History of Science in South Asia

The Flame and the Breeze
Life and Longevity Practices in Three Bengali Sufi Texts from the Long Seventeenth Century

Projit Bihari Mukharji

Volume 5, Number 2, 2017

Special Issue - Transmutations: Rejuvenation, Longevity, and Immortality Practices in South and Inner Asia

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1116120ar
DOI: https://doi.org/10.18732/hssa.v5i2.30

See table of contents

Publisher(s)

University of Alberta Library

ISSN

2369-775X (digital)

Explore this journal

Cite this article

Mukharji, P. (2017). The Flame and the Breeze: Life and Longevity Practices in Three Bengali Sufi Texts from the Long Seventeenth Century. *History of Science in South Asia*, *5*(2), 234–264. https://doi.org/10.18732/hssa.v5i2.30

Article abstract

This is a preliminary report on the longevity practices discussed in a Bengali Islamic Yogic text by Haji Muhammad called Nurjamal ba Suratnama written in the last decade of the sixteenth century. This and other similar texts were authored by Bengali literati in the kingdom of Roshang that encompassed at the time both the Arakan and eastern Bengal. I first present the unique cultural and political context in which these texts were produced. Next I discuss the particular text and its author. In doing this I also review the scant scholarship that exists on the material as well as advancing a different and parallel analytic strategy by which the texts might, in my view, be opened up to a broader range of inquiries. In the two subsequent sections I use the proposed strategy of 'figural history' to interrogate two different figures of 'life' that are found in the text under investigation. The entire discussion of longevity practices is organized around these figures of life and I suggest that they need to be explored more fully in their individuality. The conclusion pulls the strings together and reiterates the case for studying the longevity practices in this and other similar texts using figural history as an analytic strategy.

History of Science in South Asia

A journal for the history of all forms of scientific thought and action, ancient and modern, in all regions of South Asia

Special issue:

Transmutations: Rejuvenation, Longevity, and Immortality Practices in South and Inner Asia

Edited by Dagmar Wujastyk, Suzanne Newcombe, and Christèle Barois

The Flame and the Breeze: Life and Longevity Practices in Three Bengali Sufi Texts from the Long Seventeenth Century

Projit Bihari Mukharji

University of Pennsylvania

MLA style citation form: Projit Bihari Mukharji. "The Flame and the Breeze: Life and Longevity Practices in Three Bengali Sufi Texts from the Long Seventeenth Century." *History of Science in South Asia*, 5.2 (2017): 234–264. DOI: 10.18732/hssa.v5i2.30.

Online version available at: http://hssa-journal.org

HISTORY OF SCIENCE IN SOUTH ASIA
A journal for the history of all forms of scientific thought and action, ancient and modern, in all regions of South Asia, published online at http://hssa-journal.org

ISSN 2369-775X

Publisher:

History of Science in South Asia

Principal Contact:

Dominik Wujastyk, Editor, University of Alberta
Email: ⟨wujastyk@ualberta.ca⟩

Mailing Address:

History of Science in South Asia,
Department of History and Classics,
2–81 HM Tory Building,
University of Alberta,
Edmonton, AB, T6G 2H4
Canada

The electronic versions were generated from sources marked up in LaTeX in a computer running GNU/LINUX operating system. PDF was typeset using XeTeX from TeXLive. The base font used for Latin script and oldstyle numerals was TeX Gyre Pagella developed by GUST, the Polish TeX Users Group.

The Flame and the Breeze: Life and Longevity Practices in Three Bengali Sufi Texts from the Long Seventeenth Century

Projit Bihari Mukharji

University of Pennsylvania

Straddling the artificial boundary between South and South East Asia from 1430 to 1784 there existed a powerful, multicultural kingdom called Roshang.[1] Its Buddhist kings directly and indirectly patronized generations of Muslim Bengali scholars. Many of these scholars were deeply interested in braiding together Islamic and Indic traditions of spiritual praxis. A crucial part of these spiritual praxes were longevity practices that were tied up with ritual performance. Drawing variously from tantric, Sufi, Nāth and yogic traditions, these authors created a new set of Islamic yogic longevity practices.[2]

These texts unfortunately remain woefully understudied. The little scholarship that does exist on the matter is overwhelmingly in Bengali.[3] Moreover, scholarly accounts of this literature have been almost entirely focused on the theological and literary dimensions of the texts.[4] Yet, as France Bhattacharya points out, "*A l'époque, les Soufis comme les yogis étaient aussi crédités de savoirs d'ordre plus 'mondains'*".[5] Naturally, therefore, the texts produced by Bengali Sufis contain a wealth of information about topics such as the mysteries of conception, birth and death, general cosmology and what may be called "long-life" or "longevity practices."

Long-life or longevity practices are a set of practices found across South Asia and beyond. As Geoffrey Samuel points out, many of these practices seem to be

1 Today historians generally refer to the kingdom either as the "Arakan kingdom or the "Mrauk-U kingdom." The Bengali authors who lived and wrote there, however, almost always called it Roshang and so I shall stick to their name in this article. See, for instance, Huq 1993.

2 See, for instance, Bhattacharya 2003.

3 The best-known and most detailed work remains Huq 1993.

4 See, for instance, Hatley 2007; D'Hubert 2014.

5 "At the time, Sufis and yogis were also credited with more "mundane" powers," Bhattacharya 2003: 69.

connected in one way or another with Indian tantric techniques.[6] In this regard, it is also worth noting that the ideal of the *jīvanmukta*, pursued by Nāth Siddhas, entailed much that was akin to life prolongation practices.

> According to the Nāth philosophy the state of *jīvanmukti* is the ideal … The Nāths say that the body in which the supreme wisdom has been received (*parampadprāpti*) must be kept disease-free (*ajara*), immortal (*amara*) and capable to travelling wherever they please….[7]

As a result, the Nāths discuss longevity and immortality at great length, including actual techniques for achieving these ends.[8] But the relationship of the Nāth traditions with tantrism and Sanskrit culture, not to mention between its own various regional variants, remain very ill-understood to date.[9]

Much of the extant scholarship on such longevity practices has been focused specifically on Buddhist practices.[10] Dagmar Wujastyk and Lawrence Cohen, however, have studied longevity practices, and particularly longevity tonics, as components of Indian medicine.[11] Some of the emergent work on the histories of yoga has also discussed longevity practices in passing.[12] Islamic longevity practices too have recently begun receiving some attention. Y. Tzvi Langerman for instance, has discussed *rasāyana* in an eighteenth-century Shi'ite text, whilst Fabrizio Speziale has discussed a fascinating Indo-Persian alchemical treatise attributed to the thirteenth-century saint Hamid al Din Nagawri and others.[13]

In the present paper I wish to add to this discussion by focusing on three Bengali Islamic texts produced in the kingdom of Roshang in the period between the late sixteenth century and the early eighteenth century. These three texts are complex, lengthy works that cover a number of different topics. So it is best to clarify at the very outset that I do not intend to study them as a whole. My interest is mainly in their discussions of life and longevity practices. I want to compare how each of these texts conceptualize the entity called "life" and what kind of practices they recommend for prolonging life.

The paper is divided into seven principal sections. Section one introduces the three texts I will be discussing, giving brief outlines of their content, provenance

6 Samuel 2012: 264.
7 Mallik 1986: 292.
8 Mallik 1986: 310–19.
9 For Bengal see Mallik 1986. For accounts of the Nāth tradition more generally see Lorenzen and Munoz 2011. On Nāth texts see Bouy 1994. For an effort to work out a single, coherent and linear chronology for Nāth and tantric traditions across South Asia, which I find problematic for a tradition as diverse, plural and widespread as the Nāth and tantric traditions, see White 1996.
10 Gerke 2012; Samuel 2012.
11 Wujastyk 2015, 2017: (in this volume); Cohen 1998.
12 Mallinson and Singleton 2017.
13 Speziale 2006; Langermann 2018.

and some general introduction to the available scholarship on these texts. Section two will then provide a general historical context of the kingdom of Roshang and its fascinating polycultural political order. Sections three, four and five will respectively describe the longevity practices discussed in each of the three texts. The sixth section then explores the way "life" and "longevity" are conceptualized in these texts in general. Finally, the seventh section locates these texts within the material culture in which they were produced and suggests that the images of life and longevity reflect the actual material culture of the times.

1. THE THREE TEXTS

The three texts I will be discussing here are, respectively, an anonymous work called *Joga Kalandara / Yoga Kalandar*, a text entitled *Nurjāmāl bā Suratnāmā* by Haji Muhammad and finally, the *Sirnāmā* by Kaji Sheikh Monsur. My reason for choosing these three works is that each of them uses certain strikingly similar metaphors and images, suggesting that they participated in a common tradition. Of course, such participation might have meant direct knowledge of earlier works by later authors or affiliation or acquaintance with a common oral tradition.

