self-luminary as it was in the case of other schools of Indian philosophy. The devotee had to surrender his soul at the feet of Prannath in order to realize the self:

जीओ गंगू गोवाल, इनो सौंपी आतम

(That was Gangu, the cowherd, who surrendered his soul.)

96. Ibid, Section 11, Verse 1. The term *laukik* literally means worldly. *Maya* or illusion paralyses the heart and mind of an individual so that he treats the world as real so *laukik* also indicates ignorance or *avidya*. It was the basic feature of Sanskara’s and Vallabhacharya’s philosophies.

97. N.V. Joshi, *The Three Foundations of Indian Philosophy*, p. 28-32; Richard Barz, *The Bhakti Sect of Vallabhacharya*, p. 56-79. These scholars present the thoughts of different schools concerning the idea of the Absolute. With different approaches, these schools propounded the essentiality of realization of the self (*Atman*) for realization of Brahma. The *Atman* can be realized only when ignorance is destroyed.


99. Ibid, Section 9, verse 48.
Prannath as saviour would uplift the devotee from *maya*, who, otherwise was helpless:

ए पढ़े माया मिने हो गए परब्रज़।\(^{100}\)

With luminated consciousness, the devotee then realized the Truth, that was *Aksharatita* or Infinite.\(^{101}\) The idea was also common to both Hindu and Islamic traditions. Prannath interpreted the *Kalima* as containing the essence of the Supreme Reality. People under the influence of *maya* were more vulnerable to the evils of Kali Yuga.

The illusion was linked to the notion of Kali Yuga. The Kali Yuga, believed Prannath, had created illusions that could be removed by listening about his faith:

ग्राहक हाये चित दे सुनो, तो कलुग्र भ्रम जाए।\(^{102}\)

The general notion about Kali Yuga, describes it as an age of progressive deterioration. It is conceived as the worst age in which social disorder is at its peak. It is postulated that Kali or evil feared to set his feet on this world so long as it was purified by the sacred feet of Lord Krishna.\(^ {103}\)

There are differing notions about the commencement of Kali age. It is related

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100. Ibid, Section 11, Verse 9. The idea of illusion as an obstruction in Prannath's ideology has also been postulated by Raja Ram Shastri in his article, 'Mahamati Prannath's Metaphysics and contribution to Religious Integration' in Ranjit Saha (ed.) *Jagani Sanchayan*. The article 'Mahamati Prannath' by Vimla Mehta in *Jagani Sanchayan* also discusses illusion as mirage in Prannath's philosophy.

101. *Beetak*, Section 51, verse 82 and Section 52, verse 5; The concept of *Akshara* and *Aksharatita* in Prannathi literature has also been noticed by Herendra Prasad Verma. See his article, 'Mahamati: The Pioneer of Comparative Religion' (p. 384-85), and also Raja Ram Shastri’s article in Ranjit Saha (ed.) *Jagani Sanchayan*. See also, P.S. Mukharya, 'Sant Prannath and Pranami Sect', in N.N. Bhattacharya (ed.) *Medieval Bhakti Movements in India*.

102. *Beetak*, Section 35, verse 75.

103. *Vishnu-Purana*, Tr. by H.H. Wilson, p. 390.
to the death of Krishna, accession of King Parikshit or to other incidents of Mahabharata in many cases. Likewise, there are eschatological, chronological, socio-religious and catastrophic factors associated with the concept of Kali Yuga.

Eschatologically, it is believed that cosmogonic repetition will occur as fixed phenomenon. At the end of Kali Yuga, a dissolution of Yuga will occur when all the three worlds will be consumed by fire. Brahma will sleep for a day and would then create the world anew. The idea of regeneration is also viewed as cyclic notion of time which is also common to Judaeo-Christian traditions. In this perspective, man and his relation to this world which Brahma had created, the notions of transmigration, incarnation and Karma lead to regeneration.

The socio-religious aspect of Kali Yuga is related to the changes in the attitudes of people towards dharma. People became less inclined towards gods and evade their duties. The Kali Yuga also produces catastrophic phenomenon wherein demoralization of human life in all dimension takes place. These features of Kali Yuga were universal to all Indian and related religious traditions with a difference of incarnating deity and some notions of dharma which changed according to the contemporary milieu.


