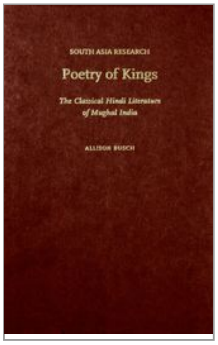

Poetry of Kings: The Classical Hindi Literature of Mughal India
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Introduction

A Forgetting of Things Past

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Abstract and Keywords

This chapter introduces *rīti* literature in Brajbhasha and outlines the premises of the book. One aim is to expose some of the fault lines in the historiography of premodern Hindi literature. One reason that Brajbhasha court literature has not attracted the kind of deep, sympathetic study it merits is because literary historians have been too quick to stamp the stigma of decadence on late precolonial traditions. The study of *rīti* literature has been trapped in stale paradigms of Mughal decline that have long been discredited in other disciplines. This chapter proposes a new approach to classical Hindi literature that recognizes the value of this early modern archive both as literature and for reconstructing elements of India's social, intellectual, and political history.

Keywords: rīti literature, Brajbhasha, historiography, court literature, Mughal, early modern

Rīti Literature and its Discontents

Imagine an English-literature classroom in which Milton was derided for retelling a story using the classical epic form. The remonstrating teacher would shake her head and scold the poet for imitating Virgil, dismiss his Latinate vocabulary and style as pure pedantry, and wonder why he did not derive his subject matter from personal observation, writing poems that expressed his inner feelings in the language of everyday speech. Or imagine reading a history of French literature that privileged fourteenth- and fifteenth-century hymnals or saints' lives, decrying great seventeenth-century playwrights like Corneille,

Racine, and Molière on the grounds that their work is inadequately spiritual, too elaborate and contrived in its classical allusions, and morally reprehensible because it is the product of a dissolute aristocratic milieu. Whereas these scenarios are scarcely possible to envision in the context of European literary history, it is an actual and alarming fact that Indian courtly literature from the same period exhibiting similar classicizing tendencies has been shunned by modern Hindi scholars. An astonishing number of discussions of classical Hindi literature, by which I mean the *rīti* (high-style) texts produced in Indian courts from the late sixteenth century until well into the nineteenth, center on the authors' distaste for it, or disapproval, and, most exasperating of all, their sense that it fails to live up to the standards of a literature composed in another **(p.4)** time and place—more often than not, given India's colonial legacy, Victorian England.

In his wonderfully sardonic essay "How Not to Write the History of Urdu Literature," Ralph Russell waxes autobiographical about his earliest encounters with Urdu literary historiography. The gist of his complaint closely mirrors my sentiments about the modern reception of classical Hindi literature:

> If you don't think much of Urdu literature, please don't go to the trouble of writing a history of it. You are under no obligation to do so, and it would be much better for all concerned if you spared yourself the labour and your readers the disappointment.[1]

Like Russell, I began the study of my subject with an acute bout of disappointment. As a graduate student with a keen interest in both Hindi and Sanskrit, I was excited to learn of the existence of a classical courtly Hindi literary tradition. I remember the dismay I felt when I began to learn more about it. No one, it seemed, could recommend the subject to a prospective researcher. The scholars to whom I turned, first in English and later in Hindi, proclaimed that *rīti* was a decadent literature. It was completely unnatural. It was mannered. It was derivative. It was shockingly sensual and thus morally suspect. It was, above all (or so the line of reasoning generally went), the product of a declining late-medieval culture. This decline was variously attributed to a generalized Indian cultural fatigue in the lead up to colonialism; feudal social conditions; the supposed depredations of Mughal rule, particularly from the time of the emperor Aurangzeb (r. 1658–1707); the weakening or even corruption of religious sentiments after the glorious *bhakti* (devotional) period had played itself out. The reasons varied somewhat, but the story was largely uniform: a tale of literary disaster.

It is difficult to forget my first impressions of Keshavdas (fl. 1600), Hindi literature's preeminent classicist, afforded by K. B. Jindal's *A History of Hindi Literature*, the first source I happened to consult. Sanskrit, the classical literature par excellence, provided a defining frame of reference for virtually all

early South Asian vernaculars,[2] and had become foundational to courtly Hindi literature in particular from the late sixteenth century. Here is how Jindal views this legacy:

> In vain one seeks for originality in Keshav[das]. We can always find Sanskrit parallels for Keshav's verses, while most of them are verbatim translations.... Fortunate for our language, the laws laid **(p.5)** down by Keshav were not followed in all particulars by his successors.... *Kavipriyā* is almost a vernacular rendering of Dandin's Sanskrit work *Kāvyādarś´a*.... Thirteen chapters are devoted to hairsplitting differences between the various figures of speech.... The average reader is baffled by the long list of qualities which should mark a good poem.... When Keshavdas can rid himself from the trammels of scholastic training, he can be very expressive.... Had Keshav had as much inspiration as he had brains, he would have ranked among the greatest. As it is, his poetry lacks that genuine religious glow which took Sur and Tulsi far beyond their contemporary.[3]

In the following chapters, a less judgmental reading of Keshavdas and other *rīti* poets, engaging seriously with their preference for classicism and trying to make sense of it for their literary world, will prove these statements to be false. But it is not a simple question of correcting a few inaccuracies in the scholarly record. If only such extremes of expository tactlessness could be dismissed as the cantankerousness of a single unsympathetic literary historian. Instead, Jindal's discussion of Keshavdas epitomizes a constellation of larger hermeneutic problems in the field of Hindi studies. Consider for a moment the judgment that Keshavdas lacks the “religious glow” of Tulsi and Sur. By what yardstick is a “religious glow” a necessary indicator of poetic achievement and, if it is, who established this measure, and when? Nobody would dispute that religious genres are an important component of the premodern Hindi canon, but this vast, and vastly interesting, canon encompasses far more than devotional songs. I share the frustration of an anonymous colleague at a conference on Keshavdas in India, who once quipped, “Why must discussions of Keshavdas always begin by apologizing for the fact that he is not Tulsi?” (Nobody seems to mind that Tulsidas, a revered *bhakti* poet, recycled classical materials himself.)

In the very same century in which Keshavdas (and Tulsi) mined Sanskrit poetry and literary theory for subject matter and stylistic protocols, French poets, too, returned to the classics and experimented with creating modern vernacular versions. It was quickly understood that vernacular writing need not be just a rustic idiom, a paltry substitute for Latin texts. Just as the North Indian poet Keshavdas felt emboldened to leave behind the Sanskrit of his forefathers to develop a beautifully, sophisticated form of Hindi writing, early modern French writers moved out from under the shadow of their own classical tradition and realized that its cultural dominance could now be challenged. Sophisticated

vernacular literatures became not only possible but also much acclaimed in courtly circles in both Europe and India. The point is not that the trajectories of French and classical Hindi literary history should be **(p.6)** unreflectingly assumed to be analogous, although tracing cross-regional parallels in the early modern period is instructive. But it is cause for consternation that whereas Corneille and Racine were and remain celebrated in the French literary canon, Keshavdas and his fellow *rīti* poets, once similarly celebrated, have become objects of routine denigration in modern Hindi literary criticism and historiography—examples of what went wrong with Indian culture, rather than what went right. It is unthinkable that European literary historians could subject seventeenth-century French poets to the treatment that Jindal and others have meted out to Keshavdas. A French department where new research on Racine or Corneille was not encouraged would be acknowledged as deficient; a library that possessed unpublished manuscripts of theirs and left them to molder would be denounced.

What are the peculiar historical conditions that enable one culture to despise and largely forget their literary heritage while others embrace theirs? This book is, in part, an exploration of this question but it is, more centrally, an act of memory. I seek to recover the story of *rīti* literature and to understand the vital cultural economy that gave rise to it. I want my readers to understand the rich aesthetic worlds of classical Hindi, as well as the vibrant scholarly lives and dynamic social histories of the poets who dignified the courts of early modern India with their literary achievements.

Introducing *Rīti* Literature in Brajbhasha

In the context of this book, the term “Hindi” does not signify the language of Khari Boli (current speech) that would much later be enshrined alongside English as one of independent India's two official languages. In the early modern period examined here, Hindi looked altogether different. Absent the standardizing imperatives of the modern nation-state, the linguistic terrain of old Hindi was populated by many dialects, and the poets who cultivated vernacular literature did not as a rule write the same language they spoke. Literature, particularly of the type composed in courtly settings, was considered a special arena of culture: it was formal, often tradition-bound, and could only be written in languages that, by a complex process, earned the dignity of being considered literary. *rīti* poets, regardless of their birthplace or native idiom, wrote their Hindi texts in a specific literary dialect today called Brajbhasha (language of Braj) or, more informally, Braj, which has a story of its own in need of telling.

Around the turn of the seventeenth century, a convenient if not absolute beginning point for *rīti* literature, Brajbhasha was a newly ascendant form of **(p. 7)** Hindi. The social and religious processes, however, that would give rise to both the literary language and its name had been underway for more than fifty

years. Communities of North Indian Vaishnavas (devotees of the god Vishnu) had been garnering a massive following throughout the sixteenth century, laying claim to the sites mythopoetically associated with the Braj region, the locus of the deeds of Vishnu in his Krishna avatar.[4] Master poets such as Surdas, as well as the extraordinarily successful Tulsidas (he attained more spectacular fame, however, for his *Rāmcaritmānas* in the Avadhi or eastern dialect of Hindi), crafted works of deep piety in a vernacular that had at the core of its literary *imaginaire* the childhood of Krishna, his boyhood antics amid the cowherds of Vrindavan, and his love games with the *gopī*s, the milkmaidens of Braj.

The religious developments that helped to underwrite Brajbhasha's rise to success coincided with a larger political process: the consolidation of Mughal rule during the long reign of Emperor Akbar (r. 1556–1605). Akbar's early capital at Fatehpur Sikri and the adjacent Mughal stronghold of Agra were situated near the sacred Hindu sites of Vrindavan and Mathura (often collectively labeled the Braj *maṇḍal* or cultural sphere), the locus of a burgeoning *bhakti* piety. Rajput rulers who had been recently incorporated into the Mughal imperial system, including one of Keshavdas's patrons, Bir Singh Deo Bundela of Orchha (r. 1605–27), were major sponsors of temples in the Braj *maṇḍal*, and Akbar's *farmān*s (imperial commands) on behalf of Vaishnava communities further augmented the cultural status of the region.[5] This conjuncture of Vaishnava fervor with Rajput and Mughal patronage of the Braj built environment helped to foster a new interest in the language of the place. Whatever its name may suggest about its origin in Hindu communities, however, Brajbhasha was from the beginning a highly versatile poetic idiom that appealed to many people: used by Vaishnavas as a vehicle for devotion, it was transformed —and, the historical record suggests, suddenly and with great éclat—into a major court language from Akbar's day. It was the literature produced in Brajbhasha and specifically in courtly environments that has come to be called, through a historiographical consensus forged only in the modern period, *rīti*.

While the terms Brajbhasha and *rīti* are not entirely satisfactory descriptors for North India's most important literary vernacular and the courtly texts that comprise a large volume of the language's heritage, we cannot get by without terminology. Premodern Hindi literature is complex and highly variable in both literary and social register; it has a vast, and vastly confusing, geographical domain in comparison to other Indian vernaculars. Moreover, nobody can particularly agree on what exactly Hindi is, when its literature began, and what its most salient features are. Uses of Hindi can be tracked from the northernmost reaches of Hindustan to the Deccan, from Gujarat to **(p.8)** Bengal, and each place Hindi went it was marked by regional touches, a fact reflected in the perplexing array of names that accrued to the language (if indeed it can be unproblematically seen as one language). Avadhi, Brajbhasha, Gujri, Rajasthani, Pingal, Dingal, Sadhukkari, Hindustani, Dihlavi, Purbi Zaban, Dakani and Rekhta are just a sampling of terms referring to some kind of proto-

Hindi (or the closely related proto-Urdu) literary culture, and attempting to understand what these names meant to all the people who used them over the last half millennium or more is a losing proposition.[6] If some poets saw their vernacular from a very local perspective, naming it after their town or region, others were completely unconcerned with labels, and when they did bother with naming they used only generic expressions such as Hindavi (Indian/Hindu) or simply Bhasha (the spoken language).[7]

Although widely used today, the actual terms “Brajbhasha” and “Braj” had surprisingly little currency before the modern period.[8] An early, if not the earliest, overt statement of classical Hindi's connection to the Braj region appears in a Persian text written by an Indo-Muslim enthusiast of Indian literature in the late seventeenth century. In his *Tuḥfat al-hind* (Gift of India, c. 1675), Mirza Khan defines what he calls Bhakha (i.e., Bhasha) as *zabān-i ahl-i birj* (the language of the people of Braj), and goes on to explain the Braj area's boundaries and proximity to Mathura with reasonable geographical accuracy.[9] While no one has been able to survey the thousands of extant Brajbhasha works still in manuscript, the term “Brajbhasha” itself does not seem to be attested before the late seventeenth century.[10] The language was instead widely designated by other terms. Mirza Khan's approximate contemporary Faqirullah, a high-ranking administrator under Aurangzeb, speaks of the literary vernacular of the day as the Language of Sudesha (the fine country), and his description maps well against the general territory of the Braj *maṇḍal*.[11] Also in circulation was Madhyadesh ki Boli (dialect of middle India), and its variant Madhyadeshiya.[12] Another well attested name is Gvaliyari or, as was the parlance in Persian circles, Zaban-i Gvaliyar (language of Gwalior).[13] How and when the specific term “Braj” gained currency is not entirely clear, but the word naturally suggests the agency of the Vaishnava communities who had been actively appropriating the religious cachet of the Braj *maṇḍal* since the sixteenth century.

Not wanting to get waylaid too long in this terminological thicket, let me state for the record that in this book I employ “Brajbhasha” because it has considerable salience for the classical literary culture it purports to describe, and because it is the name that stuck. It suffers from a definitional impairment that the Sanskrit tradition would call *avyāpti* (insufficiency of scope): many things are written in Brajbhasha that have nothing whatsoever to do with Braj, either geographically or conceptually; yet I see no reason to insist upon another name, **(p.9)** which would in any case be bound to have its own deficiencies. Still, let me at the same time register that the name Brajbhasha not only is somewhat anachronistic for this period but also reinforces the dominant Vaishnava orientation on the Hindi past that this book seeks to recalibrate. To conceptualize that past in terms of a specific domain of Hindu religiosity obscures far too much that was part of the corpus, for Hindi writers of the Mughal period operated in a religiously pluralistic landscape and served varying

clientele. Brajbhasha was extremely popular at the Mughal court, and an extensive network of itinerant poets connected the imperial centers of the day with diverse Rajput, Vaishnava, and mercantile communities. Brajbhasha is also the language of some of the poems that were beginning to anchor the Sikh religious community from the sixteenth century, eventually to coalesce in scriptural form as the Guru Granth Sahib.[14] Thus, maintaining some awareness of the religious and cultural diversity that a Hinducentric term like "Braj" masks is indispensible for historians of early modern Hindi texts.

Like the name Braj, the word *rīti* is attested only infrequently as a distinct literary category prior to the modern period, and one could adduce all kinds of objections to using a twentieth-century term for describing a pre-twentieth-century corpus. Despite its modern pedigree, the word is entirely appropriate for the courtly literary culture it has come to designate because it signals the *rīti* poets' fundamental interest in adapting older Sanskrit practices, particularly courtly genres, to the vernacular literary culture of their own day. One good translation of the term *rīti* ("going," from the Sanskrit root *ṛ*) is "method," as in the phrase, well attested in the writings of *rīti* poets, *kavitta kī rīti* (poetic method).[15] Questions of method were central to the community of vernacular court intellectuals that came into its own during the early modern period. While Vaishnava *bhakti* poets generally employed a less formal mode of writing, one well suited to the *bhajan* (devotional song) performance context and the intimate relationship with divinity they sought to express, the new courtly patronage milieu encouraged the development of an elevated form of vernacular language and textuality. Sanskrit had the prestige of centuries behind it, and its literary heritage was supremely well-equipped to provide appropriate models. The predominantly Brahman class of *rīti* authors assiduously took to writing treatises on topics from classical poetic theory, giving rise to a new Brajbhasha embodiment of the old Sanskrit discipline of *alaṅkāraśāstra* (rhetoric).

If there is one genre that epitomizes the principal literary and intellectual trends of *rīti* authors it is the Brajbhasha *rītigranth* (book of method). A *rītigranth* is basically a poetics manual in which the author both defines and illustrates the primary concepts from Sanskrit rhetoric, such as *rasa* (literary emotion), **(p.10)** *nāyikābheda* (catalogues of female characters) or *alaṅkāra* (figures of speech). Some *rīti* writers were principally interested in the method, while others cared more about the poetry; the most learned and versatile writers were astute at both theory and practice. These combined works of rhetoric and poetry, which have been known to bewilder modern readers for their melding of scholarly and literary features, became astoundingly popular in Hindustan from the seventeenth century. Evidence of extensive patronage can be found in Mughal contexts, in the Rajput courts of central and western India, and also, albeit more sporadically, as far south as the Deccan. In fact, as the patronage patterns of the *rītigranth* genre show, the circulatory sphere of this literary culture maps very well against the territorial aspirations of the Mughal Empire, for reasons that

will become clear over the course of this book (see map 2). Most kings of the day commissioned *rīti* literature. And throughout the early modern period the *rītigranth* in particular was the premier genre cultivated by Hindi court poets and intellectuals, though many writers served the needs of various patrons by diversifying their oeuvres with other offerings, including courtly epics, religious poetry, and historical ballads. Hundreds, if not thousands, of *rīti* works are extant, but scholarly understanding of these texts is in inverse proportion to their quantity, their quality, and their historical significance for the development of Hindi.

What Happened to *Rīti* Literature?

With the consolidation of British colonial rule, the production of *rīti* texts began to diminish. It did not cease overnight—important *rīti* works were produced in the Indian princely states well into the 1840s and even the so-called founder of *ādhunik* (modern) Hindi literature, Bharatendu Harishchandra (1850–85), wrote countless poems that could justifiably be termed *rīti*. But the nineteenth century witnessed far more disruptions than continuities. British civil servants in tandem with reform-minded Indians reengineered many features of North Indian linguistic, literary, and intellectual life. The standardizing of Indian languages, suddenly perceived as too chaotic; the spread of printing presses and new educational methods; and the promulgation of radically different ideas about the very point of literature, were just some of the cultural byproducts of the colonial political machinery. New themes and genres from modern European literature were transplanted into Indian soil. The traditional patronage networks that had supported Indian learning and belles lettres for centuries were also displaced, or radically reconfigured. *Rīti* works and the courtly institutions that had supported them became relics of the past.

(p.11) It is not just that *rīti* works one day ceased to be produced, however. Their death was orchestrated. From a colonial perspective, the Hindi literature of the late Mughal-period was made to play a central role in the myth of India's cultural decline and consequent need for the “civilizing influence” of colonial rule.[16] Later, during the early twentieth century, heartland intellectuals who were hard at work forging Hindi literature into a modern academic discipline drew upon nineteenth-century reformist logic in combination with newer currents in nationalist thought and radically transformed Hindi, seeking to shape a literary and scholarly agenda suitable for an aspiring nation. In the hands of Mahavir Prasad Dvivedi (1864–1938) and Ramchandra Shukla (1884–1941), among other founding fathers of Hindi studies, both the language and its literature were conscripted into the service of nation building, liberating India from the shackles of a *sāmantvādī* (feudal) past and the *patanonmukh* (decadent) literature that, it was now felt, characterized it. The new emphasis was on creating a socially useful literature for the people, with the result that Hindi's aristocratic literary heritage suddenly became suspect.

Many aspects of Indian culture came to bear the stigma of decadence by this period, but *rīti* literature fared particularly poorly under the new epistemological regimes of colonialism and nationalism. First, *rīti* literature stemmed from the by-now-reviled epoch immediately preceding the colonial era, and thus was inextricably associated with the supposed cultural weakness that had made India susceptible to colonization. Second, the subject matter of the literature no longer seemed relevant: chronicles of politically emasculated rajas and the trumped-up glories of their erstwhile kingdoms, erotically charged court poems, and poetics treatises that appeared to look backward in time to classical Sanskrit themes rather than forward to the needs of the nation. Third, change was everywhere in the air. New ideas were imported from the West, displacing the old, and writers began to embrace new aesthetic norms, eschewing the conventionality of classical Indian poetry in favor of the more naturalistic motifs that had been popularized by European Romanticism. In short, a constellation of factors led to a reevaluation of the Hindi literary past and an endorsement of new criteria for literary excellence that would help India to become both more modernized and more civilized.

The Persistence of Colonial-Period Paradigms

It is not in the least surprising that there should have been radical changes in the way Hindi literature was produced, consumed, and conceptualized during the colonial and nationalist periods, which were characterized by dramatic **(p. 12)** upheavals on many fronts. What is surprising is the unflagging endurance of colonial-period paradigms more than sixty years into political independence. That assertions about India's medieval decadence can still be made despite the rise of postcolonial scholarship with its healthy suspicion of the colonizers’ view of the world and an overall academic climate favorably disposed toward understanding India's cultural structures and knowledge formations on their own terms, suggests how necessary and timely it is to completely reassess everything to do with classical Hindi literature.[17]

One component of Hindi literary historiography that is prime for reconceptualization is the standard periodization, which has been entrenched for more than three-quarters of a century. Since the publication in 1929 of Ramchandra Shukla's *Hindī sāhitya kā itihās* (History of Hindi literature), the foundational work of modern Hindi literary history, it has been common to characterize the literature produced between the fourteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries as *madhyakālīn* (medieval). Typically, this period is further subdivided into an earlier *bhaktikāl* (era of devotion, 1318–1643), vaunted in Hindi literary histories as the high point of achievement for poets, and a later *rītikāl* (era of high style, 1643–1843), universally considered inferior. Even a superficial glance at this periodization should prompt the question of how a medieval era can extend all the way into the mid-nineteenth century, when the expiration date for anything that could reasonably be called “medieval” had long passed in the West, to say nothing of the increasingly compelling arguments that the years

1500 to 1800 mark, globally, the “early modern” epoch.[18] The idea that Hindi literature (like India) could only achieve modernity with the advent of the British is an unexamined relic of a colonial worldview rather than a sound classificatory principle for literature.[19]

Hindi literature of the Mughal period is not “medieval” either temporally or in terms of its ethos. Although *rīti* literature doubtless evinces a complex relationship to both Sanskrit classicism and newer cultural currents of the early modern world, uncritically importing that term from Western intellectual history has obstructed a rigorous investigation of the specificities of the Indian case. Another problematic component of Shukla's conceptualization of “medieval” Hindi is his bifurcation of *bhakti* and *rīti* literature. The idea is only nascent in Shukla's work, but a historiographical consensus grew out of it that religious literature of the *bhakti* era degenerated into a courtly style during the Mughal period. This is tantamount to conceptualizing Hindi literary history in terms of a long-outdated paradigm of late Mughal decline.[20] In recent years, the nature—and even the very idea—of India's eighteenth-century decline under the Mughals has been rethought.[21] A pivotal building block of imperial and nationalist historiography for far too long, this model continues to hold sway in **(p.13)** Hindi scholarship, with damaging consequences for our understanding of the period.

Another concern about the state of early modern Hindi literary study is the almost complete dearth of research on non-religious topics, particularly in the West. This may be because much of humanistic teaching and research about premodern India—at least in North America—has historically taken place in departments of religious studies instead of literature or history programs. A triennial international meeting in Europe known as “the *bhakti* conference” was for nearly twenty-five years the only regular scholarly gathering for premodern Hindi studies.[22] A substantial body of scholarship has now emerged on North Indian *bhakti* traditions, and an interested Western reader or college teacher can pick from among several good translations of canonical poets such as Kabir.[23] Other scholars have naturally turned their attention to the social registers of *bhakti*, a topic given immediacy by the astounding success of Dalit movements, the political mobilization of the historically oppressed groups once known as “untouchables” in the Hindu caste system, and consequently Dalit literature, in contemporary India.[24]

A less welcome consequence of the trends I am outlining is that the research on this period has been almost entirely skewed toward the history and sociology of religions. Very little has been written in a language other than Hindi on any of the classical *rīti* poets, let alone on any of the fundamental social, political, and intellectual questions that their literary culture prompts us to investigate. A surprising number of *rīti* texts remain unpublished—a conservative estimate is 30 percent—and most remain untranslated and thus completely inaccessible to

the non-Hindi-reading public.[25] The neglect of *rīti* literature may be partly explained in practical terms. *Rīti* is a learned idiom, and a more difficult corpus to master than its *bhakti* counterpart. It requires years of training in Sanskrit, Brajbhasha, and Indian literary theory, skills more easily acquired by Indian than Western scholars, who generally are only able to start their training in South Asian languages as adults. One fears, however, that Western scholars' startling lack of interest in Hindi court literature may stem from a more insidious bias that puts religious questions at the heart of any study of Indian premodernity, reinforcing a long-enduring Orientalist topos of India as "the spiritual East."[26] The tide has recently begun to turn, however, with several important new studies that engage the multiple cultural streams that fed the Hindi past.[27]

Although Hindi literary history written in India as a rule holds *rīti* literature in less esteem than its *bhakti* counterpart, at least Indian scholars have not ignored it. They have considerably improved the general state of knowledge about *rīti* poets and the courts they frequented. Many (but by no means all) **(p.14)** important works have been edited. Still, most scholarship on this corpus was produced in a flurry of activity in the decades immediately after India's independence; shockingly few significant studies have been published in the last thirty years. A few books continue to trickle out due to the painstaking efforts of Hindi professors at regional universities where Hindi monolingualism prevails, but it is difficult to divine in these publications much awareness of global trends in postcolonial research, much less the kinds of reconceptualization that this important archive merits.[28]

There is some justification for intellectual conservatism in Hindi studies. Whereas scholars working in English can be expected to know the major critical interventions that have transformed South Asian studies in recent decades, Hindi scholars in the regional cities and towns of north India do not necessarily have the facility in English, library resources, or travel opportunities to familiarize themselves in any significant way with Western research trends. There is an irony here that persistently troubles me. Indian scholars have been among the most significant contributors to the field of postcolonial studies, and yet the field is dominated by Indians writing in English, either in universities outside of India or in metropolitan India. Their findings do not easily reach the researchers working principally in the Hindi language,[29] who are naturally the authors of most works of scholarship in a specialized area of research like Brajbhasha literature. The field of Hindi in the West remains miniscule, and scholars there have perhaps not done enough to promote international collaboration with Indian colleagues.

Whereas most English scholarship long ago discarded notions of India's medieval "decline" and cultural "decadence," these remain foundational to current conceptualizations of Hindi court literature. The tyrannies of orientalism and nationalism may have been toppled in many disciplines, but they reign

unchecked in the study of precolonial Hindi literature, which risks asphyxiation in a stranglehold of clichés: Hindi scholars celebrate India's religious character through its *bhakti* literature; they see in *rīti* literature a reflection of "Hindu India's" late-medieval decline under Muslim rule; they implicitly sing the glories of the colonial state for bestowing upon India the novel and other facets of literary modernity. An extreme formulation of this problem would be to suggest that in the early twenty-first century, the voice of the postcolonial speaks in English, whereas the Orientalist voice is still alive, and speaking in Hindi.

Another troubling manifestation of critical disjunction is the production of postcolonial scholarship from squarely within a modernist framework. Pasts—not just presents—were created during the colonial period, and they must therefore be an important part of postcolonial reconstructions. Knowledge is **(p.15)** too easily carved up into the dichotomous categories of "modern" versus "premodern," and its practitioners are too often ignorant of debates on each other's side of the colonial divide. How can scholars claim to know that colonialism irrevocably changed traditional Indian ways of being, a fundamental tenet of postcolonial theory, if they fail to investigate, or adequately to theorize, what those "traditional ways" actually were?

One aim of this book is to investigate a set of traditional literary ways—that, upon closer scrutiny, prove to be not so much traditional as newly and deliberately created in response to early modern conditions—those of Indian courtly intellectuals writing in Brajbhasha from 1600 to 1850. I am predominantly concerned with how the cultural complex of *rīti* literature was invented and functioned prior to the nineteenth century, but of necessity I also discuss the ruptures that brought it to an end during the colonial era, and the history subsequently invented for it by the agents of those ruptures. This is the history in which the study of *rīti* literature remains trapped. The time has come to establish a fresh paradigm for understanding the courtly traditions of precolonial North India, one that does not prejudge them from the outset as failures.

Developing new approaches requires us to perform a critical reading of the narratives that have crystallized about Hindi literary history, but it also necessitates that we move beyond a critique of colonial epistemology toward historical reconstruction. This requires a sincere engagement with the literary and intellectual values of precolonial India. My study of *rīti* begins from a location of profound interest in and respect for classical Hindi writers. The animating premise is that the poets who constituted the tradition were not lost in a medieval fog; they acted with purposefulness and intelligence. Their poetry and scholarship were at once popular and prestigious in their own day, and it behooves modern literary and cultural historians to try to understand why. If we are to appreciate the world of *rīti* literary culture, we must attempt to see it from the point of view of the people who created it. And this means in some sense

leaving behind our very selves, or at least our own literary socialization, to experience another culture's ways of being literary.

Discomfort with Courtliness

Anachronism has loomed large in the reception of Indian literature. We need to be wary of unreflectively measuring premodern poetry in terms of the Romantic (and Protestant) cultural values imported to India in the colonial period.[30] Another form of socialization that merits greater self-awareness is a presentist discomfort with both courtliness and a high culture produced by **(p.16)** Brahman intellectuals. The last thirty years have witnessed a trend toward the study of history from below, as epitomized by the rise of subaltern studies and, more recently, the interest in Dalit archives. While recovering the voices of non-elites is an invaluable contribution to historiography and literary study, to which Hindi texts have much to add, is it possible for the pendulum to swing too far? In recent conversations with dozens of students and colleagues at Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi and the Indian Institute of Advanced Study in Shimla, I was struck that not a single researcher worked on Hindi's courtly past. Several people even felt the need to chide me for my choice of research topics. The spiritual supremacy of earlier *bhakti* literature and the moral degeneracy of its later *rīti* counterpart have been such unchallenged literary-historical presuppositions since the nationalist period that the only premodern texts apparently considered worth studying today are those of the *bhakti* tradition. It takes nothing away from the greatness of *bhakti* poetry to acknowledge that it has sometimes been uncritically romanticized as the great precursor to today's Dalit movements, the voice of freedom in a proto-democratic struggle against Brahmanical hegemony. Some (especially *nirguṇ*) *bhakti* communities were indeed outspoken opponents of the caste system, but there were also plenty of Brahman *bhakti* poets. In modern democratic India's climate of anti-casteism, what could be more retrograde—or so seemingly runs the logic—than to study the *rīti* literature of Brahman intellectuals produced in the courts of “feudal” India? According to the unrelenting orthodoxy of vulgar Marxism, it is as though even to study the literary production of the higher castes automatically marks one as a reactionary.[31] Granted, a full account of Indian history is impossible if we consider only the sources produced by and for the ruling powers, but we cannot have anything approaching a reasonable account without them. A literary history of India without Brahmans and courts is as absurd as a literary history of France that ignores aristocrats and Paris.

Still, in the modern world where democracy has emerged as the supreme form of polity, it has become more of a challenge to insist that courts need to be taken seriously as cultural institutions. Courts were the major political and cultural centers and the financial basis of much of premodern life the world over, but they carry a lot of baggage these days, perhaps nowhere more than in India, where there were just so many of them. Courts are now mostly dead as an institution, and this gives rise to a vexing historiographical problem. Ian Copland

in his work on Indian princes in the lead-up to independence has drawn attention to the teleology of failure that suffuses discussions of Indian courts in the modern period.[32] In a post-courtly world, it is not easy to find the right vocabulary and analytical models for discussing courts and court culture. Another problem is that monarchy is today considered direly **(p.17)** unmodern or, worse, extravagant and socially exploitative. Some of the very structures and associations built into the English language disclose a deep ambivalence about courtliness. A casual glance at any thesaurus reveals how courtliness is positively valued in terms such as politesse, civility, and elegance, but simultaneously conjures up an entirely different semantic range, whose synonyms include flattery, obsequiousness, and sycophancy.[33] A similar uneasiness surrounds the idea of luxury, which is arguably one of the defining attributes of courtly life. Whereas a few glosses, such as splendor, affluence, pleasure, and elegance, are positive, most are not only blatantly negative, but even outright judgmental: excessiveness, indulgence, self-indulgence, hedonism, sybaritism, immoderation, and intemperance.[34] Have Protestant values so permeated the modern English language that we cannot even speak of courtly splendor without dooming it to decadence and excess? Words are not, after all, mere words. They encode the very history and thought structures at the core of a culture.[35]

A similar, and similarly modern, discomfort often attends the very idea of Indian court poetry and the professional writers who produced it. Under nineteenth-century Romanticism, court poetry began to be stigmatized as too lavish and too slavish, too elaborate and too learned. The traditions of Brahmans, who wrote most of this poetry, have come to be synonymous with pedantry and rhetorical excess.[36] The very word “punditry,” which well-informed readers know to be derived from Sansrkit *paṇḍita* (scholar), in English carries the association not of intellectual achievement but of caviling. In a related vein, it is also too readily assumed that court poets were employed merely to flatter a king and to underwrite his political legitimation, which precludes any nuanced understanding of the complexities of court life.[37] In the course of this book, there will be many occasions to observe the varied roles that poets played in the knowledge economy of the Indian court. *Rīti* littérateurs could be, among other things, teachers, advisors, historians, political commentators, diplomats, and military men. They were essential not only to the literary culture, but also to the society of their day; that courtly modes of cultural behavior are obsolete today does not mean they were unimportant in their own era. On the contrary, understanding them is mandatory for anybody who wishes to be proficient in Indian cultural history. Given the sophistication of scholarship on the courtly texts of a comparable realm such as premodern East Asia, and the attention still lavished on the Confucian and Japanese classics by modern intellectual and literary historians,[38] one feels a bit silly needing to spell these matters out for India, but court culture remains so underdeveloped a domain of Indian historical

and literary study, particularly in the field of Hindi, that one is in fact driven to the brink of silliness.[39]

Organization of the Book

(p.18) A natural entry point into the world of *rīti* literature is the time and place where it began, with Keshavdas Mishra at the court of Orchha toward the end of the sixteenth century. Although traces of practices that could justifiably be called *rīti* are found slightly earlier, a particularly compelling case can be made for Keshavdas as the first *rīti* poet. His particular social history and the political history of the court that patronized him are helpful for gauging the kinds of innovations that mark the beginnings of *rīti* literary culture. Keshavdas's distant forefathers had been Sanskrit pandits at Gwalior, a thriving cultural and political center of pre-Mughal North India, before they relocated in the early sixteenth century to Orchha, a then-obscure polity emerging in the frontier zones of Bundelkhand (in what is today Madhya Pradesh). Although Keshavdas took up the same vocation of court pandit as his father, Kashinatha Mishra, he did something strikingly unconventional at the same time by abandoning Sanskrit as his primary medium of expression and declaring himself a Bhasha (vernacular) poet. Keshavdas was not the originator of the Braj *rītigranth*, but he was the most significant early exponent of the genre, writing two lengthy treatises on the subject of classical poetics as well as a shorter one on metrics, and in the process laying the foundations for a vernacular systematization of rhetoric that would be further developed by later generations of writers. He also dramatically expanded the expressive range of Braj literature, which in his day was largely limited to devotional songs and translations of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, a celebrated tenth-century Sanskrit scriptural work.

These significant shifts in language and literary practice were exactly contemporaneous with a major political shift: during Keshavdas's own lifetime, the kingdom of Orchha came under Mughal dominion. Although in general Keshavdas did not depart radically from classical literary models, his writing, particularly later in life, evinces fascinating traces of his exposure to the Mughal court. Chapter 1 provides an overview of Keshavdas's oeuvre and the political context in which he lived and worked, both of which are paradigmatic for *rīti* literature.

If an introduction to Keshavdas can be considered an introduction to *rīti* literature, it is still only a partial one. This literature is so little known to scholars, especially in comparison to the visual repertoires of Rajput painting and architecture, which were commissioned by the same courts and are to a large extent products of similar mentalities, political developments, and cultural processes, that I felt it essential to devote the following chapter to a survey of its genres and poetic sensibilities. *Rīti* was a hybrid tradition shared by multiple communities, and, though rooted in a larger pan-Indic system of courtly **(p.19)** literature, it also has distinct features that stem from its Vaishnava antecedents

and *rīti* poets' contact with the Persianate cultural order. The aim is to highlight some of the attractions of Brajbhasha poetry, which were so extraordinary that connoisseurs of various persuasions sought to partake of its beauty and cachet by patronizing scores of Braj poets across much of early modern Hindustan.

Chapters 3 through 5 are concerned with the intellectual, political, and social spaces in which *rīti* authors operated, with a special focus on the long seventeenth century. I examine the writings and career trajectories of representative authors with a view to documenting their literary orientations and worldviews. Like other court professionals of the period, poets moved between Mughal and regional courts. A few writers were associated with a specific court; others were part of a more diffuse patronage circuit, attracting the notice of multiple rulers, members of the local gentry, and merchant communities. All of this made for a widespread network of both texts and literary personnel.

Chapter 3 is more narrowly focused on questions pertinent to intellectual history: the *rīti* tradition as a new branch of vernacular scholarship. Not all *rīti* poets were literary theorists in the manner of Sanskrit greats like Dandin or Anandavardhana (from the seventh and ninth centuries, respectively), but most wrote at least one *rītigranth*. What I want to understand here is why this literary genre—by no means an obvious choice—became so prominent in the courtly circles of early modern India. Taking cues from *rīti* writers themselves, I also investigate what it meant to traverse the frontier between Sanskrit and Hindi in an era of vernacular self-determination. *Rītigranth*s fulfilled a variety of needs: they were modes of intellectual expression for the Sanskrit-trained but Braj-writing literati of the period; they were textbooks for aspiring poets as well as showcases for poetic creativity. *Rīti* authors also felt themselves to be continuing and to some extent renewing a venerated tradition of Sanskrit literary theory extending back a thousand years, by giving it a new vernacular impress that made sense amid the changed cultural conditions of Mughal India.

Chapter 4 turns to specific conditions at the Mughal court that were pivotal for the rise of *rīti* poetry and scholarship. Although today considered the self-evident patrimony of Hindus, Braj literature would never have attained the status it came to enjoy without the sponsorship of Mughal patrons. While the major court language of the Mughals was Persian, a surprising number of Braj musicians, poets, and poeticians worked at the court. The very idea of Hindus and Muslims broadly sharing a literary culture has come to seem unthinkable in modern South Asia, and thus a special value attaches to **(p.20)** learning about a cultural system where strikingly different conditions of pluralism obtained.

Chapter 5 shifts to the *rīti* tradition as cultivated in greater Hindustan, with a special focus on the adoption of these new cultural styles by Rajput courts. Although there was naturally some overlap between poets and genres in vogue

at Mughal and Rajput courts, the patronage extended by the latter was far more extensive, especially in the domain of Braj scholarship. As an emergent vernacular community striving for recognition in a courtly arena once dominated by Sanskrit writers, *rīti* poets felt a sense of kinship with their classical forebears, but they were also in dialogue with one another as they participated in the learned assemblies of their day. They often speak of themselves as constituting a *kavikul* (family of poets), and mapping out this social network teaches us about the literary culture of the period as well as the mentalities and aspirations of early modern intellectuals. We also stand to learn about the aesthetic and political programs of the Rajput patrons who underwrote so much of *rīti* literature.

The sixth chapter begins at the point where *rīti* literary culture came to an end under the profoundly transformative circumstances of colonialism. It traces how the widespread cultural changes effected by the British influenced conceptions of both the Hindi literary past and its desired future. I outline the processes by which "*bhakti*" and "*rīti*" were newly conceived as literary-historical categories, and how religious literature come to be placed on a pedestal while courtly styles, widely viewed as decadent, were newly cast as shameful, and even hateful, relics of the past. As evident from the citations of Jindal and other literary scholars noticed above, the tradition never recovered from its treatment at the hands of early nationalists, and this has had dire ramifications for the study of classical Hindi today. With the interpretive lens reoriented by the book's preceding chapters, I suggest some new ways forward in a brief conclusion.

Toward New Intellectual Formations of the Hindi Past

Although *rīti* literature has much to recommend it to the student of Indian poetry, whether or not I succeed in leading readers to share my deep appreciation for it is of less concern to me than that they come to learn something about it. Why is this material not better known? Why has everybody heard of Kabir and Mirabai, whereas the name Keshavdas draws a blank? Literary preferences change. Canons change. Some literary trends are long-lived, others fall by the wayside. These are the ineluctable consequences of **(p. 21)** interpretive communities responding to the complexities of historical change. Modernity has begotten new world-literary genres like the novel that appear especially suited for expressing the needs of our times. I am of course not advocating anything as absurd as a return to the courtly styles of India's past. What I do aim to do, however, is to eliminate the huge amount of conceptual static that prohibits us from even tuning in to centuries of literary heritage. With modern Hindi scholarship so committed to the view that premodern courtly literature is inane and irrelevant, with the very study of this literature virtually nonexistent in the West and vanishing even in India itself, the ability to understand the world and work of a literary culture that was North India's glory before colonialism and nationalism destroyed it has been almost

completely foreclosed. This book aims to provide some critical tools that can help restore both scholarly balance and access.

Restoring access to more than two centuries of Hindi and its superb courtly culture is a project of interest to all those who care about Indian literature as well as those who would like to see the debates of postcolonialism engage more substantially with precolonialism. It also has the potential to open up new vistas on the social, intellectual, and even political history of the early modern period. Understanding the dynamics of secular modes of social formation, such as how courts functioned, or how literary and intellectual groups were constituted, is a useful complement to the scholarship that has already been done on *bhakti* religious movements. Modern types of cultural—particularly national—belonging are assumed, for instance, to have been enabled through the technology of print culture. But the evidence under consideration here—Brajbhasha poets were extremely self-aware about their literary identity, and some manuscripts circulated both rapidly and in astonishing numbers—suggests the necessity of bringing the precolonial evidence into dialogue with the findings of modern social science theory.[40]

Given that *rīti* literature was commissioned primarily by Rajput and Mughal courts, the field of early modern history also benefits from more attention to classical Hindi sources, which can considerably augment the range of what we know from Persian and European writers of the same period. Many questions of critical importance to the cultural history of this period are only beginning to be asked.[41] We need to move beyond the basic political and economic issues—the processes and personnel of state formation, catalogues of military conquests, the vicissitudes of extracting agrarian surplus, which have been the unstinting focus of Mughal historians for decades—to understand the conceptual underpinnings of early modern life. This requires knowing much more about the texts people read, modes of connoisseurship, and the aesthetic but also political valences of sponsoring particular types of literary **(p.22)** culture. We understand early modern India better the better we understand the social worlds and cultural choices of its inhabitants. *Rīti* writers were primarily poets, to be sure, but they also have something important to tell us about politics (such as Rajput-Mughal relationships), mentalities (what really mattered to these writers and why), and modes of social intercourse (such as courtly protocols and early modern inflections of multiculturalism).

The mixed patronage climate for classical Hindi literature is particularly stunning. *Rīti* poets were certainly concerned with transmitting Sanskrit poetry styles into Bhasha, a fact that is rightly stressed by Hindi scholars, but to focus solely on that would be to miss something important about their complex mission and literary identity. Mughal patronage was indubitably central to the development of the *rīti* tradition in its early days and, prior to the rise of Urdu in the eighteenth century, this literary culture always had a sizable contingent of

Indo-Muslim connoisseurs and poets. Courtly Brajbhasha served as a middle ground between Sanskrit and Persian and the Hindu and Muslim cultural sensibilities that they generally represented. And it was a hospitable ground that welcomed many from different worlds.

Let us now try to take ourselves back to a time when *rīti* poets were at the very center of North Indian literary life. We turn our looking glass toward the moment when *rīti* literature may be said to have begun, with the poet Keshavdas.

Notes:

(1.) Russell 1999: 39.

(2.) Pollock 2006: 283–329.

(3.) Jindal 1993: 143–47 (with spelling and punctuation lightly emended for the sake of clarity).

(4.) Vaudeville 1996: 47–71.

(5.) Entwistle 1987: 161; also see the references noted in Pauwels 2002: 239.

(6.) A useful review of this nomenclatural morass in quest of Urdu's literary beginnings is Faruqi 2003: 806–19.

(7.) Muslim authors in particular often called their vernacular “Hindavi.” For them the operative distinction was that the language was not Persian (or Arabic). The term “Bhasha,” for its part, generally highlights a contrastive relationship to Sanskrit.

(8.) Hariharnivas Dvivedi proposes that the term Brajbhasha may have come into currency during the seventeenth century due to the agency of Bengali Vaishnavas, who had developed their own poetic idiom, Brajbuli, imagined to be the speech of Krishna and Radha. Dvivedi 1955: 59–62.

(9.) *Tuḥfat al-hind*, p. 54.

(10.) See the two couplets excerpted in Kishorilal (1971: 473–74), one of which is also briefly referenced in chap 3, note 63.

(11.) For Faqirullah, the region of Sudesha includes Gwalior and Agra and is bordered by Mathura to the north, Etawah to the east, Orchha to the south, and Bhusawar and Bayanah to the west. *Tarjumah-i mānkutūhal va risālah-i rāgdarpan*, pp. 98–99.

(12.) The first is attested in the *Ardhkathānak* (Story of half a life, 1641), v. 7. On Madhyadeshiya, see Dvivedi 1955. Delvoye (1991: 158) raises related issues about how to name the literary language of this period.

(13.) The *rīti* poet Chintamani Tripathi praised the language of the Mathura *maṇḍal* and Gwalior in his *Kavikulkalptaru*, 4.6; 4.9 (a passage discussed briefly in chapter 3). The term Zaban-i Gvaliyar was used by the Persian poet Banvalidas to designate the language of the Braj poet Nanddas. McGregor 1984: 36 n. 92. The term Gwaliyari was apparently first used by Jaykirti in 1629. See Kishorilal 1971: 473 (citing Agarchand Nahta).

(14.) See Mann 2001: 5.

(15.) Some attestations of the term *rīti* were helpfully compiled by Sudhakar Pandey (1987: 21–22). As used by Brajbhasha poets, the term *rīti* is unrelated to the literary system of three *rīti*s or regionalized literary styles (Vaidarbha, Gauḍa, and Pāñcāla) articulated by the Sanskrit poetician Vamana (c. 800).

(16.) Many other venerable literary traditions, including those of Urdu, Bengali, and Telugu, endured a similar fate.

(17.) Some foundational critiques of colonial knowledge formations and their interactions with local systems include Said 1978; Inden 1992; Breckenridge and van der Veer 1993; Chatterjee 1993b; Cohn 1996. One recent study of early modern South Asian intellectual history that takes its cues from the traditions themselves is Pollock 2011.

(18.) The deferment of modernity until the nineteenth century is part of a broader trend in Indian literary history. For the case of Bengali, see Seely 2004: 3. On reconceptualizing the period from 1500 to 1800 as “early modern,” see Richards 1997 and Subrahmanyam 1998.

(19.) The perception that Indians were static inhabitants of a culturally depleted medieval realm (a depletion often blamed on Muslim rule) prior to the arrival of the British is a staple of colonial and nationalist discourse. See Chatterjee 1993a: 92–115.

(20.) Typical is Ahmad 1972: 1–3. Early modern Hindi is not the only major literary tradition that has been stigmatized by the rhetoric of decline. On the general scholarly disdain for Arabic literature of the same period, see Toorawa 2008: 249–50.

(21.) Early interventions in the “decline” model were Bayly 1983; Alam 1986; Washbrook 1988. Also see Alam and Subrahmanyam 1998: 55–68; Alavi 2002; Brown 2003: 14–26; Marshall 2003.

(22.) This conference generated a regular series of publications. For some of the most recent ones, see McGregor 1992; Entwistle and Mallison 1994; Entwistle and Salomon 1999; Offredi 2002; Callewaert and Taillieu 2002; Horstmann 2006.

(23.) Select contributions to our understanding of Hindi *bhakti* literature from the point of view of scholars writing in English are McGregor 1973; Bryant 1978; Hess and Singh 1983; Hawley 1984, 2005, 2009; Hawley and Juergensmeyer 1988; Lutgendorf 1991; Snell 1991b; Callewaert and Friedlander 1992; Vaudeville 1993; Pauwels 1996 and 2002; Rosenstein 1997; Horstmann 2002; Dharwadker 2003.

(24.) An analysis of the social and political dimensions of premodern *bhakti* is Lorenzen 1995; for a Dalit perspective on Kabir, see Dharmvir 2008.

(25.) There are several translations of the couplets of the most famous *rīti* poet, Biharilal (Grierson 1896; Holland 1969; Bahadur 1990; Choudhary 2002; Snell, forthcoming). Bahadur has also translated the *Rasikpriyā* (1972) and parts of the *Rāmcandracandrikā* (also known as *Rāmacandrikā*) (1976) by Keshavdas; Ramanand Sharma and Harsha Dehejia have recently prepared an anthology, exquisitely illustrated, of verses by "forgotten" *rīti* poets, translated into both English and Modern Standard Hindi.

(26.) For a welcome critique of South Asia scholars' unreflecting tendency to link much of premodern Indian cultural history to religious currents, without considering the role played by courts and political formations, see Pollock 1998: 29–31.

(27.) Articles by Bahl (1974) and Schokker (1983) on the *Rasikpriyā* made some inroads into our understanding of Keshavdas, but both pieces were intended as preludes to more in-depth studies that never materialized. More recent work on *rīti* literature by Rupert Snell (1991b, 1994b, forthcoming), Imre Bangha (1999, 2000, 2005), Heidi Pauwels (2005), Stefania Cavaliere (2010a), and Sandhya Sharma (2011) are welcome indications of a more balanced trend in Hindi scholarship, where non-*bhakti* literature is given its due. New research by early modern historians, such as Sreenivasan 2007 and Talbot 2009, is also increasing the range of scholarly questions being asked of the premodern Hindi corpus.

(28.) For a few exceptions, see chapter 6, n. 130.

(29.) For some indication of the differential prestige and gatekeeping factors pertinent to Hindi and English literary institutions in contemporary India, see Orsini 2002a: 82–85; Sadana 2007.

(30.) On Romanticism and the hermeneutics of Urdu literature, see Pritchett 1994: 127–83; for a discussion of "protestant presuppositions" in the reconstructing of India's cultural past, see Schopen 1991.

(31.) Thus, a recent discussion of John Stuart Mill claims that his "love of poetry and music and art also led him toward conservative thought. Aesthetes always bend to the right … To love old art is to honor old arrangements" (Gopnik 2008:

86). On the pitfalls of a literary history driven by identity politics, with a particular concern for how modern critics have tried to rescue Kabir from Brahmanical appropriation, see Agrawal 2009b.

(32.) Copland 1997: 13–14.

(33.) Rodale 1986: 237 (and this is only a partial list).

(34.) Ibid., 691.

(35.) Lakoff and Johnson 1980.

(36.) Cohn 1996: 51–53. Compare Bronner 2010: 9–13 on the generalized distaste for the complexities of classical Sanskrit poetry among Western readers.

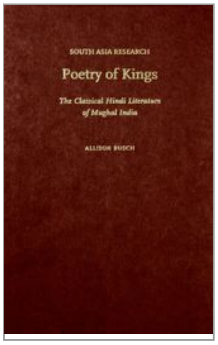
(37.) On the simplemindedness of such an approach, see Islam and Russell 1998: 5–7; Meisami 1987: 40–76.

(38.) A magisterial work of intellectual history by a historian of China who seriously engages a wealth of textual materials is Elman 2000; on *The Tale of Genji*, see Shirane 2008; a useful comparative study of European and East Asian court culture is Knechtges and Vance 2005.

(39.) Recent books by Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam (1992), Ali (2004), and Pollock (2006) epitomize the kind of sophisticated, fine-grained history that one can do by taking seriously the literary archives produced at premodern Indian courts.

(40.) Pauwels (2002, 296) examined the precolonial record and found the Andersonian model of print culture largely irrelevant. Dimock and Stewart (1999: 51–57) have stressed the mass circulation and standardization of the *Caitanyacaritāmṛta* in Gaudiya circles long before modernity. On Vallabhan community formation, see Barz 1976 and Shah 2004.

(41.) On the need to widen the net of inquiry in Mughal research, cf. Subrahmanyam 2001: 10; Aquil 2007: 2–10. This is not to say that scholarship on Mughal-period culture is entirely lacking. Some fields, like the visual arts and architecture, are relatively well served (eg., Beach 1992; Asher 1995a; Seyller 1999; Koch 2001). Important studies of Indian music as a domain of Mughal culture include Delvoye 1991 and Brown 2003. Persian literature of the period has been explored in Losensky 1998; Alam 2003: 159–86; Kinra 2008. Some advances in Mughal social history and in conceptualizing the cultural underpinnings of Mughal power include O'Hanlon 1999, 2007a; Alam and Subrahmanyam 2004; Lal 2005; Alam 2009. On Mughal engagements with specifically Hindi literary culture, see Phukan 2000 and 2001.



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Keshavdas of Orchha

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Abstract and Keywords

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the works of Keshavdas and the political context in which he lived and wrote, both of which are paradigmatic for *rīti* literature. The Bundelas of Orchha were forced to submit to Mughal authority during the reign of Madhukar Shah (1554-92), which occasioned a new concern with status and cultural patronage. The Bundelas' competition with other Rajput polities that had entered Mughal service became pronounced under King Bir Singh Deo (r. 1605-27), who was a famously generous patron of both literature and architecture. Keshavdas wrote eight major works over the course of his career. Several, including the *Rasikpriyā, Kavipriyā*, and *Rāmcandracandrikā*, are hailed as classics of the *rīti* tradition. This new turn towards classicism in Hindi literature can be linked to broader trends in Rajput and Mughal court culture.

Keywords: Keshavdas, Rasikpriyā, Kavipriyā, Ramcandracandrikā, Bundelas, Orchha, Madhukar Shah Bundela, Bir Singh Deo Bundela, Mughal Rajput

> In a family where even the servants did not know how to speak the vernacular, Keshavdas became a slow-witted Hindi poet.
>
> —*Kavipriyā*, 2.17

A Slow-Witted Hindi Poet

Nothing illustrates more powerfully the literary transformations that were underway in India around the turn of the seventeenth century than the words of

Keshavdas Mishra, whose career marks a decisive milestone in North Indian literary culture. When he introduces himself to his readers in chapter two of his *Kavipriyā* (Handbook for poets, 1601), the poet insists that even the servants in his family did not know how to speak Hindi—because, we are to infer, they spoke Sanskrit. His was a lineage of pandits, which made his linguistic defection all the more remarkable.