The *Joga Kalandara* is generally held to be the oldest of the three texts, though its own history is a matter of some dispute. Ahmed Sharif, who had collected, collated and published all these texts, argued that the text derived from a Persian original written by Shaffaruddin Bu Ali Kalandar (d. 1324) who is buried in Panipat in north India and is credited with several Persian works in a similar vein. The lack of a colophon, as was customary at the time, suggests, however, that the text circulated orally for some time before it was finally committed to writing. Sharif's uncle, Abdul Karim Shahityavisharad, who first discovered many of these Bengali texts in manuscript form in the early twentieth century, found nearly three hundred manuscript copies of the *Joga Kalandara* in the south-eastern corner of Bengal, i.e., in Chittagong. Another Bengali scholar, Enamul Huq, however, disagreed with Sharif and argued that the author of the Bengali *Joga Kalandara* was one Saiyid Murtuza in the seventeenth century (Huq 1993). Huq identified his author as one who lived in the western Bengali city of Murshidabad and wrote poems influenced by Vaishnavite devotees of Krishna. However, Huq failed to explain why the manuscripts of the work are concentrated in the Chittagong area if the author had actually lived in Murshidabad. The two cities were not only geographically distant, but also politically part of different kingdoms at the time. To complicate matters further, when France Bhattacharya chose to translate the Bengali *Joga Kalandara* into French, she found there were significant discrepancies between the manuscript versions used by Sharif and Huq. All this tends to confirm that the *Joga Kalandara* existed as an oral text in the region and

that the manuscripts probably drew variously and independently upon that oral tradition. This also makes dating the text difficult. Yet, given its popularity, it is probably not unfair to assume that it is the oldest of the three texts that deploy similar phrases and images, in other words that the *Joga Kalandara* is the source of these images.

We are on firmer grounds with the *Nurjāmāl ba Suratnāmā*. Ahmed Sharif, who edited and published the *Nurjāmāl*, cited circumstantial evidence such as poet Mir Muhammad Shafi's reference to his own discipleship to one Haji Muhammad as the basis for estimating Haji Muhammad to have lived approximately between 1565 and 1630. Sharif also estimated that the *Nurjāmāl* was written in the 1590s.[14] The surviving manuscripts of the text were all found in Chittagong and clearly evinced the text's connections to the Arakanese court. A copyist with a distinctly Arakanese-sounding name, viz. "Mongarpong", had produced the manuscript upon which Sharif based his published version.[15] In any case, if the dating of the text is correct and it was in fact written in 1590, then Chittagong itself would have been part of the Roshang kingdom at the time. Sharif and Huq, however, disagree once again upon the identity of the *Nurjāmāl ba Suratnāmā.* Huq was of the opinion that the *Nurjāmāl* and the *Suratnāmā* were in fact two distinct texts, rather than two alternate names for the same text.

The *Nurjāmāl* ("Divine Light") is part of a medieval Bengali textual tradition of writings on "divine illumination." Razia Sultana mentions the existence of at least five known *Nurnamas* by five different authors, excluding Haji Muhammad's work. The best-known of these *Nurnamas* was a seventeenth-century iteration by Abdul Hakim, whilst other authors included Sheikh Paran (1550–1615), Mir Muhammad Shafi (1559–1630) and even one by the brahmin author Dwija Ramtanu.[16] Recently, Ayesha Irani has explored the theological and ontological evolution of what she terms the "prophetic principle of light and love" in the hands of Bengali authors in splendid detail.[17] Despite the volume, diversity and complexity of this tradition, many scholars have recognized Haji Muhammad's work as being particularly significant. Thus, Sharif, for instance, wrote that,

> no other author was able to equal Haji Muhammad's adeptness (*naipunya*). He had the habitual deftness (*sbabhābik dakshyata*) to express complex and subtle theoretical issues in a plain and meaningful way.[18]

14 Sharif 1969: 114–17.
15 Sharif 1969: 114.
16 Sultana 2017.
17 Irani 2016.
18 Sharif 1969: 119.

Asim Roy similarly writes that Haji Muhammad offered the "most brilliant exposition" of what Roy calls "monistic pantheism," a position he attributes to a number of Islamic religious authors of middle Bengali texts.[19]

The *Sirnāmā* of Kaji Sheikh Monsur is the latest of our three texts. Monsur informs us in a colophon that he was the son of one Kaji Isa and lived in the important town of Ramu, in the kingdom of Roshang. He also gives us a date, in the local Maghi calendar, for his composition. The date he gives us is 1065 which, according to the Georgian calendar, would be 1703.

Notwithstanding the similarity of some of the contents, the three texts were organized in distinctive ways. The *Sirnāmā* for instance, had nine core chapters and five introductory chapters. The core chapters were adapted, by the author's own acknowledgement, from a work called the *Ahārul Masā.* In the first of these chapters, Monsur described the bio-cosmological system that related the microcosm of the human body to the macrocosm of the cosmos, using a complex system of correspondences organized around four key "stations" or *mokāms/ muqams.* As Shaman Hatley and others have pointed out, these "stations' were also correlated to the bio-cosmological "centers" or chakras known in tantric and yogic circles.[20] These "stations" of spiritual ascent are then further related to four, increasingly more sublime, paths of spiritual progress, viz. *Śariata* (Islamic Law), *Tarikata* (The Path), *Hakikata* (Reality) and, finally, *Mārifata* (Knowledge). It was these paths and matters related to it that were described in the subsequent chapters. Chapter Three for instance, gave a detailed description of the composition and the mechanisms of the human body and self. The next chapter described different types of bodies and selves. The fifth chapter described the structure and functions of the heart, whilst the following chapter dwelt at length on breath. It is here that longevity practices are dealt with. Other chapters are devoted to the human seed or "sperm," the "soul," and the Creator.

Haji Muhammad's *Nurjāmāl* also had fourteen chapters. But they covered a wider range of topics and were not as clearly demarcated into primary and introductory chapters. Many of the text's early chapters were devoted to topics such as fate, the duties of pious Muslims and so forth. It is only in the twelfth chapter that Muhammad introduces the bio-cosmological system and its four "stations" which, incidentally, he calls *monjil/manzil* ("destinations"). In this elaborate chapter, he outlines the correspondences between the microcosm and the macrocosm as well as the four different paths to spiritual progress. In fact, the chapter itself is subdivided into four sub-chapters according to the path. It is in the last of these sub-chapters, i.e., one devoted to the description of the *Mārifata* path, that the longevity practices are mentioned. The two final chapters that

19 Roy 1970: 193.

20 Hatley 2007.

follow this lengthy chapter are devoted respectively to conception and birth and the matters of the "soul."

Finally, the *Joga Kalandara* (at least the version published by Sharif), contained only seven chapters. It introduced the bio-cosmological system straight away after the inaugural paeans. It then very briefly described the body, before moving on to the various paths of spiritual progress. The next chapter described a series of postures (*āsanas*) together with directions for particular forms of meditative visualizations. The penultimate chapter was devoted to the signs that foretell death, while the final, very short chapter dealt with the esoteric meanings of various colors. More cogently for our present purposes, the longevity practices were introduced right at the outset of the very first chapter in this text.

The main scholarly interest in this material, as I have said above, has mainly been in its literary and theological content. The early Bengali scholars such as Abdul Karim Shahityavisharad, Ahmed Sharif and Enamul Huq were principally interested in recovering the literary contributions of Muslim authors to Bengali language and literature, though they also shared an interest in Sufism. Amongst western scholars, France Bhattacharya and Shaman Hatley have both explored the religious blending and braiding in these texts.[21] Recently Ayesha Irani's work has also been along similar lines.[22] Tony Stewart's work on cross-denominational translations in early modern Bengal and Carl Ernst's work on the interactions between Sufism and tantrism elsewhere in South Asia provide important contexts, agendas and vocabularies for these works.[23] Similarly, Thibaut d'Hubert's recent explorations of the literary dimensions of the intellectual world of Roshang also tangentially illuminate these texts.[24]

2. THE WORLD OF ROSHANG

Before proceeding any further in our analysis of Haji Muhammad's text, however, it is necessary to have a fuller understanding of the context within which he wrote. Modern national borders and the arbitrary contours of Area Studies have together conspired to obliterate the once powerful kingdom of Roshang from contemporary historical memory.[25] Yet, for nearly four centuries, this powerful kingdom and its intricately braided culture had dominated the Arakan and stretched well into the eastern districts of modern Bangladesh.

Founded in 1430 with its capital at Mrauk-U along one of the branches of the Kaladan river, Roshang's early history is still mired in controversy and con-

21 Bhattacharya 2003; Hatley 2007.
22 Irani 2016.
23 Stewart 2001; Ernst 2005.
24 D'Hubert 2014.
25 For the most comprehensive history of Roshang, see Galen 2008.

jecture. Myths tell of a displaced king who had been given shelter and, thereafter, military support by the Sultans of Bengal to regain his throne. Once returned to power, it was this king, Nara Mit Lha (c. 1404–1434), also referred to as Manh Co Mvan and Narameikhla, who is credited with introducing Bengali Islamic forms and styles to the court.[26] But Roshang remained a weak neighbor to Bengal for almost a century. It was only with the accession of king Min Ba, also known as Sabaq Shah, in 1531 that Roshang became a power to reckon with. Relying on a large contingent of Portuguese Catholic mercenaries, Min Ba rapidly expanded his domain by defeating the neighboring kingdoms of Tripura and Bengal. The lucrative Bengali port of Chittagong along with its hinterlands passed into Arakanese hands and remained with them until 1666. The waning of the Bengal Sultanate's powers in the seventeenth century allowed Roshang to further consolidate its position. In 1625, the Roshang troops even defeated the mighty Mughal army in Bengal and sacked the Mughal capital at Jahangirnagar (Dhaka). It was only in 1666 that the Mughals finally managed to wrest Chittagong back from the Arakanese. The kings of Roshang, however, continued to rule over their depleted kingdom all the way up to 1784, when the Konbaung dynasty finally annihilated the kingdom and incorporated it into the Burmese monarchy.