105. W.C. Beane, Myths, Cult and Symbols, p. 231.

106. In Vishnu Purana. (p. 383-90). It is written that in the Kali age, the sanctity of Vedas tend to be ceased, falsehood wins, and castes intermingle; there will be no holy places and charity will become an ordinary impulse. In such an atmosphere Kalki as an incarnation of Vishnu would appear. Similarly, Beane shows the descent of Goddess Kali in Tantric tradition to cure the evils of Kali Yuga. See, W.C. Beane, Myths, Cults and Symbols, (p. 229-56). Biardeau also refers to incarnation of Vishnu
Like all other religious traditions, Prannath also created a new meaning of Kali Age as reversal of caste and gender roles was not seen as degeneration in his ideology. He offered the membership to lower castes and even to *sudras*. Women also enjoyed equal position amongst the male devotees. Still, people who conceived this world as real were attempting to maximize their benefits, selfishness was one trait of Kali Yuga for Prannath:

सब करत ए कल जुग सब भला चाहे अपना। ॥

The neglect of *Vedas* and *Puranas* as a characteristic feature of Kali Yuga in Hindu mythology then included neglect of the Truth hidden in the religious scriptures of Islamic and Christian faith also. The notion of *dharma* also received a different treatment. He believed that fighting for individual faiths and conflict amongst various religious traditions was against the *dharma*. The *Dharma* was to follow a monastic religion and worship of God:

धरम विरोध धरा मिमै करत कुली दजाल। ॥

ताको मारो सिताब सों ज्यों होये सब्जुसाल।

एक दीन होए के एक सब भजन करे भगवान।

(Kuli Dajal opposes the *dharma* on the earth; Kill him with the help of Guru so that all become happy; they follow one religion, having united, they worship God.)

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in Vaishnava ideology to emancipate people from Kali Yuga’s abuses (*Hinduism*, p. 100-02). Sumit Sarkar writes that caste and gender with their reversed role constitute two major sources of Kali Yuga corruption according to Brahanical scriptures. *Bhakti* movement, by incorporating these two into the world of *bhakti* produced new images of Kali Yuga. Also, the myths of Kali Yuga witnessed changed perspectives in colonial Bengal during Renaissance period. See, Sumit Sarkar, *Writing Social History*, p. 187-215. The notions of Kali Yuga in *Beetak* also conveyed a different understaing. The sectarian conflicts, political turmoil and misbeliefs were seen as evils of Kali Yuga.

The symbol of 'dajal', a devilish creature in Islamic mythology now represented the source of corruption in Kali Yuga. The notions of Kali Yuga were also exposed by the Nizari Ismailis in their Satpanthi ideology. Though details of their notions concerning Kali Yuga are not available, the idea of Islamic interpretations of Kali Yuga might have influenced Prannath and he compared 'Kali' with 'Dajal'. To remove the evils of Kali Yuga, Prannath as manifestation of many divine powers emerged as Buddha in the following verse:

करे विजय अमय दे आनद बुध बुद्धि औतार ॥
कलि मेटे निहे कलंक कर अखंड किया संसार ।

(He conquers, removes fear, gives pleasure as Buddha, the incarnation of wisdom; Kills Kali, removes evils and unites the world.)

The notions of time and death have largely been explained in Beetak in terms of Qayamat. Prannath conquered death and secured salvation for all those who adhered to his faith. He told his disciples not to fear death as they will get abode in heaven after the day of judgment. He gave his disciples a vision of heaven with which they killed the kala:

श्री धाम दिखाएं के दिया अपना जोस ॥
तब कल को मारया हो गए फरासोस ।

109. Farhad Daftary writes that 'Ali would thus fulfil the eschatological expectations of the Hindu converts to Nizarism by fighting the forces of evil in the Kali Yuga, the final age; he would eventually kill Kaliyuga, the Iblis of Hindu mythology'; see, Farhad Daftary, The Ismailis, p. 485; and see also, for reference of Kali Yuga in Satpanthi ideology, Francoise Mallison 'Muslim devotional literature in Gurajati: Islam and bhakti', and Ali S. Asani 'The Ismaili ginás as devotional literature' in Mc Gregor [ed] Devotional literature.

110. Beetak, Section 17, verse 4.

111. Ibid, Section 33, verse 18.
(Showed the revered faith, demonstrated his power; killed the ‘dark time’ and then disappeared.)

The devotee was thus enabled to have a vision of Truth:

	दूँ दुनि को क्या पुकारहीं, देख तरफ हकूँ

(Why do you seek the world, look towards the Truth)

**Disputations and Dissemination**

Prannath was determined to consecrate kings who, if they joined his group, would obviously reinforce the strength of his *Sampradaya*:

	तिनसे ऐसे राजाओं को देवे हम प्रबोध....

	वे जब आयें साथ में तैल मिटे हो जाये फजर।

(So I should deliver wisdom to the kings, when they join our *satha*, night will be replaced by the dawn.)