More precise details about the poet's family can be assembled from various clues sprinkled throughout his oeuvre. His distant ancestors Dinakara Mishra and Tribikrama Mishra had both earned the Sanskrit title *paṇḍitarāja* (king among scholars) from the Tomar kings, who were based in Delhi and later Gwalior; the poet's great-great grandfather Shiromani Mishra was an authority on the six canonical philosophical systems; more recently, his grandfather Krishnadatta Mishra had been employed by the founder of Orchha, King Rudrapratap (r. 1501–31), as a scholar of the *purāṇa*s (lore of **(p.24)** past times); Keshavdas's father, Kashinatha Mishra, was a master of the Sanskrit *śāstra*s (sciences) honored at the court of Rudrapratap's younger son, Madhukar Shah (r. 1554–92). This is a most distinguished family history.[1] Coloring Keshavdas's evident pride in his ancestors' Sanskrit prowess, however, is a sense of disquiet about not continuing the tradition. Hence his self-deprecating identification as a "slow-witted" Hindi poet.

Let us not take him too much at his word. Indeed, this chapter will prove Keshavdas's self-characterization to be entirely false. The poet's posture of literary infirmity, one much resorted to by vernacular writers, highlights the anxiety that attended early vernacular literacy.[2] Central to Keshavdas's couplet, and a salient characteristic of the *rīti* tradition more broadly, is an awareness that abandoning Sanskrit in favor of Brajbhasha was a monumental step. As he carved out a path for elevated styles of courtly vernacular writing, the poet evidently felt the imposing grandeur of the Sanskrit past towering over him. And it has a way of casting a long shadow.

Sanskrit literature, nurtured by the luminaries of Indian courts since early in the first millennium, is one of the most brilliant and erudite traditions the world has ever seen. Alongside a formidable body of Sanskrit poetry evolved a complex field of rhetoric, widely known as *alaṅkāraśāstra*. In dozens of authoritative treatises, not to mention an entire subdiscipline of learned commentary, Sanskrit intellectuals had debated and dictated the protocols of literary expression for centuries, probing fundamental questions about the very purpose of literature. They developed powerful theories about aesthetic response and the mechanics of facilitating it through the careful manipulation of literary cues and compositional elements. Dozens of different figures of speech—termed *alaṅkāra*s or "ornaments"—had been theorized, which added layers to a highly cultivated metadiscourse on aesthetic experience. To be a court poet, or indeed any kind of poet, was to participate in this elaborate Sanskrit literary system. And no such

system existed for Hindi poetry. The very thought would have struck many as preposterous.

To be sure, Hindi poets of various types had been using the vernacular creatively long before Keshavdas wrote his first word. The mystical utterances of naths (spiritual seekers) and yogis had been on the lips of itinerant religious men for generations; narratives in early Hindi's signature *dohā-caupāī* meter had been cultivated by Sufi writers in the East and Jains in the West from the fourteenth century; odes in the *rāso* (martial ballad) style were being declaimed by Keshavdas's own contemporaries, the bards of Rajasthan; Hindi songs were performed in stunningly diverse communities and venues: by Sants (holy men), Jains, Vaishnavas, and Sufis, in informal gatherings, temples, *khānqāh*s (Sufi residential communities), and courts. Keshavdas was thus heir to a rich **(p.25)** array of expressive possibilities in Hindi, albeit more of it still in oral rather than in written form.

Cultural attitudes militating against formal vernacular *kāvya* (poetry) remained deeply entrenched, however, particularly in pandit communities.[3] From the perspective of one firmly rooted in a Sanskrit worldview, the movement between classical and vernacular languages was unidirectional, and that direction could only be downward. To be a vernacular writer was to exhibit both a linguistic and an intellectual failing. The hierarchies involved are implicit at the most basic lexical level. Vernaculars were by definition *apabhraṣṭa* (corrupted) languages, and their low status may be divined from the fact that they did not even merit their own names; they were often just called *bhāṣā* (language). The word *saṃskṛta* (i.e., Sanskrit), in contrast, denotes (and connotes) the height of dignity: it means “perfectly executed.” Sanskrit was also widely venerated as the *devavāṇī* or *suravāṇī* (language of the gods). How could a Hindi poet—particularly one of Keshavdas's Brahmanical background—feel anything other than diffidence in the face of a language that claimed for itself not only perfection but divine status?

And yet “slow-witted” Hindi writers did take up the challenge, adopting various stances toward the authority of their classical predecessors. In carving out a space for themselves within a literary arena historically dominated by Sanskrit, they usually needed to stake some kind of a claim for the validity of their less refined compositions. One defense of the vernacular—and one frequently mounted by *bhakti* writers—was to highlight the freshness of an idiom unencumbered by tradition. A popular verse attributed to Kabir (fl. 1450?) likens Hindi to a flowing stream, contrasting it with the stagnant well waters of Sanskrit.[4] As a weaver on the bottom rung of the social ladder whose opportunities for education would have been slight at best, Kabir could hardly have written in Sanskrit even if he had wanted to. More complicated is the choice—for it must be seen as a choice—of a Brahman poet such as Tulsidas, an early contemporary of Keshavdas who by all indications could have written in

Sanskrit.[5] Tulsidas instead pretends ignorance of the entire Sanskrit literary apparatus, wearing his putative inexpertness almost like a badge of honor:

> I am not a poet, I am not clever with words—
> I am completely devoid of artistry and knowledge.
> Words and meanings abound,
> and endless are the ornaments of speech.
> Multiple are the discourses on meter
> (*chanda prabandha aneka vidhānā*),
> **(p.26)** Endless are the categories of literary emotion
> (*bhāva bheda rasa bheda apārā*),
> Equally varied are the flaws (*doṣa*) and virtues (*guṇa*) of poetry.
> I lack even a modicum of poetic skill—
> I just write the truth, on the blank page before me.[6]

In this brief manifesto, in which Tulsidas employs an array of technical vocabulary from the domain of Sanskrit *alaṅkāraśāstra*, the poet asserts the primacy of innate expressive talent, which trumps the systematic training considered a *sine qua non* of participation in classical literary culture. Of course, one would not want to subject the venerable Tulsi to the indignity of having his principles of counter-aesthetics too closely scrutinized, for his claims to ignorance of the *śāstra*s are certainly spurious. Despite its avowed vernacular simplicity, his *Rāmcaritmānas* is a carefully crafted work informed by both the thematics and pragmatics of age-old literary systems.[7] But many *bhakti* poets such as Kabir and Tulsi presented themselves as rebels against classical literary norms. This insurrectionist stance was one common means of circumventing the Sanskrit shadow in the early modern era.

Keshavdas took another, historically highly consequential approach. Utterly belying his professions of slow-wittedness, he proved himself to be a vernacular poet with a very special set of skills—foremost among them, paradoxically, his deep knowledge of Sanskrit. Instead of rejecting Sanskrit literary authority, he embraced it fully by cultivating a new, self-consciously classicizing idiom of Hindi. By writing largely Sanskrit-based works in a highly complex—and spectacularly innovative—Brajbhasha style, he showed the world that the vernacular was a versatile, even elegant, literary medium and helped to set the stage for its acceptance as a major court language.

Bhakti Literature in the Braj *Maṇḍal*

In making the claim that Keshavdas is in an important sense the founder of the cultural phenomenon we now call *rīti* literature, it will be essential to highlight what he did and did not found, that is, where measurable newness exists, and where antecedents are in need of a footnote. The second half of this chapter is devoted to a discussion of Keshavdas's wide-ranging literary accomplishments, a necessary backdrop to which is an overview of the types of religious, political, and poetic cultures that he inherited. The first matter to consider is the dramatic

rise of Brajbhasha as a literary language in the preceding two generations. By the middle of the sixteenth century, a number of important Braj poets can be traced to the *bhakti* centers of Vrindavan and Mathura, all connected to new **(p. 27)** forms of Krishna worship that were coalescing in the region as part of an intense effort on the part of devout communities to reclaim Vaishnava heritage sites.[8] The Hindi dialect of the Braj region took on a special resonance for worshipers because it was imagined to have been spoken by god himself during his sojourns on earth as the Krishna avatar of Vishnu.

At a time when theological and formal literary texts were still largely being written in Sanskrit, pioneering authors such as Hit Harivamsh, Svami Haridas, Hariram Vyas, and Surdas were avidly composing beautiful devotional songs in a vernacular genre known as the *pad* (“foot” or verse). A wave of interest in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, a revered *bhakti* scripture originally composed in Sanskrit and a popular source for Krishnaite poetry, was also beginning to generate vernacular versions of its hallowed tales. Vaishnava poets memorialized Krishna's exploits in a variety of aesthetic moods, in some cases interweaving fervent religiosity with the motifs of Sanskrit *alaṅkāraśāstra*. They drew not only on the legends of Krishna as laid out in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, but also on classical traditions of *śṛṅgāra rasa* (aestheticized love) in both its *sambhoga* (love fulfilled) and *vipralambha* (frustrated love) forms. Particularly cherished was the theme of the *gopī*s’ (especially Radha's) passion for Krishna during his adolescence, and their *viraha*—intensely painful longing for him—after he departed from their village of Gokul to attend to his adult responsibilities in the city of Mathura.

Celebrating Krishna's deeds through the collective singing of *pad*s was a powerful medium of religious experience for various emergent Vaishnava communities, whether Gaudiyas, Vallabhans, Radhavallabhans, or Haridasis.[9] Temples sprang up across the region, sporting new architectural configurations that could accommodate this demand for congregational singing. In some cases —the most famous example being Surdas and the Vallabhans—the *pad*s of popular poets were appropriated into the liturgy of a devotional community, and stories were later invented to naturalize the association.[10] Precise biographical and historical details about many foundational religious figures and poets from Braj have for the most part been irretrievably obscured by a voluminous hagiographical tradition and competing sectarian claims. Still, it is beyond doubt that by the second half of the sixteenth century, Vaishnava impulses were transforming the aural and architectural landscape of Braj, giving voice and shape to an exciting new vernacular literary tradition.

The Braj efflorescence was not a product solely of the Braj *maṇḍal*, as the region encompassing Vrindavan and Mathura is known. Centers farther to the west in today's Rajasthan, like Fatehpur, where the most significant collection of early Braj *pad*s was inscribed in 1582,[11] and Galta, a Ramanandi center and spiritual

home of the nascent Dadupanth, were both attracting communities of worshipers and fostering the creation of new textual communities. It was in **(p. 28)** Galta at the turn of the seventeenth century that Nabhadas wrote his acclaimed *Bhaktamāl* (Garland of devotees), a celebrated text that memorialized the deeds of influential Vaishnavas and thus inspired others to become part of the movement.[12]

Developments in Bundelkhand to the east also played an important role in the crystallization of new forms of religious and literary expression. Aside from Keshavdas, the poets Kriparam and Hariram Vyas have been linked to Orchha. Little is definitively known about Kriparam, whose *Hittaraṅginī* (River of love) mentions the Betwa River, a tributary of the Yamuna that flows through the kingdom, the rationale for the entirely reasonable assumption that he was based there.[13] The *Hittaraṅginī*, if indeed it dates from 1541 as the chronogram that caps the work suggests, would be the earliest Braj *rītigranth*, anticipating some of the achievements of Keshavdas by a full fifty years, perhaps at the very same court.[14] Like the *Rasikpriyā*, discussed in detail below, the *Hittaraṅginī* is a treatise on the courtly topic of *nāyikābheda* with a distinctly Vaishnava ethos, a hybrid product of the earlier Sanskrit literary heritage and sixteenth-century religious fervor. Like so much about him, Kriparam's precise sectarian affiliations are unknown, but his repeated use of the word *hit* (love) both in his title and throughout the text evinces a sensibility that bears comparison (although not necessarily direct affiliation) with other specimens of early Vaishnava poetry, notably that of the Braj poet Hit Harivamsh (1502–52?), revered as the founder of the Radhavallabhan *sampradāy*.[15]

Also suggestively connected to Orchha is Hariram Vyas, a member of the first generation of settlers in Vrindavan and an early exponent of the *pad* genre. Although Vyas is held to have spent most of his life in Vrindavan, several sources link him to the Orchha ruler Madhukar Shah (r. 1554–92), who was himself a famous *bhakta*. As is so often the case with the foundational Brajbhasha *bhakti* poets, the evidence is not definitive, but three of Vyas's poems mention Madhukar Shah directly, and Vaishnava hagiographies from the seventeenth century confirm his association with the Bundela king.[16] The presumed patronage relationship here between a religious devotee and a king is also consistent with the court's apparent conversion to Vaishnavism around the middle of the sixteenth century.[17] Vyas wrote *pad*s in the manner of many early *bhakti* writers but he is probably the first to have written a Braj *Rāsapañcādhyāyī*, the five chapters of book ten of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* that recount the story of Krishna's round dance with the *gopī*s, a genre that was adopted by other Braj writers, including Nanddas (fl. 1570) and Bhupati (fl. 1687).[18] This keen interest in the vernacularization of Sanskrit source texts, albeit in this case generally religious ones, would surface later as a major concern of Keshavdas and other *rīti* poets.

(p.29) Here Come the Mughal Armies

If the cultural legacy of *bhakti* was a vital condition for the emergence of new literary styles during Keshavdas's long and distinguished career at the Orchha court, political factors were no less crucial. A reader familiar with central Indian geography may be wondering how an influential polity and a major literary tradition could just spring up out of the badlands of Bundelkhand in the sixteenth century. Although Keshavdas—ever the dutiful court poet—would trace the lineage of his patrons back to Rama, scion of the solar dynasty, as well as to more historically traceable kings like the Gahadavalas, Orchha was founded only in 1531, when Rudrapratap exploited the political instability of the late Lodi period for territorial gain and moved from the fortress of Garhkundar to establish a new capital on the banks of the Betwa River.[19]

Urgent political concerns put severe pressure on the next two generations of Orchha rulers. Rudrapratap died the year his capital was founded, and the succession passed to his elder son, Bharatichand (r. 1531–54). When Bharaticand died without an heir, it fell to Rudrapratap's younger son, Madhukar Shah, to maintain the family's hegemony in Bundelkhand. A major political threat came from the Sur dynasty, an upstart group of Afghan warlords. Sher Shah Sur had ousted no less than the Mughal Emperor Humayun in 1540, prompting his flight to Persia and a subsequent fifteen-year exile from India. Although successful in warding off Sher Shah's son Islam Shah, Orchha was again subject to attack during the reign of Akbar.[20] By the 1570s, the Bundela principality could not continue to hold its own.[21] Madhukar Shah capitulated to the superior Mughal forces in the manner of so many regional kings of the period: by agreeing to accept tributary status and inducting himself, his sons, and his troops into Mughal service.

This process coincides notably with the rise of Keshavdas as a poet, and the rise to courtly grandeur of the Brajbhasha literary tradition. As Mughal power took root, the regional rulers of central and western India did retain a restricted form of sovereignty, which, if almost indiscernible in the Persian historical record, can be traced in the cultural achievements, particularly the literary and visual records, of their own courts. Here is where Keshavdas comes crucially into the picture. He contributed immeasurably to the prestige of the Orchha house, serving in various capacities during the reign of Madhukar Shah and his sons. Keshavdas was a friend, advisor, and guru to the Orchha kings, but he was also a consummate poet and intellectual. He wrote a total of eight significant works on a wide range of subjects, many of which were completely unprecedented in the field of vernacular writing.[22] His extraordinary oeuvre gave voice at once to his own aspirations as a poet and scholar and to the cultural, **(p.30)** religious, and political aspirations of his patrons at a critical turning point in North Indian history.

The *Ratnabāvanī* (Fifty-two verses about Ratna), undated but generally considered Keshavdas's first work, is—entirely fittingly—a martial tale that centers on the Mughal takeover of Orchha. The hero of the story is Ratnasena Bundela, the fourth of Madhukar Shah's eight sons,[23] who valiantly leads the Orchha troops in a doomed battle against Akbar's army. Keshavdas is silent about the work's patron, but it does not strain credulity to suppose that it was commissioned by Madhukar Shah in the years when Orchha was first subject to Mughal incursions, during the late 1570s or early 1580s.

Although the precise date and patronage circumstances of the *Ratnabāvanī* are obscure, the text can be contextualized somewhat by its genre. It has strong affinities to the western Indian *rāso*, with the addition of unmistakable Vaishnava inflections. The work is written in *chappay*s (sextets), one of the favored meters of the *rāso* poets; its language is replete with the Prakrit-style archaisms that are consistent with the genre and in marked contrast to the more Sanskritized *kāvya* works that would characterize the poet's mature idiom. If the text's language is opaque in places, its message is crystal clear: Prince Ratnasena is a brave Kshatriya, and Vishnu is his stalwart champion. In a passage that mirrors, albeit with a surreal twist, Arjuna's encounter with Krishna on the eve of the *Mahābhārata* battle, a *svarūpa* (incarnation) of the god Rama disguised as a Brahman appears to the prince as he sets out to battle.[24] Promulgating exactly the opposite message of *niṣkāma karma* (selfless action) that is the hallmark of the *Bhagavadgītā*, Rama tries to convince Ratnasena to surrender, flee the battlefield, and save his skin, while summing up Orchha's pathetic plight in the face of the Mughal invasion in the following words:

> When the Pathan forces are upon you,
> who will stay by your side and fight?
> Listen, Ratnasena, son of Madhukar Shah,
> how will you avoid humiliation?[25]

These remarks prompt an intense debate between Rama and Ratnasena, a lively instance of the *saṃvād* (dialogue) style for which Keshavdas would become justly famous. Each of Rama's attempts to forestall Ratnasena's virtually certain death in battle is introduced by the Sanskrit phrase *vipra uvāca* (the Brahman said), further underscoring a connection with the exhortatory ambience of the *Gītā*, in which the term *uvāca* is similarly used to introduce dialogues of momentous import. The good Rajput, predictably, will have none of it, furnishing vehement rejoinders to the Brahman/Rama's self-preserving but pusillanimous rhetoric:

> **(p.31)** I am the son of Madhukar Shah, who uprooted his enemies,
> I am the brother of Ram Shah, crusher of armies.
> My valiant troops wipe out evil enemy kings on the battlefield.
> My battalion is fierce and able to destroy our foes.
> Lord Rama, the deity revered by our lineage, killed Ravana.
> Now his glories are sung in this world.

I am Ratnasena, junior prince of the [Orchha] clan—
why should I do what others do, and flee the battlefield?[26]

It turns out that god has just been testing Ratnasena. When he is satisfied with the prince's Kshatriya integrity, he rewards him by revealing his divine form. Again, intertextual resonances loom large, for who could read such a passage without recalling how Krishna famously revealed his *viśvarūpa* (universal form) to Arjuna in the eleventh chapter of the *Gītā*? Other deities from on high then magically appear and compose eulogies to the prince, saluting his brave resolve to fight. In the end, however, Rama's predictions all come true. Ratnasena's troops are indeed overwhelmed, and the young prince dies a heroic death in combat, his self-sacrifice prompting the admiration of even Emperor Akbar, who makes a cameo appearance at the end of the work.[27]

There is some uncertainty about how to interpret the *Ratnabāvanī*, especially its bearing on the history of Orchha-Mughal political relations.[28] Should the text be seen as a mouthpiece for the warlord ethos that characterized pre-Mughal Orchha, or is it a more complex commentary on the events that attended the court's transition to Mughal tributary status? The Persian sources do outline some details about the Orchha submission to the Mughals, often with an imperialist slant, but nowhere is Ratnasena's last stand mentioned.[29] Keshavdas, for his part, conveniently omits the fact that Ratnasena fought on the side of Akbar in the Bengal campaigns. He preferred to “improve on history” in his account of the Mughal invasion, stressing a single battle that showcases how the Bundelas admirably resisted the enemy instead of cravenly capitulating.[30]

Whatever we may say about Keshavdas's credentials as a historian, the *Ratnabāvanī* is a poignant celebration of Bundela valor even in the face of defeat, and in operationalizing the ethos of Kshatriya *dharma*, often called simply *pat* or *pati* (honor), it betokens the court's participation in an evolving system of pan-Rajput values, connecting it to other regional polities that were critically embroiled in Mughal power dynamics, such as the Kachhwahas of Amber and the Ranas of Mewar farther to the west. Keshavdas skillfully musters a range of literary resources to his political task: the militancy of the *rāso*; *bhakti*'s theology of intimacy and self-surrender; the epic grandeur of the **(p.32)** *Bhagavadgītā*. Even his first poem shows him to be a master at reworking classical themes and infusing them with the local perspectives for which a vernacular language like Brajbhasha was eminently suitable. Keshavdas's account of Ratnasena's putative heroism and lord Rama's avowed support must have had great resonance, and perhaps even provided some solace, for this newly defeated, and newly Vaishnavized, principality.

The Birth of Hindi Classicism

In the works to come, Keshavdas would not return to either this genre or the anti-Mughal political stance to which it gave voice.[31] The next phase of his

career, spanning the years 1591 to 1602, marks a strong departure, propelling the poet, and by extension the Brajbhasha literary tradition, in a more scholarly direction. Now Keshavdas would begin to exhibit his skills as a literary theorist and teacher, tasks to which his pandit background made him eminently well suited. It is in this period that he wrote his three *rītigranth*s, the *Rasikpriyā*, *Kavipriyā*, and *Chandmālā*, which together constitute the first comprehensive vernacular statement on classical aesthetics theory in North India. With these works, some of the defining features of *rīti* literature come into focus: a strong engagement with Sanskrit *śāstra* and a new stress on vernacular erudition in a courtly setting.

Raja Indrajit, the fifth son of Madhukar Shah, was Keshavdas's patron during this phase of his career. Indrajit, who maintained a court at Kachova, never achieved the political stature of his more famous brothers Ram Shah and Bir Singh Deo (on whom more below), but he did garner some prestige as an intellectual and seems wholeheartedly to have shared the scholarly proclivities of the poet he sponsored. Indrajit is known to the Braj tradition for his Bhasha commentaries on the great Sanskrit poet Bhartrihari, two of which survive. Like his famous court poet, the king fashioned works of Braj scholarship from a Sanskrit template; he also expressed himself in a high, Sanskritized register, which was certainly encouraged by the source text of his commentaries. Indrajit was also a poet, at least an occasional one. Even if he did not leave behind a major literary work, he has been credited with some verses under the *chāp*, or pen name, “Dhiraj Narind.”[32]

While Indrajit's learned expositions of Bhartrihari are of a secular bent, Keshavdas's scholarship reveals important ties to recent *bhakti* trends, particularly in the first of his *rītigranth*s, the *Rasikpriyā* (1591), a work of aesthetic theory loosely based on Rudrabhatta's Sanskrit *Śṛṅgāratilaka* (Ornament of passion, written in perhaps the eleventh century). Aesthetic theory was a staple of **(p.33)** courtly *kāvya* traditions in Sanskrit and a natural subject for this pioneering Braj poet to take up, but his rendition has a markedly different character because of its reverential stance toward Radha and Krishna. Although in brute chronological terms not the first Braj *rītigranth* (this distinction goes to the *Hittaraṅginī* of Kriparam), the *Rasikpriyā* is the most influential of the genre and serves as a good introduction to the concerns of *rīti* literary culture.

Several impulses compete in this work. The first is the desire to explicate principal ideas from Sanskrit literary theory: defining *rasa* and its corresponding emotional and physical states, the types of *nāyikā*s and *nāyaka*s (female and male characters), as well as the canonical aspects of love in union and love in separation. This emphasis on the essentials of poetry according to a Sanskrit-based literary model explains the general structure of *rītigranth*s. The works have the appearance of poetry textbooks, consisting primarily of two types of

verses: definitions and examples. The *lakṣaṇ* (definition) verses are carefully crafted *dohā*s (couplets) that encapsulate the most essential features of a given Sanskrit literary topic. But a scholarly exegesis of classical literary theory is only one focus. Interspersed with the definition verses are original poems (usually quatrains in either the *savaiyā* or the *kavitt* meter) that illustrate the theoretical propositions. Given the predilection of Braj poets for *bhakti* themes, most illustration verses—or *udāharaṇ*s as they are known in Hindi—feature episodes from the love story of Krishna and Radha.

This emphasis on at least ostensibly religious subject matter constituted a major departure from earlier Sanskrit tradition. The poems of Sanskrit *alaṅkāraśāstra* texts, tending to center on erotic themes, were as a rule peopled by more generic *nāyaka*s and *nāyikā*s and directed at courtly audiences. During the sixteenth century, however, a strain of new Vaishnava theology was forged in dialogue with ancient canons of aesthetic theory when Sanatana and Rupa Gosvāmin (fl. 1540) left the service of Husain Shah of Bengal (r. 1493–1518) to take up residence in the Braj *maṇḍal* (fewer than two hundred miles northwest of Orchha), contributing substantially to the development of Gaudiya scripture. Keshavdas may have had at least a passing knowledge of texts like Rupa Gosvāmin's *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* (Nectar-ocean of the devotional sentiment) or *Ujjvalanīlamaṇi* (Brilliant sapphire), which similarly applied the terminology of classical aesthetics to *bhakti* spirituality.[33] Whatever may be the case, *śṛṅgāra* or passion, long enshrined as the primary *rasa* in Sanskrit court literature, became associated with passionate yearning for god, and would now be frequently instantiated through the love story of Radha and Krishna. These new sixteenth-century developments in Vaishnava aesthetics contributed substantially to the development of the Braj *rītigranth* genre.

(p.34) A brief excerpt from the discussion of love in separation from chapter eight of Keshavdas's *Rasikpriyā* illustrates how the textual dispositions of scholasticism, passion, and devotion interplay. Keshavdas begins the chapter with a series of scholarly *lakṣaṇ*s that outline the general categories of this foundational literary motif:

> Definition of frustrated love
>
> When lovers are separated a particular emotion arises,
> which the master poets define as frustrated love.
> Four types of frustrated love have been clearly laid out.
> The first is a separation after love's initial infatuation (*pūrvānurāga*);
> other categories concern a sorrowful incident (*karuṇā*),
> when the lovers quarrel (*māna*),
> or a journey away from home (*pravāsa*).[34]

The definition verses in a *rītigranth* generally adapt ideas from Sanskrit sources, with the poet retaining the technical vocabulary, or some Braj adaptation of it that conforms to vernacular metrics. Often the poet signals, as Keshavdas does here with the phrase *baranata kabi siramaura* (the master poets define), his reliance on classical authorities. The operative principle is that each aspect of the literary topic needs to be treated with taxonomical and exegetical precision in keeping with the *śāstra*s. Accordingly, Keshavdas proceeds to discuss each of the subtypes of love in separation, beginning with the first adduced: *pūrvānurāga*. He defines the concept, following up with a poem that serves to explicate it further:

> Definition of a separation after love's initial infatuation
>
> Love arises in the couple after seeing each other's beauty. Then they feel pain when they cannot meet—this is what they call a separation subsequent to love's initial infatuation.
>
> > Example of Radha's hidden suffering after love's initial infatuation
> > Don’t show me flowers—without Hari they are oppressive thorns.
> > Take away the garland, it upsets me as though it were a snake.
> > Don’t fan me with fly-whisks or fans.
> > Keshav says, a fragrant breeze maddens me like a whirlwind.
> > Don’t apply sandal paste, it's akin to scorching my body.
> > I don’t want the vermilion powder, it's a fire to my limbs.
> > And don’t feed me any betel, friend—it's poison to me.[35]

(p.35) The last verse is the *udāharaṇ*, in which a *rīti* poet had greatest scope for creative expression. Here Keshavdas focuses on Radha's longing, leading the reader beyond a scholarly delineation of literary conventions to craft a poignant poem about the torments that separated lovers endure. This particular poem draws on the tradition of the *virahiṇī* (a woman separated from her lover), a *nāyikā* found in the repertoire of religious, courtly, and more popular poetry.[36] All the accoutrements of her toilette bring pain in the absence of her lover. Sandal paste, which is supposed to have cooling properties, burns with the heat of her lovelorn body. A breeze, instead of soothing her, has the perverse effect of fanning the flames of her passion. Much of the verse's imagery is generic, but the explicit mention of Radha and Hari (an epithet of Krishna) allows for a devotional interpretation. Is the *Rasikpriyā* an example of scholarship or erotic poetry or an invitation to religious experience? All three concerns are skillfully interwoven.

The very title of the work cleverly hints at these multiple uses. It literally means “dear to connoisseurs,” promising poetic delight. In Vaishnava contexts, the word *rasik* carries the extended meaning of not just connoisseur but devotee, allowing the same compound to be interpreted in the sense of “cherished by devotees.”[37] To add yet another rich layer of signification, *rasik* is a synonym for

Krishna and *priyā* (with the feminine long-*ā* ending) would then mean his "beloved" Radha. From this angle, the work presents itself as a Vaishnava meditation upon god and his lover.

Keshavdas does not insist that we commit to a single interpretation. Indeed, many passages in the *Rasikpriyā* skillfully merge the terminology of classical aesthetics with the idiom of spiritual practice. In his opening address to his readers (whom he calls "*rasika*s"), the poet presents Krishna as the deity whose salvific activities span all nine *rasa*s and establishes him as the underlying foundation of all aesthetic experience:

> When it came to the daughter of Vrishabhanu [i.e., Radha],
> he displayed his erotic mood (*śṛṅgāra*).
> When he stole the *gopī*s' clothes,
> he exemplified the comic sentiment (*hāsa*).
> When his mother bound him to the mortar,
> the sorrowful sentiment (*karuṇā*) was in evidence.
> When it came to the demon Keshi,
> he was unrelentingly fierce terrifying (*raudra*).
> When he killed the evil demon Vatsa,
> he was the embodiment of the heroic sentiment (*vīra*).
> **(p.36)** When he consumed the forest fire,
> it was fear (*bhaya*) that predominated.
> When he sucked the life out of the demoness Putana,
> he manifested the repugnant mood (*bībhatsa*).
> When he conjured up the hidden cows,
> Brahma was overcome with wonder (*adbhuta*).
> Krishna's heart is always in a state of quiescence (*śānta*).
> Keshavdas says, O *rasika*s, the lord of Braj
> embodies all nine rasas (*navarasamaya*)—
> worship him (*sevahu*) unceasingly in your hearts.[38]

This verse telescopically retells key incidents from the Krishna legend, using semantically charged language from both Sanskrit literary theory and the theology of devotion. Each of Krishna's exploits illustrates a classical *rasa*, while the imperative to worship the deity is a call for spiritual action.

A similar repurposing of aesthetics' terminology occurs in chapter three of the *Rasikpriyā*, which outlines the main subtypes of female lovers, the *svakīyā* and *parakīyā* (one's own wife and the wife of another, respectively).[39] The final verse, which simultaneously brings the section to a close and sets the stage for the next chapter, runs as follows:

> I, Keshavdas, have described the heroine of the world's hero.
> Now I will speak of their rapture in beholding each other.
> Listen to the different types, both secretive and out in the open.
> *Jaganāyaka kī nāyikā, baranī 'Kesavadāsa,'*
> *Tinake darsana-rasa kahauṃ, sunau prachanna prakāsa*.[40]

Here the poet's veneration of Radha as *jaganāyaka kī nāyikā* (“heroine of the world's hero”) playfully alludes to the majesty of the divine couple in the language of Sanskrit poetics. When he uses the term *darsana rasa* in the next line, quite apart from elucidating the technical subject under discussion, he subtly references the Hindu practice of *darśan*, a devotee's intimate engagement with an icon in a temple.

It will be clear that the *Rasikpriyā* is thoroughly imbued with the fervent Vaishnava spirituality that inspired many a Braj poet in the sixteenth century. What is new, however, is the text's sustained interest in the science of *kāvya*. Keshavdas was a scholar of literature and profoundly concerned with classificatory rigor in a way that sets his work apart from that of his predecessors.[41] He also saw himself as serving the needs of a new class of writers who, like the poet himself, were now choosing to express themselves in Braj instead of **(p.37)** Sanskrit. His mission is effectively conveyed in a valediction to his readers from the colophon:

> In this manner, Keshavdas has pronounced his opinions on success and failure in the expression of emotion in literature. May the community of poets (*kavikula*) correct him where he has erred. All vernacular poets would be lost (*bhāṣā-kabi sabai hīna*) without the *Rasikpriyā*, as lovers pine when days go by without a glimpse of the beloved.[42] If you have regard for the *Rasikpriyā*, both your passion and your wisdom will grow. You will come to know the ways of *rasa* (*rasarīti*). You will attain both worldly (*svārtha*) and spiritual (*paramārtha*) goals.[43]

Keshavdas here positions himself squarely within a nascent community of Bhasha poets and calls upon posterity to recognize the importance of his work. Posterity responded quickly. The *Rasikpriyā* became an instant classic among scholars, poets, and Krishna devotees. Countless manuscripts and several commentaries are still extant today in archives throughout India.[44] The work was also a popular subject for painters. In fact, the first known illustrated manuscript of the *Rasikpriyā*, executed in the intriguing style known to art historians as “popular Mughal,” has been dated to c. 1610–24, raising the possibility that it was commissioned during the poet's own lifetime. This important manuscript, fashioned in accordance with the vertically oriented Persian book format rather than the horizontally oriented Indic *pothī*, bears signs of contemporary Mughal painting styles (figure 1.1). By the 1630s, illustrated manuscripts of the *Rasikpriyā* were also being commissioned at major Rajput courts including Malwa, Amber, and Mewar (figure 2.2).[45] Before long, Keshavdas's classic Braj treatise on poetics became a must-have in the libraries of all self-respecting Rajput kings.

The Courtly Vernacular

Keshavdas's third work, the *Kavipriyā* (Handbook for poets, 1601), proved to be similarly influential. Written a full decade after the *Rasikpriyā*, it is in many respects a similar enterprise and the texts' parallels are heightened by analogous names and sixteen-chapter formats. Whereas his first *rītigranth* took up the subject of *rasa* theory, the second is devoted to the complementary subject of *alaṅkāra*s, or figures of speech. Another way of framing the distinction is to say that the *Rasikpriyā* emphasizes interpretation—a *rasika*'s or connoisseur's perspective—whereas the *Kavipriyā* is geared toward compositional principles—a poet's tools. The two works nonetheless share the fundamental objective **(p.38)**

(p.39) of making the literary values and systems of Sanskrit poetry accessible to a new community of vernacular literati. The *Kavipriyā* teaches poets how to infuse Brajbhasha with classical, and courtly, dignity by adopting and adapting the expressive functions of Sanskrit. The *Kavipriyā* hardly lacks the Radha-Krishna verses that were ubiquitous in the *Rasikpriyā*, but the tone noticeably shifts. The overall ambience of the work is far more worldly. A sense of the poet's intense engagement with court culture in particular comes across dramatically in the opening chapter on the *rājavaṃśa* (royal lineage). The *Rasikpriyā* contained only the briefest mention of anything to do with kings or kingship, even largely ignoring Raja Indrajit himself, the presumed patron of the work. In contrast, the *Kavipriyā* goes into lavish detail about Indrajit's family history, the story of the founding of Orchha, and contemporary affairs at court. Not content just to provide the usual eulogistic flourishes and plodding details of royal genealogy (King A begot King B, who begot King C, and so forth), the poet also gives a lengthy and vibrant account of contemporary courtly culture, typified by his description of six *pātura*s (courtesans) who brought musical and literary refinement to the assemblies hosted by Indrajit.

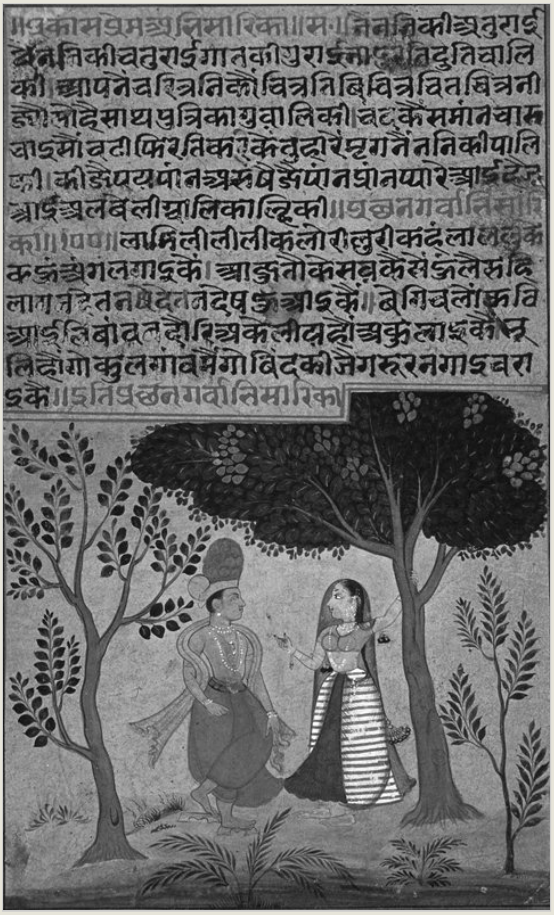


figure 1.1 Heroine who sets out to meet her lover out of pride (*garvābhisārikā nāyikā*), from a Popular Mughal manuscript of Keshavdas's *Rasikpriyā*, c. 1610–24.

Courtesy of Kanoria Collection © Asian Art Archives, University of Michigan

> Navrang Ray is adept in the arts of womanly comportment.
> Captivating like a swing, she constantly unsettles her lover's heart.
> Nayanbicitra has mastered the Bhairav and Gauri *rāg*s,
> and delights in sexual pleasure.
> She is as lustrous as the moon in Shiva's hair.[46]...
> Clever Tantarang has immersed herself in the ocean of *rāg*s,

becoming a veritable wave of melody.
Beholding the full-moon face of her lover,
the tide of her music expands.[47]
The fingers of Rang Ray are the epitome of expertise.
As soon as she touches the drum,
the room comes to life with sound.…
The experts have expounded every theoretical aspect (a*ṅga*) of music,
but Rangmurti reigns over them all,
embodying perfection in her dance poses.[48]
These courtesans are skilled in dancing, singing,
and playing the *bīn*.
They are all studious (*paṛhati saba*),
and the incomparable Pravin Ray even composes poetry.
Pravin Ray's *bīn* delights the hearts of sophisticated connoisseurs.
Rival lute players despair of their own talents, to say nothing of those less gifted.[49]

(p.40) This passage is filled with double and even triple entendres. Particularly virtuosic is Keshavdas's manipulation of the word *pravīna*, which he uses in the sense of both the proper name Pravin Ray and "rival lute [player]" (*para-bīna*).[50] The basic meaning of the word, however, is "skilled," underscoring the new emphasis in the *Kavipriyā* on courtly expertise and connoisseurship. Although little is known about the other women—the very preservation of their names is something of a feat in the androcentric annals of premodern history—Pravin Ray was a famous courtesan, a lover of the king, and a student of Keshavdas.[51]

While both the *Rasikpriyā* and the *Kavipriyā* are written in the textbook format that undergirds all *rītigranth*s, the latter in particular gives the impression that it was actually used for instruction. It was almost certainly used to teach Pravin Ray, for whom, according to the poet's explicit statement, the *Kavipriyā* was composed.[52] When he further elaborates the objective of his work—that "girls and boys" (*bālā-bālakani*) come to understand the depth of literary traditions (*pantha agādha*)—he goes out of his way to include a feminine noun instead of a generic masculine plural, as though he wanted especially to stress that girls were among the objects of his pedagogical concern.[53] He also exhibits a penchant for the vocative *pravīna*, which could mean just any intelligent person (thus being intended as a general address to his audience), but is in all likelihood a nod toward his charismatic female student. She seems to have learned her lessons well, for Keshavdas is manifestly proud of her accomplishments when he singles her out as a gifted poetess in his opening passage on the Orchha *rājavaṃśa*.[54]

The subsequent section of the *Kavipriyā*, which concludes the preamble, singles out another poet of the court: Keshavdas himself. Apart from proclaiming to the world his slow-wittedness in the now-famous verse that heads this chapter, this

section is devoted to Keshavdas's own *kavivaṃśa* (poet's lineage). A rare self-introduction by a Braj poet, albeit in places a cryptic one, it furnishes important clues about the circulation of court professionals in this period. In recording his family history, Keshavdas makes clear that his earliest ancestors were in the service of the Tomar kings, first in Delhi and later in Gwalior, but by the time of his grandfather Krishnadatta, mentioned above as a puranic scholar, their residence had shifted to Orchha. Since the poet provides no context for the sudden move, we have to read between the lines. The most likely scenario is that his family was displaced from their traditional service to the Tomars when Gwalior was conquered by Ibrahim Lodi in 1518. The court's pandits, musicians, architects, and literary figures are assumed to have dispersed to various locales, including Delhi, Agra, Orchha, and Rewa in Baghelkhand (the southeastern part of today's Madhya Pradesh).[55] Recall that Rudrapratap established his new court in Orchha in 1531, which would have required the recruitment of suitable personnel—ritual specialists, astrologers, **(p.41)** scholars, poets, and the like. In juxtaposing his own *kavivaṃśa* to the *rājavaṃśa* in chapter one, Keshavdas seems to suggest that his own story merited equal weight. His unusually sustained interest in recording his genealogy may also stem from the still-fresh memory of the violent historical events that had uprooted his family.

By the time Keshavdas was writing two generations later, Orchha was well on its way to becoming an important regional power and a major center of cultural innovation. The ability to compose sophisticated Braj poetry was soon to become a standard measure of connoisseurship and courtliness throughout greater Hindustan, to no small degree due to the proliferation of texts precisely like the *Kavipriyā*, which teaches mastery of this courtly craft. The work deals with the specific building blocks of poetry at the level of composing individual verses: basic rules of metrics, rhetorical tropes (similes, metaphors, and many other complex subtypes dreamed up by earlier Indian authors), poetic conventions, and—of never-ending concern to fledgling poets—*doṣa*s (flaws). Although the norm today is to think of poetry as an expression of one's inner feelings, traditional Indian *kāvya* operates according to a different logic. Poetry must follow well-established rules. Not to write by the rules is not to write poetry.

This principle is particularly well illustrated by Keshavdas's notion of a *sāmānya alaṅkāra* (conventional trope). The poet devotes four full chapters—a quarter of the book—to this topic, which is subdivided into sections about colors, the properties of objects, the natural world,[56] and the accoutrements of a court.[57] One might suppose that the color of an object or its characteristic property would be a simple matter of realistic representation, hardly requiring sustained reflection over entire chapters. Not so in this poetic universe. Certain principles must be followed when describing the outside world from a poet's perspective, as in the following learned discourses on “yellow” and “fleeting.”

An account of yellow (*atha pīta varṇana*)

[When writing poetry, some things are conventionally described as yellow yuga.] These include Vishnu's mount Garuda, Lord Brahma, Shiva's matted hair, Parvati,[58] turmeric, orpiment, *campaka* flowers, lamps, the heroic sentiment, Jupiter, honey, Indra, Mount Meru, the earth, mineral ointments, cow urine, *cakravāka* birds, the *dvāpara*, baby monkeys, lotus calixes, Vishnu's robes, saffron, auspicious gold, the face of a mynah bird, lightning, pollen, and brass.

(p.42) Example
Lord Brahma fashioned turmeric out of Parvati's fair-hued body
so they share the name *maṅgalī* (auspicious one).
He took the brightness of her body and created lightning that flashes,
singeing the clouds in the sky.
From her fragrance he created various ointments,
campaka and other flowers.
Slightly soiling her fair color with the hue of gold, he created the lotus calix.[59]

An account of fleeting (*atha cañcala varṇana*)

Cantering horses, a herd of deer, monkeys, the leaves of peepal trees, the hearts of greedy people, jackals, children, the passage of time, women of easy virtue, oblique sidelong glances, hearts, dreams, youth, fish, wagtail birds, bees, elephant ears, wealth, lightning, and the wind. (Pravin,[60] these are to be described as fleeting.)

Example
I don’t understand what you see in Krishna.
You stand there speechless, staring at him, that
pleasure palace of good looks and enchantment.
He is just a bee flitting about in the vines,
seeking the nectar of beautiful young women.
He's about as steady as a wagtail bird on land
or a fish in water.
He is a transient dream:
though you try to grasp him, he slips through your fingers.
Don’t be fooled by his words,
they yield nothing but bitter fruit.
He dazzles like lightning flashing through the sky.
His love lasts as long as the leaves on a pipal tree.[61]

One might suppose that following the rulebook must make for stilted poetry, but the rules just as often served as a generative force for creativity. Here Keshavdas has crafted a beautiful poem that highlights a *sakhī's* (girlfriend's) chiding of a vulnerable, lovelorn *gopī*. The theme is a universal one: love is dangerous, yet utterly irresistible to those in its thrall.

In some cultures, the literary consensus remained tacit. In India, however, the grounds of literary consensus were much more explicitly enunciated in the **(p. 43)** richly developed field of *alaṅkāraśāstra*. When Keshavdas undertook to write four chapters on *sāmānya alaṅkāra*s he did so because an elaborate system of conventions was recognized by the *kavikul*, the community of poets, and the *rasika*s who participated in literary culture. One of Keshavdas's more striking "conventional tropes," which occupies the whole of chapter eight, concerns the subject of *rājyaśrībhūṣaṇa-varṇana* (descriptions of the ornaments of royal luster)—in other words, how to write poetry about a court. Keshavdas shares the following tips:

> A poet should portray the ornaments of royal luster by describing the king, queens and princes, the priests, generals, messengers, ministers, and the advice they give. The launching of a campaign should be mentioned, along with the war horses, elephants, and unique battle feats. Recount the hunting expeditions, enjoying a swim, the winning of brides in marriage contests, the longing for an absent lover, and the joys of sexual union.[62]

With the taxonomical punctiliousness that would become the hallmark of *rīti* authors, Keshavdas develops the theme of courtly description at great length, diligently providing definition and illustration verses for each topic. Notably absent from this discussion, especially considering the historical specificity of chapters one and two of the *Kavipriyā (*in which a host of contemporaries and ancestors are named), are any details about Keshavdas's own court. He keeps the entire discussion in the abstract realm of classical poetic ideals. Indeed, the illustrative verses overwhelmingly feature the paradigmatic king Rama.

The concern with the paradigmatic makes good sense for a poet who is, after all, teaching a lesson in poetry composition. Still, in invoking the principles of *Rāmrājya*, or the utopian reign of King Rama, Keshavdas may have had in mind far more than a mere poetry lesson. No doubt he considered it his duty as a poet to instruct his charges and royal patron in kingly ethics. For centuries Sanskrit (and Persian) poetry had been deeply invested in the preservation of the moral and political order, an ethos amply evident in Braj courtly literature, as well.[63] Keshavdas's manifestly classicist approach to literary matters may have been operating on more than one level. As much as the poet's sāmānya alaṅkāras are an induction into the Sanskrit aesthetic universe, they also speak to the self-fashioning strategies of the Bundela kings, an arriviste clan that was starting to come into its own under Mughal rule. The Indian tradition produced no more potent symbol of political authority than *Rāmrājya*, making the adoption of this imagery into one's aesthetic program an obvious choice for kings, and their court poets. The erasure of contemporaneity in favor of the mythic may also have been a face-saving measure for a court that was still struggling with its loss of independence during the previous generation.

(p.44) *Rāmrājya* and *Rāmbhakti*

Keshavdas's third and least known *rītigranth*, the *Chandmālā* (Garland of prosody, 1602), rounds out the poet's interest in literary theory with a particularly avid focus on timeless *Rāmāyaṇa* themes. The short work, comprising just two chapters, covers the two basic metrical subdivisions of *vārṇik* and *mātrik* (in technical terms, the syllabic and moraic forms of prosody) in a series of definitions, illustrating each one with a verse, usually about Rama.[64] It is the first known treatise on Brajbhasha metrics.[65] Keshavdas attempted a systematic classification of the meters, dramatically expanding the repertoire of vernacular verse forms. Perhaps he wrote the work as a series of lectures for Indrajit, Pravin Ray, or another student. His educational mission is clearly stated in the opening: "I want all vernacular poets (*bhāṣākavi*) to be able to understand readily the complexities of metrics. That is why I wrote this beautiful book."[66] The *Chandmālā* is fully consistent with Keshavdas's overall mission to refine Brajbhasha so that vernacular poets would be able to speak as elegantly as their classical predecessors.

It has been proposed that the *Chandmālā* served as a companion work to Keshavdas's *Rāmcandracandrikā* (Moonlight on Ramacandra), a remarkable Braj *Rāmāyaṇa* completed during the previous year.[67] More than half of the *Chandmālā*'s example verses are taken verbatim from the epic. The *Rāmcandracandrikā*, for its part, evinces a profound interest in new metrical forms, strengthening the connection between the two texts. Whereas Tulsi's slightly earlier and more famous *Rāmcaritmānas* was composed predominantly in familiar *dohā*s and *caupaīs*, Keshavdas used meters that had never before been seen in Hindi literature (and some have never been seen since). In the introductory chapter the poet states his mission explicitly: "Using an abundance of meters, I will describe the moonlight of Lord Rama, whose constant radiance animates the world at will."[68]

The introduction to *Rāmcandracandrikā* contains further clues about the poet's approach to his subject matter. Valmiki, the famed author of the Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa*, appears to Keshavdas in a dream. When asked about the secret to happiness (*sukhasāra*), Valmiki instructs Keshavdas in the benefits of chanting Rama's name. The Braj poet then becomes a devotee of Rama (*karyo rāmacandrajū iṣṭa*) and is inspired to write his own vernacular *Rāmāyaṇa*. This episode seems to signal both a religious epiphany and a literary one. The events described also constitute an almost-classic topos of vernacular inauguration, with Keshavdas's Braj *Rāmāyaṇa* being authorized by the premier poet of the Sanskrit tradition. One *ādi kavi* (first poet) passes the baton to another.[69]

(p.45) Keshavdas shows himself to be fully worthy of Valmiki's charge. Already striking for its prosodic innovation—as was Valmiki's own *Rāmāyaṇa*, which artfully purported to invent versified language as such—the *Rāmcandracandrikā* is the work of a master poet able to manipulate *rasa*s and *alaṅkāra*s to beautiful

and sophisticated expressive effect. Keshavdas has taken a page out of his own *rītigranth*, so to speak, and here Brajbhasha literature is enriched with the fullest complement of Sanskrit aesthetics. The *Rāmcandracandrikā* can be considered the first major Braj experiment with the Sanskrit *mahākāvya* (courtly epic) style. There are certainly lively, action-packed scenes where Keshavdas moves the plot forward, but he also takes his time over the course of thirty-nine cantos, pausing to describe a forest or a moonrise in prodigious detail, or to linger lovingly over Rama's divine form in a *śikh-nakh* (head-to-toe description). This is *rasa*-filled poetry of supreme beauty.[70] It manages to be distinguished like Sanskrit while preserving the immediacy and vigor of a more colloquial style. Keshavdas ranges across different meters and registers, giving the work a rich texture characteristic of the greatest Sanskrit court poetry.

The *Rāmcandracandrikā* was something entirely unprecedented in Brajbhasha, and yet this text's newness is in harmony with the perspectives and themes of the poet's earlier *rītigranth*s. It is—and this seems the only correct term—a neoclassical work, which reflects Keshavdas's consummate scholarship and deliberate cultivation of a refined style based on Sanskrit models. Although the *Rāmcandracandrikā* is suffused with the exemplary royal themes that the Valmiki *Rāmāyaṇa* epitomizes, it is at the same time a powerful work of *bhakti* literature. Valmiki's instruction to Keshavdas that he worship Rama clearly did not go unheeded. Whatever personal inclinations the poet may have had, a directive from the work's probable patron Raja Indrajit, known to have been a devotee of Rama, was also no doubt an important factor in Keshavdas's choice of subject matter.[71] The realms of *kāvya* and *bhakti* are far from incompatible, as Keshavdas had already established in his *Rasikpriyā*.[72]

The *Rāmcandracandrikā* naturally invites comparison to Tulsi's *Rāmāyaṇa*, written in Avadhi (Eastern Hindi) nearly thirty years earlier, when Braj had not yet become the dominant literary language (Tulsi would himself show a preference for Brajbhasha later in his career). Whether or not the poets ever met, the Hindi literary tradition, which recorded various supposed conversations between the two famous authors, clearly feels they should have.[73] Although not necessarily documenting something that “really happened,” such *kiṃvadantiyāṃ* (folk legends), as they are called in Hindi, comprise a domain of cultural memory that evokes contestations within different vernacular literary spaces during this generation. While the two epics do have *bhakti* in common, their aesthetic profiles and intended audiences are distinct. Tulsidas hardly eschews **(p.46)** rhetorical finery in the manner that he claimed, but he is less interested in *kāvya* as art than in conveying a profound spiritual message to holy men and devotees. Keshavdas's rendition of the Rama story, in contrast, is foremost a literary enterprise intended for delectation by a king, albeit a devout one.

A New Kind of Politics

Keshavdas's next work, *Vīrsiṃhdevcarit* (Deeds of Bir Singh Deo,[74] 1607) is another monumental poem in the author's signature *mahākāvya* style. Here the poet exhibits extraordinary versatility, shifting from the timeless mytho-epic landscape to a new concern with aestheticizing contemporary kingly grandeur. The title of the work proclaims its affiliation with the genre of the courtly *carita*, an idealized biography of a king or other exemplary figure. In this case, the king was Keshavdas's new patron, and Orchha's new ruler, Bir Singh Deo Bundela.

The late sixteenth-century Mughal takeover of Orchha had catapulted the kingdom into a new constellation of political relationships. The Bundela rulers were henceforth exposed not only to the Mughals' Persianate ways but also to a transregional Rajput courtly culture that was evolving in dialogue with the Mughal imperial system. No longer a frontier outpost in the tribal lands of central India controlled by spurious Rajputs (as western Rajputs and, in later days, the British characterized them) or jungle robbers (as Badauni, the famously crotchety historian of Akbar's reign, viewed them), Orchha had begun to garner more recognition as a courtly center.[75]

After Madhukar Shah died in 1592, his eldest son Ram Shah was entitled to the throne in accordance with primogeniture, while the other brothers, such as Keshavdas's earlier patron Indrajit, were to maintain their apportioned estates. But Orchha's royal succession did not unfold according to an orderly plan. Bir Singh Deo, the sixth of Madhukar's eight sons, rebelled repeatedly against Ram Shah and Ram Shah's overlord, Emperor Akbar himself. When at the turn of the seventeenth century Prince Salim became estranged from his father, Akbar, he sparked his own rebellion of sorts, setting up a competing court in Allahabad. At this juncture, Bir Singh strategically threw in his lot with the younger generation, and he earned the future emperor's undying gratitude in 1602 for his assassination of Abu al-Fazl, a close friend and advisor of Akbar, and a powerful courtier who Prince Salim feared was a direct impediment to his political success. When Akbar died in 1605 and Salim acceded to the throne as Emperor Jahangir, he was now in a position to reward the Orchha rebel. Bir Singh effectively usurped the throne from his elder brother Ram Shah, not as an illegitimate jungle robber but with the backing of an imperial edict.