The kings of Roshang depended heavily upon Portuguese military power, especially autonomous Portuguese mercenaries and adventurers operating in the Bay of Bengal.[27] Through their trading contacts with the southern Indian port of Masulipatnam, they also recruited mercenaries from the kingdom of Golconda in the Deccan. At one point, the seventeenth-century king of Roshang, Thirithudhamma, described his own army to the Mughal governor of Bengal, as being manned mainly by "Firangis (Portuguese) and Telingas (Telegus)".[28] The Portuguese-Arakanese alliance was intimate enough for the Portuguese to even briefly try to foist a Lusianized minor member of the Arakanese royal house who had converted to Catholicism upon the throne.[29] The Bengali Muslims, particularly after the incorporation of Chittagong into the kingdom, provided key intermediaries and service officials.

As Sanjay Subrahmanyam points out, the geography of Roshang, with its core isolated from the rest of Burma by the formidable Arakan Yomas, but connected by rivers to the sea, meant that it could only look outwards through the oceans and not overland.[30] This meant its trade was largely maritime and depended

26 On Nara Mit Lha and his role in real and imagined histories of the Arakan, see Leider and Htin 2015.
27 Charney 2005.
28 Cited in Subrahmanyam 1993: 84.
29 Subrahmanyam 1993.
30 Subrahmanyam 1997: 203.

heavily upon the Dutch East India Company, viz. the *Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (VOC). It also meant that culturally, the kingdom saw itself as a part of the Persianate world rather than the Sinophone one. The Bengali Muslim literati were important intermediaries in both these networks. They were the local partners of the Dutch traders as well as the main conduits for Persianate culture.

It was in this milieu that there emerged a sophisticated and rich body of courtly literature. Given the polyglot and multicultural nature of the Roshang kingdom, the court literature was also multilingual. Arakanese, Pali, Sanskrit, Persian, Portuguese and Bengali were just some of the languages that were in use in the kingdom. The famous Bengali poet Alaol noted the presence in the kingdom of Arabs, Egyptians, Syrians, Turks, Abyssinians, Ottomans, Khorasanis, Uzbeks, Lahoris, Multanis, Hindis, Kashmiris, Deccanis, Sindhis, Assamese and Bengalis. Yet, as Thibaut d'Hubert points out, it was the Bengali literature of Roshang that was most significant in its originality and ambition. The Pali and Sanskrit works produced there were largely copies of older works and did not attempt to create a new canon as the Bengali authors did.[31] D'Hubert explains this in terms of the formation of a unique society of Bengali Muslim elites with close ties to the Roshang court who mediated both trade and cultural contacts with the outside world across the seas.

Court poetry and etiquette literature however, were not the only things that these Bengali Muslim intellectuals wrote about. As Shaman Hatley notes,

> One of the most consistent concerns of this genre is the explication of Islamized forms of tantric yoga, the practices of which appear integral to Sufism as it was developed in Bengal.[32]

Tantric practices, Hatley continues, had become,

> prevalent across an extraordinary spectrum of sectarian boundaries in South Asia and beyond, flourishing with Śaivism, Buddhism, and Vaiṣṇavism and finding a place in both Jainism and brahmanical *smārta* traditions.[33]

Most important for us, however, is Hatley's observation that, "Islam constituted no less likely a ground for the assimilation of tantric yoga".[34] Haji Muhammad's *Nurjāmāl* is an excellent testament to this process of Islamization of tantric yoga in Bengali texts from Roshang.

31 D'Hubert 2014: 47 f.
32 Hatley 2007: 351.
33 Hatley 2007: 352.
34 Hatley 2007: 352.

3. LIFE AND LONGEVITY IN THE *JOGA KALANDARA*

After a hasty, ten-line invocation, the *Joga Kalandara* jumped straight into the question of "life" and longevity. It described life through a vivid image of a vital flame burning incessantly on three furnaces.[35]

> These three furnaces, you must know, are the *nāsuta* (নাসুত) station
> The Angel Azrael stands guard there
> Know that those subterranean regions are the place of fire
> Fires burn forever without respite.
> Know that the sun rises at that *mūlādhāra*
> *Jīvātmā* is the lord of it.
> Meditate on that with your eyes and ears shut
> Devote yourself to the teacher as you think of Him.
> The lord of the house sits in a white lotus
> Light the fire every day in that country.
> The fire should never go out
> Light the fire with care at all times.
> My body arises from that fire
> Be careful so that it never is extinguished.
> Forever the fire and eternal, you must know, is the furnace
> Clap shut the tenth portal
> Just as you push loads onto an animal
> Push similarly at the base of the anus.
> Just like lighting the fire in a smithy
> Push similarly frequently.
> If you can do this every day
> Strong body will annul all disease.[36]

নাসুত মোকাম জান এ তিন তিহরী
আজ্রাইল ফিরিস্তা আছে তথাত প্রহরী
সে সব পাতাল জান আনলের স্থান
সদাএ আনল জ্বলে নাহিক নির্বাণ।
অরুণ উদিত জান সেই মূলাধার
জীবত্তমা স্বামী হেন জানিঅ তাহার।
কর্ণ আঁখি মুদি তথা করহ জিকির

35 Though I call this a "vital flame," the actual text does not really name the flame. There is no corresponding Bengali word for "vital" in these texts. It is presented merely as a flame that is coterminous with life. Its extinction leads to death.

36 This and all following translations in this paper are mine.

মুর্শিদ ভজিয়া কর তাহার ফিকির।
ধব কমল তথা গৃহস্বামী বৈসে
অনুদিন আনল জ্বালিও সেই দেশে।
সে আনল-যাবতে নিবি নহি যাএ
জ্বালিবা আনল যত্নে জান সর্বথাএ।
শরীর অমর হএ সে আনল হন্তে
সাবধানে থাকিবা না নিবে যেন মতে।
সদা এ আনল নিত্য জানিবা তিহরী
দশমী দুয়ারে তবে লাগাইব তালি।
পশুএ লাদিলে যেন টিপ দিয়া তোলে
তেনমত টিপ জান দিব গুহ্যমূলে।
কামার শালেত যেন অনল জ্বালন
তেনমত টিপ তথা দিব ঘন ঘন।
এই কর্ম অনুদিন করিতে যদি পার
শরীর বেয়াধি যথ খণ্ডিবেক দড়।[37]

The three furnaces burning at the *mūlādhāra* (chakra) at the base of the spine was not novel. Bhattacharya points out that it was well-known in earlier Nāth texts such as the *Goraksha Bijay* of Sheikh Faijullah. Yet, the *Joga Kalandara'*s specific descriptions of the fire are illuminating. The text clearly connects the flame to life. It asserts that the body becomes immortal from this flame (শরীর অমর হএ সে আনল হন্তে). It instructs the reader to be careful that the fire does not go out (সাবধানে থাকিবা না নিবে যেন মতে), but it also advises the reader to carefully light the fire regularly (জ্বালিবা আনল যত্নে জান সর্বথাএ).

The key practice, however, seems to involve putting pressure on one's anus in a way so as to raise the fire in a way akin to the way loads are raised on to the backs of animals (দশমী দুয়ারে তবে লাগাইব তালি/পশুএ লাদিলে যেন টিপ দিয়া তোলে). If one can do this daily, then the body will be free of all disease.

But interestingly, this was not the only vital flame discussed by the *Joga Kalandara.* The same chapter also mentioned another flame. This latter flame was to be "seen" by meditating upon the "Place of Bile" (*pittasthāna*) where a "spring breeze" blows strongly. Unlike the vital flame of the three furnaces or ovens, this is the flame of a lamp.

Know that these three furnaces are the main home
At the place of bile blows a large spring wind
Every day look at it with care
A lamp-flame there you will behold

37 Sharif 1969: 101.

That flame will spread a bright light
Within that light you will behold an image
Keep your sight trained on that light
You shall see the shape of the past and the future all
If you can behold it daily
Your body will never be destroyed.