He first approached Raja Jaswant Singh Rathor, who was then posted in Kabul as a Mughal Official. Prannath claims that the religious ideology of Jaswant Singh was known to him through his poetry:

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112. Ibid, Section 24, Verse 17, The *gurus* though married (Prannath had two wives, Phool Bai and Tej Bai) insisted on renunciation of worldly life. The descriptions of the community life of the cult comprising of heterodox communities represented a different world in which the disciples enjoyed rich food and clothes but still identified themselves as renouncer because they were engaged in the prophecy of their religion. Their identity was no more established in terms of family lineage but in terms of their *Guru* and faith. For similar notions about Radha Saomis, see, Daniel Gold, ‘Clan and Lineage among the Sants : Seed, Substance, Service’, in Schomer and McLeod (eds.) *The Sants*.

113. *Beetak*, Section 28, Verses 5-8. In these verses, Prannath rejected the orders of his *Guru* Bihari to go to Kutch region for propagation and opted for consecrating the kings.
(He heard the poetry of Jaswant, wrote two letters; Govardhan carried them to deliver the message; he reached Attock and informed him.)

Jaswant Singh had delineated through his poetry his deep philosophical insights of the relation between human soul and the Supreme Soul. He followed, in a great measure, the philosophy of Sankaracharya. Prannath might have traced some similarities between his ideology and that of Jaswant Singh. It may also be speculated that he wanted to utilize Jaswant Singh's support against Aurangzeb who in Prannath's assessment was for a narrow faith, to be propagated also through force. There are many references in Beetak which clearly indicate a strong belief of the hagiographer that Aurangzeb encouraged forcible conversions. To quote one such reference whereas the people in Udaipur had such fear:

कोई कहे मुसलमान है, भेजे है सुलतान।
tumko muhlahman karnae, kahen bachan bin pherechan।

This statement, however, contradicts the contentions, as we shall

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115. For analysis of Jaswant Singh's religious outlook as reflected in his poetry, Jaswant Singh Granthavali, see my M. Phil Dissertation 'Aspects of Society and Culture in Reeti Poetry' submitted to CHS/JNU in 1991, p. 99-100.
117. Beetak, Section 47, Verse 58.
see later, when the devotees depicted Aurangzeb as liberal Muslim. Jaswant Singh, however, refused to accept the message.

Prannath had already anticipated a conflict with Aurangzeb but meeting with the Emperor was inevitable. The persecution of Shi'ites in Gujarat, where the Islam of Prannath was emerging, had resulted in disappearance of many Ismaili sub-sects and Satpanthis of Muhammad Shahi Nizari group.\(^{118}\) In Prannath's cult as we have discussed earlier, there was also a kind of approval of the Nizari Ismaili tradition in the name of new Islam. With the experience of these sects at hand, Prannath thought it reasonable to convince the Emperor which could ensure not only the survival but also the expansion and consolidation of his cult. He thus instructed his disciple Laldas to leave for Delhi to invite Emperor Aurangzeb to his faith:

अब लड़ाई करने को, जाइए पास सुल्तान।\(^{119}\)

इनको दावत करे, ए त्यावे ईमान।

(Now we should go to the Emperor to fight; invite him to bring his faith.)

Subsequently, Prannath reached Delhi and stayed there for four months. He then left a some of his disciples there and proceeded to Haridwar to participate in polemical discussions being held there among various

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118. For persecution of Ismailis in Gujarat by Aurangzeb, see, Asghar Ali Engineer, *The Bohras*, p. 123-28; and Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis*, p. 478-85. Both these scholars stress the feuds within and amongst the Indian Ismaili sects as one of the causes which encouraged their persecution by the Mughals. Daftary, however, considers the downfall of Muhammad Shahi Nizaris as a result of general persecution of Shi'ites by Aurangzeb. Faruqi describes the persecution of Shi'i in Gujarat due to personal bias of the Mughals and their ancestral rivalries in Transoxiana and Persia. See, Zahiruddin Faruqi, *Aurangzeb and His Times*, p. 260-69, J.F. Richards, *The Mughal Empire*, p. 174-75, refers to persecution of Shi'ites as a political and administrative measure.

religious notables as a part the annual fair in the city. He revisited Delhi with a select followers to complete the mission. The message could not be delivered to the Emperor directly. Some close associates of the Emperor were first to be approached and convinced. Shaikh Sulaiman, an eminent noble, was contacted twice. A mulla in the town was also consulted for supplementing their knowledge of Quran. The writings of Prannath were reviewed with new visions of Quran and Testament, Old and New. Shaikh Badl, a new adherent of the faith also began to preach the faith. Shaikh Sulaiman was repeatedly contacted for arranging a meeting with the Emperor. He said that the Emperor would not listen to their message in Hindvi. Moreover, their dresses of Hindu ascetics was also a hindrance. Prannath asked a devotee, Dayaram, to call a boy who could translate their message in Persian:

तब एक मुल्ला पारसी का, हुकूम हुआ दया राम।
बुलाए ल्याओ तिनकों, लिखे पारसी में कलाम।

The documents were folded and delivered to all those who were close to the Emperor. Shaikh Nizam, whom Laldas calls the Ustad of Aurangzeb, Shaikh-ul-Islam, Rizvi Khan, Aqil Khan and Sidi Faulad, being the influential nobles, were handed over the documents containing the message and an appeal to embrace the new Islam. They did not respond to their appeal.