(p.47) Whereas Raja Madhukar Shah had resisted Mughal authority to the point of frequent insurrection, his son Bir Singh Deo Bundela became an active, and more reliable, player in the new *manṣabdārī* system, the now-dominant Mughal political and military regime of service to the emperor.[76] Having arrogated to himself the Orchha throne under unseemly circumstances, Bir Singh set about refurbishing his reputation in a variety of ways. In fashioning his royal self-image he drew upon the classical past, but his political aesthetic also included a judicious assemblage of new Vaishnava, Mughal, and pan-Rajput styles. His court maintained the interest in *bhakti* that had been cultivated under

his father. This reached its apogee in 1614, when the king embarked on a stately pilgrimage to the Braj *maṇḍal*, which he marked with great fanfare by the ancient kingly ritual (a practice also recently adopted by the Mughals) of distributing his weight in gold.[77] Known more as a builder than a *bhakta*, Bir Singh was far more ostentatious than Madhukar Shah, sponsoring major architectural projects at Orchha, the new city of Datiya that he founded, and further afield. His Keshavdev temple in Mathura was described by Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, a European visitor to the Mughal court in the next generation, as "one of the most sumptuous buildings in all India."[78] He was also heralded in other Mughal-period sources for his munificence at the site of the famous Vishveshvara temple in Banaras.[79]

Bhakti was both a spiritual and a political resource for many Rajput kings. Building monuments at home, such as the Chaturbhuj temple begun by Madhukar Shah and renovated by Bir Singh Deo, or the *samādhi* (memorial) erected by the latter to the *bhakti* poet Hariram Vyas in 1618, was an important public gesture of piety that served a local constituency; undertaking lavish architectural patronage in the Braj region was an active commitment to the idiom of empire, one completely new to the age (it was notably absent from the reign of Madhukar Shah). In building at Mathura, Bir Singh adopted a type of royal behavior consistent with expectations for elite officers in the Mughal *manṣabdārī* system as typified by Man Singh Kachhwaha, Akbar's leading Rajput ally. During this period, Rajput kings frequently sponsored architectural projects that gave visual shape to the imperial presence.[80] Akbar's commitment to religious pluralism meant that Hindu places of worship in the Braj *maṇḍal* were also supported by the Mughal state, as in the case of Man Singh's most famous building, the Govindadeva temple at Vrindavan (1590), which despite being a Hindu house of worship drew on the visual vocabulary of Akbar's recent constructions at Fatehpur Sikri, linking a Vaishnava monument to the very seat of power.[81] The Chaturbhuj temple at Orchha, to which Keshavdas devotes an entire canto in his *Vīrsiṃhdevcarit*, is in a related architectural style that shows awareness of Mughal registers (figure 1.2).[82] Vaishnava **(p.48)**

architecture, whether built on one's own territory or far away, was a statement not only about piety but also, and profoundly, about politics. Bir Singh Deo Bundela acclimated fully to the new expectations for *manṣabdār*s under Mughal rule, even, it has been suggested, usurping some of the considerable limelight that had accrued to the Kachhwaha dynasty of Amber under Man Singh.[83]

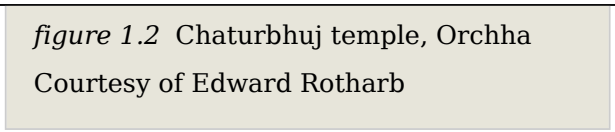


figure 1.2 Chaturbhuj temple, Orchha
Courtesy of Edward Rotharb

While the Orchha court of Bir Singh's day is relatively well known for its architectural contributions to the "topography of power,"[84] his reign also has a literary legacy. The *Vīrsiṃhdevcarit* that he commissioned from Keshavdas was an extraordinary literary assignment, executed at an extraordinary political moment. The date of the work closely coincides with Bir Singh's formal accession to the Orchha throne.[85] It is an elaborate literary, moral, and political argument about Bir Singh's fitness to rule, conceived at a time when this claim would have seemed most dubious to a contingent of his Bundela compatriots—and, as we occasionally detect in the narrative, to the poet himself.

Whatever his occasional misgivings about his subject matter, Keshavdas took to his writerly task with dedication, composing thirty-three cantos about his new patron in the type of *kāvya* style he had been honing to perfection in the *Rāmcandracandrikā*, while also drawing on a long tradition of *praśasti* (political poetry) from Sanskrit. The work is also one of the earliest examples of **(p.49)** Braj historical poems that can be traced to the Mughal period: roughly the first third comprises a fairly factual account of known historical events, with a special emphasis on the competition between Bir Singh and Ram Shah for the Orchha throne. That Keshavdas was actually a witness to much of what he describes is not in doubt. In several places he inserts himself into the narrative as a spectator and even as a political advisor.[86]

What immediately strikes a modern reader is that the reality of Orchha politics was far from consonant with the classical ideals of kingly literary representation that Keshavdas's genre required: his "hero" Bir Singh did not always behave so heroically, nor were the ostensible villains (his elder brother, Ram Shah, and Emperor Akbar) so unequivocally villainous. Whereas the *Rāmcandracandrikā* featured none other than Rama, the paragon of kingly behavior, it must have been considerably more challenging to transpose the treachery and bloodshed of recent Orchha history into the utopian domain of classical courtly *kāvya*. As though precisely to set the stage for making sense of this moral confusion, the poet's frame story features a *saṃvād* between the personified character traits of *Dāna* (Generosity) and *Lobha* (Greed). The dialogue foreshadows the impropriety of brotherly strife and the greed for political power, which become as recurring problems in the *Vīrsiṃhdevcarit* just as they had in the Bundela kingdom. These issues are first raised by Greed, and appropriately so:

> I am all confused upon hearing of this new kind of politics
> (*rājanīti yaha naī*)[87].
> One hears that a father may bear two sons,
> and both may grow to be law-abiding and dutiful.
> But I've never heard of a case where both sons can be king!

Explain to me what happened—who lost, and who emerged victorious?[88]

In writing of the struggles between Ram Shah and Bir Singh, Keshavdas is constantly forced to confront tensions between describing the imperfections of the political intrigues he observed and adhering to the idealizing modes demanded by the *carit* genre. The text is replete with telling inversions of *kāvya* ideals. Keshavdas's manipulation of traditional *Rāmāyaṇa* imagery is a case in point: instead of evoking the moral perfection and adulation of epic themes, it often creates a sense of dramatic irony.

Brotherly *sevā* (service) is one of the core moral concerns of Valmiki's epic, as when Lakshmana follows Rama to the forest, or Bharata adamantly refuses the Ayodhya throne upon hearing of his mother Kaikeyi's deception.[89] Keshavdas's rendering of the power struggle between Ram Shah and Bir Singh draws unmistakably upon the dramatic section of his *Rāmcandracandrikā* in which Bharata **(p.50)** meets his revered elder brother shortly upon the latter's exile. When Bharata goes to find Rama in the forest, he is accompanied by a full retinue, and Rama's party at first thinks that the younger prince has come with hostile intentions. In the classical *Rāmāyaṇa* story, the misconception is quickly cleared up. The brothers are happily, if briefly, reunited before Bharata agrees to act as Rama's regent and dutifully takes his elder brother's sandals with him back to Ayodhya as token of the rightful king's royal presence. This is where Keshavdas's *Vīrsiṃhdevcarit* diverges crucially from the epic, a narrative departure that would have been lost on no one hearing the text in Orchha. Keshavdas describes the younger brother Bir Singh approaching Ram Shah's palace in almost exactly the same terms as in the Bharata-Rama scene of the *Rāmcandracandrikā*.[90] But, in a complete inversion of the *Rāmāyaṇa* storyline, the junior Orchha prince incites war against his elder brother and succeeds in usurping the throne. For Keshavdas, classical literary modes were a powerful vehicle for processing contemporary historical events and measuring them against the sanctioned cultural models of the past. The parallels he draws throughout this scene between his own kings and Rama and Bharata (or, perhaps more accurately, the contrasts he highlights) serve as a telling comment on the power relations of his own day.

This problem of contemporary politics conflicting with lofty literary ideals is similarly pronounced when Keshavdas recounts Bir Singh's gruesome assassination of Abu al-Fazl, the eminent Mughal intellectual and adviser of Akbar. It is true that high *kāvya* norms prescribe a *nāyaka* who is a fearsome opponent on the battlefield. But in no *rītigranth* is it written that he should be an assassin. Keshavdas, ever the masterful writer and tactful courtier, handles this hitch in the real-life story through deft characterization and careful manipulation of the emotional tenor of the relevant scenes. In a prefatory dialogue, Bir Singh tries to dissuade Prince Salim from insisting on this rash and abhorrent

undertaking, allowing Keshavdas's hero to accrue some readerly goodwill.[91] When the inevitable murder scene takes place, the poet glosses over it as quickly as possible, and a string of eulogies divert attention away from the *nāyaka*, emphasizing Abu al-Fazl's noble demeanor, his bravery in battle, even his support for Brahmans—all terms of high praise in the classical literary imagination. This temporary moral elevation of Abu al-Fazl above Keshavdas's own patron culminates in an entire subsequent canto devoted to Akbar's grief at the loss of his dear friend.[92]

When Keshavdas celebrates the dignity and bravery of Sheikh Abu al-Fazl or lingers over Akbar's sorrow, he skillfully builds narrative tension and drama, but one suspects that far more is involved here than simply issues of literary mood or compositional strategy. Were these poetics a critique of his patron's **(p.51)** politics? Or was the poet giving voice to a terrible disquiet Bir Singh himself may have felt when forced—and as a subordinate who depended on the goodwill of the emperor to be, he must have felt forced—to carry out the assassination? What is certain is that the text's probing, almost-modernist manipulation of traditional themes, its rejection or at least undercutting of the more typological *kāvya* characterizations, are perfect for bringing to the fore the complex moral shades demanded by a new kind of politics.

Royal Affirmation

Beginning in canto fifteen of the *carit*, Keshavdas takes a new tack. He abandons his concern with emotionally layered realism to embark on a different type of literary mission: illustrating through lush poetic imagery the proposition that Bir Singh is, in fact, a perfect king. Notably absent are the moments of authorial ambivalence that cast their shadow over the earlier part of the work. It is as though Bir Singh's definitive victory over his brother Ram Shah and Jahangir's support for the junior Orchha prince require a new, unambiguous tone of royal affirmation.

We are returned to the frame story: Generosity and Greed set out to visit Bir Singh's capital at Orchha, newly named "Jahangirpur,"[93] and hundreds of verses on the king's realm and moral perfection follow. As these two characters stroll through the Bundela territories, they praise everything in sight, beginning, it bears mentioning, with Bir Singh's architectural achievements. While Keshavdas's text is not devoid of realism in its detailing of Bir Singh's well-known contributions to the built environment of Bundelkhand,[94] the emphasis is generally not so much on specific details as on pure, aestheticized description. Consider the following account of Bir Sagar, the man-made lake constructed by the king (and keep in mind the ferocious heat of an Indian summer):

> When Generosity and Greed set out to visit Jahangirpur [Orchha]
> they saw a huge array of forts, towns, and villages—
> how could I possibly recount all their names?
> They saw gladdening lakes and rivers as they approached Bir Sagar.

Seeing the magnificent lake,
they sought the right terms for describing it.
It gives such pleasure on earth, this body of water!
It is marvelous, clear, vast, and profound in its depths.
(p.52) It is home to blossoming flowers,
as though lighting up the sky with stars.
It is a place of sheer coolness,
where the heat of summer is forbidden entry:
abode of scents, a place of beauty, effacer of the world's cares,
like the goddess Chandika in its dark hue.
The tall waves are a cluster of clouds
releasing their spray in the wind;
at sunset the water takes on a red quality,
waves shimmering like lightning, dispelling the sorrow of men's hearts.
Night and day peacocks dance in all directions,
animated by the mist of the lake;
the lotuses bloom, their white luster like moonlight....[95]

Although Keshavdas's poetry commends a real-life charitable action on the part of the king in the domain of waterworks,[96] the larger argument of the text is that Bir Singh's kingdom is paradisiacal. It is a protective realm where all unpleasantness, like the grueling hot summer of the Indian midlands, is filtered out; it is a joyful place, “effacer of the world's cares”—a precise analogue of the expectations the subjects would have for the efficacy of Bir Singh's rule.

The same logic informs the poet's expansive treatment of the king's daily routine, a small portion of which is excerpted here:

Bir Singh bathed in Ganges water and honored all the gods.
He heard the *purāṇa*s recited, and gave the gift of a cow
before taking his meal.
After eating, he went into the women's quarters to take pleasure.
He then climbed to the jewel-studded terrace,
looking out in joy at the forest expanse.
Bir Singh saw the mango trees in bloom, and felt the gentle Malabar wind as it picked up.
The budding mangoes were like the limbs of the god of love
or a fluttering banner woven of rope.
The charming clove vines swayed,
alive with bees stirred in their passions.
The beautiful cuckoos cooed gently,
as though delivering a message from spring.
Then the king looked over at the festival pavilion,
and accompanied by beautiful women he went to hear the special program.
(p.53) The drums of Kamadeva resounded in victory,
all were steeped in love's magic....[97]

The poet expatiates almost reverently upon a combination of his patron's religious duties (listening to didactic recitations, the donation of a cow to a Brahman) and the idyllic *vinoda* (royal diversions) that foreground his personal beauty and charisma. This departure from the storyline—from any real focus on the actions and conversations of the characters—in favor of pure, ornate description has a long history in Sanskrit *mahākāvya* and, as in Keshavdas's own *Kavipriyā*, poets are enjoined to dilate upon the perfections of a king's personhood and dominions not necessarily in terms of what they observe with their own eyes but with time-tested imagery that draws on an established rhetoric of royal description.[98]

Since the invention of Sanskrit *kāvya* early in the first millennium, kingliness had always evoked, and perhaps required, an elaborate idiom; poetry was the rhetorical embodiment of moral and political competence. Similarly, in Keshavdas's vernacular poem, canto after canto celebrates in painstaking detail every aspect of the majesty of King Bir Singh and the bounty of the land over which he rules. Following immediately upon the more action-packed, realistic opening, these leisurely descriptive cantos construct a perfect king in accordance with classical norms, from whom the stains of an earlier political coup and murder have been washed completely. The point is driven home at the very end of the work by a long excursus into *rājyaśrī* and *rājadharma*, royal luster and royal norms, where a healthy dose of Sanskrit verses helps to underscore the political message.[99]

It can take real effort for a modern reader to understand how and why this type of poetry works and matters. The complexities of *rīti* literature, with its reliance on Sanskrit expressive techniques and classical courtly imagery, are often shunned as ornate and overdone. We miss the point entirely, however, if we cannot understand how critical it is to the logic of this text that these cantos are here, and that their form (and what may appear to unaccustomed modern readers as an almost painful wordiness) is inseparable from their content. For this section, far from being a superfluous addition pasted into the narrative or a mere sycophant's participation in the distasteful legitimizing of political power, is a rich, sensory celebration of the kind of courtliness the Bundela kings were aspiring to cultivate in this period. The question of cultural cachet was indeed no small one for the Bundelas, whom other Rajputs initially spurned as low-caste upstarts. Tapping into the prestige of the Mughals through strategic alliance, as Bir Singh Deo so adroitly did, was one method of redressing their social disadvantages. Sponsoring art, literature, and intellectual life was **(p.54)** another. Nor was Keshavdas the sole participant in the king's multi-staged royal self-fashioning. The *Vīramitrodaya*, which at a verse count of two hundred thousand is twice the size of the *Mahābhārata* and the largest work of *dharmaśāstra* ever composed, was produced slightly later at the same court by Mitra Mishra, a Brahman whose family, like that of Keshavdas, had recently been drawn to Orchha from Gwalior.[100] Whether proclaimed through architecture, in

a Brajbhasha literary work, or in a Sanskrit treatise on religious and social behavior, this prodigious interest in the classical codes of kingship and a penchant for cultural superlatives proclaimed Bir Singh's status both at home and in greater Hindustan.

The Wisdom of Old Age

Bir Singh, like his famous court poet, was a man of wide-ranging ability and taste. If the products of his patronage are any sure guide, he was a real connoisseur of architecture and literature, versed in the classical law books of kings, but also keenly interested in spirituality. His public displays of *bhakti* in a royal idiom have already been mentioned, but some of his commissions were also evidently for more private consumption. Such is the case with Keshavdas's *Vijñāngītā* (The rise of wisdom moon), a Braj adaptation of Krishna Mishra's *Prabodhacandrodaya* (Rise of the moon of enlightenment), a Sanskrit allegorical play originally written at the Chandella court in the eleventh century.[101] The *Vijñāngītā* is a staid work, a mouthpiece for the Indian philosophical system of Vedanta distinctly different in tone from the lighthearted treatment of Krishna and the *gopī*s in the *Rasikpriyā* or the royal majesty that infuses the *Rāmcandracandrikā*. Contributing to the sober atmosphere is a liberal sprinkling of untranslated Sanskrit quotations from powerhouse texts like the *Bhagavadgītā* and *Yogavāsiṣṭha*. As in the *Vīrsiṃhdevcarit*, when the poet needs to get serious about *dharma*, Sanskrit is the medium of choice.

Despite the unmistakably learned style, here too the pandit does not fail to signal his identity as a *vernacular* writer, this time mixing his familiar posture of diffidence with a more forthright statement about—almost a defense of—his choice:

> He [Kashinatha Mishra] had a son named Keshavray,[102] a slow-witted Hindi poet, who created the *Discourse on Wisdom*, source of highest bliss. Gods compose in the language of the gods [Sanskrit] and Nagas in the language of serpents [Prakrit]. Since I am a man, I wrote the *Discourse on Wisdom* in the language of men, drawing on the **(p.55)** authority of the *Gītā* (*nara hoi narabhāṣā karī gītā jñāna pramāni*). I have written in Bhasha so that even a fool can grasp the hidden doctrine, measureless, unfathomable, without end. May the learned forgive any offense.[103]

Once again, the poet's assertions about his own slow-wittedness are not very credible. Many learned individuals—the gods Shiva and Sarasvati, the sages Agastya and Vasishtha, just to name a few—feature in the narrative, but Keshavdas evidently considers his own advice to be far from trifling, writing himself into the story in the role of guru to the king. Bir Singh looks to Keshavdas for spiritual and moral guidance, some of which is dispensed through the poet's signature *saṃvād*s, here staged between the gods as well as

personified character traits like *mahāmoha* (Great Delusion) and *viveka* (Discrimination).

We need not pause too long over the content of the text, which is essentially an encyclopedic work of wisdom literature directed toward the edification of his patron. But the *Vijñāngītā* does serve as a useful reminder about the expressive range of not just Keshavdas but also the Brajbhasha language. By 1610, it was no longer primarily a medium of devotional songs; it had become the vehicle for the full range of literary forms, including scholarly treatises on aesthetics, the elevated themes of *kāvya*, local history, theology, and philosophy. The *Vijñāngītā* also helps to round out our knowledge of the multiple roles that Keshavdas played at the Orchha court. As the leading writer of his day, he was naturally called upon to celebrate the valor and worthiness of the Orchha kings; he taught the princes and courtesans the skills of poetry writing and connoisseurship; he beautified everyday life with his verses; he contributed to his patrons' *noblesse* and royal self-presentation, a kind of early modern equivalent of a public relations manager; he reminded the king of his duties to his subjects with learned disquisitions on *rājadharma*; he also served as a spiritual mentor.[104] In short, Brajbhasha poets, like their Persian and Sanskrit counterparts, were vital to the larger cultural economy of a court. The best poets were well-rounded literati who could write on diverse subjects and assist their patrons in various capacities.[105]

The *Vijñāngītā* marks the end of Keshavdas's period of service to the Orchha dynasty. If the subtle criticisms of his patron that we detected in his *Vīrsiṃhdevcarit* are any indication, perhaps he had had enough of the "new kind of politics" that had swept through his kingdom in recent decades. Or perhaps he was just feeling the weight of his years and was ready to retire after a successful career spanning nearly three decades. This is the impression he gives in the closing of his work when he requests, and is granted, both the leave **(p. 56)** and the resources to take up residence on the banks of the Ganges—a retirement package of sorts, according to classical Hindu thinking.[106]

Keshavdas's Contact with the Mughal Court

Keshavdas did not retire at once, however. He stayed active long enough to write one more work: the *Jahāngīrjascandrikā* (Moonlight of the fame of Jahangir, 1612). Clearly much had changed since he first took up the vocation of poet. While Keshavdas's *Ratnabāvanī* featured an Orchha prince leading his troops against the Mughals on the battlefield, his last work is a panegyric to the Mughal emperor set in Agra, the imperial city.

This text, like so much else in Keshavdas's life and works, naturally prompts the question of how much the poet had been exposed to Mughal court life. Bir Singh's close connections to Jahangir and to the imperial political establishment are well documented by Keshavdas, contemporary Persian writers, and the

architectural record of his reign. One of the principal palace structures at Orchha, the Jahangir Mandir, is named after the emperor, and local residents today avow that the structure was built for an imperial visit (figure 1.3).[107] Like other *manṣabdār*s, Bir Singh was also often resident in Agra, where he built a house on the banks of the Yamuna River. Less clear is the extent of Keshavdas's own direct involvement with the Mughal court, and what evidence of such involvement might mean for how we understand the early development of *rīti* literature. Let us now weigh the available evidence.

Keshavdas does not directly reveal who commissioned the *Jahāngīrjascandrikā*, but despite the text's name, it was probably not the emperor himself. The most likely patron is a Mughal courtier, Iraj Shahnawaz Khan, which is suggested by the opening praise poems to Iraj; to his father, the famous general (and Hindi poet) Abdurrahim Khan-i Khanan; and to Iraj's grandfather Bairam Khan, who had served as Akbar's regent.[108] A special relationship between Keshavdas and Iraj Khan is intimated in the introduction when the young amir approaches the wise elder poet seeking guidance.[109] Further evidence from outside the text lends itself to a more precise hypothesis about its provenance. Knowing that Jahangir favored Iraj with the title Shahnawaz (“soothing to the emperor”) Khan in 1612,[110] the same year the *Jahāngīrjascandrikā* was written, suggests he commissioned the work as a way of showing his gratitude. If so, we need to seriously qualify our understanding of the place of Braj at the Mughal court and rethink the standard assessment about the exclusivity of Persian poetry in that milieu.[111]

(p.57)

Select poems from the *Kavipriyā* and the *Vīrsiṃhdevcarit*, in which Keshavdas mentions the Mughal aristocrat Birbal, a leading courtier of Akbar, are also pertinent to this discussion. The way these are presented—in close proximity to verses about Raja Indrajit of Orchha, a known patron—suggests a similar relationship obtained in the case of Birbal:

figure 1.3 Jahangir Mandir, Orchha
Courtesy of Edward Rotharb

> And one day while they were in Prayag, Indrajit told Keshavdas to make a request. The poet said, “Fortunate one, show your grace so that I may pass my days without worry.”

> And Birbal, too, told Keshavdas to ask for his heart's desire. Keshavdas requested, “May no one block me at court.” (*māṃgyo taba darabāra meṃ “mohi na rokai koi”*)
>
> Indrajit showed him kindness, considering him his guru. He washed his feet, and bestowed upon him twenty-one villages.[112]

Although his request of Indrajit was honored at once through a generous land grant, we do not know if Keshavdas ever got his wish from Birbal. But the nature of the wish itself is of interest: the poet's desire to have access to the court. In another cluster of verses from chapter six of the *Kavipriyā* that showcases the subject of *dāna* (generosity), he again mentions Birbal and Indrajit in tandem. The section concludes with *praśasti*s to both, with the former eulogized as follows:

> **(p.58)** When Birbal passed away, there was a jubilee in Poverty's court.
> The *pakhāvaj* drums of Evil began to play,
> the conch shells of Grief resounded exuberantly, and kettledrums blared.
> The house of *kaliyuga* was merry with the songs of Falsehood,
> the tambourines of Fear, the pipes of Discord,
> and the gongs of Disgrace.[113]

A later verse from the *Vīrsiṃhdevcarit* similarly commemorates Birbal's generosity.[114] In an incident reported in the *Hindī navratna* (Nine jewels, 1910), a work of Hindi literary criticism written a century ago by authors who gave more weight to oral traditions than many scholars of today, Keshavdas is said to have gone to Agra when Akbar became enraged with the poet's patron Indrajit, whereupon Birbal interceded to have a fine of 10 million rupees waived. As often with such *kiṃvadantiyāṃ*, it is difficult to access the factual truth of this episode (although one suspects that 10 million rupees is a rather inflated number for the late sixteenth century), but another kind of truth may lie buried in the very linkage between Indrajit and Birbal and, by extension, Keshavdas and Birbal.[115] Since Birbal died in 1586, Keshavdas would have had to meet him at the very outset of his career, before he wrote even an early work like the *Rasikpriyā* in 1591. This is not impossible, of course, and the references to Birbal are real and need to be explained. And yet, if their acquaintance had been in any sense long-lived or transformative, it would be hard to account for why there should otherwise be so very little in Keshavdas's extensive corpus to suggest Mughal contact.

Another vexing problem, albeit one hardly unique to Keshavdas's oeuvre, is how to construe his poetic signature. Hindi poets frequently signal their authorship by inserting their name, or some variant of it, into their verses. Keshavdas does not always include a signature, particularly in short verses such as the *dohā*,

which do not leave much space for extraneous material. The *chāp* may be used to mark emphasis or to signal an ardent belief of the writer. Occasionally the *chāp* adds a special semantic resonance, as when “Keshav,” which means Vishnu, stands for both the poet and Krishna. As already mentioned, sometimes Keshavdas is himself present as a character in his own stories, and in such cases it can be hard to decide whether his poetic signature is intended to signal his actual speech or participation in events. To make matters more difficult, a leading *manṣabdār* of the period who was routinely involved in Orchha-Mughal political negotiations was named Keshavdas (Maru), and sometimes the poet's *chāp* refers to him instead. At a heated moment during the Orchha succession struggle, for instance, when Bir Singh Deo is on the run and Indrajit is called to court, Keshavdas completes a *dohā* **(p.59)** with the phrase “*gae āgreṃ kesaudāsa*.” This could mean Keshavdas (the poet) went to Agra. Or it could mean the *manṣabdār* Keshavdas Maru went to Agra. Or the first two words, “went to Agra,” could simply be taken with the subject of the previous lines, with “Keshavdas” being only a signature. It is not always possible to decide these matters definitively; only when Keshavdas includes his surname Mishra (which he rarely does) is it an unambiguous indicator of his participation in the events.[116] One thing is clear: the poet hardly foregrounded his experiences at the Mughal court. The very fact that it is so difficult to tell if he was even there suggests that either his life was not much touched by it, or he did not want to talk about the matter.

Nor is it easy to trace significant levels of Mughal exposure through his work. If he did spend some of his days surrounded by Persian writers or hearing the poetry of Rumi and Hafiz, he does not seem to have imbibed very much from them. Certainly not one to eschew literary change—after all, choosing to write in Braj instead of Sanskrit was nothing if not a momentous shift—Keshavdas wrote most of his *praśasti* poetry, including his poetry to Iraj Khan and the emperor, in the same classicizing style he had cultivated in earlier *kāvya* works. Indeed, to look for an obvious measure of stylistic or thematic difference that would set apart literary representations of a “Muslim” Emperor like Jahangir and a “Hindu” king like Rama or Bir Singh Deo is to look in vain.[117] The poet mostly keeps to time-tested imagery—as when Jahangir is likened to Rama in a somewhat-tired literary maneuver that underscores heroism and kingly perfection:

> Seeing the moonlight of his deeds,
> the generals of other emperors lose their courage.
> The dread of Akbar's invincible son Emperor Jahangir
> terrifies even Ravana.[118]

In keeping with Keshavdas's own prescriptions for kingly description, the emperor's realm is depicted not in terms of specific physical features like the ornamental gardens or architecture for which the Mughals were famous, but

through a range of stock literary tableaux and ancient Sanskrit-style rhetoric that conjure up the image of an almost-perfect moral commonwealth:

> In Jahangir's cities the only thunderous sound is that of a storm rolling in
> [i.e., never that of an attacking army].
> **(p.60)** There is no fear of calamity;
> the only concern is to protect the populace from poverty and instability.
> There is no illicit sex with improper women;
> the only sneaking around is to attack an enemy fort.
> The only inconstancy is in literary representations of emotion.
> The only theft is of others' pain.
> The only land-grabber to be seen is Sheshanaga, holding up the earth.
> The people are all able-bodied,
> says Keshavdas,[119] the only deformities
> are the mazes of impenetrable labyrinthine fortresses.
> On hilltops, all you see are temples [i.e., never warring rivals].
> Jahangir's rule is ideal in every respect.

This last verse had appeared earlier with very minor variations in the *Kavipriyā* (in the *rājyaśrībhūṣaṇa* section, where he instructs poets in constructing literary images of kingly glory). The original poem in the *Kavipriyā* had been about Rama, but in adapting the verse to his new Mughal context, Keshavdas conveniently substituted the word "Jahāṃgīra" for "Raghubīra" (hero of the Raghu clan, an epithet of Rama).[120] Modern Hindi critics are prone to viewing this kind of literary maneuver as the "problem of *rīti*" run amok, faulting the laziness, conservatism, or shameless sycophancy of the Indian court poet. But to do so is to miss an all-important point: Keshavdas constructed, or could construct, images of Jahangir in this poetically rich, classicizing fashion because Mughal rule had become fully routinized and was entirely comprehensible to the poet within the traditional Sanskritic episteme of Hindu *dharma* and kingship.[121]

Despite its subject matter and its setting, the *Jahāngīrjascandrikā* is at its core a Hindu-centric text, even when it comes to depictions of Muslim lawmakers and Sufis. When a qazi (Islamic judge) gives Jahangir a benediction, it is to procure victory in the manner of Rama's sons Kusha and Lava; a sheikh likens the emperor's fierce might to that of the goddess Kali.[122] The same scene has Jahangir engaging in *pūjā* (ritual obeisance) to Hindu deities; for a brief moment it is as if the emperor stands before an idol in a Vrindavan temple rather than before his court in Agra: he lights incense, performs *āratī* (worship), and feeds and adorns the gods who have just manifested themselves in his presence.[123] Quite apart from the fact that such a portrayal flies in the face of a report of a visit Jahangir is known to have paid to Vrindavan—in which all he could do was complain about the smell of the bats[124]—some of the Muslim courtiers might not

entirely have approved of these verses, which contravene the most basic Islamic proscriptions against idol worship. If Keshavdas knew something about Islam, it cannot be gauged from his writing.

(p.61) There are only a few places in the *Jahāngīrjascandrikā* where Keshavdas's imagery diverges from the boilerplate styles with minor, yet telling adjustments to his habitually Sanskritized linguistic repertoire, providing a foretaste of the hybridity and multiculturalism that would become one of the defining features of later *rīti* literature.[125] Interlaced with the manifold Sanskrit epithets typical of *kāvya* are some unusual strings of Perso-Arabic words, as when Jahangir is addressed as *ālama panāha kulli ālama ke ādamī* (shelter of the world, man of the whole world), or his son Prince Khusrau is described as *khalaka kī khūbī ko khajāno* (treasure house of all earthly good qualities).[126] These and other Persianized phrases did not flow naturally from Keshavdas's pen; in the context of his corpus, they are anomalous and seem carefully studied. The skilled manipulation of Perso-Arabic vocabulary, a gesture toward a new kind of Persianized Braj *praśasti* style, has the effect of "Mughalizing" the text.

These smidgeons of Persian evoke the Mughal courtly environment, but they still do not say much about the extent of Keshavdas's involvement with Persianate culture and, again, they appear very late in his career. The poet does mention the *dīvān-i khās* and *dīvān-i ʻām*, assembly arrangements for elite and general members of the court, respectively. The text also includes *praśasti* verses to more than twenty known princes, rajas, and members of the nobility.[127] When Uday, one of the main characters, makes remarks such as, "Who is the handsome king to the left of Man Singh, talking to [Prince] Parvez?" one is inclined to believe that Keshavdas did see with his own eyes some of what he describes. Perhaps Birbal granted his wish, after all.

Particularly tantalizing are a couple of verses at the very end of the work where Keshavdas inserts himself into the narrative. In a similar speech to the one in the *Vijñāngītā*, the poet once again expresses his desire to retire to the banks of the Ganges and pursue a life of meditation. Jahangir tells Keshavdas that he is pleased with the compositions (*tuva kavitā sukha pāya*) and rewards him handsomely.[128] Should we see the doubling of these passages in works written just two years apart as mere literary formula, the poet's wishful thinking, or further corroboration of his retirement plan? As it turns out, Keshavdas was never to be heard from again.[129] Perhaps he did indeed perform his poetry at the Mughal court and receive an emolument from the emperor (and Bir Singh Deo before him) sufficient to support some kind of retirement.

Conclusion

Keshavdas is rightly recognized as the first *rīti* poet. This chapter has shown the extent to which his literary orientation supports such an assessment. To **(p.62)** be sure, a major courtly vernacular tradition did not just come out of nowhere,

and a number of precedent factors contributed to the success of Keshavdas in this period. One condition of possibility was a long-standing tradition of Sanskrit *kāvya* that could act as a language of "superposition," by providing the models to emulate and the air of dignity that afforded a fledgling vernacular literature credibility.[130] Keshavdas's family background made him the perfect candidate for establishing a new tradition of vernacular *kāvya*. The dispersal of the Tomar court by 1523 led his ancestors to Orchha, and he grew up immersed in the Sanskrit traditions that would help him to bring incomparable luster to both Hindi and the regional court that he served.

This was a heritage in which Keshavdas took considerable pride, even if he did not continue the family tradition. Sanskrit learning—particularly literary theory—would infuse his work deeply, but something must have triggered in Keshavdas the idea to write in Bhasha instead of the language of his forefathers. Access to the new *bhakti* styles that were popular in Vrindavan is certainly one explanation, particularly given the court's conversion to Vaishnavism and the association of Madhukar Shah with the pioneering Braj poet Hariram Vyas. While much of the earlier Braj corpus consisted of songs, several more formal texts anticipate the work of Keshavdas by a few decades. The *Hittaraṅginī* of Kriparam and Nanddas's *Rasmañjarī*, two forerunners of the *rītigranth* genre, had already paved some of the way toward the classicization and elaboration of Hindi literary culture that would characterize the oeuvre of Keshavdas, even if their work lacks the complexity and scale of his more comprehensive initiatives. Nanddas and his senior contemporary Hariram Vyas had adapted *bhakti* scripture, especially the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, for new vernacular audiences, contributing to the development of Brajbhasha as a medium of formal writing. Hit Harivamsh, another Braj pioneer, used a heavily Sanskritized style for his *pad*s, but the fact that he wrote some of his works in Sanskrit suggests that he did not place full confidence in Bhasha for all of his expressive needs.[131]

Keshavdas may have been familiar with two remarkable vernacular epics produced by Vishnudas in Gwalior during the fifteenth century: the *Pāṇḍavcarit* (Deeds of the Pandavas, 1435) and *Rāmāyaṇkathā* (Ramayana tale, 1442). Although these texts bear no direct connection to Braj works of the sixteenth century and seem to have been mostly forgotten until the modern period, it is arresting to find more than a century before Keshavdas evidence of poetry in a similar Hindi dialect at the very court known to have been frequented by his ancestors.[132] Nothing indicates that Keshavdas's forefathers ever wrote a word in the vernacular, but perhaps some latent sense of the potential for refined vernacular expression traveled with the Mishra family from Gwalior to its new **(p.63)** home at the Orchha court, and helped to make the choice of Braj possible for Keshavdas in the late sixteenth century.

Another domain of Gwaliyari heritage closely connected to forms of Brajbhasha courtly expression, although one of less relevance to Keshavdas specifically, is music. The court of Man Singh Tomar (r. 1486–1516) is acclaimed as the place where the prestigious genre of vocal music known as *dhrupad* was invented, and its tremendous appeal was a major factor in the Mughal rulers' fascination with Brajbhasha and its literature.[133] These same *dhrupad* styles have an early connection to *bhakti* singing traditions, too. In fact, a counterclaim ascribes the invention of *dhrupad* to Svami Haridas, already mentioned as one of the most important Braj authors of the early Vaishnava community. He is said to be not only its progenitor but also a teacher of Tansen, Akbar's famous court musician. According to one scholar, "What seems more probable is that they were contemporaries who had, directly or indirectly, learned to sing *dhrupad* from musicians associated with the court of the Tomar rulers of Gwalior."[134] Whatever the truth about the origins of *dhrupad*, it is certain that the Tomar court was a fertile environment where new cultural possibilities were generated, with considerable relevance to both music and poetry of the period. Even if the compositions of Keshavdas never became a music tradition in the manner of *bhakti* songs, it is worth recalling how the poet celebrates the musical culture of Indrajit's court in the opening of his *Kavipriyā*.[135]

The rise of Mughal power is also partly responsible for creating new opportunities for vernacular court poets, and whatever antecedents one could trace in Gwalior or the Braj *maṇḍal*, there is much more support for the idea that the Brajbhasha courtly style is a specifically Mughal-period enterprise. The second half of the sixteenth century during which Keshavdas came of age witnessed Akbar's long reign, helping to create the conditions under which Braj court culture could flourish. The trajectory of Keshavdas's career illustrates how Brajbhasha literature became a major presence in a widening arena of courtly life. It was making its debut as a cosmopolitan idiom, borrowing from Sanskrit but articulating courtliness in a new Bhasha mode. Keshavdas's Bundela patrons were an upwardly mobile dynasty concerned with asserting their status in an evolving Mughal state system. Their intense investment in the idiom of royal classicism, particularly in the case of Bir Singh Deo, spoke to these new cultural and political aspirations. Although still only inchoate in this period, *rīti* literature signaled a new way of asserting Rajput values in a vernacular, if still largely Brahmanical, idiom. This Braj classicism was a courtly repertoire that dovetailed well with the cultural needs of the Bundelas circa 1600, and it would be cultivated by many a *manṣabdārī* court later in the seventeenth century.[136]

(p.64) To insist on a single beginning point for *rīti* poetry is probably a fool's game. On the time line of Hindi literary history, its commencement is not a pinpoint but a longish line. Keshavdas himself might not have been in a position to state exactly what was new about his work and, as I stressed in the case of both the *Rasikpriyā* and *Rāmcandracandrikā*, some of his poetry can be appreciated for both its *bhakti* and *rīti* sensibilities. Nonetheless, to speak of

beginnings has some heuristic value; there are unquestionably elements in seventeenth-century Braj literary culture that were not there in the sixteenth century whether measured in formal features such as metrics or tropology or in genres, the larger ethos of the corpus, or the diversity of patronage contexts.

Nor can we discount the less measurable qualities of personal genius and creativity. Why is it that Keshavdas's works were avidly read and collected by the literati of early modern India while his brother Balabhadra Mishra, who was part of the same cultural environment and produced a couple of minor works in Brajbhasha, was largely forgotten?[137] None of Keshavdas's ancestors was a poet. They were Sanskrit priests and scholars. It is not simply the availability of cultural resources like Sanskrit learning, the historical memory of courtly life at Gwalior, or Braj *bhakti* traditions that made Keshavdas's poetry possible; it is what he did with them. Orchha offered special intellectual resources, and Keshavdas drew upon them to extend literary culture in new directions.

This chapter has been primarily concerned with literary developments at the provincial kingdom of Orchha. In the wake of Keshavdas's innovations and without doubt in consequence of them, the world of Brajbhasha poetry expanded vastly. This is true in a geographical sense: *rīti* poetry quickly became a desired commodity at courts throughout greater Hindustan. It is also true of Brajbhasha's expressive range, to which we now turn: to explore how the aesthetic power of this language, the cultural resonances it evoked, and the discursive spaces it enabled made it so suitable a vehicle for the tastes and aspirations of courtly patrons and poets across the wide expanse of Mughal India.

Notes:

(1.) The main sources for details about Keshavdas's ancestors are *Kavipriyā*, chap. 2; *Rāmcandracandrikā*, 1.4; *Vijñāngītā*, 1.5.

(2.) R. S. McGregor is surely right to point out that Keshavdas's self-deprecating remarks are “only nominal” (2003: 928). Indeed, Keshavdas elsewhere contradicts his own professions of slow-wittedness, calling himself *sumati* (wise). See, for example, *Vīrsiṃhdevcarit*, 1.3. Other instances of this widespread Indic topos of literary incompetence are discussed in Pollock 2006: 320 n. 67, 395; Yashaschandra 2003: 578 n. 19. Examples by Keshavdas's contemporary Tulsidas include *Rāmcaritmānas* 1.9, 1.10, 1.100, 1.103 (the first of these is cited below).

(3.) Busch 2004.

(4.) “*Saṃskirita (jāniya) kūpajala, bhākhā bahatā nīra*.” Several variants of this saying exist. For a published version inflected by Khari Boli, see Prakash 2006: 55.

(5.) Tulsi begins each canto of his *Rāmcaritmānas* with a series of prayers in Sanskrit. He also drew inspiration from the Sanskrit *Adhyātmarāmāyaṇa*. Other possible "*devavāṇī*" sources include the *Prasannarāghava* and perhaps even the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* for episodes pertaining to Rama's childhood. Lutgendorf 1991: 7.

(6.) *Rāmcaritmānas*, 1.9. Cited by Vijaypal Singh (1998: 51); cf. Lutgendorf 1991: 8. According to the authoritative Tulsi commentary *Mānas Pīyūṣ* (p. 190), the reference to writing on a blank page (*kāgad kore*) carries the sense of a solemn oath made with a pure heart.

(7.) Alongside the Sanskrit precedents for Tulsi's oeuvre were two centuries of Sufi writing in Avadhi demonstrating a complex engagement with Indian aesthetic theory, which need to be seen as contributors to the intellectual and spiritual conversations that were giving rise to new modes of *bhakti* expression. See Entwistle 1987: 42–43; de Bruijn 2005; Behl 2007.

(8.) On the reclamation of Braj and invention of many Vaishnava traditions in the sixteenth century, see Entwistle 1987: 136–73; Vaudeville 1996: 47–71. A good introduction to the early Braj literary milieu is Pauwels 2002: 1–12.

(9.) The manuscript traditions of early Braj authors overwhelmingly attest to their use in performance (such signs are almost entirely lacking for *rīti* texts). The primary organizing structure of the *Caurāsī pad* (Eighty-four verses) of Hit Harivamsh, for instance, is the *rāg* and the penchant for quatrains in a portion of the work points toward a connection to *dhrupad* (Snell 1991b: 312, 329 n. 1); on Sur, see Hawley 1984: 44–45; on Hariram Vyas, see Pauwels 2002: 33–35. Many hymns from the Sikh tradition are also associated with *rāg*s (Mann 2001: 5).

(10.) On the Vallabhan appropriation of Surdas, see Hawley 1984: 5–20.

(11.) Bryant 1982.

(12.) See Pinch 2002.

(13.) See *Hittaraṅginī*, v. 308 (noted in McGregor 1984: 124). Sudhakar Pandey (1969: 42–44) and Umashankar Pathak (1999: 141) have also argued that Kriparam hailed from Orchha.

(14.) The chronogram yielding the figure 1541 has been disputed but, as R. S. McGregor notes, no argument has definitively disproven this early date (1984: 124). A recent discussion of the dating of this text is Yadav 2008: 18–19.

(15.) Pandey 1969: 43, 60.

(16.) Pauwels 2002: 19–20, 106–9; *Do sau bāvan vaiṣṇavan kī vārtā*, pp. 348–49; *Bhaktamāl*, p. 731.

(17.) McGregor mentions both Gaudiya and Radhavallabhan influences (1984: 124). Kolff sees this process as attended by a new level of “participation in all-India concerns” (2002: 121).

(18.) Niemann 1983; Pauwels 1996. An even earlier vernacular *Bhāgavata* in Avadhi is attributed to Lalach Kavi. See McGregor 1984: 96–99. I am grateful to Francesca Orsini for the reference.

(19.) Entwistle 1987: 175; Gupta 2001: 1–2; Kolff 2002: 121; Rotharb 2009: chap. 1.

(20.) Skirmishes between the Orchha ruler Bharatichand and Islam Shah Sur (r. 1545–53) are mentioned by Keshavdas in *Kavipriyā*, 1.19–20.

(21.) Madhukar Shah was forced to cede territory to the Mughals first in 1577 and then again in 1588 (Entwistle 1987: 175, drawing on *Akbarnāmah*). Badauni mentions him as a rebel from 1583 (*Muntakhab al-tavārīkh*, 2: 378–79).

(22.) There is some confusion about the exact number of Keshavdas's works, largely because the *bārah-māsa* and *nakh-śikh* from the *Kavipriyā* (which form part of chapters 10 and 14, respectively) sometimes circulated independently. Keshavdas is credited with an additional *śikh-nakh*, a minor composition of twenty-eight verses, which Vishvanathprasad Mishra included in his *Keśavgranthāvalī*, for a total of nine published works. See Mishra 1959a: 7–8.

(23.) Ratnasena is described as the fourth son of Madhukar Shah in *Vīrsiṃdevcarit*, 2.42. (The two places where Keshavdas lists the Orchha princes, *Vīrsiṃdevcarit*, 2.39–50 and *Kavipriyā*, 1.27–30, contain some discrepancies.)

(24.) Rama is, strangely, called “Gopala” at first appearance. *Ratnabāvanī*, v. 8.

(25.) *Ratnabāvanī*, v. 9.

(26.) Ibid., v. 17.

(27.) Akbar commends Ratnasena's bravery in v. 52.

(28.) Heidi Pauwels (2009) has recently made a good case for correlating the events of the *Ratnabāvanī* closely with the Mughal invasion of Orchha of 1577–78, as reported in chapter 41 of Abu al-Fazl's *Akbarnāmah*. McGregor (1984: 129) was content to see the work as “a poetic exercise” that did not aim for congruence with historical fact; Vijaypal Singh also viewed the work as more imaginative than realistic and an excellent specimen of poetry in the traditional *vīra rasa* or martial style (1993: 64). Also see Gupta 2001: 16–21; Busch 2005: 34–37.

(29.) Like the *Akbarnāmah*, the *Ma’aṣir al-umarā* (2:131–34) disregards Ratnasena.

(30.) Cynthia Talbot remarks that improving on history is one of the strategies of the *Pṛthvīrājrāso*, a renowned Rajput tale from western India (2007: 25).

(31.) On the *rāso* as a “counter-epic,” that is to say a “Hindu” response to “Muslim” conquest, see Ahmad 1964.

(32.) For a few details about Raja Indrajit's scholarship, see McGregor 1968: 5–15. On his poetry, see *Miśrabandhuvinod*, 1:404.

(33.) Haberman 1988: 30–39; Delmonico 1998.

(34.) *Rasikpriyā*, 8.1–2. Keshavdas follows the Sanskrit aesthetic tradition in differentiating the pathos of love in separation (*karuṇā viraha*) from a truly tragic situation (*karuṇa rasa*): “When all hope is lost of a happy outcome, then the compassionate emotion arises.” *Rasikpriyā*, 11.1.

(35.) Ibid., 8.3–4. This is only one of the example verses on *pūrvānurāga*. In the *Rasikpriyā*, Keshavdas normally provides four examples for each set of definitions: two about Radha and two about Krishna, exhibiting their love in both *pracchann* (secretive) and *prakāś* (out in the open) forms.

(36.) The classic account in the Krishna tradition is Hardy 1983.

(37.) The collocation *rasiktrayī* (triad of devotees) was commonly used to designate Hariram Vyas, Hit Harivamsh, and Svami Haridas, three of the most important early settlers in Vrindavan. See Pauwels 2002: 2.

(38.) *Rasikpriyā*, 1.2 (drawing on Surati Mishra's commentary, *Jorāvarprakāś*, pp. 54–57.

(39.) The topic of *nāyikābheda* is further elaborated in chapter 2 of this book.

(40.) *Rasikpriyā*, 3.74.

(41.) Chapter 3 of this book explores Keshavdas's contributions to Indian aesthetic theory in further detail.

(42.) This phrase can also refer to Krishna being separated from Radha.

(43.) *Rasikpriyā*, 16.14–16.

(44.) Vishvanathprasad Mishra (1959b: 6, 1970) has discussed some of the important manuscripts and commentaries.

(45.) See (respectively) Desai 1984: 60–61, 100–4; Das 2000: 4; Dehejia 2009: 178.

(46.) *Kavipriyā*, 1.48–49 (drawing on the insights of Maharao Bakhtavar Singh from his unpublished *Kavipriyā kī ṭīkā*). The second verse is an example of *śleṣa*, a figure of speech in which words are construed doubly. For instance, in the case of Nayanbichitra, *bhairau-jut* and *gaurī-saṃjut* mean "along with the Bhairav and Gauri [*rāgs*]," indicators of her musical talent; the same words can also be interpreted as "accompanied by Bhairava and Gauri (one of Shiva's companions and an epithet of Shiva's wife Parvati, respectively)." The compound *surataraṃginī* can be split two ways: applied to the courtesan, it means *surata-raṃginī* (delighting in sexual pleasure) but in the case of Shiva the correct reading is *sura-taraṃginī* (possessing the celestial river [i.e. Ganga]), referencing the well-known legend that the Ganges river flows from Shiva's hair.

(47.) Ibid., 1.51. The poet plays on the two parts of the courtesan's name: *tān* means melody; *taraṅg* means wave.

(48.) Ibid., 1.53, 1.55. In the latter verse, Keshavdas ingeniously uses the word *aṅga* in the double sense of branches of technical knowledge and the physical limbs of Rangmurti, the dancer.

(49.) Ibid., 1.56–57. There is scope for different interpretations here. In his *Priyāprakāś* commentary, Lala Bhagvandin suggests that the lutes of rival players are disconsolate because they do not have a gifted musician like Pravin Ray playing them. Additionally, if one includes the *chāp* (poet's signature), the first half of the last line can be taken in a self-deprecatory fashion consistent with the poet's posture of slow-wittedness: "to say nothing of the untalented Keshavdas." I am grateful to Imre Bangha for this insight.

(50.) "Rival lute player" is possible due to the lexical fudging that is a special feature of vernacular language. Such techniques are discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

(51.) Further details about Pravin Ray can be assembled from elsewhere in the work. See *Kavipriyā*, 1.46; 1.61; 3.1; 7.15 (this last verse is a stylized poetic description of her garden, which can still be seen in Orchha today. See figure 2.1). On her poetry, see chap. 4, n. 6. Tantarang has been credited with a work on music, the *Saṅgītākhāṛā* (Assembly for music), in Pathak 1999: 157.

(52.) *Kavipriyā*, 1.61.

(53.) Ibid., 3.1.

(54.) One of Pravin Ray's purported poems is discussed in chapter 4.

(55.) Dvivedi 1955: 7–8. Also note how Keshavdas refers to his grandfather's taking up residence in Orchha as a *prabāsa so nivāsa* (dwelling as if in exile) in *Vijñāngītā*, 1.5.

(56.) This chapter is briefly discussed in Stasik 2005.

(57.) Otherwise more generally indebted to Dandin's *Kāvyādarśa* (Mirror on poetry, seventh century) in the *Kavipriyā*, Keshavdas here builds upon a framework established in two other Sanskrit texts: the *Kāvyakalpalatāvṛtti* (Vine of poetic imagination with extended commentary, c. 1250) of Amaracandra Yati and the *Alaṅkāraśekhara (*Crown of figuration) of Keshava Mishra, written in Delhi in the generation preceding Keshavdas.

(58.) Reading *harā* for *harī*, as does Lakshminidhi Chaturvedi in his edition of the *Kavipriyā* (p. 48).

(59.) *Kavipriyā*, 5.16–19.

(60.) Or “clever people.”

(61.) *Kavipriyā*, 6.25–27.

(62.) *Kavipriyā*, 8.1–2.

(63.) On Sanskrit, see Pollock 2001b.

(64.) V*ārṇik* meters are governed by the Sanskrit *gaṇa* system, using invariant combinations and counts of long and short syllables. *Mātrik* meters (such as the popular *dohā*) derive from Apabhramsha and are freer in form: a prescribed total number of measures is prescribed for different segments of the verse, but there are no restrictions on the overall number of syllables. On the various Sanskrit, Apabhramsha, and Prakrit antecedents that Keshavdas would have been drawing on, see Bhatnagar 1991: 300–36.

(65.) It is not clear what relationship might obtain between this text and the *Piṅgalśiromani*, a work of prosody acclaimed by Dimgal poets that is said to date from the sixteenth century. See Kamphorst 2008: 90 n. 163.

(66.) *Chandmālā*, 1.3.

(67.) The suggestion that this work may have been an afterthought upon completing the *Rāmcandracandrikā* is that of Satyadev Chaudhari 1973: 234.

(68.) *Rāmcandracandrikā*, 1.21.

(69.) *Rāmcandracandrikā*, 1.7–21. On similar topoi associated with vernacular beginnings, see Pollock 2006: 309–16.

(70.) A recent exploration of select *kāvya* elements in the *Rāmcandracandrikā* is Cavaliere 2010b. A good general discussion of the text in light of the Hindi *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition is Stasik 2009: 115–26.

(71.) That Indrajit was a devotee of Rama is evident from the opening words of his commentary on Bhartrihari: “*śrīrāmāya namaḥ*”(I salute Lord Rama). See McGregor 1968: 17. Madhukar Shah's chief queen (and presumably Indrajit's mother), Ganesh De, was also a celebrated devotee of Ram. See *Bhaktamāl*, pp. 659–62.

(72.) The critical interplay between *kāvya* and *bhakti* during the early modern period is discussed further in chapter 3.

(73.) Encounters between the two famous poets are recorded by Vishvanathprasad Mishra (1966: 420) and Vijaypal Singh (1993: 20–21).

(74.) I adopt the English spelling Bir Singh Deo because it is standard in history books today. Bir Singh is a *tadbhava* (vernacular derivative) of the more classical spelling used in Keshavdas's title, Vīr(a)siṃha, “lion among warriors.”

(75.) Kolff 2002: 82–5, 121; *Muntakhab al-tavārīkh*, 2:378.

(76.) For insight into Madhukar Shah's complex position as an older-style Rajput warlord who did not fully acclimate to the expectations of the new regime, see Kolff 2002: 122–24 and Pauwels 2009.

(77.) Entwistle 1987: 175–76.