এ তিন তিহরী জান প্রধান খাছাল
পিত স্থানে বহে বায়ু বসন্ত বিশাল।

অনুদিত তথা দৃষ্টি করিবা যতনে
এক গাছি দীপ তথা দেখিবা নয়নে।

সে দীপের পসরে উজ্জ্বল হৈব জ্যোতি
সে জোতের মধ্যেত যে দেখিবা মূরতি।

সে জোতের মধ্যে তুমি দৃষ্টি নিযোজিবা
ভূত ভবিষ্যৎ রূপ সকল দেখিবা।

যদি সে করিতে পার দরশন নিত
শরীর তোমার ধ্বংস নহে কদাঞ্চিত।[38]

In stark contrast to this image of a vital flame, the image of life at the next "station," i.e. *malakuta mokām* was that of a "vital breeze." The *Joga Kalandara* mentioned that,

Know that the *malakuta* station is at the navel
Know that at that place the aerial element flows particularly
In yoga it is called by the name *maṇipura*
There seasonal pre-winter [breeze] blows relentlessly
Know that the Angel Israfil presides
Know for sure that the nostrils are his portal
Know that the navel houses the blister (?)
Breaths collected daily stays endlessly
Day and night forty thousand breaths flow
Within the vessel the aerial element stays any way
As long as there is air there is life
When the air disappears death is inevitable.

মলকুত মোকাম জান হএ নাভিদেশ
সে স্থানে বাবি বহে জানিবা বিশেষ।

যোগেত কহএ তারে মণিপুর নাম

38 Sharif 1969: 101.

থাত হেমন্ত ঋতু বহে অবিশ্রাম।

ইস্রাফিল ফিরিস্তা জান তাত অধিকার
নাসিকা নিশ্চয় জান দুয়ার তাহার।

নাভির খাটাল জান ফেস্কার যে ধাম
নিশ্বাস সম্বরে নিত্য রহি অবিশ্রাম।

দিবা রাত্রি চল্লিশ হাজার শ্বাস বহে
ঘট মধ্যে রাখ বাবি যেন মতে রহে।

যাবত পবন আছে তাবত জীবন
পবন ঘুচিলে হএ অবশ্য মরণ।[39]

This contrasting image is not surprising since several Sufi authors tend to associate the particular "stations" with specific primary elements, viz. earth (*khāka*), water (*āba*), fire (*ātaśa*) and air (*bāba*). But what is significant is that the "air" or "breeze" is said to be specific to the "station" (সে স্থানে বাবি বহে জানিবা বিশেষ). Moreover, this particular "vital breeze" is capable of being counted with precision. The number of daily breaths is thus tabulated at 40,000. It is this specific "vital breeze" whose exhaustion leads to immediate death and whose preservation leads to longevity. It is on the basis of this last idea that the author then goes on to recommend particular actions to preserve the "vital breeze."

Training one's vision upon one's own nostrils, with the head bowed so as to allow the chin to touch the throat, the practitioner is advised to raise the right foot over the left thigh. Thus seated, s/he is to meditate upon the breath till a light green image becomes visible. It is this image that is the image of the soul (*ātmā*) and it is at the sight of this image that the flow of breath or "vital breeze" ceases.

Train your sight upon the nostril and glimpse the air
Place your chin on your throat and follow the rules
Lift the right leg upon the left thigh
Stare at the nose with both eyes open
Then the breath will not exit the vessel
You will see the color of yam leaves
In that you will glimpse an image
Know that that is the body of the soul.

নাসিকাত দৃষ্টি দিয়া পবন হেরিবা
কণ্ঠেত চিবুক দিয়া নিয়মে রহিবা।

বাম উরু 'পরে যে দক্ষিণ পদ তুলি

39 Sharif 1969: 102.

নাসাতে হেরিব জান যুগ আঁখি মেলি।

তবে ঘট হন্তে শ্বাস বাহির না হৈব
যেহেন কচুর পত্র বরণ দেখিব।

তার মধ্যে মূর্তি এক হৈব দরশন
সেই মূর্তি আত্তমার জানিঅ বরণ।

4. LIFE AND LONGEVITY IN HAJI MUHAMMAD'S *NURJĀMĀL*

In stark contrast to the *Joga Kalandara*, Haji Muhammad introduced the longevity practices in the very last chapter of his book. Even more strikingly, he flipped the order of the spiritual "stations." Whereas the *Joga Kalandara* had identified the *nāsuta mokām* with the *mūlādhāra* (chakra) and the *lāsut mokām* with the *anāhata* (chakra) at the head of the spine, Muhammad, identified the *lāhuta mokām* with the *mūlādhāra* (chakra). The rest of the description however, looked remarkably familiar.

Know the three furnaces are *lāhuta* station
Angel Azrael stands guard there
In the room sits the Dark Lotus[40]
Every day the fire burns in that country
In that seventh subterranean world the fire is established
Fire burns incessantly without extinction
Always know the principle of the fire there
Every day the fire burns without burning out
That fire is eternally there all the time
The body is immortal from that fire
Stay careful so that it does not go out.

লাহুত মোকামে জান এতিন তিহরী
ফিরিস্তা আজ্রাইল আছে তাহাত প্রহরী।

আন্ধার কমল তথা ঘরেত বৈসএ
অনুদিন আনল জ্বলএ সে দেশএ।

40 One of the reviewers of this paper has suggested that this might be a scribal error for the "base lotus," thus *ādhāra kamala* instead of *āndhāra kamala*. This is certainly a possibility, but we should also be careful not to replace such possible scribal errors and smoothen the text. Not only do scribal errors often take root and mutate the text, but they might also bear testimony to way scribes and practitioners made sense of textual passages that had become obscure for them. In this particular case, it is also significant in my view that the epithet *āndhāra kamala* is in itself well established in Vaiṣṇava circles and often refers to Krishna himself. See for instance, Hawley 2014: 108.

সেই সপ্ত পাতালেত আনল স্থাপন
সদাএ আনল জ্বলে নাহিক নিভন।

সে আনল জ্বলিতে নিভান নহি যাএ
জানিবা আনল নীতি তথা সর্বথাএ।

শরীর অমর হএ সে আনল হোতে
সাবধনে থাক না নিভে যেন মতে।[41]

Not only was the description of the vital flame and the guardian angel almost identical, but even the practices recommended for achieving longevity were remarkably similar. Even the slightly unusual image of loads being lifted onto the back of an animal to describe how to raise the vital flame from the anus was repeated.

As one pushes loads on to the animal
Similarly push up at the anus
If you can do this action daily
All the diseases of the body will be annulled
…
Know these three furnaces are the main home
At the bile-place it goes and sits eternally
When you train your vision there
You will then notice a flame there
That lamp's wares become extremely bright
Within that lamp see an image
Keep your eyes on that image
Past and future all you will see
If you can see it every day
Your body will never be destroyed.

পশুএ লাদিলে যেন টিপ দিয়া তোলে
তেন মতে টিপ দিয়া তোলে গুহ্য মূলে।

এই কর্ম অনুদিন করিবারে পারে
শরীরের ব্যাধি যথ খণ্ডিব তাহারে।

...

এ তিন তিহরী জান প্রধান খাটাল
পীতস্থানে গিয়া সেই বৈসে সর্বকাল।

অনুদিত তথা দৃষ্টি করিবা যখন
এক গাছি দীপ তথা দেখিবা তখন।

41 Sharif 1969: 146.

সে দীপের পসরে উঝল হএ অতি
সে দীপের মধ্যে এক দেখিয়া মূরতি।

সে মূর্তিত দৃষ্ট তবে নিয়োজি রাখিবা
ভূত ভবিষ্যৎ যথ সকল দেখিবা।

যদি সে করিতে পর দরশন নিত
শরীর তোমার ধ্বংস নাই কদাচিত।[42]

Apart from the interchange of the names *lāhuta* and *nāsuta*, the rest of the description of life and longevity practices associated with the first "station" in the *Joga Kalandara* and the *Nurjāmāl* are remarkably similar. This similarity continues to the second "station" as well.

Know the *malakuta* station is the navel
Know that a particular aerial element stays there
In yoga it is called by the name of *maṇipura*
There the air blows incessantly
The Angel Israfil presides there
Know for sure that the nostril is his portal
Day and night twenty-four thousand breaths flow
Keep the aerial element within the vessel as it stays
As long as there is air, there is life
If air is diminished, death is inevitable.

মলকুত মোকাম জানিঅ নাভিদেশ
সেই স্থানে বাবি রহে জানিঅ বিশেষ।

যোগেত কহএ তারে মণিপুর নাম
এথায় থাকিয়া বায়ু বহে অবিশ্রাম।

ইস্রাফিল ফিরিস্তা তথায় অধিকার
নাসিকা নিশ্চএ জান দুয়ার তাহার।

রাত্রিদিনে চব্বিশ হাজার শ্বাস বহে
ঘট মধ্যে রাখ বাবি যেন মতে রহে।

যাবত পবন আছে তাবত জীবন
পবন ঘাটিলে হএ অবশ্য মরণ।[43]

Apart from the change in the number of daily breaths from 40,000 in the *Joga Kalandara* to 24,000 in *Nurjāmāl*—a change that could well have arisen through the oversight of a copyist—the rest of the description is once more remarkably

42 Sharif 1969: 146.

43 Sharif 1969: 146 f.

similar. In this regard, it is also worth noting that Haji Muhammad used the word *vāyu* alongside *pavana* and *bābi* as synonyms, adding yet another layer of meaning to this already multivalent notion of a "vital breeze." The ritual and meditative practices associated with the *malakuta mokām* however, contained some significant changes. Whilst the basic posture described was almost identical, its objective was quite distinctive. Instead of preventing the flow of the vital breeze out of the body, in the *Nurjāmāl*, the objective was to expel air out of the stomach through the anus.