120. Ibid, Section 37, Verse 53.
121. Ibid, Section 40, Verse 21-22; J.F. Richards and Gavin R.G. Hambly refer to the appointment of muhtasib and kotwal in 1659. The Muhtasib used to be an ulama, who was entrusted the responsibility for enforcing shara. He also regulated the disorder and fraud. See, J.F. Richards, The Mughal Empire, p. 74-75, and see also, Gavin R.G. Hambly, 'The towns and cities: The Mughal India' Habib and Raychaudhury (eds.) in The New Cambridge Economic History of India, Vol. I, Shaikh Sulaiman could then be identified as muhtasib as Laldas called him Ustad i.e. master. p. 449-50. In Beetak, Laldas called Sidi Faulad the Kotwal. (He held the
The disciples continued the programme of public discourses and kirtans in the mosques. During this period, Nandlal Ghadialchi, an attendant in the palace of Aurangzeb, was initiated. He pasted the document on the door of the gusulkhana in the palace. Aurangzeb having seen the pamphlet reprimanded Shaikh Sulaiman for not executing his duties properly:

पहले तेरे घर में भटक फिरे हैं जब122
to ko m khya tha ishi kama upar.
जिन इत्तमाम को करे, सब की दे खंसर।
(They had already visited your house; I had appointed you for this job; you had to communicate the appeals and messages of all.)

An arrest order of the appellant was issued. It was an opportunity for the Prannathis to meet the Emperor and they produced themselves on Friday in Jama Masjid. Aurangzeb ordered an enquiry into their ideology and faith. They were handed over to Kotwal Sidi Faulad. Aurangzeb consulted Shaikh-ul-Islam and decided not to converse with the strangers in seclusion as was demanded. Shaikh-ul-Islam, after some discussions,

rank of 1500/1000, see, M. Athar Ali, Mughal Nobility Under Aurangzeb). Rizvi Khan (a noble holding a rank of 300/1500 according to M. Athar Ali) was Sadr us Sadr, the supervisor of endowments of pious men and scholars. See also, Jadunath Sarkar, History of Aurangzeb, Vol. III, p. 46. Aqil Khan was also a noble of imperial court with whom is attached the alleged affair of Aurangzeb’s daughter, Zebunissa, see Sarkar, History of Aurangzeb, Vol. III, p. 46. Shaikh-ul-Islam was the imperial qazi whom M. Athar Ali assigns only judiciary services, see, M. Athar Ali, Mughal Nobility Under Aurangzeb, p. 105 and 146. Shaikh Nizam was yet another noble contacted by Prannathis who has been described as holding a rank of 1000/1500 by M. Athar Ali. Also, the visit of Prannath and his disciples has been assigned the date V.S. 1735 i.e. 1668. Jadunath Sarkar confirms Aurangzeb’s stay in Delhi during the period. See, Sarkar, History of Aurangzeb, Vol. III, p. 4-5. We thus find that the descriptions of Beetak are trustworthy.

took them to his residence. It is to be noticed that they were guised as Muslims ascetics which created suspicion in the mind of Shaikh-ul-Islam. He asked them the reason for not offering Namaz inspite of their adherence to the faith since long. Laldas's reply was:

तब हमारी निमाज को, क़बूल ना होए तुकसान।

(We are never oblivious of our namaz; as we sit, get up, walk and talk, it is all namaz.)

They were confined to custody for four months and when they expressed their will to depart, Shaikh-ul-Islam mediated their release. Emperor conferred blessings and gave them one hundred rupees.

Few things deserve our notice in this episode. Firstly, Aurangzeb was not portrayed as obstinate and rigid in dealing with these ascetics. Though the document they got pasted outside his gusulkhana was an appeal to recognize Prannath's faith, he told Kotwal Sidi Faulad to keep them nicely:

इनको नीको राखियो, खाने पीने की खिजमत।

They were also helped financially at the time of departure. Laldas writes that the kotwal also told them that they could have been beheaded for their preachings during Shah Jahan's reign:

123. Ibid, Section 41, Verse 88, See also, Verse 86-87 in which they tell Qazi that their namaz will not be violated because they are involved in the divine jobs. This explanation as given in citation suggests the Nizari attitude towards Namaz. See for this discussion, Farhad Daftary, The Ismailis, p. 389. The author discusses the concept of Namaz-i-haqiqi that suggests that the Nizaris were not bound to offer routine namaz because they well always with the God.