(78.) The temple was later destroyed by Aurangzeb, and its idols buried under the steps of Jahanara's mosque in Agra (ibid., 176, 181).

(79.) O’Hanlon 2011: 264–65.

(80.) Asher 1995b.

(81.) Case 1996 is a multi-faceted investigation of the temple's historical and artistic context.

(82.) On the Bundela architectural program, see Asher 1995a: 162–64 and Rotharb 2009.

(83.) Kolff 2002: 133.

(84.) The apt phrase is that of Monika Horstmann (2005: 21), who uses it in relation to the religious and political dynamics of the Jaipur built environment under Savai Jai Singh II (r. 1700–43).

(85.) Note the description of Bir Singh's coronation in the last canto.

(86.) See, for instance, *Vīrsiṃhdevcarit*, 11.40–53.

(87.) Keshavdas's remarks about a “new kind of politics” not only are a clear reference to the contemporary struggle for the throne that the poet witnessed but also lend credence to the findings of Dirk Kolff (2002: 71–158), namely that the Orchha kingdom was undergoing a transition from the codes of an earlier *pūrbīya* mode of warlord politics to the newer *manṣabdārī* system under the Mughals.

(88.) *Vīrsiṃhdevcarit*, 3.1–2. Also note the similar sense of foreboding regarding the problem of more than one claimant for power in *Rāmcandracandrikā*, 10.26.

(89.) The *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* epitomizes the new social and political structures that came into being in the classical period, which mandated that younger brothers submit to older ones. See Pollock 2005b: 18–22.

(90.) Compare *Vīrsiṃhdevcarit*, 12.14–28 with *Rāmcandracandrikā*, 10.18–24.

(91.) *Vīrsiṃhdevcarit*, 5.63–65.

(92.) A more detailed analysis of this striking episode is Busch 2005: 38–43.

(93.) It would be difficult to think of a more potent sign of the new Mughal hegemony than the renaming of this Bundela stronghold after the emperor.

(94.) Canto 15 is on Bir Sagar; 16 is on the Chaturbhuj temple; subsequent cantos contain yet other details—some stylized, some perhaps more realistic—of the Orchha environs, including the layout of the bazaar in canto 17, a *nagara-varṇana* (description of the city) in 18; the polo grounds in 19; the palace in 20.

(95.) *Vīrsiṃhdevcarit*, 15.1–7.

(96.) Bir Singh's waterworks project is mentioned in a nineteenth-century Bundela clan history (Kolff 2002: 129).

(97.) *Vīrsiṃhdevcarit*, 22.16–20.

(98.) Sanskrit *mahākāvya* is notorious for its seemingly extraneous set pieces and other conventionalized diversions from the main narrative, such as a couple's *jala-krīḍā* (frolicking in the water). Prabha 1976 is a good overview of the genre. The convention, to my mind, persists even today in the mountain and meadow backdrops of the song interludes of modern Bollywood films.

(99.) See cantos 28–32.

(100.) Pollock 2005a: 65–67.

(101.) This work had tremendous appeal in both *bhakti* and courtly contexts. In the words of the *Prabodhacandrodaya*'s recent English translator, “Starting with its impact within Sanskrit literary culture itself, the play became established as a

touchstone for the form of the allegorical drama, and more specifically a model for literary instruction in philosophical matters” (Kapstein 2009: xliv). The text generated a substantial number of Braj renditions and even a Persian translation by Banwalidas, a writer closely connected to the Mughal prince Dara Shikoh. On the *Prabodhacandrodaya*'s literary life in Braj, see Agraval 1962; the Persian version is entitled *Gulzār-i ḥāl* (Rose garden of gnosis, c. 1662).

(102.) Keshavray is one of the poet's *chāp* or poetic signatures. It was possibly a title bestowed by one of his patrons in the manner of *kavirāy* (the latter frequently awarded to Hindi and Sanskrit poets by Shah Jahan). According to Vijaypal Singh (1993: 49), *rāy* is also a title found in the *Bhat* community.

(103.) *Vijñāngītā*, 1.6–8. We trust that Keshavdas's use of the word *mūṛha* (fool) was merely a convenient partner in rhyme to *gūṛha* (hidden) and does not reflect the “Keshavdas's” actual sentiments about his patron.

(104.) That he had also been the *rājguru* (royal preceptor) to Indrajit is made clear in *Kavipriyā*, 2.20 (cited later in this chapter); cf. *Rasikpriyā*, 1.10.

(105.) The social complexities of the vocation of a Brajbhasha poet at the Mughal court are discussed in Busch 2010a and chapter 4.

(106.) *Vijñāngītā*, 21.69–71.

(107.) On this monument, which marks a turning point in Bundela palatine architecture, see Rotharb 2009: chap. 3.

(108.) *Jahāngīrjascandrikā*, vv. 3–8.

(109.) Ibid., vv. 9–10.

(110.) *Jahāngīrnāmah*, Thackston trans., p. 123.

(111.) A wealth of further evidence is discussed in chapter 4.

(112.) *Kavipriyā*, 2.18–20.

(113.) Ibid., 6.76.

(114.) *Vīrsiṃhdevcarit*, 1.64. Birbal is here considered a friend of Dana, in contrast to Todar Mal (responsible for raising taxes), who is said to be an accomplice of Lobha.

(115.) *Hindī navratna*, pp. 330–31. The Mishra brothers do not give a source. Also see the legends concerning Keshavdas in Mughal contexts referenced by Vijaypal Singh (1993: 21–23).

(116.) The text's recent editor and commentator, Kishorilal, seems more confident than I am about routinely construing the word Keshavdas to mean the poet as eyewitness and actor. See, for instance, *Vīrsiṃhdevcarit*, pp. 207–8, 219–20.

(117.) The use of scare quotes is to signal that these religious categories were far less clearly defined in the early modern period than they have become today.

(118.) *Jahāngīrjascandrikā*, v. 32. In line two Keshavdas puns on the word *cakravāka*, which means both general and a bird famous in Indian poetry for pining at night for its beloved.

(119.) This is a good example of the poet's *chāp* being used in a merely declarative sense without adding other semantic layers.

(120.) Compare *Jahāngīrjascandrikā*, v. 35 with the only slight variant in *Kavipriyā*, 8.5. The change from *Raghubīra* to *Jahāṃgīra* in this verse (along with a few other minor word substitutions) is simple to execute without affecting the integrity of the *kavitt* structure, for which only the total number of (31 or 32) syllables counts rather than syllable weight.

(121.) Cf. Chattopadhyay 1998: 52–60.

(122.) *Jahāngīrjascandrikā*, vv.185–86.

(123.) Ibid., v. 163.

(124.) Entwistle 1987: 173.

(125.) See chapter 2.

(126.) *Jahāngīrjascandrikā*, vv. 167–168; v. 55. Here Keshavdas has employed Braj forms of the Persian words *ʻālam* (world), *panāh* (shelter), *kul* (whole), *ādamī* (born of Adam, i.e., man), *khalq* (earth/creation), *khūbī* (good quality), and *khizānah* (treasure).

(127.) Ibid., vv. 51–98. It is notable that v. 87, which is in honor of Birbal's son “Dhiradharu,” again showcases Birbal's generosity.

(128.) *Jahāngīrjascandrikā*, vv. 198–201.

(129.) Keshavdas's exact date of death is not recorded in any contemporary source, but Vijaypal Singh, a leading scholar of his work, suggests the year 1623. For an overview of various literary historians’ propositions about Keshavdas's dates, see Singh 1993: 31–33, 61–62.

(130.) Sheldon Pollock sees superposition as an important stage in South Asia's vernacular literarization (2006: 318–29).

(131.) For a discussion of the register preferred by Hit Harivamsh and a brief outline of his Sanskrit oeuvre, see Snell 1991b: xiii, 5.

(132.) Only the final portion of Vishnudas's version of the *Mahābhārata*, the *Svargārohaṇa*, had much currency in early modern manuscripts. An obscure vernacular *Bhagavadgītā* by one Theghnath and Manik's adaptation of the *Vetāla pañcaviṃśati* into Braj *caupāī*s also originated in Gwalior, probably at the court of Man Singh Tomar. McGregor 1984: 103, 122.

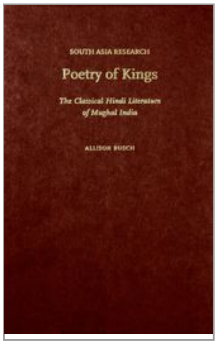
(133.) Nayak Bakshu, one of the most acclaimed practitioners of his day, took the tradition from Gwalior to Gujarat, and his compositions would later be anthologized in the *Sahasras* at the instigation of the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan. Delvoye 1994b: 270.

(134.) Entwistle 1987: 156.

(135.) *Kavipriyā*, 1.41–61.

(136.) See chapter 5.

(137.) Although he never attained the same stature as his brother, Balabhadra Mishra did not go completely unnoticed. Several manuscripts of his *Rasvilās* and a *Śikh-nakh* are preserved in the Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute, and his work was sought out enough to generate at least two commentaries, by Pratap Shah and Gopal Kavi. McGregor 1984: 130, 192. Also see Pandey 1992.



Poetry of Kings: The Classical Hindi Literature of Mughal India
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The Aesthetic World of Rīti Poetry

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Abstract and Keywords

This chapter introduces the most important genres and themes of *rīti* literature. Selections of poetry are analyzed to showcase the techniques of Brajbhasha writers from early modern India. Some of *rīti* literature is deeply embedded in classical traditions of Indian poetics, such as *rasa* theory, *alaṅkāraśāstra*, and *nāyikabheda*. Other components, notably the concern with bhakti, satire and new forms of historical poetry, are closely connected to contemporary cultural and political developments. Rīti writers experimented with the expressive potential of vernacular language, blending Persian, Sanskrit, and local words in highly innovative ways. Absent the grammatical standardization that would later be imposed on Hindi in the colonial period, Brajbhasha was a flexible idiom that could speak to a variety of communities.

Keywords: Indian poetics, rasa, ala ṅkāraśāstra, nāyikabheda, historical poetry, satire, Brajbhasha, bhakti

> All people of developed sensibility agree about the beauty of Brajbhasha.
>
> —Bhikharidas

Reading *Rīti* Literature

The previous chapter's treatment of Keshavdas's oeuvre and his milieu outlined some of the basic characteristics of *rīti* literature. But the workings of premodern Braj courtly culture are almost wholly unknown to modern readers, necessitating a more in-depth account of the tradition's genres and registers as

well as some of its theoretical underpinnings—its relationship to classical styles and its significant departures from them. This and the following chapter give a detailed, if necessarily incomplete, account of *rīti* aesthetic principles and scholarly concerns.[1]

Rīti literature was infused with the ethos of earlier Sanskrit court poetry. Braj poets were especially drawn to compositions in the *śṛṅgāra* (erotic) style, while some eulogized their patrons with that other staple of the Sanskrit literary assembly, *praśasti* (panegyric). Most *rīti* writers were deeply grounded in classical *alaṅkāraśāstra*, the formal systems of Sanskrit poetic theory. But there were also specifically vernacular concerns of *rīti* literary culture. As evident from the literary profile of Keshavdas, Vaishnava devotion was a vital spiritual and poetic inspiration for many courtly authors. **(p.66)** With respect to genres, *rāso* (martial ballad) literature from Rajasthan, the eastern reaches of which are contiguous with the Braj *maṇḍal*, further enlivened the repertoire. Not unrelated to *rāso* or to the earlier Sanskrit poems foregrounding the *vīra rasa* (martial sentiment) was a heightened interest in historical genres in this period, which must be viewed as a new cultural inclination of the Mughal-period vernacular polity. Stylistically, the tendency to incorporate Persian and Arabic vocabulary in some *rīti* poetry, already evident in the late compositions of Keshavdas, increased with increased exposure to Indo-Muslim court culture and became a defining feature of early modern Hindi style. In short, the *rīti* aesthetic was a unique blend of the old and the new, the familiar and the unfamiliar, the cosmopolitan and the regional. This chapter simultaneously demonstrates elements of the *rīti* poets' classicist stance and their capacity for blending, mixing, and reinventing traditions. These features, at first glance contradictory, are some of the chief characteristics of Braj courtly literature as well as factors that contributed to its tremendous appeal.

In the modern Euro-American cultural complex, particular beliefs have evolved about what constitutes good poetry. It is often taken for granted that poetry should emanate from deep within the human psyche and give voice to a writer's personal emotional yearnings. In approaching *rīti* literature, the modern reader should discard this notion immediately. This seemingly self-evident standard of literary excellence is born of a specific moment in European cultural and intellectual history: nineteenth-century Romanticism. An aetiology of poetry lacking a long pedigree even in the West should not be taken to be of global, transhistorical relevance. As in the Rome of classical antiquity or seventeenth-century France—indeed, throughout much of world history—complex protocols governed the composition of literature in premodern India and conditioned its modes of reception by contemporary readers and listeners. For instance, past literary authorities were admired, and it was fully expected that they should be imitated. Thus, originality—another literary obsession of moderns—was not a prerequisite for successful poetry. Although *rīti* poets were demonstrably innovative, they were crucially in dialogue with tradition, and sometimes

circumscribed by it. Several prescriptions militating against new poetic motifs can be found in one of the tradition's foundational texts: Keshavdas's *Kavipriyā*.[2] Another modernist preconception that may hinder more than help is the assumption that poetry should be simple, shorn of rhetorical excess, and not too "learned." *Rīti* poetry is lost on anybody who is not willing to engage with its elaborate poetic flourishes and literary techniques.

Unfortunately, *rīti* poetry has been lost on many a reader in the modern period, especially Indian literary historians. A common complaint is that its **(p.67)** famed *alaṅkāra*s (ornaments) are a burden rather than an enhancement, and the poetry *pāṇḍityapūrṇ* (recherché) rather than heartfelt.[3] Poor Keshavdas has been stigmatized by none other than the founding father of modern Hindi criticism, Ramchandra Shukla, as *hṛdayhīn* (the poet who didn't have a heart) and by a host of subsequent scholars as *kaṭhin kāvya kā pret* (the devil of difficult poetry).[4] A *dohā* (couplet) of uncertain provenance circulates apropos of this latter attribute:

> When a king wanted to avoid awarding a prize to one of his court poets,
> he would ask him to explain a Keshavdas verse.[5]

Keshavdas's high literary style, with its complex and famously inscrutable imagery, elicited the awe of early modern connoisseurs for its elegance and rhetorical flourish. It now invokes among some readers feelings of bewilderment or, worse, disdain.

Although modern Hindi critics regularly forget this, it cannot be stressed too much that Romantic simplicity was never the point of *rīti* literature. These poets were indeed *learned*, and their verse was designed to demonstrate deep learning through the use of ornaments and allusive (and sometimes elusive) meanings. It is no accident that the entire discipline of Sanskrit (and Braj) literary theory is known as *alaṅkāraśāstra*, the science of ornamentation. Even if a strong emphasis on complexity and literary adornment is a poetic principle fundamentally different from our own, we owe Keshavdas and other writers of premodern India the interpretive charity to approach their work first on their terms, not ours.[6]

This problem of hermeneutical distance from *rīti* literature has a complicated history dating to the colonial period, and it has been further exacerbated by a more generalized estrangement of many Hindi speakers today from their precolonial literary heritage. Colonialism brought not only political but also aesthetic tyranny to India from distant shores.[7] New criteria for poetic merit were enshrined by the colonial state and Indian reformist groups alike, who advocated for the primacy of social utility in literature. Another new concern was that poets should seek an experiential basis for their work rather than adhering to traditional formalistic criteria. I will return at the end of the book to

consider this major epistemological overhaul and the discrediting of Brajbhasha literary traditions under colonialism and in particular nationalism. But it is worth mentioning the additional—and for some readers perhaps unanticipated—linguistic fact that mastery of modern standard Hindi does not qualify one to read *rīti* literature in Brajbhasha. The distance between the two dialects is appreciable, as is the gulf between their two literary systems.

(p.68) Just as we appreciate Shakespeare better the more deeply grounded we are in his language and Elizabethan poetic norms, so reading Braj poetry with any understanding means educating ourselves about its conventions and practices. In addition to being self-aware about the literary biases we bring to poetry of the past, we need to be attentive to some general principles of literary history. Take classicism, which has been an important factor in the development of many vernacular literary cultures across the globe. Leaving aside the case of India for a moment, how did Japanese literature come about? Through a deep engagement with classical Chinese traditions. How was Roman literature born? In imitation of the Greeks. What lent credibility to Italian and French luminaries like Dante and Corneille, as each forged new vernacular styles at turning points in European literary history? Their reliance on poetic models from the ancient world. From the Renaissance well into the nineteenth century, poets and artists regularly looked to classical writers for artistic nourishment, and even many of the literary paragons like Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides themselves refashioned stories fully familiar to their audiences. Nobody would have thought to accuse Shakespeare of plagiarism for going back to classical themes from Plutarch.[8] Freshness did not invariably mean rejecting what came before. Freshness, to the extent that it was a literary value, could consist in new approaches to earlier subjects.[9] Keeping this point in mind will go a long way toward helping modern readers to appreciate the techniques and concerns of the Hindi *rīti* tradition.

Some Basic Principles of Indian *Alaṅkāraśāstra*

Most *rīti* writers, particularly the pioneering ones, adopted the genres and literary systems of classical poetry.[10] This was practically inevitable, given the prestige of Sanskrit and the typical sociocultural profile of the authors: they were almost exclusively Brahmans, a class generally well versed in Sanskrit traditions. While the reflex is to think of vernacular texts as simplifications of classical forms, they can also be spectacularly erudite. Keshavdas's signature contribution to literary history was to find ways of writing vernacular *kāvya* without sacrificing Sanskrit elegance. Not all *rīti* literature exhibits the complexity of his texts, but some Braj authors did embrace his high style, particularly in technical works on literary theory and in lengthy *kāvya*s that drew heavily on classical precedent.

An important classificatory principle that derives from Sanskrit but is of continuing relevance to theorizing *rīti* textual culture is the distinction between longer narrative works known as *prabandha kāvya* and the shorter *muktaka*, or freestanding poem. The word *prabandha* simply means a connected narrative, **(p.69)** and the blanket term encompasses several different subgenres like *mahākāvya* (courtly epic), *carita* (idealized biography of an exemplary figure), various forms of drama, and indeed any vernacular rendition of a classical work. *Prabandha*s are the high genre of *rīti* literary culture. These texts belong to a world of carefully crafted *kāvya* and are frequently composed using complex meters and dense figuration. Not all Braj authors took up the *prabandha* form. Many confined themselves to *muktaka*s, which were well suited for performance in a literary assembly. *Muktaka*s were also appropriate for illustrating the classical literary precepts of central importance to the *rītigranth* genre.

Whether poets wrote longer works or more compact freestanding verses, an elaborate series of conventions governed the creative process. In the context of Indian poetry, "conventional" should never be taken as synonymous with uncreative. One function of literary convention is to guide a reader toward the goal of *rasa* or aestheticized emotion. Treatises on classical Indian aesthetics held that there were eight possible *rasa*s: the erotic, the comic, the sorrowful, the heroic, the terrifying, the fierce, the wondrous, and the disgusting. Later in the medieval and early modern periods additional sentiments were included in the canon, notably the *śānta*, *vātsalya*, and *bhakti rasa*s, which centered (respectively) on quiescence, tenderness, and devotion. The point of *rasa* poetry is to create a sustained emotional experience in the reader. While experiencing the emotional impact of poetry is desirable to readers everywhere, in Indian literature the process was held to unfold according to highly structured protocols. A *rasika* (connoisseur or, more literally, an emotionally attuned reader) fully conversant with the system would know how to interpret the cues and clues that the poet deliberately embedded in the text.

To begin with the favorite subject of Sanskrit and Braj court poets alike, *śṛṅgāra* poetry had as its *ālambana vibhāva* (underlying cause) the *nāyikā* (heroine) who was pursued by a *nāyaka* (hero). Although the boy meets girl scenario is a universal literary formula, in Indian *kāvya* the criteria for aesthetic representations of love were painstakingly spelled out. The characters should be delineated according to particular moral and social parameters. They must be youthful, attractive, and of noble birth.[11] Once the main characters are introduced, love is sparked, often because the *nāyaka* first hears of or lays eyes on the *nāyikā*.[12] In the case of a *prabandha* narrative, where there is considerable scope for literary elaboration, the *rasa* is generally heightened by detailed descriptions of the *nāyikā* that afford a chance for the poet to expatiate on the beauty of his heroine and deepen the mood of *śṛṅgāra rasa*. But just as premodern Indian portraiture does not typically function according to realist modes, the poet was expected to portray his heroine in terms of accepted codes

of beauty.[13] In a luminous Braj retelling of Kalidasa's *Śākuntala*, the *rīti* poet **(p. 70)** Nevaj at first stresses the idyllic ashram of Shakuntala's adoptive father, Kanva, and the childish innocence of his heroine. Then, in order to build the mood of *śṛṅgāra*, he recounts step by step the stages of her coming of age, as with the following *kavitt*, the longest of the quatrain styles preferred by *rīti* poets and a meter eminently suited to poetic elaboration:

> She has begun to shed the innocence of childhood,
> her girlfriends conspire to impart knowingness.
> Her glances have narrowed, and now she moves more slowly.
> A few sighs rise up from that chest of hers.
> Youth shines forth from her body, and slowly her childish form is chiseled away.
> Her waist has slimmed, giving her a curvy shape.[14]
> She is a rare beauty, like a two-day-old moon,
> whose loveliness will now be burnished in the waxing.[15]

Very little of what is beautiful in this verse is a function of its newness. The basic imagery is entirely expected. The *tirchā* (crooked) glances of an adolescent girl and her increasingly slow gait (which, as all *rasika*s know, is not simply because she has forsaken childish games but because her hips and breasts have become heavy) are the stuff of thousands of Sanskrit and Braj poems in the *śṛṅgāra* style. Nor is the reader likely to be surprised by plot twists. What Indian connoisseur did not already know the story of Shakuntala? Familiarity is no bar to literary success, however. On the contrary, it frees the reader to immerse himself in the mood of the poem and to relish a given author's variations on an older theme.[16]

A common means of intensifying the erotic mood was to write a *śikh-nakh* or "head-to-toe" description of the heroine. Quite apart from the fact that court poets did not necessarily have a chance to meet the women of the royal harem, stylized description was the preference. The *nāyikā*'s hair is supposed to be jet black; it is usually braided; the poet should not neglect to mention her sparkling forehead ornament, her arched brows, her full lips red like *bimba* fruit, the downy hair that graces her midriff, and all her other alluring features down to her ankleted and hennaed feet. A few verses from one of the more comprehensive Braj *śikh-nakh*s serve as an introduction to the genre. Here is how Keshavdas begins a passage on the women who adorn the harem of Bir Singh Deo Bundela:

> Their hair shimmered with an intense shine, and gave off a beautiful scent.
> The king's heart was enslaved upon seeing it.
> Their braids had been woven meticulously,
> resembling a sword in the hand of King Beauty.
>
> **(p.71)** Are these braids swords to guard the lover's affection,
> warding off that rival, Deceit?

Or are they pleasing rivers of passion, carrying off in their streams
all disloyal acts?

Or are these braids—interleaved with golden ornaments—
staircases to the realm of erotic delight?
Or carpets of sumptuous beauty designed to welcome love?

The splendor where their hair is parted dazzles the heart,
like lightning flashing amid storm clouds.
The vermilion-filled parts are luminous, crowned with a string of pearls.

It is as though the Ganges and Sarasvati Rivers have united and burst forth from the Yamuna waters.[17]
Their heads are adorned with gem-encrusted ornaments,
their parted hair glitters with splendid jewelry.

Woven into their braids are the finest garlands,
upon their foreheads are bindis of ruby and gemstones.
Their twelve hair ornaments light up the night,
gracing the city like twelve suns.

Their arched brows are expressive.
The rubies on their foreheads sparkle intensely.
Two decorative lines of musk augment the splendor … .

The glow from their pearl-brightened noses enchants the whole world.
Their beauty offers up a ritual lamp to the red forehead ornament,
as though performing sun worship.

The eyes plunge for these nose-pearls hat look like stars at sunrise
or flowers in a vine of bliss, scented like the moon's nectar.

Their perfect, round, fair cheeks are delicately molded
with beauty and playfulness.
They are spectacularly lovely, an oasis to the eyes.

(p.72) Behold their ears bedecked with ornaments—they look like the sun's one-wheeled chariot. Their dangling earrings sparkle, fluttering like golden banners.…

Shiny curls frame their foreheads,
which are bathed in a fine black radiance.
The dark night of their hair is graced by light from the lamp of their nose pearls.[18]

The poet continues in this vein for some twenty more verses, but the technique is already more than clear. Again, the point is not so much to astound the reader with a new approach to describing women as to innovate within a set genre. Keshavdas cannot invent any new body parts, but his rendition is original and

deeply satisfying in other respects. His color and light imagery add a dramatic visual layer to his poetic description. The braid motif also delightfully carries him away. When the poet wonders if the royal women's braids are “pleasing rivers of passion,” “staircases to the realm of erotic delight,” or “carpets designed to welcome love,” he employs the *sandeha alaṅkāra* (ornament of doubt) to interesting effect. This is just one of the many ingenious figures of speech developed by Indian writers. The conceit centers on the poet's avowed confusion about the object of his gaze: he claims to be so astonished by the beauty of the braids that he cannot even ascertain what they are.

Here we have barely touched on a few approaches to handling the *ālambana vibhāva*s—particularly women—in classical Indian literature. The poet was also enjoined to invoke *uddīpana vibhāva*s (kindling elements) in order to heighten the *rasa*. A description of the springtime is an attractive option. Perhaps the cuckoo birds are out singing, or the mango trees have started to blossom. As in the case of a *śikh-nakh*, Indian literary theorists laid out precise codes for how a poet should handle descriptions of beautiful settings. Keshavdas, for instance, suggested:

> A garden should be enticing. Mention the hanging vines, beautiful trees and flowers, the sweet cooing of cuckoos and peacocks, the bees buzzing all around.[19]

Keshavdas does proceed to describe a real-life garden in the accompanying example verse—the garden of his student, the courtesan Pravin Ray (figure 2.1)—but verisimilitude is not his preferred style. In a courtly setting, gardens redound to the builder's honor. Descriptions of them should also stir up emotion because fostering emotion is one of the primary goals of *kāvya*.

(p.73)

In a scene that leads up to the consummation of Shakuntala's affair with King Dushyanta, the poet Nevaj heightens the mood of *śṛṅgāra* with his own focus on spectacularly enticing imagery:

> The king couldn’t wait
> to see her. He rushed
> to the bank of the
> Malini River.
> The lotuses were in
> bloom, the peacocks
> cried,
> a cool breeze swayed
> gently, peacocks
> pranced, cuckoos cooed.

figure 2.1 Pravin Ray's garden, Orchha

The lushly laden
branches of the trees
sank down low,
sheltering with cool, dense shade a bed of lotus petals.[20]

Courtesy of Edward Rotharb

Nevaj's images are not something he invented out of whole cloth, but are instead crafted from a repertoire of conventions for maximum erotic effect. Peacocks—associated with the rainy season—are a metonym for desire in Indian poetry, and lush trees help to conjure up both eros and fertility. The poet's apt choice of the *caupāī* meter, whose very structure helps to suggest forward motion and is thus perfect for leading up to an urgent crescendo, almost propels the reader into the forest arbor along with Dushyanta. Such lavish descriptions of beautiful settings are marshaled to heighten the *bhāva* (feeling) **(p.74)** of *rati* (passion), which, according to classical thinking, is a prelude to the development of full-blown *śṛṅgāra rasa*.

This is just a sampling (necessarily simplified) of an intricate complex of literary codes that relate to *sambhoga śṛṅgāra* (love fulfilled). Yet other codes are relevant when it comes to conveying the pathos of *vipralambha śṛṅgāra* (frustrated love). A poignant *kuṇḍaliyā* verse from Narottam Kavi's *Māncarit* (Biography of Man Singh, c. 1600) reports the deleterious effects of a beautiful garden on separated lovers:

The lovelorn, stricken with separation, visit the beautiful garden.
The jasmine scent, a breeze in the arbor, a conflagration sparked in the body.
A conflagration sparked in the body, how can it be quenched?
Listening to melodies intensifies the pain.
The scented breeze keeps blowing through the garden.
Not bearing to look at other women, they flee, the lovelorn.[21]

This verse uses *uddīpana vibhāva*s like jasmine, music, and the breeze to focalize the devastating condition known as *viraha* (anguished separation from one's lover). Here we see the flipside of the beauties of a garden. It brings joy to lovers, but unbearable suffering to those cursed to experience it alone. The formal features of the *kuṇḍaliyā* underscore the inescapable pain of separated lovers with the mirroring effects of the repeated opening and closing phrase *je birahī* (the lovelorn) and the structured repetitions in lines two and three, which are defining features of the meter.

A much-anthologized *kavitt* by Keshavdas can serve as a final illustration of the function of *uddīpana vibhāva*s in the depiction of *śṛṅgāra rasa*.

Oh, my friend, keep out the cooling breeze
and don’t let me see the moonlight.
They only dampen my spirits.
Cast away the flowers, brush off the camphor,

wash away the sandalwood paste—
my heart just blazes all the more.
I languish like a fish out of water,
not to be revived with a mere sprinkle.
Don’t you understand what's wrong?
Why do you persist with these cooling remedies?
My body's fire can only be quenched by the fire of my beloved.[22]

Grasping the meaning of this poem is contingent on knowledge of two related conventions. One is already familiar from Narottam's verse: unrequited love is **(p.75)** a fire. The second is that specific substances such as moon rays, camphor, and sandalwood are held to soothe the body with their cooling effects. Here the fire of separation is so strong that it renders all such remedies futile. Passion is likened to a bout of crippling fever, which only the presence of the beloved can cure.

Vipralambha śṛṅgāra has many different causes, and these too merited full description and analysis on the part of Indian pandits. *Māna* (jealous rage) and its corollary *māna-mocana* (reconciliation) were much theorized, and much poeticized, subjects. And when a *nāyikā*'s lover goes abroad a particularly protracted period of *viraha* ensues, meriting expression in a popular genre known as *bārah-māsa* (lament over twelve months).[23] This was both a stand-alone genre and a stylized subgenre that was skillfully incorporated into Hindi *prabandha* texts to contribute to the development of *śṛṅgāra* in its *vipralambha* form. Yet another method for elaborating on *vipralambha* was to invoke the system of ten *daśā*s (states) that a lover would pass through in grief over a beloved's absence: intense longing, worry, cataloguing the lover's virtues, remembrance, agitation, lamentation, madness, anguish, apathy, and ultimately death. The Indian tradition not only understood deeply but also attempted to articulate with unparalleled sophistication the way emotion works in literature, and the nuances of how a connoisseur experiences it.

All literary cultures generate meaning by working with tacit cues available to their members, but the Indian system was far more explicitly codified than most. *Kāvya* was a complex art, and it was based on science. The prodigious talents of hundreds of Sanskrit poetry virtuosos writing over a millennium gave rise to a commensurably erudite body of literary theory adopted, with creative modifications, by the Braj court poets of the Mughal period. The uniquely Indian concept of *rasa* originated in the dramaturgical tradition of classical India, but *rasa* theory was later complemented (and complicated) by intensely philosophical thinking on poetry as a special domain of language that required sustained attention to its formal features and its own systematic discipline: *alaṅkāraśāstra*.

The Sanskrit term *alaṅkāraśāstra* is used in two senses. It can refer to any work of rhetoric (whether or not it is restricted to the topic of *alaṅkāra*s) and can thus encompass *rasa* or any other domain of Indian poetics. In its narrower sense, however, *alaṅkāraśāstra* refers to the subdiscipline of tropology—figures of speech such as similes and metaphors. In Braj, as in Sanskrit, some writers of *alaṅkāraśāstra* took up the subject of tropes exclusively. Other authors treated them as one of many elements of poetic composition, devoting just a chapter or two of a larger book to the matter. Some writers, most famously the Sanskrit theoretician Anandavardhana (fl. 850), criticized an *alaṅkāra*-centered approach **(p.76)** to poetics as missing the "soul" of poetry, and he advocated instead a focus on the art of *dhvani* (suggestion), the subtler semiotic powers of language.[24] But whether *alaṅkāra* was the primary focus of literary attention or just a subsidiary domain, whether one advocated its use or minimized it, all poets and readers needed to be conversant with the science of literary ornamentation. In the words of Keshavdas,

> A woman may be noble, she may have good features. She may be shapely, beautiful, and passionate. But without ornaments, my friend, there is something missing. The same goes for poetry.[25]

Some of the literary devices that Indians theorized as *alaṅkāra*s are of course known to other poetry traditions, but the finesse of Sanskrit and Braj poets is unsurpassed. With the *śleṣa alaṅkāra*, for instance, writers took punning to spectacular lengths, composing verses and—in extreme cases—entire works that tell two or more stories at the same time.[26] In addition to the usual similes and metaphors, there are dozens of ingenious categories such as *sandeha* (expressing a doubt), *ananvaya*, (incomparability), *utprekṣā* (extended parallel), *vyatireka* (exceeding expectation), *vyājastuti* (praising while blaming), just to name a few, bringing an extraordinary complexity and detailed classificatory rigor to the enterprise.

Braj courtly authors exhibited a special flair in the domain of *alaṅkāraśāstra*, lovingly defining and illustrating hundreds of *bheda*s (types) of ornament in their *rītigranth*s. The following definition of a *vyājastuti* complete with *udāharaṇ* by Matiram Tripathi, one of the leading *rīti* poets from the second half of the seventeenth century, is a beautiful example of the motif. He begins with a *dohā* that defines the figure of speech and, as is typical, follows with a quatrain (in this case a *kavitt*) that exemplifies the theoretical point.

> Definition of "praising while blaming"
> Praise is indicated through blame, or blame through praise.
> All the clever poets call this *vyājastuti*.
> Example
> You lawlessly steal the hearts of those you behold,
> never to return them.
> Your sidelong glances, sharper than Kamadeva's arrows,

pierce the heart and dig themselves in deep.
Your eyes have tussled with wagtails, fish, and deer,
snatching away their beauty.
I have caught your eyes engaged in these cruel acts,
and yet everybody sings their praises.[27]

(p.77) In this poem, the *nāyaka* inveighs against his beloved's eyes, accusing them of every sort of destructive behavior, and yet the net effect of the verse is of course to pay her a compliment. Here Matiram may rely on conventional imagery—glances like arrows, eyes like darting fish, and so on—but he cleverly subverts these tropes in the punch line. *Rīti* writers theorized many other types of unusual figures of speech, often playing with convention in inventive ways.

In the following example by Keshavdas of a *sabhāvahetu alaṅkāra*, a trope predicated on "a cause due to presence," the lovelorn *nāyikā* waiting patiently for her lover to arrive is stricken by a breeze that has "stolen" its scents in various encounters along the route, also plundering her ability to wait for her lover's return.

Definition of a cause

All the master poets speak of two types of cause. Keshavdas illustrates them here: one is a cause due to presence, the other due to absence.

Example of a cause due to presence
First it took on a thick coat of sandalwood,
then rubbed up against lotus pollen.
It grazed the jasmine vines and roses,
fondling how many pine flowers?
It was tinted yellow in a field of *champa* flowers,
and embraced the banana tree along the way.
The gentle breeze, crisp and fragrant, was cooled by a waft of camphor.
It blew right by her and carried off her composure, too.[28]

Here the reader becomes a companion on the breeze's journey, whisked along by the momentum of the poem, swept up in the brisk, choppy cadence of the *savaiyā* meter. Keshavdas masterfully creates suspense by not unveiling the mysterious "cause due to a presence" until the very end of the poem: the *nāyikā*'s suffering at the hands of the cruelly enticing breeze. The pain of unrequited love is universal, but these examples by two of the *rīti* tradition's most renowned poet-scholars illustrate how *alaṅkāraśāstra* served as a specifically Indian tool for both theorizing and actualizing sophisticated poetic nuances.

Some *rīti* writers continued to improve on the classical systems, as we shall see in the next chapter, but many took the theory as given, without exerting too

much effort to develop it in new directions. The major Sanskrit *ālaṅkārika*s had operated differently. Their primary concern was articulating precise and intellectually rigorous definitions that either contested or more subtly modified the **(p.78)** formulations of past authorities. They were not, for the most part, inspired poets. For their example verses, Sanskrit writers usually excerpted poetry from famous classics such as the *śataka*s of Amaru or Bhartrihari rather than composing their own.[29] In contrast, for the *rīti* author, writing original poetry was the essence of the matter.

In some cases, *rīti* writers turned the theory itself into an opportunity for poetic expression. The *Bhāṣābhūṣaṇ* (Ornament to the vernacular, c. 1660), attributed to the Marwar king Jaswant Singh, is a superbly concise *rīti* work in which the author cleverly combines definitions and examples in a striking display of poetic virtuosity. The majority of *rītigranth* authors use the *dohā* (couplet) only for the *lakṣaṇ*s, employing either the *kavitt* or the *savaiyā* for the *udāharaṇ*s. In the *Bhāṣābhūṣaṇ*, Jaswant Singh uses only couplets, as though setting himself a special expository and poetic challenge. A measure of artistic success in the *dohā* form is the ability to telescope a narrative into just two brief lines. In the *Bhāṣābhūṣaṇ*, an already-challenging task becomes doubly challenging when the poet combines *lakṣaṇ* and *udāharaṇ* in a single couplet.[30] Imagine the theorical and poetic mastery required for the composition of verses such as this one on the *gūḍhottara* (sly answer) *alaṅkāra*:

> The “sly answer” occurs when an answer is
> given with an ulterior motive.
> “There is a stream over there by the grove, traveler,
> perfect for resting.”
> *Gūṛhottara kachu bhāva teṃ, uttara dīnhe hota*
> *Uta betasataru meṃ, pathika, utarana lāyaka srota*[31]

This terse *dohā* of necessity draws on a repertoire of extra textual meanings. The subtext for the “sly answer” is that the *nāyikā* finds the traveler attractive and wants to meet him alone in the grove. To onlookers (her family, etc.), she would innocently be giving helpful directions to a wayfarer looking for a place to halt for the night. But whereas the *nāyikā*'s family doesn’t get it, the reader (who for a titillating moment becomes the traveler being addressed) does understand her suggestive message. The *Bhāṣābhūṣaṇ* is, in terms of genre, a *rītigranth*, but it is primarily—even in the construction of its technical verses—a finely wrought poetic creation.

Hundreds of Brajbhasha treatises on *alaṅkāra*s were produced in the courtly milieu of early modern India. Such *rītigranth*s were showcases for poetry as well as a resource for budding writers and connoisseurs who took pride and pleasure in their knowledge of the fine points. And this beautifully conceived discourse on

ornaments was just one of the sophisticated knowledge systems cultivated by Braj literati.

Let Me Count the Ways

(p.79) A subdiscipline of *alaṅkāraśāstra* known as *nāyikābheda*, a typology of different female characters, was particularly well developed in Brajbhasha. As noted, the *nāyikā* is the foundation of *śṛṅgāra rasa*, considered its *ālambana vibhāva* or underlying cause. Traditional Sanskrit theoreticians generally subsumed *nāyikābheda* within the larger discipline of *rasa* theory, but in the early modern period this subject became a new discipline in its own right.

Love cannot arise in classical Indian poetry without a woman, but not all women are the same. A particular fascination of *rīti* literary theorists was to produce the perfect catalogue of female characters. What are their different qualities, and how do they show their love? More importantly, how should a writer portray them in all their nuances? For example, in the case of a *svakīyā* (one's own wife), the consensus was that a poet should emphasize a woman's modesty, as the famous Mughal poet Rahim (fl. 1600) does in the following couplet:

> A shadow of a glance hovers at the corner of her eye.
> When she moves you can’t even hear her anklets.[32]

A subcategory of *svakīyā* and a favorite of poets was the *navoṛhā nāyikā* (new bride). Such a woman refuses a lover's sexual advances in bed by struggling to keep her blouse done up or locking her thighs tightly together. Some poets set their sights on even younger women, such as the *mugdhā* (innocent), the girl just entering puberty. Part of this series is the *ajñātayauvanā nāyikā*, a still-unmarried girl who is so naɬve that she does not even know about puberty or lovemaking yet. She typically panics upon first noticing her budding breasts, thinking she has contracted some kind of disease until a girlfriend or nanny explains to her the ways of the world.[33] Braj poets, like their Sanskrit predecessors, were also intrigued by racier types of passion. Many a *bheda* was forged in describing the dynamics of a liaison with a *parakīyā* (the wife of another man). In some cases, love is directed toward a courtesan. Unsurprisingly, there is a name for that, too: the *sāmānyā nāyikā* or “woman available to all.”

Indian theorists of *nāyikābheda* seem to have had a penchant for threefold typologies. Aside from the triplet *svakīyā-parakīyā-sāmānyā* is a tripartite division according to stages in the relationship. After a woman gains some experience in love she ceases to be *mugdhā*. She qualifies for promotion to *madhyā* (somewhat knowledgeable) and eventually to the status of *prauḍhā* (mature). A *prauḍhā nāyikā* is wise in the ways of the world and in full command of an arsenal of feminine wiles. She enjoys sex and knows how to manipulate her lover in manifold ways (these two attributes have also been **(p.80)** theorized as subtypes: the *ratipriyā* and *svādhīnapatikā*). Another triple division hinges on

whether a woman is *uttamā*, *madhyamā*, or *adhamā* (best, middling, and worst, respectively). The principal metric here is how quick a woman is to anger. The *uttamā* does not mind too much if her lover strays; the *madhyamā* can be appeased after an indiscretion, but the *adhamā* unleashes a jealous tirade.[34] The issue of *māna*, or jealous rage, technically a subtopic of "frustrated love," was also subject to the classification of pandits (*māna* can be light, middling, or severe), giving us yet another favorite *bheda*: the *māninī* (indignant woman). Even a woman's style of expressing anger was subject to a threefold scheme. An *adhīrā* (volatile) woman lashes out indiscriminately at her man. A *dhīrādhīrā* (sometimes self-possessed, sometimes volatile) woman has learned to occasionally control her temper toward strategic ends. The *dhīrā* woman is the canniest: she knows that the best way to get back at him may be to give him the silent treatment or to let loose with a few well-timed sarcastic remarks.

To the unaccustomed observer this may seem like a surprising or even excessive degree of categorization, but it is just the tip of an iceberg in the ocean of *nāyikābheda*. There is also a well-known eightfold system called *aṣṭanāyikābheda*, a detailed exploration of the emotional landscape of women in love.

1) *svādhīnapatikā* (has her lover under control)
2) *utkā* (anxious)
3) *vāsakasajjā* (waiting, having decorated her bed)
4) *abhisandhitā* (stubborn)
5) *khaṇḍitā* (reproachful; see figure 4.2)
6) *proṣitapatikā* (sad because her lover has gone far away)
7) *vipralabdhā* (sad because her lover did not keep the rendezvous)
8) *abhisārikā* (setting forth boldly to meet her lover; see figure 1.1)

This and the other systems just outlined can be combined in various ways to generate yet additional systems, and subsystems, and sub-subsystems. Some *rīti* authors took special care to put their own stamp on the subject by modifying the existing *bheda*s. For instance, in his *Rasikpriyā*, Keshavdas augmented the traditional wisdom on the *abhisārikā nāyikā* with the addition of a new category: the *premābhisārikā* or "woman who goes forth boldly to meet her sweetheart out of love."[35]

Keshavdas additionally divided *nāyikā*s into *prachhanna* (secretive) and *prakāśa* (out in the open), the operative distinction being whether the affair is a private matter known only to the lovers and perhaps a close *sakhī* (confidante), **(p.81)** or is common knowledge. This single classificatory move effectively doubled the number of *nāyikā*s as exemplified by the poet's dual exposition of the *utkā* (anxious), which begins with a definition followed by twinned verses that illustrate both “secretive” and “out in the open.”

Definition of anxious

Keshavdas says that the “anxious” is a woman whose lover does not show up for some reason, causing her heart to brim with sorrow.

An example of the “secretive anxious”
Is it some matter at home?
Or did his cowherd friends detain him?
Is he fasting today?
Did he fail to pay a debt?
Did he get into a fight?
Has he suddenly taken a religious turn?
Perhaps he is unwell?
Or his love for me is false?
Did he see the clouds and hesitate to come in the middle of the night?
Or is he testing my love?
Again today he hasn’t come!
What could be the matter?

In this example—note the use of the *sandeha alaṅkāra* (the *nāyikā* cannot decide on the exact reason for her lover not showing up)—the worry that the heroine feels is entirely private. A second poem in which the *nāyikā* shares her concern with another woman (but not a close confidante, in which case the category of “secretive” would still apply) distinguishes the *prakāśā* (figure 2.2) from the *prachhannā utkā*:

An example of the “openly anxious”
Did he just forget?
Or has somebody cast a spell on him?
Has he lost his way?
Is he afraid of someone?
Perhaps he's met another woman more beautiful than I.
He may have left already.
Or it could be that he's just arriving now, or will arrive at any moment.
My friend, comfort me—
Nanda's son is delayed, and I don’t know the reason.[36]

(p.82) Whether Keshavdas explores the emotions of an anxious *nāyikā* talking to herself or to another, the anguished urgency of her *viraha* state comes through powerfully, evoking the *rasa* of *vipralambha śṛṅgāra* in the reader.

(p.83) The various permutations of *nāyikā*s are many. They can add up quickly, even exponentially. Keshavdas calculated a total of 360 possibilities in his *Rasikpriyā*, and even higher counts have been registered.[37] And this tally does not include all the other women who show up in literature and can therefore be classified, such as the *nāyikā*'s *sakhī*s and *dutī*s (messengers), not to mention a raft of servants including the midwife, barber's wife, gardener's wife, and so on. The male characters, *nāyaka*s, also merited categorization, but they were never treated with anything approaching the same zeal. Indian poetry may often have a female voice, but it has a male gaze.

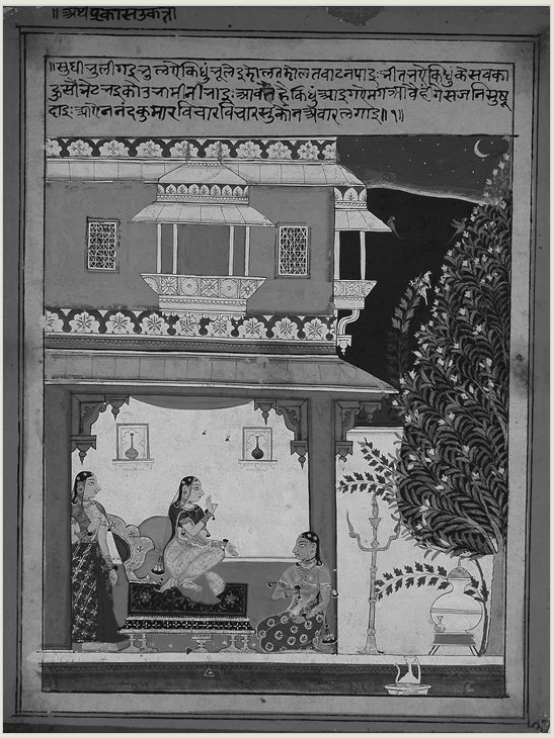


figure 2.2 Openly anxious heroine (*prakāśā utkā nāyikā*), attributed to Sahibdin. Mewar, c. 1630–35.

Courtesy of Jnana-pravaha, Varanasi

Why so Much Ado about Typology?

The existence of so many *nāyikābheda* works has perplexed many modern readers. Those who lack training in Indian poetic theory might also assume that the immense number of rules could only produce some kind of stilted and inferior literary experience. Or a person sensitive to gender issues might wonder whether all this *nāyikābheda* is some kind of bizarre testosterone-driven fantasy, the male gaze on overdrive. One modern interpreter of Braj poetry, who has identified poetic features that traditional Indian scholars, for all their systematizing, ironically never addressed, is correct to point out that Indian aesthetic theory can be too limiting an interpretative system.[38] *Rīti* styles have usually been derided as emblematic of Hindi literature's mannerist phase, in which poets were supposedly so busy typologizing that they neglected to write good poetry. When the crudest of historical analyses collided with colonial and nationalist discourse in the early twentieth century, genres like *nāyikābheda* came to be considered evidence of a

decadent (not to mention oversexed) culture that had lost its classical vibrancy and sunk to new lows of repetition and staleness.[39]

While rejecting the traditional literary categories out of hand is easy, the intellectually rigorous approach is to try to understand what these categories meant to the people who used them, and why they mattered so much. European epistemological and aesthetic regimes have come to dominate the globe since colonial times, obscuring and discrediting the sophisticated literary disciplines and interpretive codes of other cultures. Postcolonial literary theory has done much to articulate cogent critiques of the travesties of imperialism, but the focus in India has been largely on modern texts. The precolonial literary past must also be read postcolonially. And any such reading must begin by sincerely engaging with the literary values of Indian premodernity.

Questions worth posing when studying premodern culture generally concern the shape of innovation in conservative genres. What were the markers of **(p.84)** poetic beauty in a world of literary systematicity? Where was the author's chance to display originality when so much had been prescribed? Does an overly prescriptive system hinder rather than enhance the potential for poetic creativity? In fact, infinite creative possibilities were always available at the level of an individual verse, and constraint creates its own exquisite forms of freedom. Occasionally poets proposed a new *bheda* of *nāyikā*, but even when they wrote about the same time-tested ones, there was still scope for newness. Sometimes *rīti* poets sought the small twist on an old theme or a beautiful turn of phrase. It has become commonplace to note that there are hundreds of *Rāmāyaṇa*s in southern Asia, but each was told with different emphases and outcomes.[40] The fact that everybody already knew the story did not detract from the experience. On the contrary, prior knowledge enhanced enjoyment, as when, to use a modern analogy, listeners hear a favorite old song being “covered” by a newer band. The *rīti* themes that were crafted from the template of *alaṅkāraśāstra* by the members of the Braj *kavikul* (community of poets) functioned in a similar way. New emphases were always being dreamed up, testament to the vibrancy of the tradition.[41]

rīti poets’ penchant for hyper-systematicity also has to be understood in its own cultural environment. India had always been a culture of *śāstra* producers. Virtually no domain of cultural, social, or political practice went untheorized. In many fields, including *darśana* (philosophy), *vāstu* (architecture), *saṅgīta* (music), *gaṇita* (mathematics), *jyotiṣa* (astrology), and even *kāma* (sex), Indians did it by the book. Whether or not one followed it to the letter (and, to be sure, many did not), there was a deep-seated belief that theory made practice more efficacious. In the classical Sanskrit thought-world, theory was even held to be an epistemological necessity, one that *preceded* practice.[42]

In the knowledge system of *alaṅkāraśāstra*, crucial principles of literary hermeneutics were also at work. *Rīti* literary theory is a highly structured semiotic system that enabled the production, performance, and interpretation of Brajbhasha court poetry. Intelligibility and literary success in courtly venues depended on poets and audiences being conversant with the principal components. *Rītigranth*s were an important means of enabling these social and communicative processes. We do not know nearly as much as we would like about the performance conditions of *rīti* poetry, but it is certain that *bhakti* poetry in the *pad* genre was a sung tradition, as was *dhrupad*, a style that became spectacularly popular in Mughal circles.[43] It is easy to envision a context, much like the *maḥfil* associated with Urdu literary culture, in which a poet presented his couplets or quatrains to a specialized audience of connoisseurs. One corroborating clue about courtly performance in the seventeenth century comes from Jayarama Pindye's *Rādhāmādhavavilāsacampū* (Love play of Radha and Krishna, **(p.85)** c. 1650), a collection of mixed Sanskrit and vernacular poetry produced under the patronage of Shahaji Bhonsle in the Deccan. The work documents a *samasyāpūrti* (extemporaneous composition) competition in which the poets in Shahaji's assembly were asked to present verses that could elucidate the difference between *nāyikā*s of the *jñātayauvanā* and *ajñātayauvanā* types (conscious and unconscious of the arrival of puberty) according to the Sanskrit rhetorician Bhanudatta's description of them.[44] This kind of situation, in which *nāyikābheda* was a basis for performance as well as a subject of debate among connoisseurs, is probably generalizable to *rīti* contexts, as well.[45] The very structure of a *rītigranth*, predicated upon proposing a definition and composing a suitable example verse, may be seen as a textual embodiment of the oral practice of *samasyāpūrti* from the courtly *sabhā* (assembly).

Thorough immersion in *alaṅkāraśāstra* would have been essential for the appreciation of *muktaka*s. Unlike the verses of a *prabandha* work, a *muktaka* is not part of a larger narrative. The charm of this verse style is that the reader or listener steps into the middle of a story. The full story is never told in the poem itself, especially in the case of a *dohā*, where there is room for only the sparsest narrative detail. Consider the literary infrastructure that must be in place for a couplet like the following one by Bihari to generate meaning:

> Why do you drive me crazy with all your lies? You can’t hide the truth.
> Your eyes, dripping with redness, tell the tale of last night's pleasures.[46]

The speaker, the addressee, and the subject of the conversation are nowhere directly enunciated. As far as the minimal narrative content of the poem goes, all we are told is that upon seeing somebody's red eyes another person gets angry. But the metadiscourse of *nāyikābheda* allows us easily to fill in the rest of the

story. In the most likely reading of the verse, Bihari is depicting an encounter between a *khaṇḍitā nāyikā* (reproachful beloved) and a *śaṭha nāyaka* (unfaithful lover). According to the conventions of *rīti* literature, red eyes in a man are a clue that he has been up all night making love to another woman. His eyes may be red either from lack of sleep or, more extremely, because during the heat of passion things got a little messy and betel juice stained his face. The verse would then be about his angry girlfriend taking him to task for his infidelity.

However, such a reconstruction of the context does not begin to exhaust the interpretive possibilities of this poem. We cannot know for certain how a given *rīti muktaka* was interpreted by its many readers and listeners in early modern India, though the possibilities are circumscribed by the formalized literary systems just outlined. Fortunately, commentators afford valuable clues. For the poem just cited, Lallulal (fl. 1800) suggests two other potential readings **(p.86)** in his *Lālcandrikā* commentary on the *Bihārīsatsaī*. Instead of recording the harsh words of a woman whose lover has cheated on her, this *muktaka* of Bihari may also be taken as a conversation between two girlfriends. In this case, the *nāyikā* is of the *bheda* known as *lakṣitā* (found out), and the verse has a less shrill tone: the *sakhī*, the *nāyikā*'s girlfriend, is teasing her about her red eyes with a wink and a nudge that suggest she knows all about her friend's naughty escapades with her lover. But if the speakers are reversed, and these are the words of the *nāyikā* instead of the *sakhī*, an altogether different scenario arises from within the framework of *nāyikābheda*: that of the *anyasambhogaduhkhitā*, a jealous *nāyikā* who is furious at her girlfriend for spending the night with the *nāyikā*'s own lover.[47] In short, the mere seventeen words of this short *dohā* produce an array of interpretations from within a structured grid of possibilities, and the reader's puzzling over them—indeed, his ability to create new possibilities by his mastery of the poet's unique grammar of love—is precisely one of the joys of experiencing *rīti* poetry. Bihari's *dohā*s have frequently been celebrated for their quality of being *gāgar meṃ sāgar* (a small pot that contains the ocean). The reason this *rīti* poet can say so much in so few words is that a centuries-old system of literary shorthand serves as a potent mechanism for signification and connoisseurship.

