"When a Sufi tells about Krishna’s Doom: The Case of Kanhavat"


Abstract: This article focuses on the story of Krishna's doom as told in the little-studied Sufi work Kanhavat ‘The story of Krishna’ (1540), which is attributed to the Avadhi Sufi author Malik Muhammad Jayasa. The work itself is interesting to study how the Krishna story is retold, supposedly for Sufi purposes. The two final sections, two interrelated stories, give an intriguing take on the end of the Krishna. The first presents a contest of power between the Krishna and the legendary founder of the Natha yogis, Gorakhnath, the second a burlesque confrontation of Krishna with a false yogi, which leads to the apocalyptic ending where Krishna's whole tribe is wiped out and he dies by the hand of a low-caste hunter. Commonplace scholarly understanding rates this work as ‘syncretistic’. I seek to question whether that is warranted. I analyse how the author reworks these stories. Is he using what we now understand to be ‘Hindu’ elements (N@tha yogic and Krishna devotional) for Sufi propaganda purposes? I will argue that his telling of both stories is intended to be satirical and will question in how far this can be seen as a Sufi's sympathetic understanding of the ‘Hindu’ material.