124. Beetak, Section 44, V. 44.
In this abstract, Aurangzeb was depicted more liberal than Shah Jahan. Faruqi also corroborates the evidence by quoting the case of Indraman, a Dhandera chief in Bundelkhand. He tells that Shah Jahan had imprisoned the chief and promised him release only after his conversion to Islam. The petitioner then appealed to Aurangzeb who put forth recommendations for not insisting upon conversions. He then secured his release without his conversion.\(^{126}\)

Still, the religious attitude of Aurangzeb deserves further clarification even in terms of Beetak’s description. Aurangzeb, writes Laldas, told the kotwal to keep them nicely. At the same time, he directed him to interrogate their faith and identity:

तुम इनकी बातां सुनियो, पूछ देखो बुनियाद.\(^{127}\)

Being assured that they maintained no links with the Ismailis in Persia or Yaman or they were not connected with Imam Shahi Deccani rulers or they were not powerful enough to pose any threat, he released them. But when they began to mobilize pathans in Burhanpur and Akot,

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125. Ibid, verse 54, It is known that Shah Jahan had revoked all the liberal religious policies executed by his ancestors, Jahangir and Akbar. Aurangzeb continued his father’s policies and was blamed vigorously for religious fanaticism. Beetak contradicts the opinion of his fanaticism on many occasions. For religious outlook of Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb, see J.F. Richards, *The Mughal Empire*,. 121-22 and 171-75.


127. *Beetak*, Section 41, Verse 45.
they were chaced to be imprisoned.\textsuperscript{128} The attempts to consecrate Emperor's arch rivals Rana Raj Singh and Bhav Singh might have offended Aurangzeb and we shall see later that the Prannathis were thoroughly dragged until they found shelter in Panna.

Prannath had already reached Udaipur when the released devotees joined him. They proposed Rana Raj Singh to accept his faith. The Rana had already received an offer to embrace Islam.\textsuperscript{129} The offer perhaps irritated him and he answered as follows:

\begin{quote}
एह बात राणे सुनी, हम ऐसे नहीं कृपा पात्र।

जो रद—बदल करे दोन की, ऐसे नहीं हमारे पात्र।
\end{quote}

(Rana heard it, we are not so liberal; it is not our custom to change our faiths.)

The Guru then rebuked the Rana as he had ordered the Prannathis to leave his territory also in anticipation of Aurangzeb's invasion of Udaipur. Their escape from Udaipur became more difficult due to Aurangzeb's attack on Udaipur.\textsuperscript{131}

They then reached Mandsor disguised as \textit{faqirs}. Laldas refers to an encounter with a number of \textit{Pathans} under Daulat Khan Pathan :

\textsuperscript{128} The relations between the Afghans and the Mughals had generally been conflicting. The Afghans were seen as a tribe of robbers and were never trusted. For Mughal-Afghan relations, see, Jadunath Sarkar, \textit{History of Aurangzeb}, Vol. III, p. 142-62. The conversion of Pathans in a large number to Prannathi religion was then seen as a threat to the imperial authority.

\textsuperscript{129} We have discussed, elsewhere in the thesis the different reasons which caused and intensified the enmity between Aurangzeb and Rana Raj Singh. In those discussions, there is no reference to the offer being made here.

\textsuperscript{130} \textit{Beetak}, Section 48, Verse 12.

\textsuperscript{131} Laldas writes the date of Aurangzeb's attack on Udaipur as 1679. Jadunath Sarkar also confirms the attack during the same year, see, Jadunath Sarkar, \textit{History of Aurangzeb}, Vol. III, p. 224-27.
(Daulat Khan Pathan was provoked, when he recited the verse, without quoting the name of any Muhammad.)