The encoding of pointed images by skilled poets and its corollary, the existence of a sophisticated audience attuned to the fine points of classical theory, were the critical underpinning of this literary culture. It is through immersion in the system that we can identify the newly married *nāyikā* from the Rahim poem excerpted above: her sidelong glances suggest a woman too modest to look directly at her husband, and her quiet anklets bespeak a woman so unassertive as to make no sound when she moves. An uninitiated reader would feel mystified as to why a female character appears sad about the harvesting of the sugarcane, but those in the know understand her to be an *anuśayanā* (apprehensive) *nāyikā*, and the cause of her concern the destruction of the hiding spot—sugarcane grows tall—where she had been able to meet her lover, their affair thus

undetected. Connoisseurs of Indian poetry know that an *adhīrā nāyikā* is prone to lashing out in anger, and that the cure for *gurumāna* (a woman's most extreme form of jealous rage, sparked by a lover's infidelity) is *praṇati* (the man's bowing down at her feet). The system of *nāyikābheda* encodes thousands of possible exchanges between lovers in poetry, allowing the *kavikul* to bypass the need for cumbersome background detail.

Besides these elements of *rīti* literary culture that derive primarily from Sanskrit, much was new in the world of Brajbhasha textuality. For one thing, *bhakti* was a major concern, even for court poets. For another, earlier genres from Sanskrit could be given a new vernacular twist. Occasionally more pronounced **(p.87)** innovations are evident, as in Braj writers' exploitation of uniquely vernacular registers or their penchant for rhymed poetry. We also find hybrid poetic styles that draw upon the resources of Persian. I turn now to explore some of these departures.

Rīti Poets and *Bhakti*

In the modern period, the Sanskrit language is too readily equated with religious life, obscuring the sophisticated, worldly side of its intellectual and political culture.[48] The *śāstra*s, *prabandha*s, and *muktaka*s discussed above, the principal genres of the courtly *sabhā*, had largely been secular matters for the Sanskrit pandits of premodern India. But while *rīti* poets shared their Sanskrit predecessors' interest in these and the courtly styles of *śṛṅgāra*, *praśasti*, and scholasticism, their works were also profoundly informed by more recent *bhakti* trends.

A number of courtly genres may well have originated in Sanskrit but upon being transplanted into Brajbhasha were put to more religious use—or at least subject to simultaneous readings as both courtly *and* religious. As explored in the previous chapter, Keshavdas's *Rasikpriyā* is profoundly imbued with *bhakti*. Recall how the figure of Radha is cast in *rīti* imagery that is simultaneously reverential, as the *jaganāyaka kī nāyikā*, heroine of the world's hero (i.e., Krishna). The works of proto–*rīti* poets like Kriparam and Nanddas are primarily devotional in orientation even if their formal features affiliate them with *rīti śāstra*. Later Braj rhetoricians such as Chintamani Tripathi (fl. 1650) and Bhikharidas (fl. 1740) would revise earlier Sanskrit theories to bring them in line with *bhakti*; many other *rīti* authors, even while elucidating scholastic points from Sanskrit poetics, explicitly depicted love scenes about Radha and Krishna, allowing for both spiritual and secular interpretations. This ambiguity was particularly exploited by Rajput and Pahari painters, who generally signal that the *nāyaka* of their painted poems is Krishna by using blue pigment for the male character (see figure 4.2). The Krishna in question may be a sumptuously dressed courtier as opposed to a cowherder playing his flute in a grove in Vrindavan, but it is Krishna nonetheless, and for some viewers the experience would not have been as much courtly delectation as religious reverence—or

perhaps both at the same time.[49] Some of the longer *prabandha kāvya*s were also influenced by the new Vaishnava currents of Mughal-period India. Keshavdas's *Rāmcandracandrikā* is a *bhakti*-infused *prabandha* on the life of Rama, although otherwise very much in the style of Sanskrit high *kāvya*. The *Sudāmācarita* (Life of Sudama), based on Vaishnava lore about Krishna's indigent childhood friend **(p.88)** Sudama, became a popular subject with Braj poets.[50] The infusion of earlier court genres with Vaishnava *bhakti* is just one of the new hybrid styles in this period.

Braj Historiography

Another textual domain that drew from several sources, including Sanskrit, is that of Brajbhasha historiography. Although it was never a major focus of Sanskrit writers, Bana's *Harṣacarita* (Biography of Harsha, c. 640), the *Vikramāṅkadevacarita* (Biography of Vikramanka Deva, c. 1080) of Bilhana, and the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* (Genealogy of kings, 1148) of Kalhana are important instances of historical literature from the classical tradition. Early *rīti* writers showed an affinity for the genre, which inhabits an interstitial space between history and literature, with its elements of quasi reportage intermingled with less realistic scenes of great rhetorical flourish. Many local cultural streams also fed into Braj historical writing. Although the *vīra* or heroic sentiment was a foundational component of the Sanskrit literary repertoire, the *rāso* was a specifically western Indian genre that became prominent from the sixteenth century. We noted that the *rāso* must have been a model for Keshavdas's early *Ratnabāvanī* and such ballads remained current in Rajput courts of the Mughal period. This was a time when the oral, bardic traditions of Rajasthan were giving way to a new cultural preference for formal written texts.[51]

One new and pervasive phenomenon of early modern India that markedly affected Braj historiographical developments was Mughal power. Several *rīti* works are significant articulations of historical events for a local readership, composed in the genres that had currency in their own communities. As noted in chapter 1, the first portion of Keshavdas's *Vīrsiṃhdevcarit* is a detailed account of Mughal-Orchha political relations around 1600, in which Keshavdas chronicles the key events almost as if he were a court historian and with a specificity that had been rare in Sanskrit *kāvya*. In later cantos of the work, however, he departs from this historical approach, interweaving elements of elegant *kāvya* and political sermons that derive from the Sanskrit textual past. To invoke the formulation of a recent book on South Indian historiography from the same period, an attuned reader can differentiate between the poetic and historical “textures.”[52]

Narottam Kavi's *Māncarit* is another paradigmatic example from the Kachhwaha court at Amber. The following *chappay* evinces the poet's interest in recording Mughal genealogy as well as reporting on recent political events:

> **(p.89)** Babur, lord of the earth, conquered countless territories.
> Humayun challenged many rulers,
> and increased the boundaries of the kingdom.
> The kingdom was strengthened by mighty Akbar,
> glory be upon him.
> The nobility and Afghans serve him in the imperial court.
> Chaghtais hold sway over the four corners of the earth,
> their laws are obeyed.
> But everybody says the sword of Man Singh
> is instrumental to their power.[53]

The poet here projects a dramatic vision of local sovereignty within the imperial system: the Mughals may rule the earth, but it is only because of Rajputs like Man Singh that they can do so. Elsewhere in the work, Narottam assiduously catalogues the many battles where Man Singh made himself indispensable to Akbar. He was a major force in removing the threat of Akbar's half-brother Mirza Hakim in Kabul; he lead a battalion against Rana Pratap Singh of Mewar at the battle of Haldighati; he castigated the Yousufzais who had taken the life of Birbal in a murderous ambush. Not all the battle descriptions are in keeping with the rigorous annalistic approaches and evidentiary standards that have become defining features of history in the modern sense. Narottam—and *rīti* poets across the board—felt free to embellish history with poetic flourishes. He was especially fond of constructing long onomatopoeic passages that conjure up the aural landscape of war. A few lines from a description of Man Singh arraying his forces for the battle of Haldighati give a feel for his style:

> The forces assembled, platoons merging into a vast army.
> The troops donned full body armor,
> shields at the ready, their many-hued ensigns
> streaming into a colorful tableau.
> The kettle drums blared, a deafening din
> drowning out *tabla*s and drones.
> Rattles and gongs and war drums, trumpets and bugles sounded…
> *caḍhī sena senā ji senā samāha, saje aṃga aṃgeni aṃge sanāhaṃ,*
> *ḍhalī ḍhāla lālati hālati sete, milīṃ raṃga raṃgeni vairakhkha pīte*
> *bhaye ḍhimaḍhimaṃ ji ḍholaṃ nisānaṃ,taballe na tadūra jānaṃti kānaṃ*
> *bajai jhiṃjhi jhalleri mṛddaṃga tete, sahannāi bheryeṃ ru naphphīra kete…*[54]

(p.90) Narottam's biography of Man Singh is a form of what I would call enriched history, in which poetry played an important role. The poetic punch of this verse in the *bhujaṅgprayāt* meter stems from the writer's facility with *vaiṇa*

sagāī (kindred sounds), an alliterative technique perfected by the bardic performers of Rajasthan.[55] The structured assonances and onomatopoeia evoke the sounds of war drums and the bustle of an army, bringing history alive for his audience.

Whatever the poetic medium, the tremendous currency of Mughal political themes in Brajbhasha courtly texts compels us to see this kind of writing as a new and significant, if as yet undertheorized, trend in Hindi literary history. Perhaps some awareness of the Indo-Persian *tārīkh* (royal chronicle) tradition was seeping into the consciousness of *rīti* authors, who themselves occasionally spent time in residence at the Mughal court, and whose patrons regularly did. Some works, including Vrind's *Satyasarūprūpak* and the *Jangnāmā* of Shridhar (both from the early eighteenth century), which respectively recount the wars of succession between Aurangzeb's sons Muazzam (the victor and future emperor Bahadur Shah) and Azam Shah in 1707 and Jahandar Shah and Farrukh Siyar in 1712–13, read less like *kāvya* than as chronicles of epoch-making historical events. The *Chatraprakāś* (Light on Chatrasal, 1710) by Lal Kavi of the Panna court, a retrospective account of the political career of the Bundela leader Chatrasal (1649–1732), adopts a similar approach. Already a component of the *rīti* tradition even in the early days of Keshavdas and Narottam, historical genres, although present in Sanskrit, took on a new importance in the Braj milieu, with some input from Rajasthani narrative poetry and—it seems likely—the Mughal documentary state.

Brajbhasha Register and Rhyme

The development of new—or at least refurbished—literary genres was crucial to the success of Brajbhasha poets in the early modern period. So was their ability to manipulate the register of their vernacular literary language in exciting new ways. This is also an area where Sanskrit and Brajbhasha decisively part ways. Sanskrit was notionally a fixed language and—at least in theory—a closed system, the rules of which had been codified in antiquity by famous grammarians such as Panini and Patanjali (fourth and first century BCE, respectively).[56] Brajbhasha, in contrast, was highly adaptable. The precursor to modern Hindi-Urdu, which shares the same flexibility, Brajbhasha's broad spectrum of lexical registers contributed in powerful ways to its poetic charm; it also helped to foster a literature that could be appreciated by multiple communities.

(p.91) Some writers were predisposed toward a particular style; others tapped into more than one register or dialect, freely employing whatever word or phrase seemed best depending on the needs of a specific poem or context or patron. And these choices were made with forethought and flair. To use a *tadbhava* word like *kānha* or its diminutive *kanhaiya*, for instance, instead of *kṛṣṇa*, a *tatsama* (pure Sanskrit word), conjures up feelings of intimacy and rusticity that are especially appropriate for expressing the longings of the village

maidens who are at the center of this Vaishnava narrative cycle. In a poem that features a *gopī* taking Krishna to task, her speech is best reported in a lively colloquial style such as "*chāṛahu bolibo bola haṃsauṃhaiṃ* (stop it already with your pleasantries!)" rather than in a more formal register.[57]

Battle scenes follow a completely different linguistic logic. In some cases—as in Narottam's descriptions of Man Singh's army at Haldighati—Rajasthani textures contribute just the right mood to a martial poem. Other poets simulate an almost-Prakrit archaicism, as in the opening lines of a *chappay* by Padmakar (fl. 1800) with its highly marked repetitions of *cha*, *ka*, and *dha*:

> The sky is adorned with weapons all the way to the horizon.
> Behold the beauty of the imperial parasols affording shade!
> Panic spreads in all directions, the terrified enemies become flustered.
> *Chiti ati chajjiya atra, chatra-cāhana chabi chakkiya*
> *cahuṃva cakka dhakapakka, arina akabakka dharakkiya*[58]

Padmakar's studied repetition of dissonant sounds invokes both the clamor and the terror of a battlefield, while fostering the experience of *vīra rasa* in the audience.

Tatsama language also retained its importance in select *rīti* contexts. Since early Braj writers were indebted to Sanskrit authorities for the composition of their works on *alaṅkāraśāstra*, it makes good sense that the technical vocabulary in the *lakṣaṇ* portions of *rītigranth*s would be Sanskritized. Raised in a traditional pandit family, Keshavdas in particular had tremendous facility with *tatsama* style. (His occasionally heavy doses of Sanskrit vocabulary did not help the cause of his famous inscrutability.) When delivering a sermon to a royal patron on moral conduct or spiritual matters, as he does in the final cantos of his *Vīrsiṃhdevcarit* and throughout the *Vijñāngītā*, he deploys *tatsama* language in full force. Both of these works also contain pure Sanskrit quotations that contribute to the stately, elevated tone he sought. In the opening verse of the latter work, which is of a broadly vedantic bent, Keshavdas cultivates *śānta rasa* with long, almost incantatory, strings of quasi Sanskrit, apparently mobilized in an attempt to express the inexpressible nature of the divine:

> **(p.92)** Know [god] to be a light without beginning or end,
> immeasurable, wondrous, formless, renowned as the greatest bliss on earth, and, moreover, as full effulgence.
> *Jyoti anādi ananta amita adbhuta arūpa guni*
> *Paramānanda puhumi prasiddha pūrana prakāsa puni*[59]

A few words, such as *puhumi* (earth, from Sanskrit *bhūmi*) and *puni* (moreover, from Sanskrit *punaḥ*), signal that the *Vijñāngītā* is in fact a vernacular text, but just barely.

Another verse that comes as close as is conceivable to Sanskrit without actually being so is this remarkable *kavitt* from Keshavdas's *Jahāngīrjascandrikā*, an almost-classic instance of *praśasti*, or panegyric:

> See how the emperor Jahangir is as astonishing as the god Indra.
> In his court are poets and generals,
> skilled artists and discerning scholars,
> warriors, officers, stable masters, sheikhs, masterminds,
> the clever, the glamorous, the lustrous,
> a range of entertainers and their companions.
> There are beautiful songs, haunting to the soul.
> Keshavdas says, Jahangir is a capable ruler in every respect—
> he is kind to the deserving and
> harsh toward those who break the law.
> *Kavi, senāpati, kusala kalānidhi, gunī gīrapati*
> *Sūra, ganesa, mahesa*, śeṣa, *bahu bibudha mahāmati*
> *Caturānana, sobhānivāsa, śrī dhara, vidyādhara*
> *Bidyādharī aneka, mañju ghoṣādi cittahara*
> *Dṛṣṭi anugraha-nigrahani juta kahiṃ 'kesava,' saba bhāṃti chama*
> *Imi jahāṃgīra suratāna aba dekhahu adbhuta indra sama*[60]

The Brajbhasha employed here is almost pure Sanskrit (with due allowance made for standard Braj conversions of "śa" to "sa" and the like) and traditionally Indic in its imagery, with the Mughal emperor Jahangir compared to Indra, king of the Hindu gods.

Nonetheless, closer scrutiny reveals an interesting twist. The verse can be read as an extended *śleṣa*, in which all the terms of the *praśasti* apply equally to Jahangir and to Indra.[61] Barely perceptible in the presence of such hyper-Sanskritized style, it turns out, is a multilingual pun that hinges on two possible pronunciations of the word "*śeṣa*" in line two. Read as a Sanskrit word in relation to Indra's court, it means Sheshanaga, the serpent companion of Vishnu. But the same word, when pronounced in the Braj manner, sounds like "sheikh," **(p.93)** allowing it to double as the Arabic word for a venerated religious leader.[62] Despite being rooted in a Sanskritic thought-world, the verse subtly divulges its Mughal provenance.

The connection of *rīti* authors to Indo-Muslim court culture sparked many instances of literary hybridity at the level of register. The *Kavīndrakalpalatā* (Wish-fulfilling vine of Kavindra, c. 1650) of Kavindracharya Sarasvati, a Brajbhasha work written for Jahangir's son Shah Jahan, contains fascinating variations on classical panegyric styles that are made possible precisely by the judicious manipulation of Perso-Arabic words. At first glance, many of his verses seem like quite standard fare, the kinds of encomia Sanskrit poets had been writing for centuries. However, the fact that the poet writes in Brajbhasha, and addresses the Mughal emperor rather than Bhoja or some other Hindu king of old, makes several of his verses far from standard, as when Kavindra celebrates

the emperor's multicultural competency with the following lines extracted from one of his kavitts:

> He knows the Qur'ān and the Purāṇas,
> he knows the secrets of the Vedas.
> Say, where else can one find so much connoisseurship,
> so much understanding?
> He gives a Mount Meru worth of gold,
> he gives this world and the next.
> *Kurāna purāna jāneṃ, vedani ke bheda jāne,*
> *Etī rījha etī būjha aura kaho kāhi haiṃ*
> *Sumera ko sauno deta, dīna dunī dono deta*[63]

The pairing of *kurāna*, a Braj pronunciation of Qur'ān, with Purāṇa deftly underscores Shah Jahan's ecumenism: rhyme has a magical way of demonstrating the ontological unity of things otherwise thought to be completely separate. This literary technique would have been virtually impossible in Sanskrit, where rhyme was rare. The use of Braj instead of Sanskrit also allows Kavindra to tap into the Muslim thought-world with the Arabic concepts *dīn-dunī* [i.e., *duniyā*, religion and worldly life]. Similarly, in celebrating the emperor's military prowess the pandit-poet is free to use the Perso-Arabic word *fatuḥ* (victory) rather than the more typical Sanskritic *vijaya*:

> No sooner have the victory poems of the last battle been composed,
> than more battles have already been won.
> *Jau lauṃ pāchilī fatūha ko kavitta kareṃ,*
> *Tau lagi fatūha aura aure kījiyati hai*[64]

These adjustments in vocabulary no doubt aided comprehension in a performance attended primarily by speakers of Persian—but they were also **(p. 94)** effective aesthetically, rhetorically, and, by all indications, politically.[65] The key point is that Brajbhasha poets had a distinct advantage over Sanskrit in certain contexts because their language could interact with the Persianate world of Mughal India in ways that were foreclosed by classical tradition.

With the addition of Perso-Arabic possibilities and the freedom to manipulate words in unusual ways, *rīti* poets reveled in mixed-register rhyming patterns and other poetic exuberances. Take this line by Jaswant Singh:

> The dense clouds darken. A sweet girl in the bloom of youth.
> With her lover abroad, she is anxious—
> why has he not sent any message?
> *Ati kārī bhārī ghaṭā pyārī bārī bais*
> *Piya paradesa aṃdesa yaha āvata nāhiṃ sandesa*[66]

In this ultra-concise rendition of a typical *viraha* theme, the two Sanskrit-derived words *paradesa* (foreign country) and *sandesa* (message) are expertly linked with

a modified form of the Persian word *andīshah* (anxiety) to create beautiful alliterative effects and internal rhyme.

The oeuvre of the Mughal poet Rahim is particularly rich in rhyme and clever word play. His *Nagarśobhā* (Lament for the city) is a series of vignettes about the traits of Indian women of different castes. The genre he employed was distinctly Persian—*Nagarśobhā* has much in common with the *shahrāshūb* (disturber of the city), conventional poems that celebrate the exquisite charms of a particular city's handsome youth—but his language is quintessentially vernacular.[67] He modifies both Sanskrit and Persian words freely to create interesting end rhymes. The mahout's wife, who proudly rides atop an elephant while her husband drives, is eulogized as follows:

> The young woman donned bright yellow armor,
> holding a quiver of arrows.
> Indiscriminate in their destruction were
> the arrow-glances of that haughty one riding alongside her lover.
> *Pīta kāṃci kañcuka tanahi, bālā gahe kalāba*
> *Jāhi tāhi mārata phirai, apane piya ke tāba*[68]

Here the Persian word *tāb* (generally heat, but also pride or passion) becomes *tāba* in conformity with the target language's metrics. More striking is how the Sanskrit word *kalāpa* (quiver) is cavalierly converted into *kalāba* so that it can fit the rhyme scheme.[69] The principle in evidence here is, “if the word doesn’t fit, make it fit.”

In Rahim's *barvai* (short couplets) on the subject of *nāyikābheda*, he takes another approach, cherry-picking words and forcing them into unusual linguistic **(p.95)** and poetic molds. The addition of the suffix “va,” sometimes accompanied by a shortening of the preceding vowel, produces a diminutive effect in eastern Hindi dialects, but sounds highly incongruous in its repeated application to highfalutin’ Sanskritic compounds, as in this illustration of the *madhyā vipralabdhā nāyikā* (middling type of woman who is sad because her lover did not keep the rendezvous, a subset of the *aṣṭanāyikā* system referenced above):

> She did not see Nanda's son in the pleasure-house.
> Sighing long and hard, she became restless.
> *Dekhi na keli-bhavanavā, nandakumāra*
> *Lai lai ūṃca usasavā, bhai bikarāra*[70]

Forming a diminutive from a *tatsama* like "*kelibhavana*" (pleasure-house) is a rather ludicrous thing to do, and the literary impact of the poem lies precisely in this lexical play. Regal Sanskrit words are suddenly made cute. Nor are Persian words spared, as in the treatment of "*gumān*" (pride/haughtiness) in this example of an *adhamā nāyikā* (irascible woman):

> Oh woman, don't go and get in a huff all the time,
> remaining angry until I shower you with rubies and pearls.
> *Berihi bera* gumanavā, *jani karu nāri*
> *Mānika au gajamukutā, jau lagi bāri*[71]

These unusual modifications of words to produce the impression of eastern language are highly structured poetic effects that were no doubt encouraged by the need to generate the right metrical weight in each part of the tightly controlled and ultra-concise *barvai* line.[72] They are also the delightful adventures of a prominent member of the Persian literati in the new territory of vernacular poetry, a domain eminently suited to hybridity and experimentation.

Political Satire

Some instances of Brajbhasha's signature lexical hybridity are highly polemical. A case in point is the Braj style adopted by Bhushan Tripathi, court poet to King Shivaji (r. 1674–1680). Bhushan, like Keshavdas, is perfectly capable of using recherché *tatsama*s, Sanskrit compounding techniques, and all manner of classical poetic devices when he wishes, but several examples of fascinating wordplay hinge on his manipulation of Persian words to devastating ironic effect. The *Śivrājbhūṣaṇ* (Ornament to King Shivaji, 1673), his magnum opus written shortly before the Maratha ruler's coronation, is ostensibly a *rītigranth* on the subject of figures of speech, but the work doubles as a eulogy in which **(p.96)** the example verses recount Shivaji's successes in battle and the laments of his beleaguered enemies. Partly a celebration of the military feats of Bhushan's famous patron, the *Śivrājbhūṣaṇ* also trenchantly articulates Shivaji's disillusionment with the Mughal political establishment under Emperor Aurangzeb.

A few stunning multilingual puns illustrate the unique ability of select Braj words to be read simultaneously in both Sanskrit and Persian registers, which here generate bitterly sarcastic effects. Note the play on *pīra* in these lines:

> Shivaji, son of Shahji, struck such terror in the hearts of Muslim nobles
> that even the bravest lost their nerve.
> Their affliction grew, causing them to forget the teachings of the Sufis.
> *Sāhitanai sivarāja kī dhākani, chūṭi gaī dhṛti dhīranahū kī*
> *Mīrana ke ura pīra barḥī yauṃ, ju bhūli gaī sudhī pīranahū kī*

This punning technique depends on the repetition of a single word in multiple senses, a figure of speech theorized as *yamaka*, “twinning,” in the classical tradition.[73] But here the effect is dramatically different from the doubling of sheikh with Shesha(naga) in the verse from the *Jahangirjascandrikā* cited above. The first usage of the word *pīra* yields the Sanskrit meaning *pīḍā* (affliction); in the Persian lexicon, the same word as it is typically written in Braj can also mean a Sufi *pīr*. A similar bilingual mocking of Shivaji's enemies is evident in:

> There is no one in the world as merciful to the oppressed as you
> And yet you wipe out the faith of the barbarians [here Muslims].
> *Dīnadāyalu na to so dunī aru mleccha ke dīnahiṃ māri miṭāvai*[74]

Here *dīna* first occurs as part of a Sanskritized compound meaning “merciful to the oppressed,” an entirely appropriate, if anodyne, kingly epithet for Shivaji. The second half of the line, however, is anything but anodyne when we suddenly realize that the same word, *dīna*, has been used in the Arabic sense of religious faith, which Shivaji is said to be obliterating. Here Bhushan with his signature virtuosity inverts the stereotypical image of Aurangzeb's razing of Hindu temples, highlighting that in his view a true Hindu king's concern with the oppressed entails the oppression of the Muslim oppressor.

Another powerful instance of Bhushan's derisive multilingual wordplay is his thematically brilliant but etymologically corrupt handling of Emperor Aurangzeb's name. In Persian, the word *aurangzīb* is a flattering title, meaning “adorning the throne.” In Bhushan's hands, the first part of the compound, **(p. 97)** “*aurang*” (throne), is transformed into “*avaraṅga*.” According to Braj phonetics, this is a plausible enough pronunciation of the emperor's name, but it also invokes the combination of the Sanskrit lexemes *ava* and *raṅga*, which together mean something like “sickly pale”—a point that would have been immediately apparent to a Sanskrit-trained Brahman like Bhushan or to members of the Maratha court.[75] This deliberate Sanskritization of the emperor's Persian name suggests Aurangzeb's overwhelming trepidation in the face of Shivaji, transforming his exalted title into a source of derision.

Another example of a Brajbhasha *yamaka*, this one a milder form of satire ingeniously conceived by Lal Kavi, historian *cum* poet of the Panna court in Bundelkhand, takes a different tack, Brajifying two distinct Persian words to sound the same. Lal recounts how Mirza Raja Jai Singh enlisted the Panna ruler Chatrasal Bundela and his brother Angad to fight in the Mughal army:

> Chatrasal met with King Jai Singh and then summoned his brother Angad.
> Both were granted a *manṣab* and were happily reunited.
> They remained with the Kurma Raja (Jai Singh)[76]
> like the Pandavas in the realm of King Virata.
> Even though the *manṣab* was not appropriate,

their hearts rejoiced.
Milikai nṛpa jayasimha sauṃ, angada lie bulāi
Manasiba *bhayau duhūna kau, rahe sanga sukha pāi*
Rahe sanga kūrama ke aise, nṛpa virāṭa ke paṇḍava jaise,
Yadyapi manasiba manasiba[77] *nāhīṃ, Saba taiṃ umagi adhika mana māhīṃ*[78]

It is impossible to capture in translation the finesse of line four of the original Braj text with its play on the Perso-Arabic words *manṣab* (Mughal administrative unit) and *munāsib* (appropriate). In Persian, these two words are completely unrelated (the s's are written with the distinct letters ص *sād* and س *sīn*, respectively), but that is irrelevant to the poet. The vowel character and length can also be fudged in Brajbhasha, allowing *munāsib* magically to become *manasiba* and resulting in a clever pun based on two invented homonyms.[79] The choice of Brajified Persian words creates a Mughalizing effect appropriate to a scene in which two Rajput leaders are recruited into the Mughal army. Lal Kavi simultaneously takes a potshot at the *manṣabdārī* system, a crucial component of the Mughal political establishment that was fraying by the late seventeenth century.[80]

Political unrest is also at the heart of a satirical verse from the *Jangnāmā* of Shridhar, another instance of the historicism that infiltrated the early modern **(p.98)** Braj corpus. This heavily Persianized Braj poem centers on the battle between Farrukh Siyar and Jahandar Shah for the Delhi throne that led to the ousting of the latter in 1713. Here is how Shridhar intimates his low opinion of Jahandar Shah just at the turning point of the narrative:

One day Moizuddin [Jahandar Shah] was sitting,
intoxicated with wine.
He was filled with the urge to celebrate Navroz, so he gave the order.
Just then he got the news that Farrukh Siyar had reached Kannauj,
and Aizuddin [Jahandar Shah's son] had fled,
taking the whole army with him.
Ika roja baiṭhe maujadī madirā baḍhāyo mauja ko
Utsāha soṃ cita cāi bhari kari hukuma navaroja ko
Tehi bīca āī khabari, āe farukh shāhi kanoja ko
Aru ejudīṃ bhāge lae hamarāha sigarī fauja ko[81]

Shridhar's satire depends on contrived rhymes, such as his inimitable pairing of the Persian New Year festival Navroz with the Indian city of Kannauj, as well as his deft manipulation of register. The name Moizuddin (a.k.a., Jahandar Shah), which is supposed to be an elevated Arabic title (*Mo'izz al-Dīn*, "strengthener of the faith"), is humorously lampooned by reducing it to Maujuddin, suggesting that the emperor is a drunken playboy caught up in *mauj-masti* (frivolous pleasure) and unfit to rule.

Vernacular Lawlessness in the Face of Modern Linguistic Regimes

The lexical variety of Braj poetry came under attack during the modern period when the older style of Hindi was superseded by a revamped form of Sanskritized Khari Boli that could be disciplined by grammar. In the manner of so many things Indian under colonialism, Brajbhasha was constructed as faulty, disorderly, and fatally medieval. The flexibility in usage we have been outlining was decried as unsystematic *toṛ-maroṛ* (bending and twisting) rather than appreciated for its expressive potential or its literary beauty.[82] Braj's lack of codified grammar was now taken metonymically to signify a pressing Indian cultural lacuna. And for staunch Hindi and Hindu nationalists, Persianization would come to symbolize the taint of Islamic conquest.

Like so much colonial and nationalist discourse, decrying Brajbhasha's ungrammaticality as some worrisome Indian deficiency is profoundly misguided. The workings of the Sanskrit language had been brilliantly studied and theorized by ancient Indian grammarians, giving birth to the sophisticated **(p.99)** field of *vyākaraṇa* (language analysis). However, while of utmost importance to *devavāṇī*, the language of the gods, grammar was not universally applicable to *narabhāṣā*, the language of men. On just two occasions prior to colonialism had it been considered necessary to write a grammar of Brajbhasha. The first instance is a seventeenth-century text written for a Persianate audience: the *Tuḥfat al-hind* (Gift of India, 1675) by Mirza Khan.[83] The second, a *Bhāṣāvyākaraṇ* (Grammar of the vernacular, 1717) attributed to Kavi Ratnajit, hails from Gujarat.[84] The technology of grammar was available to Indians. It was simply not implemented for the Braj language (or any other North Indian vernacular in premodernity[85]), presumably because it was considered unnecessary or somehow unsuitable for a Bhasha.

The variability of Braj was never a liability in the judgment of early modern Indians. Its inherent potential for diversity was in fact celebrated, even within the relatively conservative paradigms of the *rītigranth* genre. In his *Kāvyanirṇay* (Critical perspective on literature, 1746), Bhikharidas spoke enthusiastically of Brajbhasha as a literary language beautifully mixed with Sanskrit and Persian.[86] It is an arresting irony that some of Braj's literary power stems from its very “corruptedness”—the one feature that Sanskrit by definition does not have.[87] Some traditional Indian theorists were deeply suspicious of the truth value of vernacular utterances, believing that “*apabhraṣṭa* [i.e., non-Sanskrit] language communicates meaning only by reminding the listener of the original, predialectal [i.e., Sanskrit] word from which the *apabhraṣṭa* word was presumed to have been corrupted.”[88] As late as the seventeenth century, the Sanskrit philosopher Khandadeva, facing a radically changed sociolinguistic environment but reluctant to give up on an older thought-world, argued that the language of the *mlecchas* (barbarians, often Muslim speakers of Persian or Arabic) was not even capable of signification.[89] Meanwhile, Brajbhasha poets were adopting *mleccha* words with great abandon. For a *rīti* writer, literary elegance was

possible in both Perso-Arabic and Sanskrit registers, and there was not only flair in mixing them, but also a very wide range of new meanings and poetic possibilities that could be explored.

Conclusion

To observe the rise of Brajbhasha court poetry in the Mughal period is to observe a powerful new hybrid literary tradition in the making. It is to observe Hindi in the process of becoming Hindi. The courtly writers of early modern India wrote in *bhakti* and *śṛṅgāra* modes (often in the same poem). They crafted martial ballads, some in the high *kāvya* registers long associated with Sanskrit *praśasti*, and others in the more vernacular *rāso* idiom. They wrote histories, **(p. 100)** scholarly works, and intricately wrought multi-canto *prabandha kāvya*s. Their concerns were both timeless and topical, and their corpus resists any straitjacket that literary historians might try to fit on it.

Perhaps most important, *rīti* literature developed an extraordinary capacity to speak across cultural barriers to a wide variety of people in a way that neither Persian nor Sanskrit could ever do. Although *rīti* literature's most obvious textual antecedents were from the classical Sanskrit world, it also successfully addressed contemporary Indo-Muslim communities, sometimes in their own idiom. I do not want to give the impression that Braj writers suddenly started churning out *ghazal*s or *maṣnavī*s, two of the hallmark literary genres of the Persian tradition. Some responded enthusiastically to the new poetic possibilities of their multicultural world. Some responded enthusiastically but satirically, and some hardly at all. Indeed, despite the close contact of a significant number of early *rīti* writers with Indo-Muslim court culture, it remains surprising how few Persian genres, motifs, and verse forms made it into the Braj repertoire. Exposure to the *tārīkh* tradition may have encouraged Braj authors to experiment with new forms of historical writing, as suggested above. Rahim's *Nagarśobhā* resonates with the Persian tradition of *shahrāshūb*. And there are certainly a few ideas from Persian poetry in *rīti* poetics, as when Rasnidhi (late seventeenth century?) invokes the paradigmatic lovers Laila and Majnun or Bodha (c. 1760?) adopts the dual Sufi framework of *ʻishq-i majāzī* versus *ʻishq-i ḥaqīqī* (loosely: worldly versus spiritual love, respectively).[90] It is also very likely that the importance of rhyming couplets, and perhaps rhyme in general, to Brajbhasha owes a debt to Persian literary culture.[91] But the ability of Braj poets to embrace newness had its limits; it is best to think of *rīti* literature as a cultural arena with permeable but not completely open boundaries.

While *rīti* poets used the resources of Brajbhasha in variable and skillful ways, they were especially amenable to lexical innovation. Responding creatively to different contexts, they exploited the literary potential of their comparatively lawless vernacular, “bending and twisting” Sanskrit and Hindi words and introducing Persian ones. Some Braj writers opted to Sanskritize or Persianize in accordance with the needs of a particular genre or patron. In writing a *praśasti*

to a Mughal emperor, Sanskritized style made good sense because of its long history of underwriting royal authority, but Persianized language gave contemporary rather than classical inflections to political rhetoric. In some cases, the choice to Persianize reinforces an aesthetics of cultural rapprochement, as when Kavindracharya stresses the ecumenicism of Shah Jahan. In other cases, most dramatically in the poems of Bhushan, Mughal politics and an unpopular emperor are handled with scathing reproach. For some *rīti* **(p.101)** poets, however, politics was irrelevant; their goal was simply to fashion the most beautiful verse possible with the best ingredients from any language available.

Despite all the innovations in *rīti* poetry, the tradition remained profoundly marked by its inheritance from Sanskrit, particularly the systems of aesthetic moods, catalogues of female characters, and figures of speech so punctiliously expounded in the *rītigranth*, which in terms of sheer abundance was the most important genre of Hindi courtly culture. Whether written in Sanskrit or in Braj, *alaṅkāraśāstra* was a scholarly apparatus that calibrated aesthetic experience, theorizing how it works in terms of both how poets produce it and how audiences feel it. This is not to suggest that every reader, writer, or listener of *rīti* poetry carefully studied a rulebook before stepping into an assembly, but the existence of the system was a fundamental underpinning of literary practice. At stake in these vernacular *rītigranth*s was the continuation of an ancient and normative set of both compositional and interpretative principles for poetry. The vernacularization of an ancient domain of Indian *śāstra* was also a significant development in Indian intellectual history.

Notes:

(1.) For more information about the formal features of Brajbhasha poetry, Snell 1991a is an excellent resource.

(2.) See the discussion of his conception of *doṣa*s (flaws), especially the *andhadoṣa* (flaw of blindness), in the next chapter.

(3.) Typical such formulations are by Satyadev Chaudhari (1973: 237) and Sudhakar Pandey (1999: 5–7).

(4.) Vijaypal Singh (1998: 10) and Kishorilal (1993: 9), both important scholars of Keshavdas, rue this misguided assessment of the Braj tradition's pioneering classical poet.

(5.) Cited by Anandnarayan Sharma (1970: 41).

(6.) On the philosophical necessity of allowing for the truth claims of others, an idea that can perhaps be loosely extended to the hermeneutics of aesthetic texts, see Davidson 2001.

(7.) Pritchett 1994 is an excellent account of the tyranny of Romanticist aesthetics in the reform of Urdu literature during the colonial period.

(8.) Recall K. B. Jindal's criticism of Keshavdas for drawing on Dandin, cited in the opening pages of this book.

(9.) Cf. Losensky 1998: 100–33.

(10.) Although my focus here is the interface with Sanskrit, some *rīti* genres like the *satsaī* (collection of seven hundred poems) also have roots in Prakrit. On the complex literary antecedents of the *Bihārīsatsaī*, a *rīti* masterpiece, see Holland 1969: 44–99.

(11.) Keshavdas defines a *nāyaka* as follows: "A hero is self-confident, willing to sacrifice, young, and skilled in the arts of love. He should be charismatic, tolerant, handsome, wealthy, well-groomed, and always from a good family." *Rasikpriyā*, 2.1.

(12.) The initial meeting of lovers is called *pūrvānurāga*, which was also described in accordance with specific literary codes. For a brief discussion of this concept, as well as a general introduction to the structure of a *rītigranth*, see chapter 1.

(13.) On the Indian portrait traditions that were more or less contemporary with the *rīti* literature commissioned at Rajput courts, see Aitken 2002.

(14.) Literally "curved like a pot," referencing the curved shape of a terra cotta container that women carry on their heads.

(15.) *Sakuntalā nāṭak*, v. 28.

(16.) A careful reader of Nevaj will certainly appreciate some of his variations on the classical story (he dispenses with the *vidūṣaka* or buffoon character, for instance) as well as the pleasing rhythms and clever word play of the original Braj, such as his pairing of the phrases *bālapana ko ayānapa* and *sakhina so sayānapa*.

(17.) This verse extends the imagery of the previous lines by likening the women's dazzling white pearl ornaments and their (vermilion-filled red) part on a backdrop of black hair to the *triveṇī* or confluence of three rivers in Prayag. (The Ganges River is conventionally white in color, the Sarasvati red, and the Yamuna black.)

(18.) *Vīrsiṃhdevcarit*, vv. 22.51–57, 22.59–62, 22.66.

(19.) *Kavipriyā*, 7.14.

(20.) *Sakuntalā nāṭak*, v. 67.

(21.) *Māncarit*, v. 117.

(22.) *Kavipriyā*, 6.38. The same verse also occurs as an example of *rādhikā ko prakāśa viyoga śṛṅgāra* (Radha's manifest love in separation) in *Rasikpriyā*, 1.25.

(23.) This important Hindi genre, shared across folk, *bhakti*, Sufi, and courtly contexts, has been elucidated by Charlotte Vaudeville (1986); Shyam Manohar Pandey (1999); and Francesca Orsini (2010).

(24.) On Anandavardhana, see Ingalls 1990 and McCrea 2008. Some Braj writers, notably Bhikharidas in his *Kāvyanirṇay*, also treat *dhvani* theory.

(25.) *Kavipriyā*, 5.1. In fact, according to an earlier verse (*Kavipriyā*, 3.7), Keshavdas considered poetry without *alaṅkāra*s to be “naked” and therefore flawed.

(26.) A masterful study of the Sanskrit *śleṣa* tradition is Bronner 2010. A few examples of Keshavdas's use of *śleṣa* that occur in his verses about courtesans in the *Kavipriyā* were noted in chapter 1. Also see below for a *śleṣa* poem that is simultaneously about the Mughal emperor Jahangir and the Hindu god Indra.

(27.) *Lalitlalām*, vv. 182–83.

(28.) *Kavipriyā*, 9.15–16, preferring the reading *kari* for *saba* and *sīro* for *jīro*, as printed in Lala Bhagvandin's *Priyāprakāś*.

(29.) Although there are a few notable early exceptions such as Dandin and Udbhata, the general practice from the ninth century until c. 1500 was for the theoretical and literary function to remain separate. Pollock 2009: xxiv–xxv.

(30.) There were Sanskrit precedents for this masterful conciseness. The *Kuvalayānanda* (Joy of the water lily, 16th century) of Appayya Dikshita and the *Candrāloka* (Moonlight, 13th century) of Jayadeva are two well-known examples. Another from the later Braj tradition is Dulah Trivedi's *Kavikulkaṇṭhābharaṇ* (Necklace of the community of poets, 18th century).

(31.) *Bhāsābhūṣaṇ*, v. 177. This verse is comparable to *Kuvalayānanda*, v. 153, although Jaswant Singh has modified both the name of the *alaṅkāra* and the example verse. The example verse has elements of the *vastudhvani* or “suggestion with reference to content” theorized by Anandavardhana (compare, for instance, *Dhvanyāloka*, p. 71), but Jaswant Singh, apparently following Appayya Dikshita, has preferred to theorize such scenarios as literary ornaments rather than giving credence to *dhvani* theory. On Appayya Dikshita's *Kuvalayānanda* as a response to the domination of *dhvani*-centered poetics, see Bronner 2004: 65–73.

(32.) *Barvaināyikābhed*, v. 6.

(33.) The *navoṛhā* and *ajñātayauvanā nāyikā* are illustrated in ibid., v. 11 and v. 9, respectively.

(34.) As explicated in *Rasikpriyā*, 7.36–41.

(35.) *Rasikpriyā*, 7.28–29.

(36.) *Rasikpriyā*, 7.7–9. According to the commentator Surati Mishra, the reason we know this verse outlines a case of *prakāśā utkā* is that the *sakhī* is given the epithet *sukhadāī* (giver of comfort or pleasure), signaling a servant's role. *Jorāvarprakāś*, p. 185.

(37.) *Rasikpriyā*, 7.34–35. 384 is a typical count, according to S.K. De (1988: 271, cited in Hawley 2005: 170). Bhanudatta even raises the possibility of 1152 permutations but rejects it. See Pollock 2009: xxxv.

(38.) Bryant 1978: 21–24.

(39.) The disparagement of *rīti* literary styles by Hindi writers of the nationalist period is a major theme of chapter 6.

(40.) The classic formulation is Richman 1991.

(41.) A comparable situation obtains for Persian and Urdu poetry of the early modern period. See this chapter, n. 9 and Faruqi 1999.

(42.) Pollock 1985.

(43.) R. S. McGregor (1984: 118) proposes that the characteristic *rīti kavitt*s and *savaiyā*s were “chanted or sung.”

(44.) *Rādhāmādhavavilāsacampū*, p. 233.

(45.) At least one *rīti* poet, Chintamani Tripathi, was patronized by Shahaji Bhonsle. A few related details about the performance of Chintamani's poetry in a Mughal *maḥfil* are discussed in chapter 4.

(46.) *Bihārīsatsaī*, v. 11.

(47.) *Lālcandrikā*, p. 36.

(48.) Sheldon Pollock (2006) has recently demonstrated how the “language of the gods” had a distinctly more urbane existence in the “world of men.”

(49.) On the blurring of such distinctions, see Dehejia 2009. Some modern commentators on the *rīti* tradition have disapproved of this boundary-crossing between *śṛṅgāra* and *bhakti* forms, seeing *rīti* as a corrupted form of *bhakti*, whereby Radha and Krishna began to be depicted in terms of courtly luxury

rather than with appropriate reverence. See, for example, the remarks by Sudhakar Pandey (1999: 4–5).

(50.) Snell 1992.

(51.) New (or in some cases retooled) Rajasthani genres like the *vigat* and *khyāt*, as well as more transregional Braj styles, were adopted by courts whose patrons were developing an interest in history. See Ziegler 1976 and chapter 5.

(52.) Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam 2003.

(53.) *Māncarit*, v. 122.

(54.) ibid., v. 219. The English translation is only an approximation of the Dingal (laced with Marwari) text, which contains many onomatopoeic words that are difficult to render literally.

(55.) The techniques of *vaiṇa sagāī*, a staple of Dingal poetry, are helpfully elucidated in Kamphorst 2008: 89–108.

(56.) Deshpande 1993 discusses some of the gaps between theory and practice. Bronner and Shulman 2006 make a powerful case for the influence of region on the usages of Sanskrit poets. Also germane to the *rīti* context is the work of Truschke (2007), who illustrates how Persian words are occasionally adopted by Sanskrit writers in Mughal texts. One example by Rahim is *Kheṭa-kautukam*. See Das 1997.

(57.) *Rasikpriyā*, 3.66.

(58.) *Himmatbahādurvirudāvalī*, v. 76. Onomatopoeic renditions of battle scenes are, of course, attested elsewhere in Sanskrit and Hindi literature. See Lutgendorf (1991: 31) for a powerful line by Tulsi in a similar vein.

(59.) *Vijñāngītā*, 1.1

(60.) This interpretation is based on the modern Hindi translation of the verse by Kishorilal. *Jahāngīrjascandrikā*, v. 114. A second translation of the verse from the Indra *pakṣa* (perspective):

> See how the emperor Jahangir is as astonishing as the god Indra.
> In his court all kinds of wise deities are present:
> Venus and Karttikeya, the clever moon, learned Jupiter,
> the sun, Ganesha, Shiva, Sheshanaga,
> Brahma, Kamadeva, Vishnu, the Vidyadharas and their lovers,
> and the *apsara*s like Manjughosha to captivate a man's heart.
> Indra is a capable ruler in every respect—
> he is kind to the deserving, and harsh toward those who break the law.

(61.) The deliberate conflating of a king with divinity is a typical use of *śleṣa*. See Bronner 2010: 6, 85.

(62.) In Braj, the Sanskrit phoneme “ṣa” is routinely pronounced, and often written, “kha.”

(63.) *Kavīndrakalpalatā*, p. 4, v. 8.

(64.) ibid., p. 6, v. 13.

(65.) Kavindra's political intercessions with Shah Jahan are discussed in chapter 4.

(66.) *Bhāsābhūṣaṇ*, v. 204. This verse is an example of *upanāgarikā bṛtti, or* “sophisticated repetition.”

(67.) The Indo-Persian *shahrāshūb*, is discussed by Sunil Sharma (2011).

(68.) *Nagarśobhā*, v. 131 (here taking *kāṃci* from the verb *kācnā*, to wear); there is a lovely play on the word *kañcuka*, which means both armor and blouse; *kalāpa* is construed in the sense of arrow/quiver, as attested in Apte 1957: 546. The context for this terse couplet is set by the previous verse.

(69.) In Nastaliq, the letters “be” and “pe “are not always distinguished, which would make this a more legitimate rhyme in Persian script than in Nagari.

(70.) *Barvaināyikābhed*, v. 63. Compare “*gulabavā*” (rose) in v. 18 and “*kopabhavanavā*” (anger-house) in v. 49. Rahim's distinctive use of Avadhi diminutives has also been remarked by McGregor 1984: 122 and Snell 1994a: 382.

(71.) *Barvaināyikābhed*, v. 5. The subtext is that the *nāyaka* has been with another woman, causing the *nāyikā* to contract a case of *gurumāna* or serious jealous rage, a remedy for which is a significant investment in jewelry.

(72.) An informative discussion of the *barvai*, with its distinctively short nineteen *mātras* per line, is Snell 1994a.

(73.) The apt translation “twinning” is that of Bronner 2010: 21.

(74.) *Śivrājbhūṣaṇ*, vv. 110, 167.

(75.) See, for instance, *Śivrājbhūṣaṇ*, vv. 58, 74, 113. In this last the satire is further heightened by the paired rhyme *badaraṅga* (ill-colored, from Persian *badrang*).

(76.) I believe Lal Kavi here references the Kachhwaha title Kurma (as used by Narottam in *Māncarit*).

(77.) I have standardized the printed “*manasiva*” to “*manasiba*.” Possibly the text's editor was reproducing a tendency in the original, and one attested in many Braj manuscripts, not to distinguish the character “ba” from “va.”

(78.) *Chatraprakāś*, p. 79. As reported in the fourth book of the *Mahābhārata* the Pandavas spent their last of thirteen stipulated years in exile in disguise at the court of King Virata, who gave them shelter.

(79.) This is not unlike Bhushan's fudging of the word *pīra*, discussed above. Also recall from chapter 1 Keshavdas's play on the word *prabīna*/*parabīna*, which means Pravin Ray, clever person, and rival lute player.

(80.) Tensions in the *manṣabdārī* system are generally held to be a factor in the weakening of the Mughal state under Aurangzeb. Asher and Talbot 2006: 235–36.

(81.) *Jangnāmā*, v. 201.

(82.) Ramchandra Shukla singled out Bhushan in particular as a culprit. See Shukla 1994: 132–33, 141.

(83.) Grammar is only one of many topics of this fascinating work, which also contains the most important early discussion of Braj rhyme. Some premodern efforts to regulate the lexicography of Braj are explored in McGregor 2001.

(84.) Mallison 2011: 174 (citing the edition by Bhayani and Patel).

(85.) *Notes on the Grammar of Tulsidas* by Edwin Greaves makes for amusing reading today because of the stark mismatch between the British colonial approach to standardizing Indian languages and the delightful lawlessness of premodern poetic practice. Greaves gamely tried to explain the famous poet's bewildering array of Avadhi usages, even if he had to admit that “any attempt to voice all the modifications and changes to which a word is liable in the hands of Tulsi Das would be quite vain” (1895: 9).

(86.) *Kāvyanirṇay*, 1.14. Bhikharidas's theorizations are discussed more fully in the next chapter.

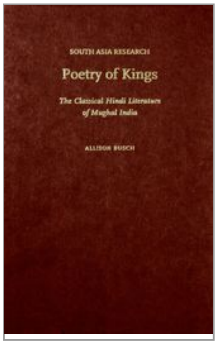
(87.) See chapter 1.

(88.) Pollock 2006: 309.

(89.) Pollock 2007: 212–16.

(90.) On Rasnidhi, see Shukla 1994: 189; on Bodha, see Prakash 2003: 81.

(91.) Holland 1969: 105. Holland also traces some of Biharilal's themes to precedents in Persian poetry, such as “the satirical description of beauty” and “the exaggeration of female delicacy.”



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Brajbhasha Intellectuals

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Abstract and Keywords

This chapter surveys the archive of Brajbhasha scholarship on poetics with special reference to the *Rasikpriyā* of Keshavdas (fl. 1600), the *Kavikulkalptaru* of Chintamani Tripathi (fl. 1650), and the *Kāvyanirṇay* of Bhikharidas (fl. 1740). Rīti scholarly traditions have been wrongly derided as derivative of classical works and the corpus, like too much of premodern Indian intellectual history, ignored. A fine-grained reading of both primary works and commentaries reveals the crucial interplay between innovation and tradition that was at the heart of the *rīti* enterprise. Different ways of viewing and marking change are explored, as are the techniques and worldviews of early modern scholars. Another major theme is vernacularization, the process by which Brajbhasha began to supersede Sanskrit as a language of poetry and intellectual life, with major consequences for the rise of Hindi as we know it today.

Keywords: intellectual history, vernacularization, Keshavdas, Rasikpriyā, Chintamani Tripathi, Kavikulkalptaru, Bhikharidas, Kāvyanir ṇay, commentaries

> Everybody says Brajbhasha is equivalent to the language of the gods.
>
> —Krishna Kavi

Vernacular Scholarship in Early Modern India

Now acquainted with the most important poetic contours of the *rīti* tradition, including elements of the Sanskrit systems that helped to shape it, in this chapter we look more closely at the characteristics of *rītigranth*s themselves as

documents of early modern intellectual life. A new community of Bhasha writers that was garnering unprecedented attention in the courtly circles of early modern India, *rīti* poets were positioning themselves as new authorities on literary practice. Key to this effort was the development of a knowledge infrastructure: a new vernacular domain of *śāstra*, or systematic thought. While a comprehensive understanding of the vernacular intellectual topography of this period would require far more investigation than is possible here, reasonably satisfactory data are available for the field of *alaṅkāraśāstra*, which was at any rate the principal scholarly concern of Brajbhasha writers.

Works of poetic theory in the *rītigranth* genre have come down to us in astonishing quantities from this period. Since many texts by lesser authors (and even some by famous ones) remain unpublished, nobody really knows how many of them exist, but a conservative estimate based on surveying some of the most important manuscript **(p.103)** catalogues is five hundred independent treatises, and the actual number may well be over a thousand. Nearly every Brajbhasha court poet penned a *rītigranth*; some authors, such as Keshavdas and Surati Mishra, wrote multiple works addressing the major topics.[1] These *rītigranth*s were for the most part fairly straightforward treatises on female characters, figures of speech, and metrics. Some, however, are more extensive reworkings of Sanskrit *śāstra*s, and a few were by all appearances written with the intention of contributing new insight to centuries-old Indian literary debates. This massive commitment to rhetoric of early modern Braj writers was partly underwritten by the patronage of Rajput courts. The fascination of some Indo-Muslim connoisseurs with India's poetic heritage was another factor in the tradition's broad appeal. The rise of *rīti* scholarship also reflects the diligent efforts of an increasingly vernacular *kavikul*, or community of poets, to keep alive an ancient system of literary science.