> Train your eyes on the tip of the nose and see the air
> Put your chin on your throat and follow the rules
> Lift the right leg on the left thigh
> Remove your vision to the tip of the nose with both your eyes open
> Then will the aerial element from the intestines be expelled
> You will behold an image the color of yam leaves
> In that you will notice an image
> Know that that is the image of the soul.
>
> নাসিকাত দৃষ্টি দিয়া পবন হেরিব
> কণ্ঠেত চিবুক দিয়া নিয়মে রহিব।
>
> বাম ঊরু 'পরে দক্ষিণ পদ তুলি
> নাসিকা হেরিবা দৃষ্টি দুই আঁখি মেলি।
>
> তবে কোষ্ঠ হোন্তে বাবি বাহির হৈব
> যেহেন কচুর পত্র বরণ দেখিব।
>
> তার মধ্যে মূর্তি এক হৈব দরশন
> সে জুতি আত্মার জানিবা বরণ।[44]

Despite these changes, Haji Muhammad's general conception of life associated with the first two "stations" is similar to the conceptions of the *Joga Kalandara.* Life is essentially conceptualized either as a "vital flame" or as a "vital breeze."

5. LIFE AND LONGEVITY IN KAJI SHEIKH MONSUR'S *SIRNĀMĀ*

In monsur's *sirnāmā*, both the structure and the content of the longevity practices were radically transformed. The text did not organize its spiritual pursuits according to the four "stations," though the "stations" are mentioned in the text. There is as a result no clear distinction between the practices associated with the *nāsuta* and *malakuta mokāms*. Yet, some of the material associated with

44 Sharif 1969: 147.

these stations in prior texts crops up in the *Sirnāmā.* The following description is introduced, somewhat suddenly, in midst of a section dealing with the relation between particular breaths and the conception of progeny.

> Pay attention, one who does the work of the aerial element
> Making the navel touch the back while keeping the spine straight
> Drinking the aerial element in the upper pipes and later the ears
> Close all the portals and strengthen the police station
> Putting your feet to the anus you will lift the air
> Deep push at the furnace touches the sky
> Train your eyes on the tip of the nose
> Do these actions every day
> Along with the aerial element you will see the immaterial self's divine light
> Whatever paths whoever follows the aerial element must be presented
> In that lamp will arise your own divine light
> Past and future will all be disseminated
> If someone is attached (?) to the aerial element
> The world and the cosmos will both serve that person.
>
> যে করে বাবির কর্ম শুন মন দিয়া
> পৃষ্ঠেত লাগাএ নাভি মেরু স্থির হৈয়া।
>
> ঊর্ধ্বনালে পিয়া বাবি পাছে কর্ণে হানা
> সর্বদ্বারে তালি দিয়া দড় কর থানা।
>
> মল দ্বারে পদ দিয়া তুলিবেক বাই
> তিহরীতে ঘন টিপ গগন ঠেকাই।
>
> নাসিকা অগ্রেতে দৃষ্টি দিয়া নিযোজিব
> প্রতিদিন এই মত কর্মেত রহিব।
>
> বাবি সঙ্গে আত্তমার দেখিবেন্ত নূর
> যে যে মতে যেই বাবি করিব হুজুর।
>
> সে দীপে উতপন হৈব আপনার নূর
> ভূত ভবিষ্যৎ যথ হইব প্রচার।
>
> কেহ যদি বাবি সঙ্গে হৈল মুছখর
> দীন দুনিয়া তার হইল কিঙ্কর।[45]

45 Sharif 1969: 185 f.

While the description is still strongly reminiscent of the practices associated with the first "station" in the previous texts, its sense has been radically transformed. In fact, the "vital flame" has virtually disappeared. The ritual actions are now intended to raise the *bāi* or "air" from the *mūlādhāra* or *tiharī*. In fact, the chapter went on to emphasize the powers of air upon longevity, citing the example of the Prophet Isā (Jesus) to the effect that: "Prophet Isā practiced (*sādhana*) *bābi* and went to the sky/ the moment (he) ate *bāi* he became immortal."

The idea of the "vital flame" is lost in Monsur's text. In its place, the rituals intended to nurture the flame are remade to raise the "air." The only competing image of life and longevity not connected putatively to *bābi*, is Monsur's chapter on *maṇi* or the seed/sperm. In this latter chapter, Monsur declared that, "everyone knows that from the jewel [i.e., semen] life is prolonged" (মনি হন্তে আয়ু দীর্ঘ জানিও সকল).[46] It is possible that this replacement of the "vital flame" by the "seed" was enabled by notion of "divine illumination" or *nur* as a mediating principle. For Monsur wrote that, "capacity for eternal life comes from the jewel of divine illumination" (চির আয়ু কুওত নূর মনি হন্তে হএ).[47] Clearly he was equating the "seed" with the "divine light" and this might have led him to replace the "vital flame" with the "seed." However, at this stage, this replacement cannot be entirely explained and a fuller examination of the topic would lead us too far away from the issues at hand.

6. CONCEPTUALIZING LIFE

In order to get a sense of the true contours of the ways in which life and longevity practices were conceptualized in these Bengali Sufi texts, we must begin by clarifying the relationship between physiological elements and the primary elements they resemble. Most Islamic thinkers accept the four Aristotelian elements, viz. earth, water, fire and air, to be the fundamental building blocks of all physical realities in the sub-lunar world.[48] According to Ibn Sina, i.e., Avicenna, these four primary elements are also the only entities in the sub-lunar world that are life-less.[49] Yet, in our texts, the "stations" where life and death hang in balance are clearly identified with one or the other of these life-less elements, i.e., fire for the first station and air for the next.

It is worth remembering, however, that Ibn Sina's notion of life is quite distinctive from our notion of life. For him, everything in the sub-lunar world is alive, except the four fundamental elements. As Seyyed Hossein Nasr points

46 Sharif 1969: 187.
47 Sharif 1969: 187.
48 Only the Ikhwan hold that the four elements are also constitutive of the sub-lunar world. See Nasr 1993: 62.
49 Nasr 1993: 252.

out, for Ibn Sina and most Islamic cosmologists, all territorial events are "determined and ordered" by the "Intelligences and faculties of the World Soul".[50] The primary elements all remain inert or passive until the World Soul animates them to combine. Such combinations gradually produce rocks, plants, animals and eventually humans. Rocks, plants, animals and humans, all therefore are possessed of specific faculties of the World Soul.[51]

The *Joga Kalandara* conceptualized the relationship between the human soul and the World Soul through the language of *jīvātmā* (Individual Soul) and *paramātmā* (Supreme Soul) It stated that the body belonged to the *jīvātmā*, who was the "husband" (*svāmī*) or "householder" (*gṛhasvāmī*).[52] At another point, the *jīvātmā* was explicitly equated with the *ruh hayawāni*.[53] This latter entity is most likely identical to Ibn Sina's *al nafs al-hayawāniya*, the "Animal Soul," which is also responsible for the preservation of the integrity of the breath.[54] Later, however, it added that the *paramātmā* or Supreme Soul "is there with" the *jīvātmā*.[55] Adding slightly later that,

> *Jīvātmā, paramātmā* are two images
> Arise there as radiances comingle.
>
> জীবাত্তমা পরাত্তমা এই দুই মূরতি
> উদয় হইছে তথা জোতে মিলি জ্যোতি ।.[56]

Finally, the *Joga Kalandara* declared that,

> Water, fire, earth, air are four things
> Along with divine illumination five in the body
> Know that these five things have forty symptoms
> Mixing soul(s) with them makes it conscious.
>
> আব আতস খাক বাত চারি চিজ হএ
> নুরের সহিত পঞ্চ শরীর মধ্যএ ।
>
> এই পঞ্চ চিজ জান চল্লিশ লক্ষণ
> আরোহা মিশাই তারে করিতে চেতন ।a[57]

The Indic idea of *ātmā* and the Islamic ideas about *ruh* thus became braided together, but the overall thrust of Ibn Sina's distinction between a basic World Soul and a specific Animal Soul seems to have been preserved. As the identification of *ruh* and *ātmā* became stronger, however, a unified notion of an all

50 Nasr 1993: 280.
51 Nasr 1993: 250 f.
52 Sharif 1969: 101.
53 Sharif 1969: 103.
54 Nasr 1993: 249, 256 f.
55 Sharif 1969: 103.
56 Sharif 1969: 103.
57 Sharif 1969: 106.

pervasive World Soul became increasingly difficult to discern. Thus in Haji Muhammad's *Nurjāmāl*, an entire chapter was entitled *Ātmatattva* (Essence of *Ātmā*). The chapter commenced by declaring that,