They organized *kirtans* in Mandsor in the presence of the imperial army, some of whom also joined them. Some obstructions were caused due to some reasons not described by Laldas and, the adherents had to hide themselves here and there. They had to live without food and shelter for many days. In these circumstances, Prannath sent Mukundadasa to survey the situation in Bhav Singh's territory. If there was little hope, they could go there:

> मुकुन्ददास को इत्त से, भेज्या भावसिंह पास!  
> तुम जाए उनकी खबर लेओ, है जीवता कछू आस।

The devotees had to confront greater difficulties in Aurangabad. Mahant Das, a Hindu elite in Bhav Singh's Court, assaulted Mukund Das to prevent him from reaching Bhav Singh:

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133. Jadunath Sarkar in the *Chronology of Aurangzeb* reign for the first half in his *History of Aurangzeb*, Vol. III, on last page mentions Aurangzef's departure from Udaipur along with the imperial army for Deccan in 1679. He halted at Burhanpur for three months. Mandsor being situated on the same route was also visited by Prannathis who were also proceeding for Aurangabad. Both the parties then might have confronted each other at Mandsor.
134. *Beetak*, Section 49, Verse 82; Bhav Singh, a Hada Chief, also supported Dara Shikoh against Aurangzef. All the efforts to destroy Bhav Singh by Aurangzef gained no fruits. He was lastly placed in Aurangabad as imperial rank holder. Prannath before entering his vicinities wanted to confirm his attitude. For details of the conflict between Aurangzef and Bhav Singh, see P. Saran, *Provincial Government*, p. 130-31.
When they finally met Bhav Singh, he assured Prannath of his support only after the four Muslim nobles of Aurangzeb's court were convinced. But they all refused to side with Prannath except Jahan Muhammad, and then, Prannathis along with Jahan Muhammad had to leave Aurangabad. In the meanwhile, Bhav Singh died and whatever little hope the Prannathis had were also lost.

Laldas then proceeded to Gwalior with a view to inviting the Shaikh-ul-Islam of the city for discussion. The Shaikh-ul-Islam rejected Prannath's quotations from *Quran* and *Hadith* and said that these were the errors of the transcribers. He further upbraided Laldas for recording the wrong interpretations of these quotations in the new book. Another Muslim theologian of the city, Mufti Muhammad also refuted Prannath's claim to being *Mahdi*. Prannath, who was then in Burhanpur, realized the futility of Laldas staying in Gwalior any longer and sent him a message to leave the city at once.

The Prannathis then accompanied their Guru to Akot where they stayed with him for four months. They delivered his message to the Muslim elites in Aurangabad inviting Amanat Khan, the *diwan*, Fathullah, a military

officer and Hidayatullah Khan, the qazi of the town, to come to the fold of their faith. But none of them accepted their invitation; the Prannathis then had to shift to Ramnagar where they consecrated a large number of people. Aurangzeb, being scared of the scale of conversions reportedly ordered Purdil Khan, the faujdar of Bhilsa and Dhamoni, to check their activities. Khizr Khan, a deputy of Purdil Khan, was sent to arrest them. He warned the Raja of Ramnagar of the consequences of their being in his territory; insisted they be handed over to him. The Raja expressed his neutrality and allowed him to take the desired action. But when Khizr Khan reached Ramnagar to arrest Prannath, he was so impressed by his teachings that he turned out to be his follower. He was then entrusted the task of converting Purdil Khan, who, in turn, was to communicate their message to the Emperor. Khizr Khan, however, failed in his mission; the Raja then under imperial pressure expelled the Prannathis from his territory.

**Patronage by Maharaja Chhatrasal**

Prannath then reached Garha and Mau where diwan Dev Karan, a noble in Chhatrasal’s court accepted his mission. Through him Prannath invited the Bundela King Chhatrasal to come to his support in his struggle to propagate his mission:

नौरंग अकस राखत हैं, हे लड़ाई इस्लाम।

दावत सब ठीरों करी, बुलाओ अपने घर।

137. Purdil Khan was assigned a rank of 2000/1500 and was appointed the faujdar of Bhilsa and Dhamoni. See M. Athar Ali, *Mughal Nobility under Aurangzeb*, p. 124; and, see also, Bhagwandas Gupta; *Life And Times of Maharaja Chhatrasal*, p. 43.


139. Ibid, Section 58, Verse 5.
(Naurang is hostile, it is fight for Islam; we invited people from all corners, you call us to your place.)

In response, Chhatrasal visted Prannath twice secretly, to receive his blessing in the fight against the Mughals and their allies including the Bundelas of his region.\textsuperscript{140} Chhatrasal believed that the victories he had scored them all owed to Prannath's support. He began to worship him like God:

\begin{quote}
 कही तुम साख्यात अख्यातीत हो, हम चीनें तुम्हें बनाए।\textsuperscript{141}
\end{quote}

(He said, I have recognized you, you are the Absolute.)