One goal of this chapter is to understand the precise nature of Brajbhasha *alaṅkāraśāstra*. The concerns of *rīti* writers were in some respects fundamentally different from those of their Sanskrit counterparts. From the seventh century (Bhamaha) to the seventeenth (Jagannatha), Sanskrit culture continued to update new theory with impressive regularity, expounding new theories of literary signification, renouncing or reconfiguring the older ones, or debating the locus and method of producing *rasa*. By contrast, Braj authors were generally not interested in tackling the big theoretical questions in the same way.[2] The *rīti* approach to the “Sanskrit shadow,” the inferiority complex that disquieted early vernacular writers, was not to rebel against it but actively to engage with it, tapping into the cultural cachet of a major classical literary tradition.[3] Sanskrit predecessors were invoked by both direct and indirect quotation; foundational classics were translated and reworked. As noted, Keshavdas based his *Rasikpriyā* in large part on an earlier Sanskrit text, the *Śṛṅgāratilaka* of Rudrabhatta. In composing his *Kavipriyā*, he worked closely with three different Sanskrit source texts: Dandin's *Kāvyādarśa* (Mirror of

poetry, seventh century), Amaracandra Yati's *Kāvyakalpalatāvṛtti* (Vine of poetic imagination with extended commentary, c. 1250) and Keshava Mishra's *Alaṅkāraśekhara* (Crown of figuration, c. 1560). Chintamani Tripathi (fl. 1650), the elder brother of Matiram and Bhushan, whose poetry we have already encountered, was indebted to the great Sanskrit theoreticians Mammata, Vidyanatha, Dhananjaya, and Appayya Dikshita. Some *rīti* poets (like Chintamani) acknowledged their debt, whereas others (like Keshavdas) remained completely silent about their sources.[4] Regardless, it can often be conclusively demonstrated that one or more Sanskrit sources hovers some where in the background of a given *rīti* text. This emphatically does not mean, however, that *rīti* writers should be dismissed **(p.104)** as mere plagiarists. For starters, the modern notion of plagiarism carries assumptions about authorship and individuality that are not generally pertinent to India during this period.[5] *Rīti* authors employed a highly nuanced form of appropriation. Still, it is fair to say that the scholarly practices of *rīti* intellectuals were largely based in a Sanskrit worldview.

While Sanskrit *alaṅkāraśāstra* is a well studied set of knowledge practices, researching its Braj counterpart presents challenges. Premodern commentaries, a staple of Indic literary hermeneutics, are almost invariably printed in editions of Sanskrit texts, but this never became a habit in Hindi publishing. Of all the Indian regional languages, only Brajbhasha has a substantial commentarial tradition, and that we know so little about it constitutes a major scholarly lacuna. Braj commentaries merit a far more extensive analysis than can be attempted here, but where possible I draw on this important corpus, a window onto the precolonial *kavikul* and the workings of the *rīti* textual enterprise. Of the numerous extant works of *rīti* scholarship, a representative sample, drawn especially from leading theorists such as Keshavdas, Chintamani, and Bhikharidas, affords substantial insight into how *rīti* intellectuals understood their roles as scholars and littérateurs. Their own perspectives are often fundamentally at odds with modern conceptions of the *rīti* tradition, which suggests the need to reassess this intellectual culture. Throughout this chapter, the emphasis is on accessing the premodern Hindi tradition's own procedures, hermeneutics, and literary canons, because the goals are to learn to see from the vantage point of the writers who participated in it and to analyze the idioms in which vernacular pioneers like Keshavdas found the voice to speak. In trying to understand the raison d’être for *rīti* traditions and in developing hypotheses about the period's conceptual landscape, one is forced to piece together snippets of data—a few introductory lines here, a colophon there—teasing out their implications. Sometimes it is seemingly by accident that an author reveals how he perceived his place in the intellectual life of his day, why he undertook the project of writing a *śāstra* or commentary, what his methods were, and—of particular interest in the formulations of this chapter—what it meant to him to now be using Brajbhasha instead of Sanskrit.

The Paradox of Vernacular Newness

The implications for Indian intellectual history of a centuries-old tradition of literary scholarship in Brajbhasha are not well understood, but a few painstaking studies of select works of *rīti alaṅkāraśāstra* do exist. Refreshingly, rather than seeing the enterprise as marking a lamentable decline from Sanskrit, **(p.105)** several scholars have undertaken to identify the contributions of *rīti* rhetoricians, arguing for both the *ācāryatva* (intellectual merit) and the *mauliktā* (originality) of their treatises on poetics.[6] I take my cue from them, operating from the premise that Braj writers grappled in meaningful ways with their classical heritage, seeking to move it forward in new directions.

In the last chapter, it was proposed that modern literary values such as prizing originality and despising conventionality are hindrances to a culturally appropriate hermeneutics of Braj court poetry. What will be helpful in the discussion of *alaṅkāraśāstra* here is a willingness to recognize forms of intellectual virtuosity and change that are small rather than grandiose in scale. Surveying the corpus of *rīti* scholarship as a whole makes it clear that Braj rhetoricians felt the tradition they inherited to be largely still relevant and thus not in need of a complete overhaul. Indeed, the very thought that ancient classical norms should be questioned, much less rejected, would have struck many scholars of the day as profoundly misguided. And yet change did prove necessary. More than a millennium had passed since the foundations of Sanskrit poetic theory had been laid. The mere fact that Keshavdas abandoned the path of his ancestors to begin a career as a vernacular scholar and poet meant that he, and those who followed in his footsteps, would embrace tremendous change. Brajbhasha writers responded to the Sanskrit tradition by making painstaking and deliberate alterations to the ancient *śāstra*s, alterations that on occasion require a comparable degree of attentiveness and deliberation to excavate. But this archaeological expedition, at times deeply philological and perhaps even arcane to the non-specialist, is necessary to demonstrate how Braj pandits thought and worked.

For all their apparent radicalism in eschewing the time-honored language of courtly intellectual life, and even in some cases trumpeting their vernacular works as new theorizations, most Brajbhasha scholars also seem keen to insist that they have not departed from existing Sanskrit traditions. This somewhat paradoxical nature of vernacular newness is well illustrated by the logic and concerns of chapter three of Keshavdas's *Kavipriyā*. After preliminary chapters about his court and himself, the author embarks upon his treatment of *alaṅkāraśāstra* with the much-discussed subject of *doṣa*s, literary flaws that mar the beauty of poetry. In composing this compendium of introductory literary principles, Keshavdas does not strictly follow Dandin's *Kāvyādarśa*, otherwise a major Sanskrit source for the *Kavipriyā*. His opening gambit is instead to lay out

several entirely new categories of *doṣa*s by analogizing flawed poetry to various forms of physical impairment:

> **(p.106)** Flaws are a serious liability in poetry, women, and friends. A tiny drop of liquor renders the whole jug of Ganges water impure. They say never to make a Brahman one's dependent (*negī*), to make friends with fools, or to serve an ungrateful master. Also avoid flaws in poetry. The wise pronounce poetry flawed when it is blind, deaf, lame, naked, or dead (*mṛtaka*). “Blind” poetry contravenes tradition (*birodhī pantha ko*), and “deaf” poetry has no sense of the harmony of words. “Lame” poetry is unmetrical. “Naked” poetry lacks ornamentation. “Dead” poetry is meaningless. So says Keshavdas. Listen, clever people.[7]

So far the discussion is completely new. Upon closer investigation, however, the poet's innovation would appear to be not only measured but seriously compromised. The first flaw, the *andhadoṣa* (flaw of blindness), an entirely original Keshavdasian category, proscribes poems that violate tradition. Now, the very act of forging a new vernacular style and writing some of the earliest treatises on Brajbhasha poetics means that in some important sense Keshavdas did question the supremacy of Sanskrit and thereby violated tradition. Yet the new “flaw” of “contravening tradition” helps to capture the very special character of Braj poetic theory, which sought energetically to maintain the validity of the classical Indic literary system even while transgressing it.

As is the standard procedure in a *rītigranth*, Keshavdas reinforces his definition of the *andhadoṣa* with an example verse that develops his point. This takes the form of a parody and serves as a warning about the potential aesthetic disaster that lies in wait for an inexperienced poet striking out on his own:

> Seeing her soft lotus-like breasts in bloom,
> the moon face of her lover beams in delight.
> Her eyes dart quickly like monkeys,
> the corners red like Sindur powder.
> Her lower lip is sweet like butter.
> Seeking metaphors for her beauty, Keshavdas despairs.
> There she stands, that desirable woman,
> like lightning or a roaming deer—
> she moves slowly like an elephant.[8]

The mixed metaphors and infelicities in this verse are painfully obvious to any experienced reader of Sanskrit poetry. Note how the most egregious errors concern the flagrant disregard for tradition. First of all, a woman's breasts should be firm like lotus *buds*, not soft like *blooming* lotuses. The images in the next line are a precarious combination because according to classical literary **(p.107)** thinking the moon causes certain lotuses to wither. In line three, Keshavdas's imaginary clumsy poet gets one image right—the part about

women's eyes darting quickly—but when it comes to the *upamāna* (standard of comparison), he makes a serious blunder in choosing the animal: in Sanskrit poetry beautiful women are *mṛga-nayanī*—doe-eyed, not monkey-eyed. Furthermore, when it is a question of the movement of eyes, the *mīna* (fish) or *khañjana* (wagtail) are preferable images because they are consecrated by tradition as metaphors for fast-moving objects.[9] In line five, the hapless poet has bungled things again. Lower lips are indeed soft and sweet, but they should be compared to the red *bimba* fruit—not to pale yellow butter. The message any would-be poet takes away from this opening passage of the *Kavipriyā* is that vernacular composition must be rooted in classical imagery. In short, Keshavdas's foundational premise of vernacular poetics automatically constrains its potential for innovation. This striking of a careful balance between innovation and adherence to tradition is not peculiar to Keshavdas; it continued to define the scholarly comportment of many Brajbhasha intellectuals.

Chintamani Tripathi, one of the most important Braj theorists of the mid-seventeenth century, expresses a similar logic about the nature of vernacular newness in the opening to his *Kavikulkalptaru* (Wish-fulfilling tree for the family of poets, c. 1670):

> I, Chintamani, have carefully considered the precepts of books written in the language of the gods [i.e., Sanskrit], and I am expounding a theory of vernacular literature … I describe the system of vernacular literature according to my intellectual ability (*budha anusāra*).[10]

If his word choices have the significance I think they do, Chintamani viewed himself not so much as a translator of his Sanskrit source texts but as a scholar engaged in a new *vicāra* (theorization) of *bhāṣā kavita* (vernacular literature). The statement “according to my intellectual ability” further suggests not just the poet's modesty, but also that he is providing his own perspective. Evidently, the very enterprise of writing new literary theory in Brajbhasha was not only complicated but also epistemologically fraught. That it could be done only upon consulting Sanskrit precepts reveals a core dependency on the classical language. This dependency is in evidence throughout the work. Far from trumpeting some new vernacular theory, the *Kavikulkalptaru* is mostly concerned with laying out the fundamental structures of *Sanskrit* theoretical discourses on literature. Chintamani's style is to mix and match key treatments of particular topics from various Sanskrit authors. And yet for all the work's intellectual debts, it is ultimately a successful, rigorous example of Braj *śāstra*. Rarely is the **(p.108)** discussion of any given topic taken wholly from one author. Chintamani chooses the treatments he considers most cogent, reconfiguring them into a new synthetic account. The *Kavikulkalptaru* is pervaded by the implicit logic that Brajbhasha intellectuals saw their literary

culture as a continuation of Sanskrit practice rather than an entirely separate sphere.

A similar emphasis on tweaking and rearranging past theories is attested throughout the *rīti* corpus. Kulapati Mishra, an exact contemporary of Chintamani who served the Amber court, reworked Mammata's authoritative *Kāvyaprakāśa* (Light on poetry, eleventh century) in his major *rītigranth*, the *Rasrahasya* (The secret of literary emotion, 1670). In the process of transmitting Mammata's theories about literature to his early modern Braj readers, Kulapati did not hesitate to add a few ideas of his own. One of Mammata's most famous verses is his *Kāvyalakṣaṇa* (definition of poetry). **(p.109)** Kulapati is careful to cite this in the opening to *Rasrahasya*, but he prefaces it with a definition of his own making:

> Poetry consists of sound and sense. It affords wondrous rapture in this world.
> I fashioned this definition after mastering numerous works.
> *Jagataiṃ adbhuta sukhasadana, śabda'ru artha kavitta*
> *Yaha lakṣana mai ne kiyo, samujhi grantha bahu citta*[11]

Like Chintamani, Kulapati tells us that he has consulted many books before arriving at his own position, suggesting, again, the weighty influence of the Sanskrit past on a new vernacular domain of scholarship. But this did not preclude the possibility of new knowledge. On the contrary, when Kulapati presents his definition of poetry he not only puts it ahead of Mammata's but also boldly foregrounds his own authorship (*mai ne kiyo*). His colophon also contains a revealing statement about how he conceptualized his scholarly mission:

> I have presented the categories succinctly, according to my own understanding.
> Poets and connoisseurs, read them thoroughly and consider them.
> I have presented figures of both sound and sense in accordance with Mammata,
> giving definitions and example verses of all the tropes at great length.
> *Kahe bheda saṃkṣepa so, apanī mati anusāra,*
> *Kavi suhṛdaya saba pāra kari, ina ko karo vicāra*
> *Sabda artha aru duhuna ko, mamāṭa mati anusāra*
> *Kahe lakṣya lakṣana, sakala alaṅkāra vistāra*[12]

Kulapati's paired phrases *apanī mati anusāra* and *mamāṭa* (i.e., Mammata) *mati anusāra* perfectly encapsulate how Brajbhasha *rītigranth*s are new and old at the same time, the creative products of early modern writers who were deeply immersed in classical thought.

“According to My Own Understanding”

Premodern indexes of literary and intellectual change are not always easy to gauge. Such markers often have to be excavated, and we risk missing the signs if we adhere too closely to the paradigm of how change looks from the viewpoint of Western modernity. Keshavdas's *Rasikpriyā* is a particularly good instantiation of how early vernacular scholarship manifests newness. At first glance, the work appears to be a very close adaptation of the *Śṛṅgāratilaka* (Ornament of passion), composed by the Sanskrit rhetorician Rudrabhatta in perhaps the eleventh century.[13] Keshavdas takes up most of the same subjects (and mostly in the same order) as his source, and when he uses identical vocabulary in the definition verses, his reliance on Rudrabhatta is proven beyond a doubt. Looking no further than these obvious similarities, it would be easy to conclude, erroneously, that Keshavdas simply appropriated the theories of his Sanskrit predecessor. The reality is much more interesting. The *Śṛṅgāratilaka* may be Keshavdas's guide through the principles of *alaṅkāraśāstra*, but as often as not he veers off on his own detours.

One such detour is to invent variations on his predecessor's *bheda*s or organizing categories, particularly in places where the original Sanskrit text handles its subject in a cursory, even desultory fashion. Take the *Śṛṅgāratilaka's* treatment of *milana-sthāna* (lovers’ meeting places). Rudrabhatta lists a few occasions for lovers’ rendezvous briskly, in a single verse, and then considers the subject closed, not bothering to furnish even one example. Keshavdas, seizing an opportunity for creative ramification, develops the kernel of Rudrabhatta's idea into a significant component of an entirely new chapter on the courting of lovers, adding many original example verses as well as proposing entirely new categories of his own.[14] In this verse, Keshavdas presents the ingenious idea of an *atibhaya ko milana*, meeting during an emergency (figure 3.1):

> Hearing that the house next door to Vrishabhanu[15] had caught fire,
> the residents of Braj fled, scattering in all directions.
> Pandemonium reigned, as men and women jostled,
> confounded, calling out in grief.
> Seeing the commotion, Kanha rushed to free the parrot and mynah bird
> and woke up Radha and the other young women.
> **(p.110)** Radha, delicate like a *campā* garland, looked wide-eyed at Lal
> as he took her into his arms and stole a kiss.[16]

As though to hold up a signboard proclaiming his innovations, Keshavdas closes this particular chapter with a statement that proves to be the refrain of *rīti* poet-intellectuals: “I have composed this passage according to my own

(p.111) understanding."[17] However else one might view Keshavdas's relationship to Sanskrit tradition, in the writer's own estimation, he intended to create new knowledge.

figure 3.1 Meeting during an emergency (*atibhaya ko milana*), from Keshavdas's *Rasikpriyā*, Mewar c. 1660

Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: Purchase, F 1998.309

In the poem just cited, Keshavdas also localizes his theme to a specifically Braj milieu, for if classical Sanskrit *alaṅkāraśāstra* was his main wellspring, early modern *bhakti* styles also contributed in significant ways to the shaping of his scholarly approaches. Rudrabhatta happens to have been a Shaiva, not a Vaishnava, but religion was in any case irrelevant to his theorization of literature. The focus on god in the *Śṛṅgāratilaka* occurs just where one would expect it to: in the opening *maṅgalācaraṇa* (invocation) and nowhere else. In the *Rasikpriyā*, in contrast, Radha and Krishna are omnipresent, with nearly every definition in the work followed by alternating sequences of example verses lovingly devoted to each deity.

Keshavdas's reverence for Radha and Krishna underpins numerous points of theoretical divergence from his Sanskrit predecessor. Not all of Keshavdas's innovations are in the service of his *bhakti*, but many are. For instance, whereas neither he nor Rudrabhatta approves of literary representations of lovers who pine so much for their beloved as to reach the point of death (*maraṇāvasthā*), Rudrabhatta eschews the category on wholly aesthetic grounds, because such poems lack beauty (*asaundaryāt*); for Keshavdas, in contrast, the crucial point is that his poems are about a god, and he could not possibly describe the death of an immortal deity.[18]

When it comes to the three broad types of *nāyikā*s that had been recognized by Sanskrit theoreticians from time immemorial, Keshavdas entirely omits one of the categories, the *sāmānyā nāyikā* (courtesan), again trumpeting the decision as a deliberate departure from tradition based on his own reasoning:

> And as for the third type of *nāyikā*, why should I describe her here? The best poets have said that one should not ruin good poetry by including tasteless (*birasa*) subjects. Here I have described all the *nāyikā*s according to my own understanding of them.[19]

The omission of the *sāmānyā nāyikā* makes perfect sense in Keshavdas's more *bhakti*-oriented universe: in a text where Radha is the principal *nāyikā*, it would hardly have been possible to treat the morally questionable figure of the courtesan.[20] Radha's central role as the *nāyikā* could be construed as a radical new Vaishnava approach.

A devotional orientation toward Krishna and Radha informs Keshavdas's treatment of the domain of *rasa* theory, as well. In the opening to *Rasikpriyā*, he argues that Krishna is *navarasamaya*—that is, the deity embodies all nine **(p. 112)** *rasa*s—which his eighteenth-century commentator Surati Mishra came to consider one of the major postulates of the work.[21] In his treatment of the various canonical *bhāva*s and *hāva*s (emotions and lovers' coquetries) that interplay to contribute to the full complement of *śṛṅgāra rasa*, the love of Radha and Krishna is posited as the substratum:

> Passion arises from the love of Radha and Krishna. From the force of their emotion arises my theory (*bicāra*) about lovers' coquetries.[22]

In this case, too, Keshavdas's new formulation of his subject matter is absolutely deliberate, as is evident from the way he concludes the discussion:

> Keshavdas has described the various gestures of Radha and her lover according to his understanding of them. May master poets forgive his audacity.[23]

Keshavdas again foregrounds his recasting of tradition, although in this case (if we are to take him at his word), his otherwise bold assertion of independence from the Sanskrit source material is tempered by a qualm about whether his proposed changes are too daring. Indubitably, the Sanskrit authorities were foundational for Keshavdas and not to be transgressed lightly, but these are not the words of someone mindlessly following tradition.[24]

Although Keshavdas takes an unusual approach in developing the idea, the *Rasikpriyā* also restates an important doctrinal position from Sanskrit *alaṅkāraśāstra*: *śṛṅgāra* is the paramount *rasa*, and the others may be subsumed within it. In the opening to his book, he proclaims outright that *śṛṅgāra* is the preeminent literary emotion[25] and devotes the first thirteen of the sixteen chapters to topics that develop this point. The remaining *rasa*s are treated only very briefly in a single chapter (fourteen). The *lakṣaṇ*s of this chapter are unremarkable, explaining the comic, sorrowful, heroic, and other emotions in perfunctory fashion, but when it comes to the *udāharaṇ* verses, all the subsidiary

*rasa*s are rallied to the task of confirming Keshavdas's basic tenet on the supremacy of *śṛṅgāra*, losing their theoretical precision as separate *rasa*s. To appreciate his method, consider how this verse on Radha's manifestation of *vīra rasa* (the heroic sentiment) converts the conventional battlefield filled with clashing swords and headless trunks into a *ratiraṇa* (battlefield of passion):

> Radha set out for battle, deploying the war elephant of her gait.
> For cavalry she had her beauty,
> for infantry her feelings.
> Her various gestures were a chariot,
> her sweet smile was her sword.
> **(p.113)** Says Keshavdas, Her breasts were warriors,
> her nails spears to her lover's back.
> She conquered shame and fear,
> and worry over what people might say.
> She drew the bow of her eyebrows,
> then shot piercing glance-arrows.
> She had put on the armor of love,
> and courage was her companion.
> Today she conquered Gopal on the battlefield of passion.[26]

In the case of Krishna's *adhbuta* or wondrous qualities, which are not difficult to demonstrate since he is a deity, Keshavdas clinches the argument with a *śṛṅgārik* point: he loses all composure in the presence of Radha (figure 3.2):

> “He steals butter, he steals ghee, he steals curd and milk
> and then vanishes unseen.
> But as soon as anybody lays eyes on him, he steals their heart.
> Why do the Purān.as and the sages of old
> speak of him as the primal being?”
> So wondered the wives of the gods in their perfect wisdom.
> “And no sooner does he see the gait of a *gopī*
> then he forgets his own nature.
> How can one so hapless be heralded the savior of the hopeless?”[27]

A similar technique is adopted for the other *rasa*s: an example of *raudra* (terrifying) *rasa* depicts a Radha so ruthless and fierce with the animals of the forest that she plunders their various attributes, hence her doe-like eyes, elephant-like gait, and so on; an example of *bhayānaka* (fearsome) *rasa* features a Radha so terrified by rain during a storm that she clings to Krishna in a tight embrace—again, the dominant ethos is love rather than fear. Even *sama* (more commonly known as *śānta*, the quiescent) *rasa*, which epitomizes the Indian ideal of detachment from the world, paradoxically takes on carnal hues when Keshavdas portrays Krishna as so enamored of Radha's sweet lips that he has become indifferent to all other sweet things in this world.[28] Chapter fourteen of the *Rasikpriyā*, while striking one unsympathetic modern critic as “unscientific

and ridiculous,”[29] is actually making a powerful Vaishnava argument about aesthetic response.

(p.114)

(p.115) Keshavdas's theorizations and the example verses he designed to substantiate them make perfect sense for a devout Krishna *bhakta*. In an unambiguous proclamation of his literary values, he would later classify poets according to the following threefold system:

> Poets may be considered best, middling, and worst. The best are steeped in the *rasa* of Hari. Middling poets honor men. Clever girl, the worst write verses filled with flaws.[30]

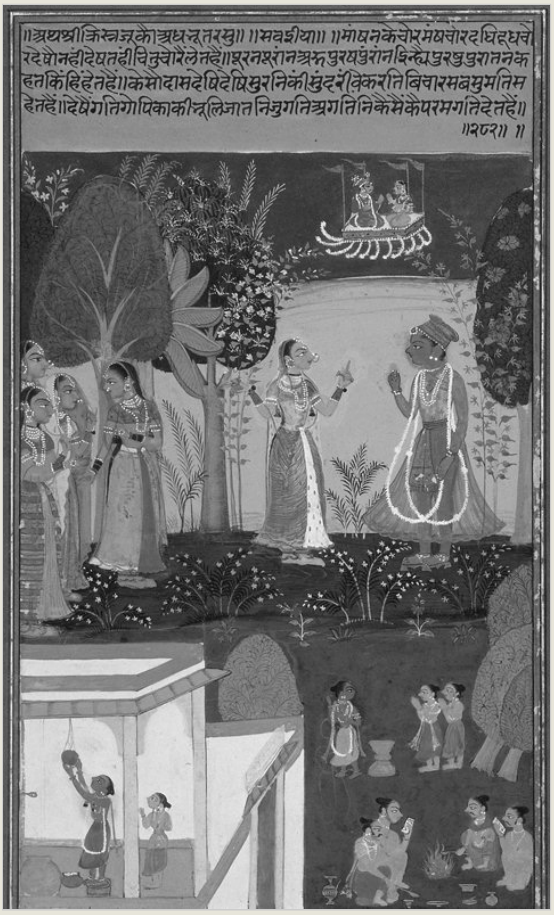


figure 3.2 Krishna's wondrous qualities (*Krishnaju ko adbhuta rasa)*, from Keshavdas's *Rasikpriyā*, Bundi, c. 1725

Courtesy of Asian Art Archives, University of Michigan

Keshavdas's hierarchy of subjects was a common one in the early modern period. His commentator Surati Mishra recalls being introduced to the Mughal Emperor Muhammad Shah (r. 1719–48) as follows: “He (i.e., Surati Mishra) does not usually write poems about men but has written much on the subject of god. Since everybody speaks of kings as being incarnations of god he has, to the best of his ability, composed some poems about the emperor.”[31] Keshavdas was likewise “steeped in the *rasa* of Hari,” though we have seen that he wrote many poems honoring all-too-human kings. Even if the poet does not always overtly link his *bhakti* to his intellectual positions, the obsessive parallelism of the *Rasikpriyā*, in which nearly every single literary concept has to apply to *both* Radha and Krishna, may stem from Vaishnava values such as *smaraṇ* (remembering the deity) and *līlā* (play of the divine couple).[32] Moreover, rewriting Sanskrit *śāstra* in a manner

that insists on its theoretical relevance to both Radha and Krishna leads to other truly major departures from the classical norms. An example is when Krishna is made to display what previous Indian thinkers considered a quintessentially female trait: *māna* (jealous rage). Rudrabhatta's perspective, and that of the Sanskrit courtly tradition in general, is that of the “male gaze” focusing in upon a *nāyikā*'*s* actions.[33] In Sanskrit poetry, women experience but never inspire anger; *māna* is the exclusive preserve of a *nāyikā* who has been wronged by her lover. Keshavdas's chapters on *māna* and its corollary, *māna-mocana* (reconciliation), never fail to fix the gaze of Radha—a woman's gaze—on Krishna, as well.

The *nāyaka*'s and *nāyikā*'s emotions are understandably manifested in different ways, and gender norms prevent true parallelism in many of the example verses. Sometimes the very rules of the game are different for men and women. For instance, *gurumāna*, the most serious form of jealous rage in a woman, is sparked when she suspects her lover has been unfaithful:

> Keshavdas says,
>
> When the *nāyikā* sees evidence of another woman, or when she hears another woman's name, it is natural to experience intense anger.

Keshavdas's insistence on applying every literary concept to Radha and Krishna becomes a theoretical challenge when he then needs to compose a complementary verse about Krishna's anger. What are the grounds for Krishna's getting angry? With the *gopī*s an arguable exception, in Indian poetry women do not stay out all night and then swagger home bleary-eyed in the morning after **(p.116)** making love to a paramour on the sly. That is what men do. Keshavdas thus has to invent a whole new scenario for why Krishna might get angry enough to lash out at his beloved. Here is his *lakṣaṇ*:

> When a woman speaks harsh words that go beyond all sense of decorum,
> intense anger arises in her lover's heart.

In describing how to appease a lover, again Keshavdas has to retool his inherited theoretical apparatus to come up with gender-specific rationales for *praṇati*:

> A woman falls at the feet of her beloved out of great love, but never out of passion or because she has committed a serious mistake. To describe such things would ruin the aesthetic experience.[34]

Far from slavishly imitating his Sanskrit models, Keshavdas's method is to take cues from them, while frequently offering his own perspective on individual topics and in some cases going off in highly original directions.

These intellectual processes and attitudes are widely applicable to both *bhakti* and *rīti* authors (at times distinctly overlapping categories, as the case of Keshavdas well illustrates) who engaged with their classical heritage. It requires meticulous research, and familiarity with both Brajbhasha and Sanskrit, to understand the mentality of vernacular writers of the early modern period, but every scholar who has taken the time to read a Braj text in tandem with its Sanskrit source(s) has arrived at the same conclusion: vernacular writers sought to reshape the classical tradition "according to their own understanding." More often than not, they even tell us that this is what they are doing. A few additional examples will suffice.

One major concern of the *bhakti* poet Nanddas (fl. 1570), active in the generation before Keshavdas, was to make Sanskrit texts available to a growing Brajbhasha reading community. He produced Bhasha versions of the *Rasamañjarī* of Bhanudatta, the *Rāsapañcādhyāyī* (Five chapters on the round dance, from the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*), and the *Prabodhacandrodaya* of Krishna Mishra; his *Mānamañjarī* and *Anekārthamañjarī*, two much-consulted Braj dictionaries, were based on the *Amarakośa*.[35] Not one of these is a mere translation of a Sanskrit source. The *Rasamañjarī*, for instance, is imbued with Krishna *bhakti* and marks a significant change from the version of Bhanudatta, who, although not ignoring god entirely in the manner of Rudrabhatta, does not give him pride of place. In this particular case and more generally, Nanddas demonstrably uses his own *mati*; furthermore, he announces it with his typical signature, *nanda sumati yathā* (Nanddas, in keeping with his judicious understanding).[36]

(p.117) Hariram Vyas, an approximate contemporary of Nanddas, was also demonstrably creative in his approach to vernacularizing the *Rāsapañcādhyāyī* segment of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*. Heidi Pauwels has done a close comparison of the Braj and Sanskrit texts, and for all that they are supposed to tell the same story, the two versions in some respects hardly resemble each other.[37] Vyas felt himself at liberty to skip some of the chapters and to add one that was not in the original—no trivial matter, since the canonical segment of this Vaishnava scripture has only five chapters. The substance, not just the form, also underwent a radical transformation. Radha, who was never named as a *gopī* in the Sanskrit *Bhāgavata*, is accorded a dramatic new role as Krishna's chief love interest. In another major departure, Vyas proves uninterested in *viraha*, the pain of separated lovers, which in some ways is the core aesthetic mood of the Sanskrit original. "What joy is there in the story of separation?" he asks.[38] The emphasis on *sambhoga śṛṅgāra* (love fulfilled) is consistent with the new Vaishnava focus on *mādhurya*, the sweetness of Radha and Krishna's amorous play in the groves of Vrindavan.

Another example from the *rīti* tradition of reworking a staple from the Sanskrit thought-world to fit with new Vaishnava doctrines is Chintamani's treatment of the classical subject of *guṇa*s (phonological principles) in the opening of his *Kavikulkalptaru*. At first glance, Chintamani's ideas appear mostly to mimic those of a Sanskrit predecessor, Mammata's *Kāvyaprakāśa*. Much of his technical terminology is taken from this work, and both the manner and the order in which he treats the *guṇa*s conform to Mammata's approach.[39] But closer scrutiny reveals a new take on the subject matter.

Chintamani does not merely repeat verbatim Mammata's literary propositions. He elaborates on competing systems from other Sanskrit masters, laying out the basic concepts and points of debate. In some cases, he composes original poetry to illustrate categories omitted by Mammata. And some of this thinking is completely new, notably Chintamani's theorization of *mādhurya guṇa*. We can appreciate this newness best by studying the relevant passages side by side.

> *Chintamani:*
> In the case of love in union a pleasurable experience melts the heart.
> This is called *mādhurya*—the very essence of poetry.
> *Jo saṃyoga sigāra maiṃ sukhada dravāvai citta*
> *So mādhurya bakhāniyaiṃ yahai tattva kavitta*[40]
> *Mammata:*
> *Mādhurya* is that which produces joy. It is the underlying reason for melting in love (he continues with a gloss: by the expression “in love” I mean “during love in union” and by melting I mean “dissolving”).
> **(p.118)** *āhlādakatvaṃ mādhuryaṃ śṛṅgāre drutikāraṇam*
> (*śṛṅgāre arthāt saṃbhoge drutir galitvam iva*)[41]

These two definitions are demonstrably similar. With the special prerogative of a vernacular poet—Braj poets did not have to follow rigid grammar rules—Chintamani can even coin a Braj verb (*dravāvai*, “melts”) to express Mammata's concept of the *druti* (melting) that attends a connoisseur's deep immersion in a poem. But in Chintamani's verse he unexpectedly declares *mādhurya* to be the *tattva*, the very essence of poetry. No Sanskrit theorist had ever singled out any one *guṇa* as superior to the others—certainly not to declare it poetry's essential feature. In isolating *mādhurya* as a special poetic property, Chintamani subtly yet tellingly offers a new assessment of vernacular literature, and one very much in dialogue with recent debates in the Vaishnava community.[42] In what we can now confidently recognize as a larger trend among *rīti* intellectuals, Chintamani does not allow his revised treatment of the Sanskrit *guṇa* systems to go unremarked. He proclaims, “Certain categories of *guṇa*s were theorized by the ancients, and I am writing about all of them here according to my own understanding.”[43]

A close comparison between Mammata and a later Braj author on another typical topic of *alaṅkāraśāstra* clinches the case for the originality of Braj scholars. Bhikharidas, a major eighteenth-century *ālaṅkārika* from the Avadh region who was unusually detailed in his discussions of literature, literary theory, and literary persons, emended Mammata's definition of the *kāvya prayojana* (purposes of poetry) from the *Kāvyaprakāśa* in a way that foregrounds *bhakti*:

> *Bhikharidas:*
> Some acquire religious merit,
> such as the spiritual masters Tulsi and Sur.
> Others seek wealth, in the manner of
> Keshavdas, Bhushan, and Birbal.
> There are the Rahims and Raskhans
> who concern themselves with fame alone.
> Says [Bhikhari] Das, Discussing poetry is
> in every case pleasing to scholars.
> *Ekai lahaiṃ tapapuñjani ke phala jyoṃ tulasī aru sūra gosaīṃ,*
> *Ekai lahaiṃ bahusaṃpati kesava bhūṣaṇa jyoṃ barabīra baṛāī,*
> *Ekani koṃ jasa hī soṃ prayojana hai rasakhāni rahīma kī naīṃ,*
> *Dāsa kabittani kī caracā budhivantani koṃ sukhadai saba ṭhaīṃ.*[44]
> *Mammata:*
> **(p.119)** Poetry is for the sake of fame, wealth, practical knowledge, warding off illness,
> for the aesthetic rapture that arises suddenly (upon hearing a poem),
> and for instructing—the way a beloved does.
> *Kāvyaṃ yaśase ’rthakṛte vyavahāravide śivetarakṣataye*
> *Sadyaḥ paranirvṛtaye kāntāsaṃmitatayopadeśayuje*[45]

It is beyond doubt that here and elsewhere in his *Kāvyanirṇay* (Critical perspective on literature, 1746) Bhikharidas bases many of his arguments on those of Mammata.[46] But whereas for Mammata *kāvya* was (or was generally presented as) a largely secular pursuit, Bhikharidas considered spiritual gain one of the three primary rationales, and it is the one he places first in his list when he invokes the *bhakti* poets Tulsi and Sur. That he took the trouble to rewrite Mammata's well-known *kāvyaprayojana* verse dramatically underscores this crucial shift in conceptions of the literary between Sanskrit in the eleventh century and Brajbhasha in the eighteenth.[47]

Bhikharidas's *Kāvyanirṇay* contains several other passages of interest to those seeking to understand the conceptual world of Braj intellectuals, reminding us that not all the important theoretical shifts in *rīti* are related to *bhakti*. Some new arguments derive from the literary and linguistic specificities of Brajbhasha. Bhikharidas was the first *rīti* author to treat rhyme, one of the hallmarks of the Hindi vernacular transformation (as it was in the changeover from Latin to Romance languages[48]), and he views it as a specifically vernacular stylistic trait. He devotes all of chapter twenty-two of *Kāvyanirṇay* to the subject, opening with

the proclamation, “First of all, in a vernacular composition rhyme is particularly desired.”[49] Still, it is arresting that attempts to theorize such a new and essentially vernacular subject did not appear until one hundred and fifty years after *rīti* scholarship had begun (and Hindi poets themselves had been using rhyme much longer than that). The chapter is admittedly short, consisting of a mere seventeen stanzas, but the mission is entirely new. As always, the point for Braj intellectuals was not to present a radical overhaul of classical theory but to make relatively minor adjustments within the older paradigms.

Another innovation of Bhikharidas—which must have been forced by real changes in language use—is his intriguing if enigmatic discussion of linguistic register. Sanskrit had always been theorized in the Indian tradition as a pure, unchangeable language (the facts of the matter are different but irrelevant to the dominant language ideology). Clearly this conception of language could not make theoretical sense of Brajbhasha, which—among other signature hybridities—bears numerous lexical traces of *rīti* poets’ exposure to Persian. In the **(p.120)** first chapter of *Kāvyanirṇay*, Bhikharidas presents Brajbhasha as a language that is mixed to its very core, and beautiful precisely for being so.

> All people of developed sensibility agree about the beauty of Brajbhasha. Braj may be mixed with Sanskrit, and also Persian, but it still remains altogether clear. Braj, Avadhi, Sanskrit, Prakrit, Arabic, and native Persian are found (or mixed, another meaning of *milai*)—they say that poetry is of six different types.
>
> *Bhāṣā bṛjabhāṣā rucira, kahaiṃ sumati saba koi*
> *Milai saṃsakṛta pārasyau, pai ati pragaṭa ju hoi*
> *Bṛja māgadhī milai amara, nāga jamana bhāṣāni*
> *Sahaja pārasīhūṃ mile, ṣaṭabidhi kabita bakhāni*[50]

This passage does not yield its meaning easily. It is not clear, for instance, whether the term *māgadhī* means Apabhramsha or Avadhi. Nor is the intended distinction between *jamana* (i.e., *yavana*, Arabic? Turkish?) and *sahaja pārasī* (native Persian?) transparent.[51] What is not in doubt is that three of the literary languages (Braj, Jamana, and Persian) mentioned by Bhikharidas were not part of any classical thinking from the *kāvya* tradition. As with his treatment of rhyme, here was a chance to say something completely new about literature. Did Bhikharidas take it?

Yes and no. To write Braj scholarship in this period was a delicate balancing act. It is emblematic of the epistemological complexities of preserving a revered scholarly tradition while incorporating new developments that Bhikharidas articulated radical linguistic change using an archaic, typologizing scheme. Instead of trumpeting a bold new insight, he conceptualized Brajbhasha register as *ṣaṭvidhā* (sixfold), a term that had been used long before by the Sanskrit theorist Simhabhupala to designate the non-Sanskrit literary languages Prakrit,

Shauraseni, Magadhi, Paishachi, Chulika Paishachi, and Apabhramsha.[52] Although half of the components of Bhikharidas's proposed sextet of *kāvya bhāṣā*s are a clear break with tradition, the retention of a sixfold frame means that this otherwise highly inventive vernacular writer must have felt it necessary to theorize literary language not in accordance with his lived experience but in terms of established categories. To be valid, vernacular innovation needed to be authorized by the writers and systems of the classical past or even, on occasion, disguised. Sudipta Kaviraj has usefully distinguished between modern and premodern modes of cultural change: "Modern rebellions announce themselves even before they are wholly successful; revolutions in traditional cultures tended to hide the fact of their being revolts."[53] Brajbhasha intellectuals were waging a revolution, to be sure, but it was a surreptitious one.

(p.121) *Suravāṇī* and *Naravāṇī*

Conservative or not, as Brajbhasha poets encroached on the cultural space that Sanskrit had occupied for some 1,500 years, they managed to dismantle the traditional conceptions about its preeminence. Several poets hint at this dramatic upending of centuries of Sanskrit literary monopolization—even if they do so with very little drama. Chintamani's *kāvyalakṣaṇ* (definition of poetry) from the opening of his *Kavikulkalptaru* is a case in point:

> Literature is defined as expression replete with aesthetic sentiment. In Sanskrit, literature is twofold: prose and poetry. A composition in meter is called "verse," and "prose" lacks meter. Good poets derive pleasure from hearing verse composition in the vernacular.[54]

At first glance his bifurcation of literature into the categories of "prose" and "poetry" may appear to be a banal, mechanical reiteration of one of the most basic tenets of Sanskrit literary thinking. But upon closer reflection, two points of great significance come into focus. First, Bhasha poetry is associated with pleasure—not Sanskrit. Second, prose is not mentioned as a concern of vernacular writers. Chintamani does not overtly rule out the idea of Bhasha prose (and indeed Braj writers, including Chintamani, did use prose from time to time), but the theoretical point is that, for this *ālaṅkārika*, *chandanibaddha* (versified) literary discourse was the special purview of vernacular writing.

Another telling conceptualization of Brajbhasha's relationship to Sanskrit is found in Chintamani's treatment of *doṣa*s. Like Keshavdas before him, Chintamani was not in the least reticent about proposing new flaws, indicating that for vernacular poets the proliferation of subcategories was one important mechanism for creative self-expression. His *kācīdoṣa* (flaw of unripeness) plays on the imagery of the harvest to critique unpolished language:

> Language that does not follow the usage of good poets is known as "unripe." [The language of] the area encompassing Mathura and Gwalior

(i.e., Brajbhasha) is considered fully ripe.… And some say the [language of the] Mathura-Gwalior region is the “language of the gods.”

> *Jo nahi progī sat-kavina, kācī bhāsā jāna*
> *Mathurā-maṇḍala gvāriyai(gvāriyara?) kī paripaka bakhāna … .*
> *Mathurā-maṇḍala gvāriyara kī suravānī koi*[55]

Of interest here are some ideas that prove to be far more radical than the *upabheda* (subcategory) in which they are couched. Quite apart from proscribing another type of inferior poetry, Chintamani is striving to articulate the special **(p.122)** status of Brajbhasha. Braj is the “ripe” standard against which “unripe” languages fail to measure up. Even more extraordinary is the notion that, due to its literary excellence, Brajbhasha can now be designated by the term *suravāṇī*, a long-standing reverential epithet for Sanskrit and *for Sanskrit alone*.

The idea that Brajbhasha was on some level becoming equivalent to Sanskrit can be found even in Sanskrit works of the early modern period, notably the *Śṛṅgāramañjarī* (Bouquet of passion, c. 1670) of Akbar Shah, a member of the Indo-Muslim literati from the Golkonda court.[56] Both the work's textual history and its modes of argumentation proclaim that perceptions about the validity of vernacular texts were altering irrevocably by the late seventeenth century. In a momentous reversal of the normal trajectories of source and target language, the work was first composed in Telugu (*āndhrabhāṣā*), and only then translated into Sanskrit (suravāṇī). It was the Sanskrit version, not the Telugu one, that Chintamani translated into Brajbhasha during his stay at Golkonda.[57] That Sanskrit is not the language of the original composition is one testament to the new status of the vernacular as a medium of scholarly writing. Another is the *Śṛṅgāramañjarī*'*s* unprecedented mentioning of Brajbhasha authors in the same company as Sanskrit literary authorities—as though they were now perceived to be intellectually comparable. Keshavdas's *Rasikpriyā* is one of two Braj texts to share the designation *pramukhagrantha* (principal text) with such illustrious Sanskrit works as Dhananjaya's *Daśarūpaka*, Mammata's *Kāvyaprakāśa*, and Bhanudatta's *Rasamañjarī*, betokening the erosion of age-old language hierarchies.[58]

Although it never became very common for Sanskrit *ālaṅkārika*s to refer to their Braj counterparts, we have evidence that they were reading them. Venidatta Bhattacharya, a Bengali scholar and poet writing in the eighteenth century, cites Keshavdas's definition of a *bhāva* (emotion) in his *Rasikarañjana* (Delighter of connoisseurs), a commentary on the *Rasataraṅgiṇī* (River of emotion, c. 1500) by the Sanskrit theorist Bhanudatta. Intriguingly, he translates the definition into Sanskrit rather than quoting the original Braj.

> As stated in the *Rasikpriyā*,

> A mental event can be manifested by way of facial expressions, or the eyes,
> or words. That very thing is what is known as “emotion,” which sensitive people turn into an object of their own experience. All power to it.
> *Tathā coktaṃ rasikapriyāyāṃ*
> *Mukhanetravacanamārgaiḥ prakaṭībhavati mānasikapadārthaḥ*
> *Sa eva bhāvo vijñaiḥ svānubhavaviṣayīkṛto jayati*[59]

The Sanskrit does not quite scan as a recognizable meter, an awkwardness that perhaps stems from the linguistic transplantation. Nor is the last quarter of the **(p.123)** verse quite an exact translation. This Sanskrit pandit may have been doing something that Braj authors had long known to do: invoking a literary authority in a manner that was simultaneously *apanī mati anusāra*, “according to his own understanding.”[60]

Citations of Keshavdas by Akbar Shah and Venidatta Bhattacharya are only some of the evidence that points to a shared community of Sanskrit and Bhasha intellectuals in this period. The great Sanskrit *ālaṅkārika* Jagannatha Panditaraja (fl. 1650) was the revered guru of Kulapati Mishra, the *rīti* writer from the Amber court whose *Rasrahasya* and other works were thoroughly in dialogue with Sanskrit. Jagannatha, for his part, is thought to have been influenced by contemporary trends in Bhasha poetry.[61] It was not uncommon for Braj writers (Narottam and Keshavdas, for example) to pepper their vernacular works with Sanskrit *śloka*s. In his Braj commentary on Jaswant Singh's *Bhāṣābhūṣaṇ*, Haricharandas moves freely between Braj and Sanskrit, citing sometimes a *dohā* by Biharilal, at other times a *śloka* by Appayya Dikshita. He proposes corrections to some of Jaswant Singh's Braj *lakṣaṇ*s, but when he does so it is on the authority of a Sanskrit text, Jayadeva's *Candrāloka*.[62] The *kavikul* consisted of both Sanskrit and Braj writers and, even if there had been historically asymmetrical relations between them, this situation was now changing and they began to influence one another, whether or not they acknowledged that this was the case.

The existence of Sanskrit commentaries on *rīti* works, little studied though they are, offers yet further confirmation that these literary cultures overlapped to some degree. Samartha, author of a Sanskrit commentary on the *Rasikpriyā* entitled *Pramodinī* (Giver of gladness, 1698), announced in his colophon that he had “greater affection for Braj than for the language of the gods.”[63] Krishna Kavi, writing during the next generation, echoes Samartha's sentiments in his exegesis of the *Bihārīsatsaī*:

> Everybody says Brajbhasha is equivalent to the language of the gods (*suravāṇī*).
> So say all poets, knowing it to be the foundation for great aesthetic enjoyment.[64]

Braj writers had come a long way since the days of Keshavdas with his professions of slow-wittedness.

Yet, if the confidence of Brajbhasha intellectuals increased over time as vernacular texts on *alaṅkāraśāstra* gained tremendous currency in courtly venues and beyond, many *rīti* writers continued to express deference to their classical predecessors and voiced apparent anxieties about their own ability to contribute new ideas. Bhikharidas, one of the greatest vernacular rhetoricians that the Indian tradition produced, felt compelled to say:

> **(p.124)** I studied the Sanskrit texts *Candrāloka* and *Kāvyaprakāśa*.
> I understood them and made their ideas beautiful in the vernacular.
> From other sources, too, I adopted the path of poets (*kabipatha*) … .
> But even though I may express my own opinions,
> I still feel anxiety about that which I have created myself (*rahai svakalpita saṅka*).
> Therefore, I have mixed my own opinions with classical precepts—
> may poets forgive any faults.[65]

A century and a half after Keshavdas had shown scholars of systematic literary thought that such systematicity was not only possible but also necessary in the vernacular, did the very execution of the project remain doubtful? Bhikharidas may instead be simply outlining his scholarly method. To write Bhasha *śāstra* meant to mix newer ideas with older ones, not to compose new theory from scratch (*svakalpita*).[66] This is consistent with earlier statements by Keshavdas and Chintamani, who stressed the necessity of classical precepts to the vernacular scholarly enterprise.[67]

In the very same chapter of Bhikharidas's *Kāvyanirṇay*, however, are unmistakable indicators that classical authority was less important than he avowed. Once again, we observe the intricate balancing act of trying to give both older authorities and newer ones their due. Bhikharidas opens his work with a *kavi-praśaṃsā* (ode to past poets), a genre of particular value to modern literary historians for retrieving the literary self-understanding of premodern writers.[68] Bhikharidas does give Sanskrit authors pride of place in his opening verses, but he mentions only two, Jayadeva and Mammata, while he memorializes more than two dozen Brajbhasha *kavi*s.[69] Thus, whatever anxiety may have attended the production of vernacular scholarship in the early modern period, there is unmistakable evidence of the increasing self-assurance that the consolidation of a tradition can instill.

A similar discrepancy between avowing the greatness of the Sanskrit past and the reality of contemporary Braj achievements can be found in the *Sujāncaritra* of Sudan, an approximate contemporary of Bhikharidas who served the kings of

Bharatpur. He frames the very existence of the Bhasha tradition as a decline necessitated by the waning of intelligence in the *kaliyuga*:

> As the *kaliyuga* became overweening, intelligence waned.
> The poets of today speak Bhasha, and even still their grasp is incomplete.[70]

Clearly the older ideas about Sanskrit supremacy and Bhasha degeneracy lingered on. And yet, whatever he might say about vernacular incompetency, Sudan's own *kavi-praśaṃsā*, like that of Bhikharidas, attests to the unmistakable strength of Braj literary culture. Braj writers outnumbered their Sanskrit **(p. 125)** counterparts by a very large margin: whereas Sudan devotes a single *chappay* to the Sanskrit past, fully six are needed to account for the important Bhasha writers of recent centuries.[71]

In the *Satkavigirāvilās* (Play of the language of true poets, c.1750?[72]) of Baldev Mishra, a *rītigranth* commissioned by Raja Vikram Shah of Charkhari in Baghelkhand (in today's southeastern Madhya Pradesh), is yet another *kavi-praśaṃsā*. This time, Sanskrit poets have been completely omitted. Writers of this place and time—just a decade or so later than Bhikharidas—apparently no longer felt the need to look back reverently to major Sanskrit thinkers like Mammata. More recent Braj luminaries such as Keshavdas had taken their place. Baldev says,

> Taking definitions and example poems from the pioneering poets Keshav[das], [Chinta]mani, Matiram, and Sukhdev, and those who are discriminating when it comes to *rasa*, I have mixed in my own ideas to describe the nine *rasa*s and characters both male and female, bringing intellectual delight.
>
> *kesava mani matirāma kabi, sukhadevādi aneka*
> *inhaiṃ ādi kavi aura je rasa mai sahita viveka*
> *tinake lakṣana lakṣya lai āpani ukuti milāi*
> *barno nava rasa nāyakā nāyaka mati sarasāi*[73]

The phrase "*āpani ukuti milāi*" reinforces the importance to these authors of the now-familiar compositional strategy of mixing the old with the new. Also note how Baldev Mishra is simultaneously concerned with composing and anthologizing the most popular poems of what could finally be seen as a Brajbhasha canon. The Braj tradition possessed its own classics now, and poets could dispense with Sanskrit authority altogether. The process of vernacularization was coming to a close.

Conclusion

The scholarly methods of early modern writers working in Brajbhasha are barely charted terrain, and this discussion has raised just a few questions of interest for a single field.[74] At stake are important concerns for Hindi scholars but also,

more generally, for intellectual historians, including our ability to understand the conceptual world of Indian pandits before the transition to colonialism. The relatively conservative stance of Brajbhasha writers even in a highly developed vernacular field such as rhetoric merits a more nuanced analysis than it has attracted so far. The degree to which these writers based their **(p.126)** *alaṅkāraśāstra* discourse on Sanskrit models has usually been interpreted as a sign of deficiency, sometimes explained by a decline in India's intellectual vibrancy, a result of medieval stagnation during the late precolonial period.[75]

Although we should reject both “medieval” and “stagnation” as descriptions of this intellectual culture—one is an unreflective import from European intellectual history, the other a judgmental reaction to an epistemological system that does not have progress as a core value—it is perfectly natural to wonder why vernacular writers were committed to subtly reworking Sanskrit literary concepts rather than to forging a bold new literary system. In certain cases, the purpose of the *rītigranth* genre was not necessarily to propose new theory: some of these works had an educational mandate, while others were more of a poetic enterprise.[76] But a number of *rīti* writers were seriously interested in being theoreticians, and it remains something of a puzzle that their intellectual style was so unassuming because matters could, of course, have been different. Brajbhasha authors, some of whom worked at the Mughal court or were otherwise firsthand witnesses to political and cultural conditions very different from the Sanskrit *sabhā*s where *kāvya* began, developed entirely new aesthetic practices like multilingual punning by infusing Persian words into the language. Despite being an important site of difference from Sanskrit, the new Perso-Arabic lexical streams (which still characterize spoken Hindi today) were never taken as a basis for dramatic new conceptualizations of language use; nor was rhyme, another specifically vernacular domain. Bhikharidas, almost alone of *rīti* scholars, called attention to some elements of change, but in a surprisingly bland manner that seems to disguise rather than highlight innovation. Nowhere in his oeuvre can we find a radically new theory of Brajbhasha literature. Why should this have been the case across the spectrum of the hundreds of works of *rīti śāstra*?

One widespread theory that became current during the nineteenth century stresses Brajbhasha's innate expressive limitations as a linguistic medium, particularly the *rīti* authors’ preference for poetry over prose. Retarded development in the area of prose is just one of a litany of complaints lodged against Braj and other premodern Indian vernaculars from Bengali to Tamil. Since it is rooted in colonial bias rather than any serious engagement with Indian intellectual history, it can be safely dismissed. Numerous works in both Hindi and Sanskrit demonstrate amply that prose is not a requirement for reasoned argument. The *dohā* meter of Hindi, like the Sanskrit *śloka*, could be prose-like in its function. Even in Sanskrit, whose intellectual merits as India's preeminent classical language are less disputed than those of Brajbhasha, prose

was never used in the field of *alaṅkāraśāstra* until the time of Vamana in the early ninth century (and Vamana's contemporary Udbhata still wrote verse). When two **(p.127)** generations later Anandavardhana adapted the more complex style of philosophical prose to the discipline, many authors continued to compose Sanskrit definitions in verse. Verse was an entirely legitimate medium of formal scholarly expression in precolonial India. Regardless, it is erroneous to state that Brajbhasha lacked a prose tradition. Countless plays were written in Brajbhasha prose, as was a vast corpus of Vaishnava *vārtā*s, quasi-historical hagiographies. Some *rīti* authors, notably Chintamani and Bhikharidas, used the exact same *vṛtti* (expository prose style) as their Sanskrit predecessors.[77] The Braj commentarial tradition occasionally referenced above is another important corpus of vernacular prose. And some Braj commentaries, such as those on Bhartrihari written by Keshavdas's patron Indrajit of Orchha, are of a complexity that makes it impossible to argue that the language was somehow inherently unsuited to subtle reasoning.[78] Brajbhasha prose existed; Brajbhasha intellectuals simply did not avail themselves of it for writing *alaṅkāraśāstra*. The reasons for *rīti* writers' lack of interest in developing radically inventive poetic theory need to be sought elsewhere.