> Soul has four names, four types
> Soul *nāthakī* sits in human bodies
> All the animals got Soul *hāmi*
> *Jirmi* is the name of the soul bequeathed to the earth
> *chaṅga* is the soul given to stones.
>
> আত্মার এ চারি নাম এ চারি প্রকার।
>
> রুহু নাথকী বৈসে মনুষ্য শরীরে
> রুহু হামি পাইল যথেক জানোয়ার।
>
> জির্মি নামে রুহু বকশিয়াছে ধরান্তরে
> ছঙ্গ নামে রুহু দিয়াছে পাথরেরে।[58]

Monsur's *Sirnāmā* also offered a very similar formulation. The chapter dealing with this, however, was titled *Ārohātattva* rather than *Ātmatattva*. The Arabic word *Ārohā* is the plural of the word *ruh*. Yet in Bengali texts, the word is often used to denote a singular entity. Thus, Monsur mentioned, for instance, that *ārohā* was simply the "Arabic name for *prāṇa*."[59] In any case, Monsur wrote that,

> Soul(s) have four names these four types
> …
> *Nāthakī* soul(s) sit(s) in the human body
> Words are spoken and the spoken understood
> *Chaṅga* is the soul sitting in animals and birds
> Cannot speak words for sure
> All the creatures that are contained in the family of animals and birds
> Insects and flies, etc., in the world
> *Jisimi* souls sit in all the plants and trees
> Grasses, creepers, etc., and fragrant good looking
> Souls named *nāsi* sit in all stones
> All the gems, pearls, etc., all the pieces and pebbles.
>
> আরোহর চারি নাম এ চারি প্রকার
>
> ...
>
> নাথকি আরোহা বৈসে মনিষ্য তনএ

58 Sharif 1969: 145.

59 Sharif 1969: 188.

বচন কহএ যথ কহিলে বুঝএ।

ছামি নামে পশু পক্ষী আত্তমা বৈসএ
কহিতে না পারে ফিরি বচন নিশ্চএ।

যত জীব ধরে পশু পক্ষী পরিবার
কীট পতঙ্গ আদি পৃথিম্বি মাঝার।

জিসিমি আরোহা বৈসে যথ বৃক্ষ তরু
তৃণ লতা আদি আর সুগন্ধ সুচারু।

নাসি নামে আরোহা বৈসে যথ পাথরএ মনি মুক্তা আদি যথ দানা কঙ্করএ।[60]

The general Islamicate notion of a World Soul and animal, vegetative and mineral souls developed in a way in the Bengali texts that it became increasingly difficult to see them as manifestations of a single unified World Soul. Instead, by the time Monsur wrote, the World Soul had come to resemble animistic notions. This happened particularly through the three-way equivalence that emerged between *ruh*, *ātmā* and eventually *prāṇa.*

This is particularly interesting since *prāṇa,* in the Indic context, is often described as the "vital breath." According to Kenneth Zysk, "(t)he cosmic wind was mankind's vital breath (*prāṇa*), the principal *manifestation* of a person's immortal soul".[61] But rendering it as an equivalent to *ruh* and *ātmā* clearly expanded its meaning. The term *ātmā*, as Anthony Cerulli has recently pointed out, usually stands for the "non-material self" and this is the sense in which the word appears most often in non-medical Sanskrit literature. Though it is equally noteworthy that the word also connotes the gross physical body in certain contexts, particularly in some classical ayurvedic texts.[62] By equating *ātmā* with *prāṇa* therefore, a notion of a non-material self began to resemble the "vital breath."

It is safe to assume that this elaboration of meaning from "vital breath" to non-material selfhood was enabled by the aforementioned association of the "Animal Soul" (*al nafs al-hayawāniya*) with the "Individual Soul" (*jīvātmā*). Since the former was held by classical authors such as Ibn Sina to be primarily responsible for the integrity of the breath, it became easier to conflate the two. Since Ibn Sina was clear that all breaths originate in a single breath and that what engenders that original breath is the *al nafs al-hayawāniya,* it was possible to gradually identify the cause and the effect.

A similar elaboration also took place with regard to the words for breath, air and the primary aerial element. *Bābi* and *vāyu*, not to mention other related words such as *bāi* and *pavana*, became so closely linked that they were almost

60 Sharif 1969: 188.
61 Zysk 1993: 198, italics mine.
62 Cerulli 2016: 66.

treated as being interchangeable words. Yet, these words originally had distinctive connotations. *Bābi*, strictly so called, was in fact one of the four primary elements of Islamic cosmologies. Whereas, by contrast, *vāyu* could mean a range of things, such as one of the Indic primary elements, one of the three ayurvedic humoral substances (*doṣa),* a particular ayurvedic physiological principle and even simply the wind. To complicate matters further, the word *prāṇa* can often designate either the "vital breath" itself or a particular sub-type of bodily wind.

My point behind drawing attention to these confusing equivalences is to argue that multiple equivalences that were posited in the Bengali Sufi works generated a certain degree of definitional flexibility that confounds a rigorously etymological or philological approach. Recently, Bruno Latour has revived the Egyptologist Jan Assmann's discussion of "moderate relativism" in the ancient polytheistic empires. Latour, following Assmann, points out that these polycultural and polyreligious polities allowed diverse groups to cohabit "without cutting each other's throats" by constantly positing rough equivalences. "What, you a Roman, call Jupiter, I, a Greek, call Zeus".[63] Such equivalences and the "moderate relativism" it engendered would be unsustainable if more rigorous or scrupulous translations were sought. I would argue something similar was at play in these Bengali texts, viz. a practically oriented "moderate relativism" where conceptual flexibility was valued more than precision in translation.

The conception of life that emerges within this context of "moderate relativism" is expectedly then, a somewhat plastic, rather than precise, concept. It recognized a gradation of types or modes of life through the increasing dismemberment of the unified idea of the World Soul into the idea of distinct types of souls. It also tended to connect life to heat, light and air. Of these, the latter especially, in its many and myriad forms as breath, breeze, wind, bodily air and non-material self, gradually grew in importance. Yet it never emerged as the sole or discrete figure of life.

7. MATERIAL METAPHORS

We have noticed above that despite the conceptual plasticity of "life," the actual longevity practices that were recommended did to some extent persist for a century or more. I will argue that what allowed and even sustained the persistence of these practices was not the underlying conceptual coherence but rather the practical legibility of the images and figures through which longevity practices were imagined.

63 Latour 2017: 404.

My argument is that images such as not letting a furnace go cold or a lamp burn out, or indeed, keeping a room well-aired, were all images sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Bengalis well understood. The doctrinal or lexical minutiae were perhaps not as important as the consistency of the images and their general legibility. By drawing attention to the historico-material culture in which metaphors became meaningful, I do not wish to claim that the metaphors were in themselves new or novel. Throughout the world and in the many different traditions to which our authors had access, no doubt images of forges, lamps, divers and so forth would be legion. We do, for instance, find the metaphor of the forge in some Vedic texts, just as the metaphor of the lamp appears in some South Indian inscriptions. What I want to emphasize is that people choose metaphors and do so, because certain figures or metaphors make more sense to them and their audiences than others. They prefer some that are legible to them and ignore others. This choice is shaped by the lived experience of the authors and their audiences. In Bengali oral traditions, for instance, there are frequent references to the "life-breath-bumblebee" (*prāṇa-bhramara*) as well as to the "life-breath-bird" (*prāṇa-pakśī*). Yet, none of our authors used these metaphors. The point I am trying to argue is that there is always more than one image or metaphor to choose from, and the choice authors make reflects what they and their audiences find more familiar. Therefore, even though the figures of a forge, a lamp or a diver may not be utterly novel, their appeal for our authors must be related to aspects of their lived experience of historico-material culture.

This, in my view, should also encourage us to take a closer look at the basis of these images. Why were these images chosen and why were they so easily legible? This is where a history of material culture can illuminate our path. In the *Joga Kalandara*, which, as I have already mentioned, is widely believed to be the oldest of the texts, we find, for instance, a fascinating reference to a smithy in connection to the furnaces that is absent in the later texts. Referring to the furnaces at the *nāsuta mokām*, the text stated that,

> As the fire lit in the smithy.
> কামার শালেত যেন অনল জ্বালন[64]

I would argue that this reference to a smithy was not accidental. Metal-working was a widespread and serious industry in Chittagong and it was this widespread material culture of metal-working that rendered the image of multiple, almost perpetually burning furnaces legible to the readers of these texts.

64 Sharif 1969: 101.

A component of this metal-working was connected to silver coinage. John Deyell has argued that the sixteenth century witnessed a great expansion in metal coinage in Bengal. This was engendered by the expansion of the Sultanate state and the growing maturity of the state system itself. It was eventually the silver coinage of the Bengal Sultanate that was adopted across South Asia.[65] Even more importantly, the Chittagong region, where all our authors and texts are based, was the entry point for Burmese and Yunnanese silver into South Asia proper. Even small kingdoms around the region, such as Kamta and Tripura, issued silver coinage, and the kingdom of Roshang itself issued coins, mainly from external trade, from Chittagong itself.[66] Moreover, the silver actually circulated in Burma, Thailand, Laos etc. as ingots known as "Shan Shell Money".[67] It was only molten down and worked into coins upon entering Chittagong and its neighboring regions. Metal-working and state systems thus went hand in hand in the region.