Prannath thus finally found a place to make the seat of his mission. He told Chhatrasal that he had tried many including the Rana and the Emperor, but he found the base for truth only in him and his kingdom:

\begin{quote}
 तब बोले श्री राज जी, देखे राना पालसाह सब।\textsuperscript{142}
 पर जो कहूँ करनी अंकुर की, सो हम देखी उत।
\end{quote}

In course of his stay in Panna, Prannath convinced him of the fact that Quran also contains the truth (the message of his guru Devchand) and this he did in the presence of both the qazi and the pandit.

The ideology of Prannath was a radical one aiming at introducing social change in terms of transgression of caste barriers, social mobility and transformation of the established religious beliefs. As the caste heirarchy was the foremost basis of the prevailing social order, Prannath's inclusion of the sudras in his cult invited criticism, also from his own group:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{140} Bhagwan Das Gupta also confirms an attack by Sher Afghan, the Faujdar of Errach (Irij) in 1682 on Bundelkhand to subdue Chhatrasal. He was defeated by Chhatrasal.
\item \textsuperscript{141} Beetak, Section 58, Verse 52.
\item \textsuperscript{142} Ibid, Section 58, Verse 55.
\end{itemize}
(This is the cult of the sudras, everyone is listed here; none (respectable) would utter the name of Devchand here;)

It is to be noted that unlike many other noted medieval radical saints, Devchand and Prannath both hailed from Kayastha and Kshatriya castes respectively and their families had affluent business. The people Prannath tried to bring to the fold of his Sampradaya generally belonged to the upper or middle strata. Thus there was a strong reason for opposition from within to the inclusion of the sudras in the cult. Prannath, however, did not bow to their pressure.

The participation of women as active members of the cult was yet another problem. There were a large number of female followers of Prannath who not only embraced the faith but accompanied him to distant places in the course of his missionary activities. They participated in all the public rituals along with the male members of the Sampradaya:

चुंगली खाई कोतवाल ले, एक काइथ के घर।

जोरू मरद बैठत हैं, तुम क्यों न लेत खबर।

(Someone reported to the Kotwal that males and female sit together in the house of a Kayastha; why do not you check.)

143. Ibid, Section 27, Verse 9 and see also, Section 29, Verse 54.
144. Ibid, Section II, Verse 23. The term Qotwal here conveys the meaning of the authority of the person carrying this post in executing the Shariat strictly. The joint seating of men and women was not allowed in Shariat and he had the right to check such gatherings. For reference of Qotwal, see Gavin R.G. Hambly ‘Towns and cities: Mughal India’ in Tapan Raychaudhury and Irfan Habib (ed.), The New Cambridge Economic History of India, Vol. I, p. 449-50.
The women disciples when attended late night sessions of public lectures, their husbands also felt offended:

लगे लुगाइयों से लड़ने, क्यों तुम जाओ तित।145
ऐसा न तुमको चाहिए, घर छोड़ो रात बख्त।

(The husbands fought with their wives and asked why they went there. They should not do so, they should not be out of their houses at night.)

Still, Prannath attracted a large number of devotees towards his faith. According to Laldas, Prannath and his followers in their journey covered a wide area of western and northern India, including Jamnagar, Surat, Thatta (Sindh) Kachh, Khambhalia (Cambay), Junagarh, Deev Bandar, Porbandar, Udaipur, Burhanpur, Ramnagar, Aurangabad, Delhi and Panna. Besides some of his disciples also visited the Arab land. On most of these places, specially in Gujarat and Sindh, the Ismailis had left their impact. The Nizaris and Satpanthis had integrated a number of Hindu religious ideas in their versions of Islam. It is possible that many of these Ismailis, who had long been suppressed, found echoes of their faith in the Nijananda Sampradaya. Prannath may have provided them with a kind of new identity, not so different from what they had as part of their collective memory.

Though Laldas clearly stated in the beginning of the Beetak that Devchand based his faith on Krishnaite traditions, Prannath emphasized the similarities in Hinduism and Islam. Prannath also sought the support from the ruling elites. He contemplated and preached the unity of all the religions, projected himself as an adherent of the Prophet, and attempted to convince Aurangzeb of the truth of his understanding of Islam:

145. *Beetak*, section 25, verse 47.
It is also the same Islam on which we all profess.

Like the other sants and bhakti traditions, Prannathi Islam also emerged as a reaction against both the Islamic bigotry and Brahmanical exclusiveness. Prannath attempted synthesis of Brahmanism and Islam by establishing a unity between the teachings of the Vedas and Quran. However, in the end this radical attempt in the manner of other bhakti cults also merged into the great Brahmanical stream.