An intellectual propensity for neoclassicism is one good reason, and was a broader trend in both intellectual and social history. *Rīti* theorists were animated by the mission of both continuing and updating the erudite traditions of their Sanskrit forebears; they were also in the process of constituting themselves as a major literary community. The members of this Braj *kavikul* were in dialogue with one other but also with their Sanskrit predecessors, who had crafted a well-defined theoretical system eminently suited to the type of vernacular cosmopolitanism cultivated by *rīti* poets.[79]

The disavowal of the old is generally a more modern cultural value, and expectations that writers should exhibit "originality" were not the same in premodernity—not in India, and not elsewhere. Many forms of vernacular literature could only be deemed literary to the extent that they encapsulated the literary values of the past. In an Indian context, neoclassicist writings were sometimes theorized as *mārga*, a term that precisely encodes those traditional values, and contrasted to more localized, idiosyncratic *deśī* styles.[80] Elsewhere in world literary culture, as already signaled, imitation of the classics was an important precondition for the rise of French literary culture (and Italian, and many other European languages). By appropriating the very features that made Latin elevated, French writers associated with the early modern courts lent dignity, majesty, and reason to their works. A comparable process, unfolding according to its own local logic, was underway nearly contemporaneously in *rīti* literature. By adopting Sanskrit protocols and genres—a Sanskritized high style—*rīti* authors imparted dignity to the vernacular and made it suitable for an evolving courtly setting that was no longer the exclusive preserve of **(p.128)** classical poets. This was a deliberate decision on the part of rational people and

should not be seen, as it too often is, as evidence of mannerism or a failure in scholarly creativity. In short, the widespread imitation of classical authority is universally recognized as a critical stage in the vernacularization process elsewhere in the world and should be recognized as such for India, as well.[81]

Still, Brajbhasha scholarship cannot just be reduced to a feeble recapitulation of Sanskrit norms. Furthermore, though based on Sanskrit sources, these texts differ from translations in the modern sense of the term. As discussed by A. K. Ramanujan and, more recently, John Cort, the tendency in premodern India was always toward “indexical”styles of translation rather than the word-for-word “iconic” method dominant today.[82] Indexical translation signals a complicated engagement with the source text and stems from radically different ideas of authorship and newness. This was the method used by many *rīti* authors, a style of scholarship both creative and derivative, for Braj authors did not fail to imprint their own stamp upon the material even while working in classical genres. And they often stated precisely this, using the clear, if unassuming phrase, “according to my own understanding.”[83]

The claim that *rīti* authors were expressing their own opinion should be taken seriously. These are not sporadic, insignificant assertions: they are frequent and central not only to Braj theorizations of rhetoric but also to the identities of the poet-intellectuals who constituted this cultural world. The act of translating core Sanskrit ideas into the vernacular was only part of the *rīti* intellectual enterprise. These poet-theorists also subtly reworked the *śāstra*s, modifying Sanskrit themes and localizing them to a specifically Brajbhasha milieu. In some cases, *bhakti* impulses were driving new theorizations. Why the *rīti* writers never embraced the idea of a *bhakti rasa*, a radical new concept embraced by Sanskrit theologians of the Gaudiya Vaishnava community in the sixteenth century, remains an enigma, when so much else about their poetry and theory shows the influence of Krishna *bhakti*. Perhaps it was just too much of a departure to add another entirely new *rasa*, or was it that Jagannatha Panditaraja's indignant, traditionalist rejection of the idea in the middle of the seventeenth century held sway?[84] Whatever may be the case, *rīti* intellectuals adhered to a much older idea from the Sanskrit tradition, championing the primacy of *śṛṅgāra*, the aesthetics of love, even for devotional poetry.

For moderns, it is not always easy to appreciate the significance of what at first glance appear to be mere micro-refinements of preexisting theories, as in many of the examples presented here. This is not because newness is not there, but because our modernist minds are not well attuned to the value of such subtle gradations. In early modern India, newness was interwoven into older systems.[85] This innovation through renovation may have been far more than an **(p.129)** act of deference to tradition. Affiliation with the dignity and power of a classical literary culture of the past helped to ensure Brajbhasha's intellectual and aesthetic success in the present. Perhaps this helps solve the paradox of

vernacular newness as epitomized by Keshavdas's proscribing the flaw of “blindness to tradition” in the *Kavipriyā*. The enriching of Bhasha literary culture with Sanskrit ideas may actually have been a discerning power play on the part of *rīti* poets. Keshavdas and his many successors in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century India contributed to a larger intellectual-historical process by which Brajbhasha began to encroach upon the cultural space that Sanskrit had once monopolized, eventually to usurp its place. By appropriating Sanskrit style, Brajbhasha appropriated Sanskrit space, rendering the classical language increasingly irrelevant.

Focusing on *rīti* authors’ intellectual relationship to the Sanskrit past, as I have done in this chapter, risks projecting the idea that Brajbhasha courtly literature was exclusively the domain of Hindu pandit communities. It was not. It is time to focus more fully on the important issue of how *rīti* writers interfaced with more contemporary styles of Indian culture across wide social domains. One particularly important group of connoisseurs but also writers of *rīti* literature was the Persianized Mughal elite. Their engagement with Brajbhasha was not just one factor among many in the rise of *rīti* literary culture: it may have been decisive.

Notes:

(1.) On Surati Mishra's contributions to Braj *alaṅkāraśāstra*, see the study by Ramgopal Sharma (1975).

(2.) The special features of Sanskrit *alaṅkāraśāstra*, including its complex developmental trajectories and the tradition's own dialectic between conservatism and innovation, are discussed in Bronner and Tubb 2008; on the rather different aims and scope of the Braj tradition, see Chaudhari 1992: 3–4.

(3.) See chapter 1. We did observe, however, that in the case of Keshavdas deference to classical authors may have been more of a posture than a heart-felt sentiment.

(4.) Keshavdas does reveal that he was familiar with various positions in the field of Sanskrit literary theory in *Kavipriyā*, 3.2. Although he never names any Sanskrit theoretician, his mention of “one master poet” (*eka kabirāja*) in *Kavipriyā*, 3.51 must be a reference to Dandin.

(5.) For some methodological perspectives on authorship in the domain of *bhakti* texts, see Hawley 1988; Novetzke 2003.

(6.) Careful, sympathetic studies of *rīti* intellectual traditions include those by Vishvanathprasad Mishra (1959a, 1959b, 1972, 1994); Sudhakar Pandey (1969); Kishorilal (1971); Kumvar Ray (1979); Vidyadhar Mishra (1990); Renu Bhatnagar

(1991); Satyadev Chaudhari (1992); Ramanand Sharma (1998, 2003, 2004); Vijaypal Singh (1998).

(7.) *Kavipriyā*, 3.4–7. Bhagvandin takes *negī* differently: as *dhan sampatti kā prabandhkartā* (administrator of finances). See *Priyāprakāś*, p. 15. The last phrase, *sunahu prabīna*, "listen, clever people" may also be taken as an invocation to Keshavdas's student Pravin Ray.

(8.) *Kavipriyā*, 3.8.

(9.) This is a point the author himself makes in his discussion of *cañcala* (fleeting) in the same work, which was excerpted in chapter 1. The commentator Bakhtavar Singh also objects to the idea that a beautiful woman's eyes should be described as red, a color that is associated with anger. *Kavipriyā kī ṭīkā*, folio 16a.

(10.) *Kavikulkalptaru*, 1.3, 1.6.

(11.) *Rasrahasya*, folios 2a-b. Unfortunately, Kulapati Mishra's work is mostly unpublished, making his ideas difficult to access. Vishnudatt Sharma's study (1970) provides a helpful overview. Also see Ray 1979.

(12.) *Rasrahasya*, folio 84a (lightly emended for clarity).

(13.) Similarities between the *Rasikpriyā* and *Śṛṅgāratilaka* have also been noted by G. H. Schokker (1983).

(14.) Compare *Rasikpriyā*, 5.24–38 with Rudrabhatta's original discussion in *Śṛṅgāratilaka*, 2.38.

(15.) Vrishabhanu is Radha's father.

(16.) *Rasikpriyā*, 5.31.

(17.) "*Kahe apanī mati anusāra*," *Rasikpriyā*, 5.41.

(18.) Compare the arguments in *Śṛṅgāratilaka*, 2.28, with those of *Rasikpriyā*, 8.54.

(19.) *Rasikpriyā*, 5.39–40.

(20.) It is easy to see how the figure of the courtesan would have seemed problematic to Keshavdas when moral debates raged in contemporary *bhakti* circles on the question of the *parakīyā* status of the *gopī*s. See Kinsley 1975: 37–38 n. 59. On the special status of the *parakīyā* in Gaudiya Vaishnavism, see Haberman 1988: 55–56.

(21.) *Rasikpriyā*, 1.2 (this verse has already been translated in chapter 1.) See *Jorāvarprakāś*, pp. 54–57. The concept of *navarasamaya* does have an analogue in Rudrabhatta's idea of Shiva as *sarvarasāśrayaḥ* in *Śṛṅgāratilaka*, 1.1.

(22.) *Rasikpriyā*, 6.15.

(23.) Ibid., 6.57.

(24.) Indian cultural theory has yet to develop an adequate framework for understanding the complex and thoughtful ways that premodern writers engaged with their models. The use of tradition is not simply retrenched conservatism; it has many nuances. A useful approach to “the intelligence of tradition” in Rajput painting is Aitken 2010.

(25.) *Rasikpriyā*, 1.16. This was also the position of Rudrabhatta, and subsequently elaborated by Bhoja in the eleventh century, as well as many later theorists working in both Sanskrit and Braj. As signaled by the choice of title for his most important *rītigranth*, *Rasrāj* (King of *rasa*s), Matiram also avows the supremacy of *śṛṅgāra rasa*.

(26.) *Rasikpriyā*, 14.25.

(27.) Ibid., 14.36. In the last line of this *kavitt*, Keshavdas uses the word *gati* four times in an untranslatably brilliant way: *dekhi gati gopikā kī bhūli jāta nija gati, agatina kaiseṃ dhauṃ parama gati deta haiṃ*.

(28.) Ibid., 14.22, 14.28, 14.39.

(29.) Chaudhari 1973: 231. Jindal (1993: 144), for his part, finds this approach a mark of Keshavdas's immaturity. Pollock has noted a similarly dismissive reaction by modern Kannada scholars to classical authors’ appropriation of Sanskrit categories, an attitude that led them to completely misunderstand the theoretical significance of new vernacular localizations (1998: 22–23).

(30.) *Kavipriyā*, 4.2. Again, the word *prabīna* can refer to Pravin Ray, as I translate it, or simply mean a clever person in general.

(31.) (*Nahīṃ mānuṣī kabita karata, aru prabhu ke bahuta banāye, pai sabahī ke mata maiṃ nṛpati, prabhu kau rūpa bakhānyoṃ, tāteṃ pātisāha ke kabita su kiye yatha mata ānyoṃ*). *Rasgāhakcandrikā*, folio 1.

(32.) Recall from discussions in chapter 1 how celebrating the acts of Radha and Krishna in various moods was conceptualized as both an aesthetic and religious experience.

(33.) The classic statement on the male gaze as applied to cinema, which has elements that can be extended to literature, is Mulvey 1988.

(34.) *Rasikpriyā*, 9.3, 9.6, 10.18.

(35.) McGregor 1973; 2001; 2003: 923–26.

(36.) McGregor 1971: 493. According to McGregor, Nanddas employs this and other similar phrases specifically to signal that he is reworking a passage from a Sanskrit source. Other variants include *nanda sumati anusāra*; *maiṃ yaha kathā yathāmati bhāṣā kīnī* (“Nanddas, according to his judicious understanding”; “I translated this story into Brajbhasha in keeping with my understanding”).

(37.) The information in this paragraph is based on Pauwels 1996: 163–82.

(38.) Ibid., 165.

(39.) The comparable passages on the subject of *guṇa*s are from *Kavikulkalptaru*, 1.12–28 and Mammata, *Kāvyaprakāśa*, 8.66–77. Broadly speaking, Chintamani follows Mammata closely in endorsing the threefold set of *guṇa*s, and not the tenfold set espoused by early Sanskrit theorists such as Vamana.

(40.) *Kavikulkalptaru*, 1.14.

(41.) *Kāvyaprakāśa*, 8.68.

(42.) Vidyadhar Mishra has discussed this particular innovation of Chintamani's (1990: 152, 161).

(43.) *Kavikulkalptaru*, 1.30.

(44.) *Kāvyanirṇay*, 1.10.

(45.) *Kāvyaprakāśa*, 1.2.

(46.) Bhikharidas specifically mentions Mammata's *Kāvyaprakāśa* as one of his sources in *Kāvyanirṇay*, 1.5.

(47.) I am indebted to Yigal Bronner, Whitney Cox, and Larry McCrea for alerting me to the importance of Bhikharidas's critical engagement with Mammata on this point.

(48.) See Pollock 2006: 472.

(49.) *Bhāṣā-baranana meṃ prathama, tuka cāhiye biseṣi*, *Kāvyanirṇay*, 22.1. The importance of Bhikharidas's theorization of rhyme has also been noticed in McGregor 2003: 941 and Shukla 1994: 130.

(50.) *Kāvyanirṇay*, 1.14–15.

(51.) For just a few interpretations of these two verses, see Chaturvedi 1962: 7; Shukla 1994: 132; McGregor 2003: 942; Prakash 2006: 55. Alternative readings of a few key words, such as *so* for *pai* (“that” instead of “but”) and *avara* for *amara* (“and” instead of “immortal,” i.e., Sanskrit), compound the problem. There is also some tension in the last two lines, and one that cannot be resolved grammatically, about whether Bhikharidas is trying to indicate that Braj is one of six languages for *kāvya* or whether he is really continuing an idea raised in the first two lines, that Braj can be used in many different registers, mixing in words from Avadhi (or Apabhramsha), Prakrit, Sanskrit, and so on.

(52.) See *Rasārṇavasudhākara*, 3.306. According to Chaturvedi's modern Hindi commentary on *Kāvyanirṇay* 1.10 (1962: 7), a similar concept, that of *ṣaḍbhāṣā* (six languages), was invoked by Chand Bardai in the *Pṛthvīrājrāso*, who was referring to Sanskrit, Prakrit, Apabhramsha, Rajasthani, Braj, and Avadhi.

(53.) Kaviraj 1992: 35.

(54.) *Kavikulkalptaru*, 1.4–5.

(55.) *Kavikulkalptaru*, 4.6, 4.9.

(56.) Akbar Shah was the son of Shah Raja, teacher to Sultan Abul Hasan Qutb Shah of Golkonda (r. 1672–87). Raghavan 1951: 7.

(57.) See *Śṛṅgārmañjarī* (ed. Mishra). Look to chapters 4 and 5 for further discussion of Chintamani's remarkably peripatetic career and what it means for the circulation of the Brajbhasha courtly ethos in the seventeenth century.

(58.) The other was Sundar's *Sundarśṛṅgār* (Sundar's love poems, 1631). See *Śṛṅgāramañjarī* (ed. Raghavan), p. 2.

(59.) *Rasikarañjana*, folio 25, recto, line 11. I am grateful to Sheldon Pollock for the reference.

(60.) The Braj reads, “*ānana locana bacana maga, prakaṭata mana kī bāta/tāhī soṃ saba kahata haiṃ, bhāva kabini ke tāta*.” *Rasikpriyā*, 6.1. Completely absent from the Braj is Venidatta Bhattacharya's idea of “*svānubhavaviṣayīkṛto jayati*,” which shows that he was improvising.

(61.) A Brajbhasha *pad* purported to have been composed by Jagannatha is excerpted in Athavale 1968: 420. Jagannatha's penchant for rhyme is in all likelihood due to the influence of Bhasha; he may also have adopted the practice of writing his own poetry (instead of merely excerpting that of earlier writers) from Bhasha poets. The relationship of his oeuvre to contemporary Braj styles has been mentioned by Vishvanathprasad Mishra (1959b: 57) and Sheldon Pollock (2001a: 408).

(62.) *Bhāṣābhūṣaṇ ṭīkā*, folio 1a.

(63.) "*Surabhāṣā teṃ adhika hai*, *brajabhāṣā soṃ heta*." Quoted by Vishvanathprasad Mishra (1970: 230); cf. Kishorilal 1971: 474.

(64.) "*Brajabhāṣā bhāṣata sakala, suravāṇī sama tūla, tāhi bakhānata sakala kavi, jāni mahārasa mūla*." Quoted in Kishorilal 1971: 474.

(65.) Excerpted from *Kāvyanirṇay*, 1.5–7.

(66.) The term *svakalpita* had earlier been used disparagingly by Sanskrit authors to describe idiosyncratic theoretical and literary concepts that were not sanctioned by tradition. See Jagannatha: "Once we have established that only a particular kind of language use counts as this entity "poetry" can we properly proceed to define poetry; we do not define a "poetry" that we have just invented ourselves (… *na tu svakalpitasya kāvyapadārthasya*)," *Rasagaṅgādhara*, p. 6.

(67.) Persian authors of the early modern period adopted a similar strategy of improving on earlier treatises. Katherine Brown (2003: 45–50, 75–76) observes that many enthusiasts of Indian music, such as Faqirullah and Mirza Khan, relied heavily on Abu al-Fazl's discussion of Sangit in the *Ā'īn-i akbarī* (without necessarily acknowledging the source), adapting it with minor tweaks. Clearly different conceptions of scholarship were in play from those of the present day, when invoking the textual authority of a past work was sometimes more important than recording contemporary practice.

(68.) A useful methodology for approaching the *kavi-praśaṃsā* genre has been outlined in Pollock 1995.

(69.) *Kāvyanirṇay*, 1.5, 1.8, 1.10, 1.16, 1.17.

(70.) *Sujāncaritra*, 1.3 (*jyauṃ jyauṃ kali uddhata bhayo, tyauṃ tyauṃ ghaṭi gaī buddha/aba ke kavi bhāṣā kahata, taū na samajhata suddha*).

(71.) Ibid., 1.2, 1.4–9.

(72.) Little was known about this text until the recent edition by Shivgopal Mishra.

(73.) *Satkavigirāvilās*, v. 46.

(74.) The holdings of Indian manuscript libraries reveal that Braj writers, in fact, produced many types of *śāstra* in the early modern period, including works on astronomy, erotics, physiognomy, medicine, and equestrian science, but virtually none of this material has been published, let alone studied, making it difficult to assess its character or importance. A preliminary overview of the scope of early modern Braj textual culture is Busch 2003: 162–66; cf. Pollock 2007: 209–11.

(75.) The classic case is Ramchandra Shukla's treatment of the *rītigranth* genre, discussed in chapter 6.

(76.) The variable uses of the *rītigranth* are discussed in Busch 2004: 53–56.

(77.) See the *Śṛṅgārmañjarī* (ed. Mishra) and the passages designated “tilak” in Bhikharidas's *Kāvyanirṇay*.

(78.) Indrajit's Brajbhasha is highly sophisticated with its predilection for *tatsama* (pure Sanskrit) lexical forms. See McGregor 1968 and 2003: 928–29.

(79.) The concept of a cosmopolitan vernacular is that of Sheldon Pollock, who has critiqued the long-held scholarly consensus that Indian vernacularization should be seen as a primarily demotic or religious imperative driven by the aim of speaking simply in the idiom of the people. It was often, on the contrary, a profoundly erudite literary enterprise marked by superposition or intensive borrowing from Sanskrit—its lexicon, themes, and *śāstra*s—and one closely tied to courtly centers. Pollock 2006: 283–329, 423–36.

(80.) On the relevance of the categories *mārga* and *deśī* in Telugu literature, see Rao 1995; for Kannada, see Pollock 1998: 21–25.

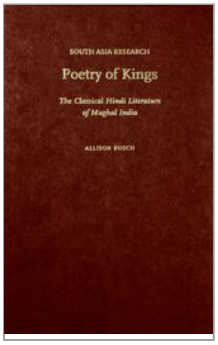
(81.) In his influential sixteenth-century *Défence et illustration de la langue françoise* (Defense and refinement of the French language), Joachim du Bellay enjoined French poets to classicize their literature by imitating the great works of Latin and Greek (1904: 22–25). Cf. Fumaroli 1984: 157–58.

(82.) Ramanujan 1991: 44–46; Cort 2009.

(83.) These types of tags are everywhere in premodern intellectual culture, if one only knows how to spot them. For instance, Bronner and Tubb have noted that both Appayya Dikshita and Jagannatha use the phrase *vastutas tu* (but really) to signal that they are offering their own opinions (2008: 626, 628).

(84.) *Rasagaṅgādhara*, pp. 56–57.

(85.) A powerful example of this from the Sanskrit intellectual milieu is the *Kuvalāyānanda* of Appayya Dikshita, a complex engagement with the thirteenth-century *Candrāloka*. See Bronner 2004.



Poetry of Kings: The Classical Hindi Literature of Mughal India
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Rīti Literature at the Mughal Court

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Abstract and Keywords

This chapter looks at the lives and texts of important Brajbhasha writers who were associated with the Mughal court. Although this court is most often linked to Persian literature, a surprising number of Brajbhasha poets also attracted the notice of Mughal patrons. Their achievements have been largely lost to the historical record; thus, uncovering the nature of the social, political and cultural interactions that the Mughal patronage of Brajbhasha represents opens up new perspectives on the period. Brajbhasha writers—prominent figures include Kavindracharya Sarasvati, Sundar, and Vrind—performed a variety of functions for the court. They could be teachers, poets, musicians, even ambassadors. Some members of the Mughal political establishment, such as Rahim, also tried their hand at Hindi literary composition. Contrary to conventional wisdom, this pattern continued into the reign of Aurangzeb and beyond.

Keywords: Mughalcourt, Brajbhasha, Akbar, Jahangir, Shah Jahan, Aurangzeb, Kavindracharya Sarasvati, Sundar, Rahim, Vrind

> This language contains poetry full of colour and sweet expressions of the praise of the lover and the beloved, and is much in vogue among poets and people of culture.
>
> —Mirza Khan

Mughal-Period Hindi and its Archival Disarray

One way to study the beginnings of *rīti* literature, and the approach adopted in chapter 1, is to look closely at the figure of Keshavdas in relation to the cultural forces that converged at Orchha in the second half of the sixteenth century. A newly Vaishnava court, in a newly Mughal realm, created highly favorable conditions for literary experimentation, albeit experimentation that was crucially in dialogue with the Sanskrit past and the Persianate and *bhakti* present. Chapters 2 and 3 explored courtly Brajbhasha as a textual tradition: its poetics and scholarly profile. Now we turn to the subject of royal patronage, without which little of this would have been possible. What transpired in North Indian courtly communities during the heyday of Mughal rule such that by 1650, Braj poets were in demand in all the places that mattered in the empire? In other words, how was Brajbhasha literature transformed into a poetry of kings? Here and in the next chapter, we will learn more about the *gunī*s, the court professionals who enlivened the assemblies of early modern kings, and the important roles that Braj poets played in their society. While **(p.131)** emphasizing the function of *rīti* texts in their courtly contexts, these chapters continue to highlight key features of the poetry itself.

A central theme of chapter 1 was the shifting political culture of Orchha during the consolidation of Mughal hegemony and some of its traces in the work of Keshavdas. This chapter returns to tracking the decisive interfaces between political and literary history, shifting the focus from the sidelines to the very center of empire. The oeuvre of Keshavdas is with good reason considered a crucial beginning point for *rīti* literature, but a nearly parallel career of Brajbhasha can also be traced at the Mughal court. The Mughal patronage of Braj poets, although challenging to document, was early, copious, and critical to the consolidation of Hindi's courtly style. Brajbhasha's rise to success and indeed its entire lifespan as a literary language were largely contemporaneous with Mughal rule, and this was no mere coincidence. We must first trace the Mughal part of the story in order to understand the deeply interconnected subject of the phenomenal proliferation of Braj poets and texts in Rajput courts throughout Hindustan, which is treated in chapter 5.

To attempt even a partial reconstruction of the role of the Mughals and Indo-Muslims more generally in the history of Braj literary culture is truly daunting. First of all, there are enormous holes in the data. Many Braj poets said to be associated with the Mughal court are only shadowy figures whose biographies were never recorded. Some Mughal Braj texts have been lost; others molder unpublished in scarcely accessible archives. Even when published texts are available, most Braj poets prove uncommunicative about matters beyond their immediate literary and scholarly aims. Recall just how little we know for a fact about Keshavdas's exposure to Mughal court life even after carefully combing all

eight of his major works. And we know a lot about Keshavdas in comparison with other Braj poets, whose biographies are often startlingly scant.

These very real practical difficulties have been compounded by conceptual obstacles, which must be faced if we are ever to achieve a post-nationalist history of Hindi literature. In modern times, the tendency has been to see anything connected with Brajbhasha as centrally Vaishnava, and thus inherently Hindu, in orientation. This is a gross anachronism. Mughal literary culture, to the small extent that it has been studied, has too often been approached as though the only language that counted at the court was Persian.[1] The Mughal sponsorship of Braj musicians is somewhat better understood.[2] There are also isolated monographs in Hindi on individual Braj writers, such as Vrind and Sundar, who are known to have commanded Mughal patronage.[3] But we do not yet have anywhere near a satisfactory picture of what the Mughal literary landscape looked like.

(p.132) It has not helped that too often Hindi literary historians have been severely critical of Brajbhasha's courtly tendencies, seeing them as emblematic of a wrong turn that the Hindi language took on its developmental path. *Rīti* authors, known especially for their *praśasti* poems to kings and their penchant for erotic subject matter, are frequently unfavorably compared to their more spiritual *bhakti* counterparts, who kept themselves at a remove from courts with their attendant politics and pleasures. In modern India, the stigma of decadence is too quickly stamped on writers associated with Mughal courtly life. Another commonplace in the narrative of literary waywardness is the idea that *rīti* literature with its emphasis on *alaṅkāra*s is characterized by untoward showiness, a *camatkār* (flashiness) that is felt to have its analogue in the same *yug kī paristhitiyāṃ* (conditions of the age) that produced the Taj Mahal and other opulent symbols of Mughal grandeur. This paradigm, while at least acknowledging Braj poets' associations with the Mughals, finds that contact in large part to have been a corrupting one, with *rīti* poetry considered long on style but short on substance.[4]

Another historiographical concern is whether to admit evidence drawn from oral tradition as well as Hindi's copious heritage of poetry anthologies. Over the centuries, oral forms of literary culture circulated through sophisticated local mechanisms in tandem with written streams, generating a robust corpus of legends about Hindi literati, their personas in some cases accruing countless *phuṭkal* (miscellaneous) verses that are not necessarily well attested in manuscript traditions.[5] Take, for example, the popular genre of stories about Braj poets' encounters with Mughal emperors that are often reproduced in modern scholarship. One such tale concerns the poetess Pravin Ray, the courtesan of Raja Indrajit of Orchha and a student of Keshavdas. Akbar, hearing

of her legendary beauty, purportedly summoned her to appear at his court. Pravin Ray defiantly sent the emperor the following couplet:

> Pay heed, wise emperor, to what Pravin Ray has to say.
> Only low-caste people, crows, and dogs eat off plates used by others.[6]

Dozens of such tales chronicling encounters between Braj poets and Mughal emperors have come down to us. A famous example from the *Caurāsī vaiṣṇavan kī vārtā* (Tales of eighty-four Vaishnavas, seventeenth century) relates that Akbar visited Surdas in Mathura and became enchanted with his *pad*s. Surdas, for his part, was considerably less enchanted with Akbar. He could have commanded any reward from the emperor but instead told him, “Please don’t ever summon or visit me again.”[7] Many such narratives may not be true in a historically positivist sense, but their sheer abundance suggests a larger composite truth about the acclaim for Brajbhasha poetry at the Mughal court. The fact that **(p. 133)** in the two instances just cited the poets wanted nothing to do with the court adds a layer of meaning about resistance to Mughal power during an age when most of North India had come under its sway. The various legends about Braj poets and the pithy, if unverifiable, verses ascribed to them form a parallel domain of cultural and historical memory that, while subject to a truth regime at odds with the methodologies of modern scholars, cannot be entirely discounted.[8]

The problem is how to get at some approximation of the more conventional historical truth that hovers behind various tales, undated texts, and ghostly authors—in short, the archival mess that constitutes the historical record on *rīti* literature as an arena of Mughal cultural life. Mughal texts are not the only part of the Hindi corpus that poses historiographical challenges.[9] We would have to throw out many celebrities of the Hindi canon—Surdas, Kabir, and Mirabai, for starters—if we insisted on biographical precision; if every verse attributed to them had to be authenticated, Hindi literary study would grind to a halt. Given the limitations of the archive, then, reconstructing the story of Braj poets at the Mughal court is an imperfect science, and at times requires a creative approach. I will in some cases be piecing together circumstantial evidence, or relying on informed conjecture made possible by following the faint but tantalizing tracks some poets left behind in their texts. If too often the documentation is unsatisfactory—particularly for the early Mughal period—there are more traceable, datable texts and individuals that can help to anchor this investigation, particularly when the more conventional Hindi sources are put in dialogue with the historical memory of the Persian tradition. A multilingual archive, in fact, proves critical to understanding India's prenationalist literary past, in which Hindi connoisseurship had very little to do with being Hindu.

Literary Choices in a Multilingual World

In the early modern period, literatures in both classical and vernacular languages occupied variable positions in a complex cultural system. In the courts of western India, textual traditions in Sanskrit, Braj, and Rajasthani were at times simultaneously accorded patronage; but since many Rajput kings were also elite *manṣabdār*s in the Mughal administration, they were familiar with Persian culture, as well. Persian was especially dominant in the court circles of the Mughals and the Deccan sultanates, but other languages, notably Sanskrit, Braj, Dakani, and Telugu, figure—sometimes substantially—in the literary histories of these same courts.[10] Yet another choice for the Mughal emperors, **(p.134)** ethnically a Timurid clan that hailed from Central Asia, was Chaghtai Turkish, at least in the early generations. This is the language in which Babur (r. 1526–30), the first of the Mughal emperors, wrote both the *Bāburnāmah*, his memoirs, and a *dīvān* (poetry collection).

Mughal language and literary practices shifted over time. Babur's son Humayun (r. 1530–40; 1555–56) continued to host Turkish poets but was also inspired by the Persianate ways of the Safavid court, where he spent part of a lengthy period of exile from 1540 to 1555.[11] There is also evidence that his court sponsored some Hindi singers, and even, it has been suggested, the little-known Braj poet Narhari, who had been one of several vernacular poets to attract the patronage of Islam Shah Sur (r. 1545–54) during the Sur interregnum and who is thought to have become a court poet of Akbar.[12] Akbar inherited the Persophilia of his father but was also profoundly attracted to vernacular songs and poetic compositions. The practices of the Sur court perhaps influenced his literary tastes. The court of Islam Shah Sur in particular was by all indications a congenial place for Hindi writers. Two towering figures were the Avadhi poet Manjhan (author of *Madhumālatī*, 1545) and the Afghan nobleman Shah Muhammad Farmuli, whose vernacular poems are fondly remembered by Persian literary biographers.[13] In the middle of the sixteenth century, Braj was still not the dominant idiom for Hindi poetry, but it would begin to eclipse Avadhi toward the end of Akbar's reign. Braj was already well established in *bhakti* circles, however. It was also a major language of music.

Akbar was a fervent connoisseur of music, especially *dhrupad* songs composed in Brajbhasha. His celebrated court musician Tansen needs no introduction here.[14] The *Ā'īn-i akbarī* (Edicts of Akbar, c. 1595) **(p.135)** of Abu al-Fazl, one of the leading intellectuals and historians of Akbar's court and a dear friend of the emperor, takes special note of music and also includes a section on localiz singing styles, including *dhrupad* and *bishnupad* (songs about Vishnu).[15] Nonetheless, it is puzzling that Abu al-Fazl does not mention any of the numerous Hindi poets now associated with Akbar's court. His lengthy discussion of poets is entirely devoted to Persian writers. Despite this silence (part of a larger pattern in Persian historiography, compounding an already-daunting archival challenge), the names and even a few purported compositions of some

Hindi poets routinely appear in Hindi literary histories. One such figure is Karnes, to whom, incredibly, three *rītigranth*s—the *Karṇābharaṇ*, *Śrutibhūṣaṇ*, and *Bhūpbhūṣaṇ*—have been attributed. None survives. Another name frequently encountered is Manohar Kachhwaha.[16] In his memoirs, Akbar's son does mention that Manohar composed poetry, but it was in Persian.[17] Distinguished Mughal courtiers such as Todar Mal, Akbar's revenue administrator, and Faizi, Akbar's Persian-language poet laureate (and brother of Abu al-Fazl), are occasionally credited with writing Braj poetry.[18] Akbar himself is also ascribed a few compositions. In the words of Abu al-Fazl, “The inspired nature of His Majesty is strongly drawn to composing poetry in Hindi and Persian, and he exhibits a subtle understanding of the finest points of literary conceits.”[19] Although one could certainly wish for more corroborating evidence, there is no good reason for Abu al-Fazl to have mentioned Akbar's abilities in Hindi poetry if that poetry were not a part of Mughal court culture.

That Akbar, for all his Timurid ancestry and much-touted Persophilia, was fully conversant with Hindi is not in question. As Derryl MacLean has noted, transcriptions of religious debates that took place at Fatehpur Sikri between Sheikh Mustafa Gujarati, a Mahdavi leader, and members of Akbar's court “reveal a congenial if slightly dim-witted and naɬve Akbar who delights in exemplary tales and poetry, especially *dohra*s (i.e., *dohā*s) in the vernacular.” Apparently, the only Hindi portions of these transcriptions occur in sessions where Akbar is present; whereas the Arabic portions were translated into Persian for the emperor's benefit, Hindi needed no such mediation.[20]

A major political imperative of Akbar's period was to build consensus with local Rajput kings who were not yet Persianized and spoke various Hindi dialects. In forging new Rajput-Mughal alliances, the emperor began to accept Rajput princesses as brides, bringing Hindi into the heart of the Mughal harem. Akbar's son Salim and grandson Prince Khurram (the future emperors Jahangir and Shah Jahan, respectively) were born to Rajput mothers, which means that Hindi was literally becoming the mother tongue of the Mughal princes even if Persian was the primary public language and ties to Turkish were maintained.[21] This must undoubtedly have been a factor in the court's interest in vernacular poetry.

Religious developments are also relevant to the story of Brajbhasha at the Mughal court. Fatehpur Sikri, Akbar's early capital built on lands adjacent to Agra, was situated close to the Braj heartland of Vrindavan and Mathura, the locus of new Vaishnava communities that were gaining power with both Mughal and Rajput support. Important members of Akbar's administration such as Todar Mal and Man Singh were major patrons of Vaishnava monuments and institutions. By 1580, Mathura had become part of the *ṣūbah* (administrative province) of Agra.[22] The Braj dialect would not have been too distant from the type of Hindi spoken in Agra; it would have been readily comprehensible to the Mughals, especially compared to Avadhi, which, as its name indicates, originated

farther east. At any rate, the new types of song and poetry emerging from a major Hindu cultural center backed by members of his own elite circle, in such close proximity to the capital, naturally would have been of interest to the emperor. Persian literary patronage betokened the Mughal **(p.136)** rulers' participation in a cosmopolitan Islamicate world; listening to Braj poetry and music was a means of engaging with the local. This would have been at once a political and a cultural choice.

Major Braj Poets Associated with Akbar and Jahangir

The association of some Braj poets with the Mughal court during Akbar's reign is less speculative, even if we are still reduced to speculating about the poets themselves. One widely known to, if today little studied by, Hindi scholars is Gang. He apparently did not write any *prabandha* works, but hundreds of Braj *muktaka* poems survive with his *chāp*. They were widely anthologized in the early modern period; their popularity in diverse communities is evident from the numerous manuscripts that survive in royal libraries and, in at least one case, a Sufi *khānqāh* of the Chishti order.[23] A century and a half later, Bhikharidas not only included him in his *kavi-praśaṃsā* but crowned him one of two *sardār*s (masters) among Hindi poets, the other being Tulsidas.[24] If Gang could be mentioned in the same breath as Tulsi, then we can feel quite confident of his high status in the precolonial Braj tradition. Such confidence is bolstered by the remarks of Tarinee Churun Mitra and William Price, who in a grammar book written for British military recruits in 1827 noted that Gang was among the half dozen most celebrated Hindi literary figures.[25] Since then the Hindi tradition seems to have suffered from an astonishing case of literary amnesia.

Although the authenticity of the verses today attributed to Gang is not always easy to gauge, there is no doubt that Gang existed, that some of the surviving poems are actually his, and that he performed them for Mughal patrons.[26] His work exhibits a fairly typical *rīti* profile: *bhakti* and *śṛṅgāra* verses—some in the *nāyikābheda* style—are well represented, and there are more than seventy-five praise addresses to Mughal princes, emperors, and members of the nobility, including Akbar; his leading general and governor Abdul Rahim Khan-i Khanan (often simply known as "Rahim"); the latter's sons Iraj Shahnawaz and Darab Khan; Prince Salim (the future Jahangir); Prince Daniyal (Salim's brother); Man Singh Kachhwaha; and Birbal.[27]

The scholarship on Gang is a prime example of the methodological and interpretive problems that beset the study of Mughal Hindi poets. In addition to the uncertainty of his oeuvre, almost nothing is known about his biography that can be verified or confidently asserted.[28] All signs point to his close contact with the Mughal court, yet no Persian source mentions him.[29] Hindi cultural memory, however, considers him not just a fine poet but also a political critic. He is thought to have voiced opposition to an alleged act of **(p.137)** cruelty condoned by Jahangir—the killing of Brahmans in the town of Eknaur by one Zain Khan —

for which Jahangir had the poet crushed to death by an elephant. Or at least so say the Hindi *kiṃvadantiyāṃ* (folk legends) that have coalesced about him.

Was Gang truly a vociferous critic of Jahangir, a poet-hero willing to face death rather than allow an injustice to stand? Or was he, perhaps in the manner of Pravin Ray and Surdas, simply the vehicle for a popular genre that has been aptly characterized as "talking back to empire"?[30] A generic signature line such as *kahai kavi gaṅga* ("so says the poet Gang"), found in many of the *kavitt*s attributed to him, is easily interpolated, and it is not hard to see how poetry attributed to Gang could have become the carrier of anti-Mughal attitudes that became prevalent only much later. Jahangir, often stereotyped as a dissolute, ineffective ruler, is an especially vulnerable target.[31] The alleged Eknaur massacre is not referenced in the *Jahāngīrnāmah* (Jahangir's memoirs) or any other Persian text. Badauni mentions Zain Khan Koka's love of Hindi music (*sāzhā-i hindī*); he also refers to one Malik Nahv Tuhfa, who (in the words of his nineteenth-century translator) "inflicted condign punishment upon the infidels of Etawah [the district where Eknaur is located]."[32] But this event occurred in the fifteenth century. The eighteenth-century Persian historian Shah Nawaz Khan stresses Zain Khan Koka's love of Hindi *kavitt*s and *rāg*s (*Zain Khan bikavitt ūrāg shīftah būd*), as well as mentioning the nobleman's fondness for elephants.[33] Non-Mughal sources, for their part, are unanimous that Gang met a sorry end under the feet of an elephant. And yet many versions of the tale omit the name of Jahangir; here it is a more generic royal figure (sometimes a nawab, sometimes a raja) who pronounces the cruel sentence. The *Bhānucandragaṇicarita* (Biography of the mendicant Bhanuchandra), the Jain ascetic Siddhichandra's Sanskrit biography of his guru Bhanuchandra written during the reign of Jahangir, mentions that Jahangir threatened the monk with death by a ferocious elephant if he refused to give up his celibate ways.[34] Although not related to Gang specifically, Siddhichandra does attest to the motif of the cruel emperor and the elephant. Another twist on the legend, this one in the *Mūl gosaīṃ carit*, a spurious late biography of Tulsidas, has Gang insulting not Jahangir but Tulsidas, resulting in his being cursed to be killed by an elephant.[35] Perhaps these various details about a pre-Mughal massacre of Hindus, a courageous Braj poet, a Mughal notable's engagement with Hindi poetry (combined with his large stable of elephants), and a mercurial emperor too quick with the sentence of death-by-elephant, were conflated in popular memory. Although none of this evidence feels very trustworthy as historical fact, the linked tales at least allow us to confidently infer that Gang was indeed a famous Brajbhasha poet during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries and that he had critical **(p.138)** linkages to elite Mughal society. That Zain Khan Koka (d. 1601) was a connoisseur of Hindi *rāg*s and *kavitt*s (one of the two meters favored by *rīti* poets) is also important testimony about Mughal cultural preferences of the late Akbar period.

Another Mughal Braj poet whose biography was subject to a range of fantastical accretions is Birbal (d. 1586). He is fondly remembered as one of the *navratna* (nine jewels) of Akbar's court, and Indian children to this day are regaled with stories of his clever escapades. Even if more legend than fact surrounds some aspects of his courtly persona (a phenomenon to which we have now become accustomed), there is no reason to doubt that this famous Mughal courtier was also a Braj poet. Both Badauni and Shah Nawaz Khan mention Akbar's awarding Birbal the title *kavirāy* (king of poets), though with the characteristic silence of Persian historians about Hindi literary culture neither provides any details about his poems.[36] A few dozen of Birbal's Braj verses have, however, come down to us under the *chāp* of “Brahma.” Bhikharidas never accorded Birbal the same status as a major poet in the manner of Gang and Tulsidas, but he does include him in his *kavi-praśaṃsā*, and Birbal's work was much anthologized in the precolonial period.[37]

Another Mughal administrator who moonlighted as a Braj poet, and whose name is already familiar from chapter 2, is Rahim (1556–1627, figure 4.1), the son of Bairam Khan, who served as Akbar's regent when Humayun abruptly died in 1556. After Bairam Khan's assassination in 1561, Rahim was raised at Akbar's court and assumed various roles in the Mughal political and cultural establishment. He was employed early on as Prince Salim's tutor and would become renowned for his military successes as well as his lavish support of the arts. Rahim is remembered as a major literary figure, too: he was both an avid connoisseur and a versatile poet. He mostly hosted Persian poets at his literary gatherings, but some sources also indicate the patronage of Brajbhasha writers, including Gang, to whom a substantial number of *praśasti* verses in Rahim's honor are attributed.[38]

Rahim's own oeuvre is striking for its multilingualism—even by the impressive standards of polyglot India. It goes without saying that Rahim spoke Persian, the imperial language of the Mughals, but he also knew Chaghtai Turkish, the native tongue of his father Bairam Khan and of the earliest Mughal rulers. It was through Rahim's Persian translation of Emperor Babur's memoirs, *Vāqi‘āt-i bābarī*, that the text became accessible at all to the Mughal readers of his day (most of whom did not know Turkish). Rahim is also thought to have been one of the earliest Indians to learn Portuguese, which was spoken by the Jesuits who became a visible presence at the Mughal court during Akbar's period; he is even said to have studied Sanskrit.[39] But **(p.139)**

(p.140) when Rahim is remembered in Hindi circles today, it is for his poetry in Avadhi and Brajbhasha.[40] Most of his corpus consists of loosely organized collections of *muktaka*s and, as in the case of Gang, it is difficult to assess how much of Rahim's attributed poetry was actually written by him. No work is dated or contains a colophon, and the available published editions in Hindi are less than transparent when it comes to revealing their manuscript sources. If the collections are authentic (i.e., not pseudonymous or massively interpolated), they would be crucial testimony to the importance of Indo-Muslims as writers and not just patrons of *rīti* literature from the very inception of the tradition. Rahim and Keshavdas were almost exact contemporaries.

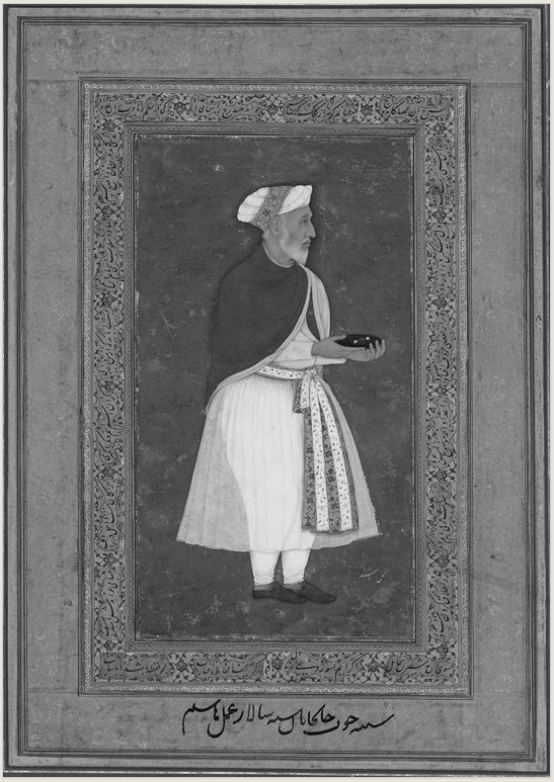


figure 4.1 Portrait of Rahim by Mir Hashim, c. 1626

Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: Purchase, F 1939.50a

Two remarkable collections of verses in the *barvai* (short couplet) meter, one on *bhakti* themes, the other a short quasi-*rītigranth*, are strikingly consonant with late sixteenth-century literary trends in Brajbhasha. The *bhakti*-oriented *barvai* verses are an experiment with the Indic *bārah-māsa* motif that simultaneously exhibits the poet's deep knowledge of Krishnaite poetic conventions. Most of the poems are in the voice of a *gopī* who is chagrined that Krishna has not returned in time for the monsoon, a season that is supposed to be one of joy for reunited lovers. A few *muktaka*s take up the theme of Uddhava's sermonizing to the *gopī*s, another popular motif of the day. An intermingling of four Persian verses in a Braj *barvai* collection are a highly unusual feature, however, and add a distinctive Mughal touch.[41]

The other *barvai* collection draws on themes from the quintessentially *rīti* topic of *nāyikābheda*. Although the concise *barvai* meter did not afford scope for a rigorous and detailed treatment of Indian literary theory, this beautiful collection of poems shows that the author was fully conversant with the system.[42] It also testifies to the *rītigranth*'s importance to a Mughal readership by the late sixteenth century. Abu al-Fazl's discussion of *sāhitya* (literature) in the *Ā'īn-i*

akbarī is principally devoted to precisely this subject. A comment in the conclusion to his discussion of *nāyikābheda* prompts one to wonder if these Braj works were already widely available in Mughal circles: “In this art the manners and bearing of the hero and the heroine are set forth with much variety of exposition, and illustrated by delightful examples. The works on this subject should be consulted by those who are interested in its study.”[43] Since Abu al-Fazl was writing in Persian for an Indo-Muslim audience not conversant with Sanskrit, this suggestion may well have been an invitation to read an emerging class of Braj poetry handbooks, one of the lost works of Karnes (if they ever existed), the *Rasmañjarī* (Bouquet of sentiment) of Nanddas (fl. 1570), Keshavdas's *Rasikpriyā* (Handbook for poetry connoisseurs, 1591), or perhaps even Rahim's own *barvai* sequence on *nāyikābheda*.[44]

(p.141) Altogether too little is known for a fact about the patronage of *rīti* poetry by the early Mughal rulers, but the sheer amount of evidence we can amass makes a strong case. We will probably never know if the mysterious figure Karnes was an Akbari poet or if he did write three *rītigranth*s for Akbar, as claimed by Shukla and reiterated by many subsequent Hindi literary historians. But we do know that Abu al-Fazl praised Akbar's knowledge of Hindi poetry, and his own brother Faizi may have written some. Abu al-Fazl was also knowledgeable about one of the most important *rīti* motifs, providing an elaborate account of *nāyikābheda* for his Persian readers. There are numerous connections between Braj and the nobility who served as agents of empire, including the strong possibility that leading Mughal officials such as Birbal, Todar Mal, Zain Khan Koka, and Rahim were composing poetry in the language. By the turn of the seventeenth century, Braj poetry had begun to make a dramatic entrance into Indian courtly life—not just in the frontier lands of Orchha but in the political heartland.

How does all this connect with what was happening at Orchha? Given the patronage relationship between Keshavdas and Rahim's son Iraj Shahnawaz Khan suggested in the poet's *Jahāngīrjascandrikā*, it is entirely likely that Rahim would have had some knowledge of Keshavdas's work.[45] They may have known each other personally, even exchanging couplets or literary ideas. Close connections can be readily posited for several other early *rīti* poets associated with the Mughal court. Recall the evidence already presented that Keshavdas knew Birbal. Gang can be connected to both Birbal and Rahim by virtue of the *praśasti* verses that he wrote for them. Both Keshavdas and Gang can be linked, if circumstantially, to Emperor Jahangir. Indeed, one implication of Keshavdas's *Jahāngīrjascandrika&*, by virtue of its very existence, of course, but also its specific contents, is that Jahangir was a connoisseur of Brajbhasha poetry. Although it is possible that Iraj Khan commissioned an elaborate Braj *praśasti* from Keshavdas for its symbolic value as a token of his esteem, it seems unlikely

that he would have gone to the trouble had the emperor not been interested in Brajbhasha literature.

The tendency of Braj poets to speak in typologizing terms makes the interpretation of the literary record a delicate matter, but it seems highly significant that in one of Keshavdas's *praśasti* verses to Jahangir, the poet praises the emperor for his knowledge of *nāyikābheda*. Before we take this as a straightforward description of Jahangir's own personal tastes and habits, it should be noted that a similar verse (except for the last line in which the royal patron is mentioned) occurs in Keshavdas's *Kavipriyā* as a praise address to Raja Indrajit of Orchha.[46] Nonetheless, it is striking that when Keshavdas could have chosen from hundreds of *praśasti* verses in his repertoire, he decided to retool this particular one for this particular **(p.142)** Mughal patron. A similar dilemma confounds the interpretation of the work's *darbār* scene, in which an astounding number of people, including the main characters Fate and Human Effort, a Bhat (a traditional bard), various Brahmans, a sheikh, a qazi, an anonymous raja, a chorus each of poets and ministers, and finally Keshavdas himself present Braj poems to the emperor.[47] It is tempting to speculate that such a veritable crowd of poets might mean that Braj performance was a fairly routine affair at Jahangir's court. However, some of the same poems are repeated nearly verbatim from Keshavdas's *Vīrsiṃhdevcarit*, where they were presented to Raja Bir Singh Deo.[48] These acts of literary recycling suggest the need for caution in taking any passage from the *Jahāngīrjascandrikā* too literally, but they cannot be dismissed altogether.

If we pair even this vague and admittedly dubious evidence for Braj performance with several references to Hindi poets and singers from Jahangir's memoirs, it becomes clear that Persian had no monopoly on the literary esteem of Mughal rulers. The emperor is generally quiet about Hindi poets, but not entirely silent. Of his brother Danyal, he remarks in passing: “He was fond of Indian singing. Occasionally he composed poetry in the language and idiom of the people of India that wasn’t bad.”[49] In an entry for the year 1608, Jahangir records with some excitement his pleasure at hearing a Hindi poem whose performance was orchestrated by Raja Suraj Singh of Marwar (uncle of Prince Khurram, the future Shah Jahan). Jahangir does not provide the original Hindi, preferring to explain the poem to his readers in Persian. He does, however, conclude with remarks that demonstrate his participation, at least to an extent, in Hindi literary culture: “Rarely have I heard such subtle conceits from the poets of India. As a reward for this eulogy I gave him an elephant. The Rajputs call a poet *charan*.”[50] Elsewhere the emperor mentions his regard for a singer in terms that once again stress patronage and knowledge of Hindi: “I awarded Shawqi the tamboura-player, one of the wonders of the age, the title of Anand Khan. He sings Hindi and Persian songs in a manner that soothes the soul. In the Hindi language *anand* means pleasure and repose.”[51]

Perhaps the most striking evidence available from the emperor's memoirs is this passage in which Jahangir becomes almost rapturous about bee imagery in Hindi poetry:

> The lotus flower often closes up and traps the *bhaunra* [bee] inside for the whole night. It also happens with the water lily. But when they open it comes out and flies away. Because the black bee is a constant visitor to these flowers, the Hindi poets consider it to be like the nightingale in love with the rose, and they produce marvellous poetic conceits based on it.
>
> **(p.143)** One such poet was Tan Sen Kalawant [musician], who was in my father's service and without equal in his own time—or any other for that matter. In one of his songs he likened the face of a youth to the sun and the opening of his eye to the blossoming of the lotus and the emerging of the *bhaunra*. In another one he likened the beloved's wink to the motion of the lotus flower when the *bhaunra* alights on it.[52]

In referencing not just the musician Tansen but a larger class of “Hindi poets” (*shuʿarā-yi hindī*), Jahangir again signals his appreciation of contemporary vernacular literary trends. The bee imagery may be a reference to the *bhramargīt* (songs of the bee) popularized by the *bhakti* poets Surdas and Nanddas during Akbar's time.[53] (Note how Jahangir uses the Hindi word *bhaunra*, a colloquial form of the word *bhramar*.) Although no major Hindi patronage can be conclusively traced to Jahangir, it seems certain that Brajbhasha had more currency at his court than we have been able to corroborate from Persian records or extant poetry.[54]

That Jahangir spoke of Tansen and Hindi poetry in the same breath once again underscores the deep link between music and poetry traditions in the Mughal environment. There is even some intriguing evidence that the same people considered poets by the Hindi tradition are treated as musicians in Persian texts. Jagannatha Panditaraja, regarded as a major poet and literary theoretician by the Sanskrit community, is called *kalāvant* (musician) in Persian court chronicles.[55] When Abu al-Fazl listed Hindi singers, but not Hindi poets, in his *Āʾīn-i akbarī*, was he classifying a diverse array of literary and artistic professionals in accordance with a cultural logic very different from ours today? Or perhaps only Persian writers counted as poets for the Persian readership of the official court histories. Regardless of how little we can glean with verifiable certainty in the sources, strong indicators point to the importance of Braj poetry (and music) in the court culture of Mughal rulers.