But coinage was far from being the only use to which molten silver was put. Silver inscription plates dating from the middle of the sixteenth century for instance have been found in Chittagong.[68] Metal images have also long been produced in the region. Particularly well-known are the large number of Bronze images of the Buddha found at Jhewari in Chittagong. These images long predate our authors and testify to the depth of the local metal-working tradition.[69] These metal images are particularly redolent with the comments made in the *Joga Kalandara* that,

> Golden doll looks like (?) body of fire
> Silver doll looks like (?) the shadow in a mirror.
>
> সোনার পুতলী মন আগুনের কায়া
> রূপার পুতলী মন দর্পণের ছায়া।[70]

If metal-working was connected to the political economy of Roshang, lighting lamps and keeping them burning was one of the most conspicuous acts of Islamic piety performed at shrines. The nineteenth-century observer and ethnographer James Wise mentioned the practice of lighting lamps at the Dargah of Pir Badr that stood at the center of Chittagong town. "On the walls of the cenotaph," Wise wrote,

> are ten niches for ten oil lamps, which are lighted every evening and burn all night. Pilgrims from all parts of Bengal visit the Dargah

65 Deyell 2011.
66 Deyell 2011.
67 Deyell 1994.
68 Kānunago 1988: 183, 187 f.
69 Huntington 1984: 190–92.
70 Sharif 1969: 106.

Figure 1: "An Experiment on a Bird in an Air Pump," By Joseph Wright of Derby. National Gallery, London, Public Domain.

> in fulfillment of vows, or to obtain the favor and intercession of the saint, while Hindu fishermen regard him with as much awe as the Muhammadans.[71]

Though the mosque lacks an inscription that would help date it firmly, on the basis of local traditions and its links to neighboring buildings, the edifice is usually dated to the fifteenth century.[72]

More intriguing than these images of furnaces and lamps are the images of "life" being extinguished or suffocated within a vessel through the exhaustion of air/ breath within. It is an image that almost calls to mind Joseph Wright's famous 1794 painting, "An Experiment on a Bird in an Air Pump" (Fig. 1).[73] It is easy to assume that the link between breath and life is so ubiquitous as to be "natural" or ahistorical. I would, however, argue that this seemingly self-evident image too was connected to a material culture within which it appeared

71 Wise 1883: 14 f.

72 Hasan 2007: 109 f. While the presence of this imposing structure and its institution of lighting lamps right in the heart of sixteenth-century Chittagong is useful supporting evidence for my argument, it is not absolutely essential. Even if this particular mosque does not date from our period, the practice of lighting lamps at shrines in the evening would have been fairly widely known.

73 On this painting see Raymo 2007.

obvious. Once again, the clues to such a reading, I will argue, are given in the *Joga Kalandara* itself.

The four lines just preceding the lines about the golden and silver dolls went thus:

> Clear crystal shines within
> Necklace of pearls that looks bright
> Pieces of gems shine within the crystal
> That is the ultimate knowledge known to sages.
>
> শুদ্ধ ফটিকের মধ্যে করে ঝলমল
> মুকুতার হার জিনি দেখিতে উঝল।
>
> শুদ্ধ ফটিকের মধ্যে মাণিক্যের কণা
> সেই যে পরম তত্ত্ব ভেদ মুনি জনা।[74]

I would argue that these references to crystals, gems and pearls are not at all accidental glosses. Rather they are the material basis that sustains and explains the images of breathing, breath-control and the exhaustion of breath. European travellers to Roshang, such as the Dutchman Walter van Schouten and the Portuguese Sebastian Manrique are awash with lavish descriptions of resplendent pearls and luscious gems at the Arakanese court. While unfortunately little information exists about the local pearl fishery of the Arakan/Chittagong region, we do know that a couple of small pearl fisheries still existed in the region by the end of the nineteenth century.[75] Also in existence was a much more robust and related industry of conch fishing.[76] Chittagong remained a major arena for the production of conch jewelry. This jewelry was in particularly high demand amongst the Buddhist population of Arakan. Interestingly, Muslim craftsmen of Chittagong monopolized the production of this jewelry.[77] The pearl and conch industries were connected, since both involved diving deep into the sea to recover their objects. This would naturally also mean having to hold one's breath for a fixed amount of time. In fact, once again the *Joga Kalandara* made a direct reference to diving, when it stated that,

> Diving into that pool all the time
> Keep your mind focused on meditation.
>
> সেই সরোবরে ডুব দিয়া সর্বক্ষণ
> ধেয়ানে ধেয়াই রহ নিযোজিয়া মন।[78]

74 Sharif 1969: 106.
75 O'Malley 1908: 119.
76 Milburn 1813: 1: 357.
77 Hornell 1914: 77.
78 Sharif 1969: 103.

These references to diving and meditating in the water, of finding pearls and gems, etc., were not merely accidental references. They reflected the material context of the times and rendered the images legible and meaningful. It is therefore not at all surprising that the images of pearls and gems found embedded in crystals were strung together to explain meditative practices that involved breath control. Arakan and its neighboring regions had long been known for its ruby, sapphire and jade mines. The threat of suffocation and the need to be able to hold one's breath in a mine or under water would be very similar and would make the image of life as something sustained by a fixed amount of air in a vessel immediately meaningful. Statements such as the following, I would argue, resonate on at least two levels:

> Upon arising from the depths you will receive the light.
>
> পাতালেথু উঠি জোত মিলিব তখন[79]

While the statement undoubtedly refers to the process of raising the biocosmic fire or energy vertically up the body's multiple stations, it cannot but also resonate with the experience of miners and divers coming up to the light and air from their respective downward journeys.

8. CONCLUSION

Unlike the texts studied by Speziale and Langermann, our Bengali Muslim texts do not focus much upon the materia medica for extending life. Their focus is closer to the "personal meditative practices, passed on from teacher to disciple, that employ breathing techniques and visualisations of various life channels in the body in combination with mantras and deity practices, all of which are meant to enhance the life-forces" which Barbara Gerke found amongst contemporary Tibetans in Darjeeling.[80]

The conceptual underpinnings of these meditative practices drew, however, upon multiple different traditions, vocabularies and agendas. I have argued that these multiple sources were connected to each other with an eye to flexibility and accommodation rather than strict translation and precision.

What allowed the "moderate relativism" engendered in this flexibility to function, however, was the clarity, consistency and legibility of the images employed. These images in turn relied on the material culture of the polity and society in which our authors were based. The main industries and acts of piety were therefore material resources from which illustrative metaphors were crafted. It was the backdrop of the shared material culture upon which the metaphors relied that made stabilized them.

79 Sharif 1969: 107.

80 Gerke 2012: 9.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I WOULD LIKE TO THANK Dagmar Wujastyk for her help, encouragement and patience. Without her this piece would certainly not have had any "life," leave alone a "long life." Manjita Mukharji's help was also crucial. Whatever inadequacies remain are of course mine and mine alone

REFERENCES

Bhattacharya, France (2003). "Un texte du Bengale médiéval: le yoga du kalandar Yoga-Kalandar)". In: *Bulletin de lEcole française dExtrême-Orient* 90.1, pp. 69–99. DOI: 10.3406/befeo.2003.3608.

Bouy, Christian (1994). *Les Natha-yogin et les Upanisads: étude d'histoire de la littérature hindoue*. Publications de l'Institut de civilisation indienne, Collège de France ; Série in-80 62. Paris: Boccard. ISBN: 2868030629.

Cerulli, Anthony (2016). "Body, Self and Embodiment in Sanskrit Classics of Ayurveda". In: *Refiguring the Body: Embodiment in South Asian Religions*. Ed. by Barbara A. Holdrege and Karen Pechilis. Albany, NY: SUNY Press. ISBN: 978-1-4384-6315-5.

Charney, Michael W. (2005). "Arakan, Min Yazagyi and the Portuguese: The Relationship between the Growth of Arakanese Imperial Power and the Portuguese Mercenaries on the Fringe of Mainland South East Asia, 1517–1617". In: *SOAS Bulletin of Burma Research* 3.2, pp. 974–1145. URL: https://www.soas.ac.uk/sbbr/editions/file64407.pdf (on 13 Feb. 2018). MA Thesis as submitted in 1993.

Cohen, Lawrence (1998). *No Aging in India. Alzheimer's, the Bad Family, and Other Modern Things*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press. ISBN: 9780585068800.

D'Hubert, Thibaut (2014). "Pirates, Poets and Merchants: Bengali Language and Literature in Seventeenth Century Mrauk-U". In: *Culture and Circulation: Literatures in Motion in Early Modern India*. Ed. by Thomas de Bruijn and Allison Busch. Brill's Indological Library. Leiden: Brill Academic Pub, pp. 47–74. ISBN: 9789004264472.

Deyell, John (1994). "The China Connection: Problems of Silver Supply in Medieval Bengal". In: *Money and the Market in India 1100-1700*. Ed. by Sanjay Subrahmanyam. Oxford in India Readings: Themes in Indian History. Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 112–36. ISBN: 0195633032.