We may speculate that even as Prannath advocated synthesis, his faith still represented the Brahmanical strand. The behavioural pattern, like the strictures banning the consumption of meat and fish, as emphasized by the founder guru was predominantly Brahmanical. The dress code was also in conformity with the Indian tradition. The devotees wore chains and put vermilion mark. More significant was the ideology based on Brahmanical scriptures that was given prominence. Quran and Hadith were viewed in relation to Vedas. The aspirants were advised to renew their understanding of Quran and not of the Vedas. Prannath clearly stated in the court of Chhatrasal that they read Quran because the truth of his mission also be traced in that scripture.

It is then not unlikely that the Brahmanical religion was conceived as the basis of the Prannathi faith and other religious thoughts were subordinated. This may also be true of the other medieval sani traditions.

146. Ibid, Section 45, Verse 73.
147. R. Champaklakshmi refutes the assumptions of those historians and sociologists who view Alvara and Nayanar hymns as movement of protest and reform against Brahmanical traditions in Tamil Society. She rather portrays bhakti as a major ideological force in restructuring of economy and society with Brahmanism as the nucleus. See, 'From Devotion and dissent to dominance' in R. Champaklakshmi and S. Gopal (eds.), Tradition, Dissent and Ideology, p. 135-64.
All those movements which began with opposing the Brahmanical tradition, thus eventually became parts of Brahmanism. 148

Prannath movement, though imbued Islamic ideology in a great measure, did not reject the authority of the Indian scriptures. Prannath rather believed that the true meaning and esoteric (batin) message contained in these scriptures was not known to the people and his reformulations could bring forth the real essence. He also borrowed from Sufi ideology and we find frequent references to haqiqat and marifat as different stages of realizing the Supreme. 149 All these ideologies so distinct from Brahmanical thought were connected to the latter by Prannath. Though he utilized different ideologies as and when required in interacting with people, in the concluding phase of the movement, he received acknowledgement only in terms of Brahmanical beliefs. 150 Moreover, his deification as living God, the

148. See, C. Vaudelville, 'Sant Mat: Santism as the universal path to sanctity, in Schomer and McLeod (eds.) The Sants; Though she believes that Kabir, Namdev and Jaideva were true sants believing in a monotheist God, she also thinks their ideology as opposed to Brahmanical philosophy. Still, she accepts that these sants also drew upon the Vaishnava idea of Saguna Brahma. As regards protest against caste distinctions as opposed to Brahmanical Varna theory, David Lorenzen, in his analysis of Kabir Panth, highlights that albeit the rejection of caste hierarchy by Kabir panthis, they still accommodated it by encouraging Sanskriti behavioural patterns. See ‘Kabir Panth and social protest’ in Schomer and McLeod (eds.) The Sants, p. 281-304.


150. Francoise Mallison, 'Hinduism as seen by the Nizari Ismaili missionaries of Western India: The evidence of ginas' in Sontheimer and Kulke (eds.), Hinduism Reconsidered and See also his article ‘Muslim devotional literature in Gujarat: Islam and bhakti’ in McGregor (ed.), Devotional Literature in South India.
Purna Brahma or Lord Krishna in the court of Panna clearly reflects the direction the movement finally took.

After the death of Prannath in 1694,\textsuperscript{151} the tradition was continued by his eminent followers, but none of them assumed the title of Guru. They were called swamis or Kavis for composing poetry to reiterate and disseminate the Prannathi literature. Laldas was the most eminent among them and after him Swami Mukunddas or Navrang Swami, Chhatrasal, his son Hirde Shah, Braj Bhushan, Bhattacharya, Pancham Singh, Murlidhar, Bakshi Hansraj, Gulab Das, Jeevan Mastan, Mohan Das, Chetan Das, Jugal Das, Krishna Das and Swami Sadanand prompted the tradition during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.\textsuperscript{152} An important twentieth century advocate of the mission Suchit Prasad Narayan interestingly describes the tradition as 'Krishna-Pranami Vangmaya'. All the noted swamis and poets wrote the praises of Prannath and Krishna. Poet Bakshi Hansraj, whom we have discussed in context of Radha-Krishna, his text Saneh-Sagar has also been treated as a Krishna-Pranami Scripture. The Nijananda Sampradaya which actually emerged as a synthesis of Brahmanic and Islamic ideologies was virtually reduced to the status of a Krishnaite cult. The tradition still continues among 25000 followers of the cult with a strong belief among them that their cult was deliberately persecuted for political and social reasons by different power groups right from its inception.

\textsuperscript{151} Beetak, Part 2, Section 7, verse 19.

\textsuperscript{152} Suchit Prasad Narayan, Mahamati Prannath Prerit Shri Krishna Pranami Vangamaya, p. 59-160. It must be noticed that Vimla Mehta, the convener of Prannath Mission, and all other contemporary contributors of the mission do not discuss the Ismaili influence on the ideology of their cult.