— (2011). "Monetary and Financial Webs: The Regional and International Influence of Pre-Modern Bengali Coinage". In: *Pelagic Passageways: The Northern Bay of Bengal Before Colonialism*. Ed. by Rila Mukherjee. New Delhi: Primus Books, pp. 279–316. ISBN: 978-93-80607-20-7.

Ernst, Carl W. (2005). "Situating Sufism and Yoga". In: *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 15.01, pp. 15–43. DOI: 10.1017/s1356186304004675.

Galen, Stephan Egbert Arie van (2008). "Arakan and Bengal : The Rise and Decline of the Mrauk U Kingdom (burma) from the Fifteenth to the Seventeeth Century AD". PhD thesis. Leiden University. URL: http://hdl.handle.net/1887/12637 (on 18 Mar. 2018).

Gerke, Barbara (2012). *Long Lives and Untimely Deaths: Life-span Concepts and Longevity Practices among Tibetans in the Darjeeling Hills, India*. Leiden, Boston: Brill. ISBN: 9789004217034. DOI: 10.1163/9789004217485.

Hasan, Perween (2007). *Sultans and Mosques: The Early Muslim Architecture of Bangladesh*. London: I. B. Tauris & Co. ISBN: 9781845113810.

Hatley, Shaman (2007). "Mapping the Esoteric Body in the Islamic Yoga of Bengal". In: *History of Religions* 46.4, pp. 351–68. DOI: 10.1086/518813.

Hawley, John Stratton (2014). *Krishna, The Butter Thief (Princeton Legacy Library)*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. ISBN: 978-0691613413.

Hornell, James (1914). *The Sacred Chank of India. A Monograph of the Indian Conch (Turbinella Pyrum)*. Madras Fisheries Bureau Bulletin 7. Madras: Superintendent, Goverment Press. URL: https://archive.org/details/sacredchankofind00horn (on 17 Mar. 2018).

Huntington, Susan L. (1984). *The Pala-Sena Schools of Sculpture)*. Studies in South Asian Culture 10. Leiden: Brill. ISBN: 9789004068568.

Huq, Muhammad Enamul (1993). *Muhammad Enamul Huq Rachanabali*. Dhaka: Bangla Academy,

Irani, Ayesha A. (2016). "The Prophetic Principle of Light and Love:Nūr Muḥammadin Early Modern Bengali Literature". In: *History of Religions* 55.4, pp. 391–428. DOI: 10.1086/685571.

Kānunago, Sunīti Bhūshaṇa (1988). *A History of Chittagong: Vol. 1, Chittagong*. Chittagong: The Author.

Langermann, Y. Tzvi (2018). "The Chapter on Rasāyana (Medications for Rejuvenation) in Miʿrāj al-duʿāʾ, a Shiʿite Text from the 12th/18th Century". In: *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* 6.1-2, pp. 144–183. DOI: 10.1163/2212943x-00601010.

Latour, Bruno (2017). *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime*. New York: Polity Press. ISBN: 978-0745684345.

Leider, Jacques P. and Kyaw Minn Htin (2015). "King Maṅḥ Co Mvan's Exile in Bengal: Legend, History, and Context". In: *Journal of Burma Studies* 19.2, pp. 371–405. DOI: 10.1353/jbs.2015.0016.

Lorenzen, David and Adrian Munoz (2011). *Yogi Heroes and Poets: Histories and Legends of the Naths*. Albany: SUNY Press. ISBN: 978-1-4384-3891-7.

Mallik, Kalyani (1986). *Nāth Sampradayer Itihas, Darśan O Sadhan-pranali*. Calcutta: Calcutta University. URL: https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.300865 (on 18 Mar. 2018).

Mallinson, James and Mark Singleton (2017). *The Roots of Yoga*. Penguin Classics. London, etc.: Penguin. ISBN: 9780241253045.

Milburn, William (1813). *Oriental Commerce Containing a Geographical Description of the Principal POlaces in The East Indies, China, and Japan*. 2 vols. London: Black, Parry & Co. URL: https://archive.org/details/orientalcommerce01milb (on 17 Mar. 2018). V. 2 at https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.61192.

Nasr, Seyyed Hossein (1993). *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*. Albany: SUNY Press. ISBN: 9780791415160. URL: https://goo.gl/9rfjvw (on 18 Mar. 2018). First edition 1964. The URL refers to the 1978 revised edition (London: Thames and Hudson).

O'Malley, Lewis Sydney Steward (1908). *Chittagong*. Eastern Bengal District Gazetteers 9. Calcutta: The Bengal Secr. Book Depôt. URL: https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.228204 (on 18 Mar. 2018).

Raymo, Chet (May 13, 2007). *A Light in the Darkness*. Science Musings Blog. URL: http://www.sciencemusings.com/2007/05/light-in-darkness.html (on 24 Jan. 2018).

Roy, Asim (1970). "Islam in the Environment of Medieval Bengal (With Special Reference to the Bengali Sources". PhD thesis. Australian National University. URL: http://hdl.handle.net/1885/11231 (on 18 Mar. 2018).

Samuel, Geoffrey (2012). "Amitayus and the Development of Tantric Practices for Longevity and Health in Tibet". In: *Transformations and Transfer of Tantra in Asia and Beyond*. Ed. by Istevan Keul. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, pp. 263–86. ISBN: 9783110258103. URL: http://hdl.handle.net/10765/93891 (on 18 Mar. 2018).

Sena, Rāmakamala (1834). *A Dictionary in English and Bengalee Translated from Todd's Edition of Johnson's English Dictionary*. Vol. 1. 2 vols. Serampore: The Serampore Press. URL: https://archive.org/details/bub_gb_tXsxAQAAMAAJ (on 18 Mar. 2018).

Sharif, Ahmad, ed. (1969). *Banglar Sufi Sahitya: Alochana O Noykhani Grantha Sanbalita*. Dhaka: Dhaka. Samay Prakashan.

Speziale, Fabrizio (2006). "De zeven vrienden. Een Indo-Perzische verhandeling over alchemie". In: *Bronnen van kennis. Wetenschap, kunst en cultuur in de collectives van de Leidse Universiteitsbibliotheek*. Ed. by Paul Hoftijzer, Kasper van Ommen, Geert Warnar, and Jan Just Witkam. Leiden, pp. 23–31. URL: https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-00584966.

Stewart, Tony K. (2001). "In Search of Equivalence: Conceiving Muslim-Hindu Encounter through Translation Theory". In: *History of Religions* 40.3, pp. 260–87. DOI: 10.1086/463635.

Subrahmanyam, Sanjay (1993). "Quisling or Cross-cultural Broker? – Notes on the Life and Worlds of Dom Martinho De Alemão, Prince of Arakan". In: *Mare Liberum* 5, pp. 77–89. URL: http://www.cidehusdigital.uevora.pt/mare_liberum/volume-5/quisling-or-cross-cultural-broker-notes-on-the-life-and-worlds-of-dom-martinho-de-alemao-prince-of-arakan/ (on 18 Mar. 2018).

— (1997). "Slaves and Tyrants: Dutch Tribulations in Seventeenth-Century Mrauk-U". In: *Journal of Early Modern History* 1.3, pp. 201–53. DOI: 10.1163/157006597x00028.

Sultana, Razia (2017). *Nurnama*. Ed. by Sirajul Islam, Sajahan Miah, et al. URL: http://en.banglapedia.org/index.php?title=Nurnama (on 24 Nov. 2017).

White, David Gordon (1996). *The Alchemical Body: Siddha Traditions in Medieval India*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. ISBN: 0-226-89497-5.

Wise, James (1883). *Notes on the Races, Castes and Trades of Eastern Bengal*. London: Harrison & Sons. URL: https://books.google.ca/books/about/Notes_on_the_Races_Castes_and_Trades_of.html (on 18 Mar. 2018).

Wujastyk, Dagmar (2015). "On Perfecting the Body. Rasāyana in Sanskrit Medical Literature". In: *AION: Annali dell'Università degli Studi di Napoli "L'Orientale". Elisir Mercuriale e Immortalità. Cpitoli per una Storia dellÁlchimia nellÁntica Eurasia. A cura di Giacomella Orofino, Amneris Roselli e Antonella Sannino* XXXVII, pp. 55–77. ISSN: 11128-7209. URL: https://www.libraweb.net/articoli.php?chiave=201509901&rivista=99 (on 16 Aug. 2017).

— (2017). "Acts of Improvement: On the Use of Tonics and Elixirs in Sanskrit Medical and Alchemical Literature". In: *History of Science in South Asia* 5.2, pp. 1–36. URL: http://hssa-journal.org. In press.

Zysk, Kenneth G. (1993). "The Science of Respiration and the Doctrine of the Bodily Winds in Ancient India". In: *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 113.2, pp. 198–213. DOI: 10.2307/603025.

Please write to ⟨wujastyk@ualberta.ca⟩ to file bugs/problem reports, feature requests and to get involved.
The History of Science in South Asia • Department of History and Classics, 2–81 HM Tory Building, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB, T6G 2H4, Canada.