The Patronage of Braj Poets under Shah Jahan

Jahangir's successor, Shah Jahan (r. 1628–58), was an avid patron of both Braj poets and musicians, and in his case the data are both compelling and unambiguous. He, perhaps more than any other Mughal emperor, evinces not only a fascination with Braj texts but also a personal relationship with several

rīti poets. Like Akbar, Shah Jahan was a keen connoisseur of music. Heirs to the expertise and patronage of Tansen such as Lal Khan (son-in-law of Tansen's **(p. 144)** son Bilas) and Lal Khan's sons, Khushhal and Vishram, maintained the tradition of *dhrupad* at the Mughal court. Another musician named Darang Khan was weighed against silver and given a substantial royal gift in 1636.[56] Shah Jahan also commissioned a massive compilation of Braj verses attributed to Nayak Bakshu (a court musician of Raja Man Singh Tomar of Gwalior), whose compositions were popular in the repertoires of mid-seventeenth-century singers. The work, known as *Sahasras* (A thousand emotions, c. 1640), contains more than one thousand verses and is important testimony not only to the general literary and musical climate of the day but also to the specific tastes of the emperor.[57]

The names of numerous Braj poets can also be connected with Shah Jahan. As in the earlier Mughal period, some are obscure figures, about whom little is known except for the occasional detail mentioned in passing by Mughal court chroniclers. In the *Bādshāhnāmah*, the monumental court-sponsored history of Shah Jahan's own reign, Harinath, the son of Narhari (mentioned earlier in connection with the reigns of Humayun, Islam Shah, and Akbar), is said to have enjoyed the hereditary patronage of the imperial house.[58] (As always, it is not much to go by, but an expression like “hereditary patronage” does suggest imperial sponsorship of Hindi poets in Akbar's and Jahangir's eras.) The eighteenth-century Mughal historian Khafi Khan reports that an unnamed Hindi poet was given an elephant and a 2,000 rupee cash reward at Shah Jahan's court.[59] Modern Hindi literary historians, for their part, recount Shah Jahan's encounters with Shiromani and the famed Braj poet Biharilal, but solid corroboration in Mughal-period Hindi and Persian sources is lacking.[60]

Several poets really stand out, however, for both the quality of their work and the quality of our information about them. One is the Brahman poet Sundar Kaviray of Gwalior. Here at last is a figure who can be securely located at the Mughal court at a precise time, and easily tracked in both Hindi and Persian texts. The preface of the poet's major Braj work, *Sundarśṛṅgār* (Sundar's love poems,[61] 1631), contains a eulogy to the emperor in typical *rīti* style, as well as personal details about the author and the favor he received at court. A sense of the preface can be gleaned from the following excerpts:

> Shah Jahan assumed power and rules from the city of Agra,
> a beautiful place on the banks of the Yamuna.
> The emperor is great, and the mouth of a poet small!
> How can his virtues be described?
> All the stars in the firmament cannot fit into the palm of one's hand.
>
> **(p.145)** Shah Jahan gave untold wealth to talented men (*gunina*).
> Among them he honored the fine poet Sundar with much respect.

He gave gemstones, ornaments, rubies, horses, elephants, a gift of cloth.
First, he bestowed the title *kavirāy*, then *mahākavirāy*.
Sundar Kaviray hails from the city of Gwalior.
The emperor, ever merciful toward the poor (*garība-nevāja*), showed him kindness.[62]

This is the first unambiguous statement by a Braj poet of his Mughal patronage context. Of special note is Sundar's use of the term *gunina* (the Braj plural of *gunī*, "talented man," derived from the Sanskrit *guṇī*), which occurs regularly in Braj courtly works of the seventeenth century, denoting the literati and other court professionals who sought royal patronage. They were rewarded for their intellectual and creative powers with costly gifts and markers of symbolic capital, such as the two titles Sundar received from Shah Jahan, *kavirāy* (king of poets) and *mahākavirāy* (emperor of poets). Keshavdas had already used the term *gunī* in 1612: in the very same *praśasti* series where he praises Jahangir for his knowledge of *nāyikābheda*, he also eulogizes the emperor for "causing the talent-trees of the talented to come to fruition"—yet another suggestive indicator about Braj patronage.[63]

Like the *Rasikpriyā* of Keshavdas, *Sundarśṛṅgār* is a *rīti* classic that circulated profusely in early modern India, becoming popular with connoisseurs of both poetry and painting (figure 4.2).[64] This fine collection of poetry expounds the basic principles of Indian aesthetics with a special focus on *nāyikābheda*. In contrast to Rahim's *barvai* collection, *Sundarśṛṅgār* is a more typical *rītigranth* containing both definitions and example verses. Several of the poems flatter the patron by inserting him into the text as the *nāyaka*, the attractive hero desired by beautiful women. A *kavitt* illustrating *sākṣāt darśan* (meeting in person), for instance, concludes with the line, "Catching a glimpse of Shah Jahan makes the heart leap up, pleasure courses through the body."[65] In addition to its technical meaning in literary theory, the idea of *sākṣāt darśan* also suggests the Mughal court practice of *jharoka-i darshan*, the daily court ritual in which the emperor showed himself from a window.[66]

Quite aside from flattering his patron, one likely aim of *Sundarśṛṅgār* was to educate the emperor in the subject of Indian aesthetic theory. A technical manual of this type may have been especially appealing to Shah Jahan because of his passion for Braj singing: some of the love scenes typical of *rīti* poetry are shared by the *dhrupad* repertoire.[67] As we have seen, Abu al-Fazl's comments in the *Ā'īn-i akbarī* imply that works on *nāyikābheda* were beginning to attract **(p. 146)**

a Mughal readership and this point seems to be corroborated by Keshavdas's praising Jahangir's knowledge of the subject. Written only a couple decades later, the *Sundarśṛṅgār* points conclusively to a Mughal interest in Indic literary culture that was mediated through vernacular manuals. Finally, it becomes possible to reconstruct more concretely some of the patronage conditions for Braj poetry that, one suspects, had already been in effect for at least two generations.

figure 4.2 Krishna faces a reproachful Radha, from a manuscript of *Sundarśṛṅgār*, Kangra or Guler, c. 1780

Photograph Courtesy of Sotheby's, Inc. © 2008

Although Sanskrit texts were occasionally commissioned at the Mughal court, compositions in Brajbhasha would have been far more accessible to an Indo-Muslim readership. In his colophon, Sundar explicitly addresses the issue of his work's comprehensibility:

> I carefully composed this work, *Sundar's Beautiful Poems*, bringing it from the language of the gods (*surabānī*) into the language of men (*narabānī*) so that the path of *rasa* could be understood by everybody (*jāteṃ maga rasarīti ko, saba pai samujhyo jāi)*.[68]

The last chapter looked carefully at evidence from Hindu pandit communities that showed how the “language of men” began to gain ground over the “language of the gods” during the early modern period. The Mughal emperors were also contributing to this major linguistic transformation in an altogether different social setting.

(p.147) Accessibility must have been an important factor behind another of Sundar's works that is also said to have been commissioned by Shah Jahan: the *Siṃhāsanbattīsī* (Thirty-two tales of the lion-throne). Mughal interest in this work dates to Akbar's period, when a translation from the original Sanskrit into Persian was made at the court.[69] The *Siṃhāsanbattīsī*, like the *Pañcatantra* (or any number of its translations in the Islamicate world such as *Anvār-i suhaylī* or *Kalila wa Dimna*), is a collection of moral fables that was particularly popular with royalty. In a similar manner to the Persian *akhlāq* (mirror for princes) genre, the tales educated princes in the responsibilities and ethics of their privileged position. Sundar's translation of the *Siṃhāsanbattīsī* shows that by Shah Jahan's time (and again, probably much earlier) Braj, not just Persian, was functioning as a target language for Indo-Muslim readers.[70] The poet's original text is now unfortunately lost, but it was known to Kazim Ali Jawan and Lallulal,

two Bhasha munshis who produced a Hindustani version of it at Fort William College. The frontispiece of the 1805 edition states, “This story of thirty-two tales of the lion throne was in Sanskrit. At the request of Emperor Shah Jahan, Sundar Kavishvar [i.e., Kaviray] told it in the dialect of Braj.”[71] Over the course of the many reprintings of this version in the nineteenth century (it was chosen as a set text for the civil service exam in 1866[72]), the attribution to Sundar disappeared along with all references to its original Mughal patronage context, but the very fact of its existence, especially when considered in relation to evidence from the same poet's *Sundarśṛṅgār*, suggests that one reason Mughal patrons sponsored Braj works was that they served as a gateway into local literary culture.

In recollections of Sundar from the Indo-Persian tradition, which are refreshingly abundant, the Persian court historians Abdul Hamid Lahori (author of *Bādshāhnāmah*) and Muhammad Salih Kanbo (author of *ʻAmal-i ṣāliḥ*) think of him, unexpectedly, not primarily as a Braj poet but as a diplomat. Although they call him Sundar Kab[73] Ray (i.e., Kaviray), “Sundar, king of poets,” they give no inkling that they actually know anything about his poetry, recounting instead the details of the various occasions when he was dispatched by Shah Jahan to negotiate with recalcitrant rajas. The incorporation of Rajputs into the Mughal system in force since Akbar's day was attended by intermittent successes and failures. One spectacular failure was the breakdown of Mughal-Orchha political relations in the years following Jahangir's death, which occasioned Sundar's diplomatic mission to King Jujhar Singh Bundela (r. 1627–34), the son and immediate successor of Keshavdas's patron Bir Singh Deo, who rebelled twice early in Shah Jahan's reign. As a Hindu and a Hindi speaker from nearby Gwalior, Sundar was presumably thought to have a diplomatic edge over a Central Asian or Iranian Muslim member of the court. Sundar's attempt to quell the reckless ambitions of the Orchha king was ultimately unsuccessful, for **(p. 148)** Jujhar Singh and his son Bikramajit were executed in 1636, an incident grimly illustrated by Shah Jahan's court painters (figures 4.3, 4.4).[74] Regardless of the outcome, the case of Sundar Kab Ray dramatically highlights that Braj poets not only were present at the Mughal court as esteemed literati but that they served in other capacities, such as trusted diplomats. And note again how markedly perceptions of them can differ in Persian and Hindi sources.

Another *gunī* of Shah Jahan's court—this one known from Hindi, Sanskrit, and Persian sources—is Kavindracharya Sarasvati, a Maharashtrian pandit whose very name signals his contribution to the literary life of his day.[75] His *Kavīndrakalpalatā* (Wish-fulfilling vine of Kavindra) is a multitasking Braj text that combines *praśasti* and *śṛṅgāra* elements from *rīti* poetry with the musical traditions of *dhrupad* and *bishnupad*. He even throws in a few religious sermons. Intriguingly, Kavindra, like Sundar Kaviray, draws attention to his choice to write in the vernacular, introducing his work as follows:

> I am an expert in the *Asulāyana* branch of the Rig Veda.
> I have composed Bhasha poetry.
> My work's name is *Kalpalatā*, and you will find in it all poetic pleasures.
> "Wish-fulfilling vine" is a suitable title—the work is full of figures of speech, carefully orchestrated sounds, and sentiments (*alaṃkāra guna rasa sauṃ sanī*[76]).
> Everything is described within, and everybody can take pleasure from it.
> I have written countless works, expounding the meaning of the Vedas.
> I feel ashamed to use the vernacular (*bhāṣā karata āvati lāja*).
> I wrote this book for the sake of others.[77]

As a learned pandit who prided himself on his Sanskrit treatises, Kavindracharya felt that the choice to use *naravāṇī* instead of *suravāṇī* needed to be defended.[78] Note his variation on the now familiar theme of vernacular anxiety when he foregrounds his *lāja* (shame). The unnamed "others" for whose sake he claims to have written in Bhasha were hardly the kind of patrons that should induce shame: the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan and his son Dara Shikoh. Once again, there is the distinct sense that Mughal cultural needs were an important factor in the impetus toward vernacularization.

The *Kavīndrakalpalatā* contains both familiar fare and unusual elements that set it apart from other *rīti* texts. Many of the *praśasti* poems are predictably focused on the emperor's military might and dharmic rule. A variation on the *nagara-varṇana* (description of the city) adds a topical twist when Kavindra praises the emperor's newly founded city of Shahjahanabad.[79] Strikingly **(p.149)**

(p.150)

figure 4.3 The capture of Orchha by imperial forces, from the Windsor Castle *Padshahnama*, an illustrated chronicle of Shah Jahan's reign

(p.151) atypical of the genre is the addition of a sequence of *dhrupad* songs set to *rāg*s (*rīti* texts are otherwise largely unmarked by such signs of performance). As in some verses from the *Sundarśṛṅgār*, Kavindra's *dhrupad*s cast Shah Jahan in the role of the *nāyaka*. These lyrics stress the perfection of his physical appearance and his supercharged eroticism, respected kingly traits in the Indic literary imagination. Although the *Kavīndrakalpalatā* is no poetry manual, Kavindra incorporates many distinctively *rīti* topics into his song texts, as when he praises Shah Jahan's dexterity as a *dakṣina nāyaka* (lady's man).[80] In a song that depicts Shah Jahan playing Holi, his beautiful female companions are described in the technical terms of *nāyikābheda*:

> In springtime, the king plays Holi in the golden palace. Decked out in beautiful garments and jewels are the mature, innocent,
> and somewhat experienced beauties.
> *Kanaka mahala madhi*
> *ritu vasanta maiṃ, khelata śāhi ihi vidhi kī horī*
> *Vasana amola ābhūṣaṇa pahiraiṃ, prauḍhā mugdhā madhyā gaurī....*
> [81]

figure 4.4 Jujhar Singh and his son Bikramajit beheaded, from the Windsor Castle *Padshahnama*, an illustrated chronicle of Shah Jahan's reign

The *dhrupad* verses also emphasize Shah Jahan's connoisseurship, signaled by a range of complimentary epithets, including *mahājān* (greatly knowledgeable), *sura-jñān* (connoisseur of music), *mahārasī* (emotionally sensitive), and *mahādānī* (generous patron).

That Shah Jahan was indeed just such a connoisseur of Kabindra's own compositions is attested by the court historian Kanbo, who describes the emperor's appreciation for the talents of one “Kabindra Sannyasi” (Kabindra the renunciant[82]) and records the emperor's generous cash gift and a robe of honor:

> Kabindra Sannyasi, who composed exquisite, perfect *dhrupad*s and Hindi compositions (*taṣnīfāt-i hindī*), arrived at the court of The Refuge of the World (i.e., Shah Jahan) and received permission to enter. When his compositions had pleased those with blessed minds, he was honored with a robe and a gift of 2000 rupees and his esteem illuminated the peak of the sky.[83]

Although the text provides no further details, it is virtually certain that this reward was granted specifically for *Kavīndrakalpalatā*, which fits Kanbo's description perfectly since it contains both *dhrupad* verses and "Hindi compositions." Either the Mughal court's sponsorship of Braj texts was on the rise in Shah Jahan's period or something had shifted in the historiography that made it more acceptable for Persian writers to mention Hindi poets. Were Hindi writers now so prevalent that they could not be ignored?

Also important in Kavindra's Braj text is the theme of religious dialogue. In a verse already excerpted in chapter 2, Kavindra praises Shah Jahan's ecumenicism, **(p.152)** fashioning a strategic rhyme to commend the emperor's Quranic and puranic knowledge. Several *praśasti* verses to Prince Dara Shikoh similarly stress religious ecumenicism and spiritual understanding. In a clever *yamaka* that plays on the word *dīna*, which means "oppressed" in Braj but "religion" in Arabic, the poet proclaims that Dara is "merciful to the oppressed, extinguishing the sorrows of the two religious communities."[84] The prince has "a highly sensitive heart; he knows the intricacies of *dharma*."[85] The Sanskrit pandit also employs a central dyad of Indian religious thought, likening Dara Shikoh to "formless *brahma* incarnate in human form."[86] Here Kavindra confirms the commonly attributed traits of a Mughal prince who to this day is famous for conversing with Hindu ascetics and commissioning translations of Indian spiritual texts into Persian.[87]

Some of the court's knowledge of Indian spirituality must have come from Kavindra himself, for he was not just a musical performer but also a teacher. A verse from a Sanskrit text of the day, the *Kavīndracandrodaya* (Moonrise of Kavindra, c. 1650), stresses this role:

> Every day the king of poets in the three worlds (i.e., Kavindracharya) wisely expounds the Vedas, auxiliary texts, and *śāstra*s to the Lord of Delhi....[88]

This detail helps to fill out the context for a more than sixty-verse excursus into *tattvajñān* or metaphysics, another unusual (but not unprecedented[89]) feature of the *Kavīndrakalpalatā*. In this section, Kavindra takes the reader on a whirlwind tour through basic principles of Indian philosophy, briefly making stopovers in the thought systems of Samkhya, Yoga, Pancaratra, and Jainism, with a decided preference for Vedanta. We are told about overcoming ego, distrusting the sense organs, and sharpening the mind to become receptive to the divine presence.[90]

One wonders if in a multi-confessional environment a special resonance accrued to statements such as, “Know there to be doctrines of many types, [but] they say that God is one.”[91] More puzzling, considering that the work was presumably performed at court in the presence of many Muslims, is the capping of a verse with the rather pointed query, “Why do the Turks pray and fast?”[92] Perhaps the aim was—and here Kavindra would have been in the good company of Kabir—to question all external manifestations of religiosity, Hindu or otherwise. That the pandit Kavindracharya was free to educate Shah Jahan and his son in Hindu religious matters suggests that he had special favor at the court; it is also another telling indicator of the celebrated religious openness of this milieu. That Brajbhasha was a medium of religious instruction is **(p.153)** hardly surprising given the language's *bhakti* heritage. Still, the inclusion of such a sermon in the *Kavīndrakalpalatā* expands our conception of how *rīti* texts were used in Mughal settings.

Much more could be said about the fascinating figure of Kavindracharya, whose charisma was enthusiastically celebrated in the Hindi, Sanskrit, and Persian texts of his day.[93] The *ʿAmal-i ṣāliḥ* of Muhammad Kanbo contains the briefest of references, and there the dominant impression is of Kavindra the singer *cum* Hindi poet. We know from a contemporary Sanskrit text, the *Kavīndracandrodaya*, and strongly suspect from verses in Kavindracharya's own work that the pandit served as a guru at the court. His surviving texts in both Brajbhasha and Sanskrit also attest to his role as a scholar. Another remarkable achievement—not unrelated to the emphasis on religious discussions highlighted above—is that Kavindra convinced the emperor to rescind the tax levied on pilgrims visiting Hindu holy centers such as Prayag and Kashi. Kavindra refers to this powerful act of political advocacy himself,[94] but it left an even more lasting impression on Braj and Sanskrit writers of his day. Poets from far and wide wrote *praśasti* verses in the pandit's honor, which have come down to us in two separate volumes: the *Kavīndracandrodaya* (in Sanskrit) and *Kavīndracandrikā* (in Braj).[95] Not only royalty were entitled to poetic accolades: Kavindra, himself an author of *praśasti*s, became a recipient of them. Although the process by which the verses were solicited is obscure, they illustrate powerfully how literati and intellectuals long before the modern age functioned collectively in the public domain.[96] It is odd that Kavindracharya's lobbying on behalf of Hindu pilgrims was never recorded in the Persian histories when it sparked the attention of more than one hundred Hindu literati. Shah Jahan is well known to have kept tight control over his public image. Perhaps the reversal of an imperial policy, particularly as an accommodation to Hindu interest groups, was not the kind of thing to be discussed in an official court history.[97] As with Sundar Kaviray, accounts of the same people diverge considerably in Persian- and Indic-language sources.

Chintamani Tripathi is another Braj poet who left his mark on diverse communities, although in his case a direct connection to the imperial court is less certain. It is emblematic of the challenges that confront a historian of *rīti* literature that the most essential source, the poet's own *Rasvilās* (Play of *rasa*), has never been published. Chintamani is thought to have written this *rītigranth* for Shah Jahan early in his career, perhaps during the 1630s. Any definitive assessment of the *Rasvilās* and Chintamani's connection to the court awaits a more detailed study of the two surviving manuscripts than has been possible for scholars to date, but a few points are beyond dispute.[98] The main focus of the work is *rasa* theory, including a section—now something we have come to **(p. 154)** expect in Mughal contexts—on *nāyikābheda*. As with *Sundarśṛṅgār*, such a handbook probably had a pedagogical function, but the *Rasvilās* also contains an abundance of political poetry, including an elaborate *virudāvalī* to Shah Jahan. The *virudāvalī* or "necklace of heroic epithets" is a traditional, almost incantatory genre in which the hero's glory is aurally manifested through the recitation of a long list of titles. That the work contains such a praise address to the emperor naturally suggests a close patronage relationship. The poet refers to himself as "*Cintāmani kavirāu*" (Chintamani, king of poets), using a title akin to those given by Shah Jahan to Sundar and the Sanskrit writer Jagannatha Panditaraja, but *kavirao* could also be a more generic term for an authoritative poet.[99] In addition to praising the emperor, a few *praśasti* poems address other contemporary Mughal notables, including Dara Shikoh; Shah Jahan's grandson Zainuddin Muhammad (son of Shah Shuja); Hriday Shah (r. 1634–78), the raja of a principality in southern Bundelkhand; and Jafar Khan, a Mughal *manṣabdār*. In theory, any of these figures, rather than Shah Jahan, could have sponsored the work. Recall that Keshavdas's *Jahāngīrjascandrikā*, its title notwithstanding, was probably commissioned not by Jahangir himself but by Rahim's son, Iraj Shahnawaz Khan.

More definitive evidence about the reception of Chintamani's *rītigranth*s in elite Mughal settings comes from a later Persian text, *Ma'āṣir al-kirām*, an eighteenth-century Persian *taz_kirah* (anthology of poets' biographies) compiled by Ghulam Ali Azad Bilgrami. Azad was one of the great polymaths of his day, and his intellectual curiosity ranged to the field of Indian poetic theory.[100] His *Ma'āṣir al-kirām* is unusual in the Persian *taz_kirah* tradition for including a section on Hindi poets. By Azad's time, the Indo-Muslim elite had become avid participants in Braj literary culture, but his retrospective account of Chintamani (based on a source he never identifies) makes it amply clear that this was the case in the seventeenth century, as well. Azad's entry on Chintamani begins with a few biographical details:

> Chintamani lived in the town of Jahanabad and he had two brothers, Bhushan and Matiram, who are also famous, inspired poets. Chintamani excelled above his peers in the science of Sanskrit. He lived with honor in

> the district of Shah Shuja, son of Shah Jahan. And his *Kavittvicār*, as it was commonly called among the poets, is much esteemed.

In mentioning Bhushan, the Braj court poet of Shivaji, and Matiram, who served the court of Bundi, Azad confirms the consensus of the premodern Hindi tradition that the three were brothers. He also references one of Chintamani's now-lost *rītigranth*s, the *Kavittvicār* (Reflections on poetry). More **(p.155)** important, he goes on to furnish precious clues about the reception of *rīti* texts among the Mughal elite.

That Chintamani Tripathi had found favor in Indo-Muslim court settings has already been established through his Braj translation of Akbar Shah's *Śṛṅgāramañjarī*, a work of Sanskrit rhetoric, which was commissioned by the Golkonda court in the 1660s.[101] From Azad Bilgrami, we learn of his association with another Indo-Muslim patron: Sayyid Rahmatullah, the diwan of Jajmau (near modern Kanpur). A student of Chintamani is mentioned as a participant in the *maḥfil* of the diwan. He shares with those assembled a *dohā* that his teacher had written on the rhetorical trope known as *ananvaya alaṅkāra*.[102] Azad begins by explaining the concept to his Persian readers:

> *Ananvaya alaṅkāra* occurs when the subject and standard of comparison are one and the same. It has not come within the purview of this poor author's (*faqīr*) investigation whether or not one of the wise men of Arabia or Persia has explained this simile. Nevertheless, I know it exists.

Azad proceeds to improvise some examples of *ananvaya*, including "There is nobody like Zuhuri except Zuhuri"[103] and

> Your coquetry comes to me, O heart-ravishing one.
> You are like yourself in the happy thoughts of lovers.

Now confident that his audience understands the rhetorical device he is trying to explain, Azad records the poem that Chintamani's student presented to the *maḥfil* in illustration of it:

> I saw the eyes of that doe-eyed girl, which were like herself.
> *Vā mṛiga-nainī kī lakhī, vāhī kī sī naina*

The student made a slight error, which Sayyid Rahmatullah, fully conversant with Chintamani's writing on Indian poetic theory, is not shy in pointing out. The poem proves deficient because in accordance with the norms of an *ananvaya alaṅkāra*, the *nāyikā's* eyes should be compared to her own eyes (since there is no adequate standard of comparison aside from her own eyes), whereas this example muddies the waters by calling her doe-eyed. Chintamani is later asked to correct his student's verse, which is emended to:

> I saw the eyes of that beautiful girl, which were like herself.

Vā sundari kī maiṃ lakhī, vāhī kī sī naina

In critiquing the Braj verse, the diwan is following the ideals of *nuktah-sanjī* (weighing the points) and *iṣlāḥ* (correction of others) that betokened expertise **(p.156)** in Persian and Urdu literary cultures.[104] But the key point is that Sayyid Rahmatullah has manifest admiration for the Indian system of *alaṅkāra*s, and his display of finesse in the subject marks him as a poetry connoisseur. In a related episode, Chintamani is invited to stay for a period with Sayyid Rahmatullah, who, we learn from Azad, rewarded the learned Braj author with gold coins and a robe of honor. Evidently inspired by his exposure to Indian *rasa* theory, the diwan himself authored a collection of Hindi poetry called *Pūranras* (Aesthetic plenitude).[105]

The *Ma'āṣir al-kirām* affords a rare glimpse of how *rīti* works were actually used in practice. The literary categories were introduced, discussed, and debated—not just by the scholars who wrote the works, but also by connoisseurs in an assembly.[106] Azad's account boldly underscores that Indo-Muslim literati were one of the main audiences for both Braj poetry and literary theory. Some of them—such as Rahim and Diwan Rahmatullah—even tried their hand at Braj composition.

Braj Poets during Aurangzeb's Reign and Beyond

The evidence adduced thus far shows beyond doubt how Brajbhasha literature was an important domain of Mughal court culture. This did not stop with Shah Jahan. Constraints of space preclude a thorough assessment of patronage conditions during Aurangzeb's extended reign (1658–1707), not to speak of the long eighteenth century, but even a brisk review of the evidence confirms that there was a lively and encouraging climate, fostered more by the princes and nobility than by the emperor himself. The reception of Chintamani Tripathi's work reminds us that the purview of court culture extended far beyond the imperial court to include the *maḥfil*s of governors and various elite officials, who actively contributed to fashioning what we now think of as the Mughal style. During Aurangzeb's reign a new capital, Aurangabad, was founded in the Deccan, but even with the shifting of the political center of gravity southward, Hindi court culture continued to flourish in the *maḥfil*s of princes and amirs in the north.

The extent of Emperor Aurangzeb's own patronage of Braj poets is not easy to establish. The stereotype that he was antagonistic toward Hindus, which in the nationalist imagination also means he was antagonistic toward Hindi, is a misconception. Recent work by Katherine Brown has shown how his supposed ban on music has been grossly exaggerated, which underscores the need for caution regarding the received wisdom in the case of poetry, as well.[107] For all the clichés in Mughal historiography about Aurangzeb's tyrannical orthodoxy, **(p.157)** his love of music, particularly in the early days of his reign, is well

attested, and in fact it was only in this period that major treatises on music began to appear in Persian after a hiatus of a century and a half. The *Risālah-i rāgdarpan* (Treatise elucidating *rāg*s, 1666) of Faqirullah, who served as governor of Kashmir under Aurangzeb, is positively brimming with evidence of Aurangzeb's sponsorship of musicians.[108] The emperor was known to cite Hindi verse and, as reported in the *Ma'āṣir-i 'ālamgīrī*, he also took an interest in Hindi orthography, consulting Khan Mir Hadi, the diwan of his son Azam Shah, about the matter. Some scholars have also attributed original Braj compositions to Aurangzeb.[109]

There is certainly evidence for Braj poets being in his entourage, and it seems likely that he directly sponsored some.[110] In an episode reminiscent of the Sundar Kab Ray mission to Orchha, at least one poet was also employed for distinctly nonliterary activities during the war of succession between Aurangzeb and his brothers. Khafi Khan, the author of *Muntakhab al-lubāb* (Compilation of essential matters, early eighteenth century), reports that a Brahman simply referred to as "Kab" was sent to negotiate with Jaswant Singh, the maharaja of Jodhpur (who also happens to have been an acclaimed *rīti* poet):

> Aurangzeb sent a Brahman named Kab, who was reputed for his Hindi poetry and eloquence, to the Maharaja, with the message: "The object of our movements is to pay our respects and offer our services to His Majesty, our patron and the master and the *qiblah*[111] of the two worlds. We are going to the illuminated court as an act of pure religious devotion and have no intention of opposition or war. It would be appropriate for you to have the good fortune of accompanying us; but if this is not possible, remove yourself from our path, go back to your *vaṭn* (i.e., Jodhpur), and do not become the cause of strife and bloodshed among the people of God."
>
> The Maharaja put forward the orders of His Majesty (i.e., Shah Jahan) as his reason for not accepting Aurangzeb's offer and gave an impertinent reply. The next day, the two sides prepared for battle.[112]

This anonymous Hindi poet's intercession with Jaswant Singh was no more successful than Sundar's visit to Jujhar Singh. Perhaps diplomacy was not the strong suit of Hindi poets, after all. The episode nonetheless intriguingly places a Hindi poet in the service of Aurangzeb, a reminder that poets were not just poets but also served the court in myriad capacities—and that Persian and Hindi writers can offer highly divergent accounts of the cultural history of their day.

(p.158) Another Hindi poet who served in Aurangzeb's administration is Mirza Raushan Zamir. Like Faqirullah, he was a connoisseur of music; he also wrote Persian poetry. One of his claims to fame is that he translated an Indian music text, *Saṅgītapārijāta[ka]*, into Persian.[113] While "Zamir" (enlightened) was his Persian *takhalluṣ*, when he wrote Braj poetry he used the penname "Nehi" (the

lover). According to Khafi Khan, Zamir's “capacity in the composition of Persian prose and verse and of Hindi poetry was so great that he could have been called a second Amir Khusrau.”[114] Nehi had a remarkable command of Braj literary style: he was conversant with the Indic genre *śikh-nakh* (it had an analogue in the Persian *sarāpā*) and also explored standard topics from *nāyikābheda* texts like a woman's *māna*. While it is mostly in Persian sources that we find information about him, Baldev Mishra included verses by Nehi alongside those of luminaries such as Keshavdas, Chintamani, and Sundar in his mid-eighteenth-century compilation *Satkavigirāvilās*. Nehi was also one of the poets in Sudan's *kavi-praśaṃsā*, showing that the work of this now-forgotten Mughal poet was considered part of the Hindi canon well into the eighteenth century.[115]

Patronage of Braj poets by several of Aurangzeb's other courtiers and at least one of his sons is also well attested. Himmat Khan Mir Isa (d. 1681), a *manṣabdār* of Aurangzeb, has been dubbed the “Rahim Khankhana of his age” for his patronage of poets, including the Braj writers Shripati Bhatt (fl. 1674, author of *Himmatprakāś*), Balbir, and Krishna Kavi. A few of Mir Isa's Braj poems also survive under the *chāp* “Miran.”[116] Fazil Ali, a minister of Aurangzeb, commissioned Sukhdev Mishra to write the *nāyikābheda* work *Fazilaliprakāś* (Light on Fazil Ali, 1676).[117] During the same period, Aurangzeb's son Azam Shah maintained what can now unhesitatingly be called a tradition of Mughal interest in Braj music and Indian literary theory. According to Bindraban Das Khushgu, compiler of the eighteenth-century biographical dictionary *Safīnah-i khūshgū*, Azam Shah “possessed a perfect command of many genres of Hindavi poetry, and he was above all famed for his excellent musical compositions.”[118] Some Hindi scholars consider him (though the evidence is ambiguous) to have been the first patron of the Braj poet Dev, whose poetry is among the most admired in Brajbhasha.[119] We can say with more certainty that he commissioned the *Tuḥfat al-hind* from Mirza Khan, a unique Persian treatise that contains a detailed section on Brajbhasha. Like the *rītigranth*s by Sundar and Chintamani, the *Tuḥfat* introduced Indo-Muslim readers to the major principles of Braj literary culture. The work indeed bears a strong resemblance to a *rītigranth* with treatments of prosody, rhyme, *rasa*, *alaṅkāra*, and *nāyikābheda*. Mirza Khan also included discussions of grammar, music, *kāmaśāstra* (erotic science), and *sāmudrikaśāstra* (physiognomy).[120]

(p.159) The remarkable *Tuḥfat al-hind* deserves close attention for its insight into attitudes of the Persianized elite of the late seventeenth century toward Indian languages. For Mirza Khan, three were considered worthy of mention: Sanskrit, Prakrit, and Bhakha (i.e., Brajbhasha). While Sanskrit is treated respectfully as the language of the gods and India's major language of learning[121] and Prakrit duly acknowledged (albeit in a slightly confused manner, as an amalgam of Sanskrit and Bhakha resorted to by royalty and magical serpents), the author's real esteem is reserved for Brajbhasha:

> Ornate poetry and the praise of the lover and the beloved are mostly composed in this language. This is the language of the world in which we live.… It is particularly the language of the *Birj* (i.e., Braj) people. *Birj* is the name of a country in India … with its centre at Mathurā, which is quite a well-known district. The language of the *Birj* people is the most eloquent of all languages.… Since this language contains poetry full of colour and sweet expressions of the praise of the lover and the beloved, and is much in vogue among poets and people of culture, for that reason its grammatical laws are here formulated.[122]

The perception that Braj is *afṣaḥ-yi zabānhā* (most eloquent of all languages) is incontrovertible evidence—if more were needed—that at least some members of the Mughal elite considered not just Persian but also Brajbhasha to be a literary language of special elegance. Similar acclaim for the language of the Braj *maṇḍal* and Gwalior is expressed in many texts of Aurangzeb's period. Faqirullah uses a nearly identical expression, *afṣaḥtarīn zabān* (most eloquent language), adding that it is comparable to the Persian spoken in Shiraz, a generous compliment indeed coming from a Persian speaker.[123] In short, Persian writers of the early modern period were according considerable acclaim to Braj poetry, and there had been an explosion in patronage at the very highest levels of Mughal society. The *Tuḥfat al-hind* owes its very existence to the literary tastes of Aurangzeb's son Azam Shah, who evidently was so enthusiastic about Braj poetry that he wanted Persian readers everywhere to understand it. Several of Aurangzeb's grandsons were also enthusiasts. Some of the poetry of Rafi us-Shan (son of Azam Shah's elder brother Muazzam Shah) survives under the *takhalluṣ* “Nyayi” (the just).[124] His brother, Azim us-Shan, was a major patron of the poet Vrind (1643–1723).

Vrind was a prolific author and, like many successful *rīti* poets, had multiple patrons. Originally hailing from the Rajput kingdom of Kishangarh, he moved to Delhi in 1673 upon being hired, probably as a tutor, to attend on Azim us-Shan.[125] When his patron later became governor of Bengal, Vrind moved with him to Dhaka. There he composed his most celebrated work, **(p.160)** *Nītisatsaī*, a collection of seven hundred aphorisms completed in 1704. Another of Vrind's works, the *Śṛṅgārśikṣā* (Instruction in passion, 1691), was written for a prominent Muslim family in Ajmer (near Kishangarh), thus helping to transmit royal styles into wider social circles, as Braj poets of the day so often did.

Much about the *Śṛṅgārśikṣā* seems familiar since it is structured loosely as a *rītigranth*, but a few less typical features bear witness to the types of retooling such genres could undergo to suit the needs of specific patrons. The introduction marks a subtle departure from typical Hindu practice. Most Braj courtly works begin with a short *maṅgalācaraṇ* (invocation), usually to the deity Ganesha, with an additional verse or two in honour of Sarasvati or Krishna. In the *Śṛṅgārśikṣā*, Vrind operates within a different set of salutatory conventions

seemingly tailored to an Indo-Muslim audience. The opening verse is indeed to a god, but Vrind labels his object of reverence simply *prabhu*, a Sanskritic but otherwise denominationally neutral word:

> The supreme light manifest in all, emanation of effulgent joy—
> To this god I pay obeisance in thought, word, and deed.
> *Parama jyoti saba maiṃ pragaṭa, paramānanda prakāsa,*
> *Tā prabhu kauṃ bandana karauṃ, mana krama bacana bilāsa*

Although expressed in a highly Sanskritic register, the emphasis on light imagery in phrases like *parama jyoti* and *paramānanda prakāsa* arguably nods toward the Qur'ān.[126] There may also be Sufi resonances. The remainder of the introduction follows—albeit in telescoped fashion—conventions more akin to those of the Persian *maṣnavī* than the Sanskrit and Braj styles with which Vrind would have been most familiar and which he generally follows elsewhere in his oeuvre. He invokes first spiritual, then worldly authority with verses in honor of Muinuddin Chishti, the revered saint whose tomb is the major landmark in Ajmer, followed by praise addresses to the reigning monarch, Aurangzeb, as well as the local governor of Ajmer, Muhammad Salih, the father of the patron.[127]

The verses dedicated to the patron, Mirza Qadiri, are less formal in tone and provide additional clues about the reception contexts of *rīti* texts during this period. While Aurangzeb is given royal traits (powerful, compassionate, praiseworthy)[128] and Muhammad Salih is celebrated for his moral probity (*nekī*), Vrind presents Mirza Qadiri in terms that foreground his emotional qualities and connoisseurship:

> His son Mirza Qadiri is clever and responsive in every respect.
> He is handsome, steadfast, valiant, and skilled with a bow.
> **(p.161)** Generous, knowledgeable, appreciative, extremely generous in spirit,
> Mirza Qadiri is the jewel of his family.
> Clever with emotion, experiencing delight,
> he is a connoisseur who understands matters of sentiment
> and pursues love wholeheartedly.
> He longs night and day for music and pleasure.[129]

Mirza Qadiri is further praised because he recognizes men of talent (*deta gunī-lokana kauṃ māna*), a self-serving argument on the part of the poet, no doubt, but one that speaks to expectations of gentlemanly behavior among the nobility of the day.[130] The *Śṛṅgārśikṣā* contains much that is familiar from other *nāyikābheda* texts, but it adds lively details about other markers of consummate connoisseurship, such as furnishing a *raṅg-maḥal* (pleasure suite), savoring betel nut, and appreciating music.

The omissions are almost as interesting as the additions. *Śṛṅgārśikṣā* takes up only the category of the *svakīyā nāyikā*, leaving out the two other major categories typical of the genre, the *parakīyā* and *sāmānyā*. It has been suggested that Qadiri commissioned the work for the education of a marriageable daughter, a supposition strengthened by the text's excursus into *byāh bidhi* (wedding procedures).[131] Some of the discussion of *solah śṛṅgār* (a woman's sixteen types of ornamentation) also seems didactic:

> A young woman should augment
> the beauty of her mouth with betel. (v. 63)
> Thus apply kohl to delight a lover's heart. (v.65)
> Vrind says, such elegant cleverness is needed
> to please a clever lover. (v.73)
> Keeping faithful, be a devoted wife (*pativratā*)
> to your husband. (v. 78)

Regardless of who was the primary audience for the text in Mirza Qadiri's household, the *Śṛṅgārśikṣā* is a bold celebration of sensual life. With its enticing descriptions of passion, ornamented bodies, the boudoir, and the mouth-watering tastes of betel nut and cardamom, and its exhortations to relish music and other pleasures, it inducts the reader into a world of highly refined taste and sensibility. Is this what sex education looks like in an early modern context?[132] The stress on love and connoisseurship is certainly fitting for a work that proclaims itself to be an instruction manual on *śṛṅgār*, but the critical point is that the *rītigranth* genre should not be seen as only a literary one. Here the aim is to inculcate the very building blocks of emotional life and civilized comportment. **(p.162)** It is tempting to put Vrind's text in dialogue with a contemporary Persian genre on gentlemanly conduct known as *mīrzānāmah* to suggest that compositions in Braj with their sensory celebrations similarly played a role in the cultural self-fashioning of Mughal elites. Also intriguing in the case of Vrind's work is the possibility of a female readership. Very little work has been done in the domain of either gender history or history of the emotions for precolonial India (in contrast with, say, early modern Europe) and the full exploration these topics surely merit cannot be attempted here. But Vrind's *Śṛṅgārśikṣā* suggests that Braj courtly texts functioned within a larger repertoire from both the Indian and Persian traditions that served to educate the senses.[133]

Conclusion

During Akbar's reign—in the same period when Keshavdas began his career—Braj began to achieve astonishing popularity at the Mughal court. Although Brajbhasha did not outstrip Persian in importance,[134] its status was recognized from within the Persian political ecumene, as when Abu al-Fazl praises Akbar's knowledge of the finer points of Hindi poetry, or Tajjuddin, author of *Mir'āt al-mulūk*, an eighteenth-century manual for princes, mentions on two occasions that knowledge of Hindi poetry is necessary for Mughal royalty.[135] The emphasis in this chapter has been on the long seventeenth century, but it would be

possible, given space enough and time, to document the continued success of Braj poetry in elite Mughal circles throughout the eighteenth century and well into the colonial period.

There can be no doubt that members of the Persianized elite were avid readers of *rīti* literature. There is even some evidence of a commentarial tradition written by or otherwise tailored to this community, including the *Safrang-i satsaī* of Joshi Anandilal Sharma of Alwar.[136] Nasirullah Khan, the governor of Jahanabad, commissioned Surati Mishra to elucidate Keshavdas's *Rasikpriyā* by writing *Rasgāhakcandrikā*.[137] Mir Ghulam Ali Azad's lengthy discussion of Hindi poets in his *Ma'āṣir al-kirām* also points to important signs of readership from the Persian *taz_kirah* tradition. Chintamani was just one of the poets commemorated. Azad was if anything more effusive in his praise for a poet from his own time and place, Sayyid Ghulam Nabi Bilgrami (1699–1750), an attendant of Nawab Safdarjang of Avadh who used the Braj pen name "Raslin" (absorbed in sentiment). Raslin wrote both Persian and Braj poetry, but it is the latter that occasions rhapsodic notice in Azad's biography: "No parrot in Hindustan has scattered sugary speech with the beauty of his pen, and no peacock in this garden has spread its feathers with the magic of his **(p.163)** imagination."[138] Pervading the *Ma'āṣir al-kirām* is a sense that Hindi competency had become a prerequisite of literary mastery, even for Persian poets. And Raslin's was no ordinary Hindi competency. Azad emphasizes his knowledge of the minutiae of *rasa* and *nāyikābheda*, and Raslin's *Rasprabodh* (Understanding of sentiment, 1742) must certainly be the most beautiful and theoretically precise *rītigranth* ever to have been written by a Muslim poet.[139] All of this suggests shared literary communities across diverse linguistic, religious, and social landscapes, even if the work of documenting them and parsing their specific cultural logic has barely begun.[140]

By the late eighteenth century, Urdu began to supersede both Persian and Braj among Indo-Muslim writers, but preferences did not change overnight, and literary monolingualism does not seem to have become the norm. Emperor Shah Alam II (r. 1759–1806) used two different pen names, "Aftab" (sun) when he wrote in Persian and "Shah Alam" when he wrote in Braj; the critical point is that he did both. The last Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah "Zafar" (r. 1837–57), though best known for his Urdu compositions, is still remembered today as a Braj poet.[141] Whereas modern scholars have tended to compartmentalize, and even communalize, the identities of precolonial Indian writers in terms that were only fixed in the modern period (Persian and Urdu poets must be Muslim, and Braj poets must be Hindu), the literary-historical record exhibits far greater nuance. Literary identities were elective, not innate.

Braj poetry was hardly the only index of Mughal engagement with Indic literary culture—Akbar in particular sponsored Persian renditions of many classics, including the *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Mahābhārata*, *Harivaṃśa*, *Pañchatantra*, and

Kathāsaritsāgara—but Sanskrit texts remained largely inaccessible except through the medium of translation. *Rīti* literature, in contrast, was a cultural repertory in which the Mughals could participate firsthand. One need only call to mind Akbar's courtier Rahim and how well versed he was in Indian languages, Vaishnava *bhakti*, Hindu lore, and diverse technical details about Indic literature. This raises an important issue from the perspective of intellectual history: the contribution of Mughal courtly communities and genres such as the *rītigranth* to the process of vernacularization in the early modern period. Previous chapters explored how, in the hands of early exponents like Keshavdas, *rītigranth*s served as a vehicle for vernacularizing Sanskrit literary principles. The next chapter will examine how the proliferation of such texts in Rajput circles helped to anchor the Braj *kavikul* that was increasingly separating itself off from Sanskrit. But any theorization of the reasons for the cachet of the *rītigranth* as a cultural form and the diffusion of Brajbhasha in the early modern period must also factor in the decisive role of Indo-Muslim patronage and readership.

(p.164) The data are not always cooperative, and some of the patterns of patronage and readership with Braj remain obscure; not all of the important texts are published, and some archives remain inaccessible to scholars. That Persian- and Hindi-reading scholarly communities largely work in isolation from each other today compounds the problem of reconstructing a shared cultural heritage.[142] Another handicap, to which Shantanu Phukan (one of the few scholars to think seriously about the use of Hindi among Mughal elites) has usefully drawn attention, is the “pervasive and largely unexamined assumption of monolingualism in the study of premodern Indian literature.”[143] Practicing monolingualism in the archive precludes capturing the complexities of a multilingual, multi-literary realm. Much of Brajbhasha's social complexity emerges only if both the Hindi and Persian archives are used, since each on its own paints an incomplete picture, and in some cases the roles of poets are even represented in dramatically different ways. Persian sources report on a Sundar who was sent on diplomatic missions to help Shah Jahan settle affairs with rebellious kings; they ignore his Braj poetry and fail to mention his magnum opus, *Sundarśṛṅgār*. Rahim's apparent passion for Hindi cannot be reconstructed from Persian sources, which stress instead his military and administrative roles, as well as his patronage of Persian poets and large-scale architectural commissions. From Sanskrit and Hindi texts we know that Kavindracharya Sarasvati was influential in myriad ways: he served the cause of Hindus in general as a political activist and was respected as a religious authority by both the Mughals of Delhi and the Sanskrit scholars of greater Hindustan. He was an author of books in both Braj and Sanskrit, reaching diverse audiences. But Persian historiography remembers him largely for his musical compositions and Hindi poetry, for which he was rewarded handsomely. This fragmentation of knowledge across archives in different languages means

that scholars with less linguistic range than their early modern subjects risk missing important parts of the story.

Puzzling blind spots remain in the Mughal texts that have come down to us. These have serious implications not just for Hindi literary history but also for Mughal historiography. When Abdul Hamid Lahori, **(p.165)** Muhammad Salih Kanbo, and other Persian historians of Shah Jahan's reign fail to mention the poems of a major Braj writer such as Sundar, is it simply because they were not aware of Hindi literary trends? This would mean that only some—not all—Mughal elites were culturally competent in Braj. Or perhaps their silence can be attributed to the frequently political, even imperialist, focus of the royal *tārīkh* genre. Or perhaps some Persian writers were snobs and felt that the only poetry worth the name was Persian poetry. In an episode from the *Afsānah-i shāhān*, Mirza Kamran, the brother of Humayun, is reported to have told Muhammad Shah Farmuli that if only he had written in Persian his reputation would have been great.[144] Abdul Baqi Nahawandi, author of *Ma'āṣir-i raḥīmī*, the monumental Persian biography of Rahim, pays hardly any attention to Hindi poetry, but when he does so he stresses that the rewards for Hindi writers were one-tenth those accorded their Persian counterparts.[145]

Whatever the reason, the Persian tradition often fails to adequately represent Brajbhasha literary life. The *Ā'īn-i akbarī* is voluble about Hindi musicians but silent about Braj poetry (although not about one of Hindi's most important genres, *nāyikābheda*); yet we know that poets like Gang were notable literary figures at Akbar's court. Keshavdas portrays himself at the *darbār* reciting verses to Jahangir, an event that was never recorded in the *Jahāngīrnāmah*. Persian sources say not one word about Shah Jahan's rescinding the pilgrimage tax at the request of Kavindracharya, an event copiously recorded in Braj and Sanskrit poetry of the same period. The existence of multiple languages in India gave rise to arenas of shared culture, but also to separate textual spaces of political and cultural expression, with their own social and literary norms. Whether we are dealing with normative genres, deliberate omissions, or understandably different emphases across a range of sources, we confront some troubling limitations on our ability to understand the past through textual means. At the very least, we need to keep in mind that silence in Persian sources does not necessarily mean historical absence.

And silence is too often what we face when trying to understand the Hindi literary culture of the Mughal rulers that by all indications coexisted with the Persian one. Those indications allow an even stronger argument to be made: that the *rīti* tradition would never have grown into a major literary culture if it had not been accorded the stamp of excellence by the Mughal court and the higher echelons of Indo-Muslim society. For all its resonance with *bhakti* communities of the day, Braj literature achieved spectacular success because it was cultivated

by urbane, cosmopolitan people. It was a poetry of kings, as its role in the court culture of Rajput rulers incontrovertibly demonstrates.

Notes:

(1.) While no broad, historically rigorous study of imperial court sponsorship of Braj poetry exists, Muzaffar Alam's excellent study (1998) of the Mughal patronage of Persian poets does briefly discuss a few eighteenth-century vernacular poets (see especially pp. 343–46), although it ignores earlier trends. Phukan 2000 is an important corrective to the assumption that the Persian corpus is the only Mughal literary culture.

(2.) See Delvoye 1991, 1994a; Brown 2006, 2007; Shofield 2010.

(3.) Two good overviews of Vrind are by Janardan Rao Cheler (1973) and Sudhir Kumar Sharma (1998). Ramanand Sharma (2004) and his student Avanish Yadav (2008) have recently published new studies of Sundar.

(4.) These and other challenges posed by the historiography of Hindi literature are discussed more fully in chapter 6.

(5.) Two influential examples, together totaling more than two thousand printed pages, the provenance and historicity of whose contents are not always easy to verify, are the *Śivsiṃhsaroj* (1878) and *Miśrabandhuvinod* (1913).

(6.) For this and other verses attributed to the poet Pravin Ray, see *Hindī kāvyagaṅgā*, p. 201.

(7.) The episode is excerpted in Snell 1991a: 71–73. An analysis is Hawley 2005: 182–83. According to R. S. McGregor, six of the eight Braj poets consecrated by the Vallabhans as *aṣṭachāp* (eight seals) are said to have been brought before Akbar (1973: 32 n. 7). A number of episodes that relate to Akbar's encounters with Braj musical aficionados are discussed in Delvoye 2000: 202–10.

(8.) Similar processes of literary memory formation in South India have been discussed in Rao and Shulman 1999.

(9.) On the *bhakti* corpus, see Bryant 1978: vii–xi.

(10.) The mixed literary culture of the Deccan is explored in Eaton 1996: 89–106.

(11.) Alam 1998: 317–19.

(12.) Sheikh Abdul Bilgrami and Sheikh Gadai Delhavi, both associated with Humayun's court, are said to have sung compositions in Hindi. See Pandey 1940: 6–7. Humayun's interest in vernacular poetry is asserted in Agraval 1950: 27–29, 298–304, 309–33.

(13.) On Manjhan, see Behl and Weightman 2000; on Farmuli, see Askari and Ahmad 1987: 59–60 and *Ma'aṣir al-kirām*, pp. 352–56.

(14.) See Delvoye 1994a; 2000.

(15.) *Ā'īn-i akbarī*, 3:265–67 (Blochmann and Jarrett trans.). A more general discussion of music at Akbar's court (in which Tansen is given pride of place) is in 1:680–82 (Blochmann trans.).

(16.) Shukla 1994: 113–15, 121. Hindi poems attributed to Manohar and Karnesh are excerpted in *Hindī kāvyagaṅgā*, pp. 184, 467.

(17.) *Jahāngīrnāmah* (Thackston trans.), p. 30.

(18.) Select Braj poets from Akbar's court are treated in Agraval 1950 and McGregor 1984: 118–22. Two verses attributed to Faizi are discussed in Zaidi 1977: 135–40. The likelihood that Todar Mal was the patron of the Avadhi poet Alam, whose *Mādhavānalkāmkandalā* is dated to A.H. 991 (1582–83), is stressed by Vanina 1993–94: 67.

(19.) (*Ṭab'-i ilhām-pazīr-i ān ḥaẓrat bih guftan-i naẓm-i hindī ū fārsī bih ghayāt-i muvāfiq uftādah dar daqā'iq-i takhayyulāt-i shi'rī-yi nuktah-sanjī ū mū-shigāfī* [i.e., *shikāfī*] *mīfarmāyand*). *Akbarnāmah*, 1:270–71. My translation modifies Beveridge (*Akbarnāmah*, 1:520). A sampling of Hindi verses attributed to Akbar is in *Hindī kāvyagaṅgā*, p. 463.

(20.) MacLean 2000: 203 (and n. 17).

(21.) Jahangir's mother, Harkha, titled Maryam uz-Zamani, was the daughter of Bharmal (also known as Bihari Mal) Kachhwaha, the raja of Amber. One of Jahangir's Rajput wives, Jagat Gosain (granddaughter of Raja Maldeo of Jodhpur), was the mother of Shah Jahan. See Lal 2005: 170. While Akbar was formally unlettered, his son Jahangir takes pride in his broad literary interests. He wrote his memoirs in Persian, occasionally including Hindi words, but even this fourth-generation Mughal was invested in his Timurid ancestry: upon reading his grandfather's memoirs, he wrote a sentence in Turkish and declaimed, "Although I grew up in Hindustan, I am not ignorant of how to speak or write Turkish." *Jahāngīrnāmah* (Thackston trans.), xvi, 77.

(22.) Entwistle 1987: 159.

(23.) See *Krishna-rādhā* of Gang-kab, originally housed in the Hazrat Pir Muhammad Shah Library, Ahmedabad. Manuscript courtesy of Iran Culture House, New Delhi. I am grateful to Muzaffar Alam for the reference.

(24.) *Kāvyanirṇay*, 1.17.

(25.) The others were Chand Bardai, Kabir, Tulsi, Bihari, Keshavdas, and Sur. Mitra and Price 1827: viii–x.

(26.) Bate Krishna, the editor of one of the better modern printed anthologies of Gang's poetry, expresses doubt about the authenticity of some of the material he collected. See *Gaṅgkabitt*, p. 8.

(27.) Ibid., pp. 88–117 and *Gaṅggranthāvalī*, pp. 234–69.

(28.) Some remarks, including what appears to be wild speculation, are Agraval 1970: 1–21.

(29.) Some Indo-Persian texts are not indexed and not all have been published, which renders this assertion provisional.

(30.) On the idea of Hindi poets “talking back” to empire, see Pauwels 2009: 200.

(31.) The negative image of Jahangir in Mughal historiography, which became pronounced from the time of his son Shah Jahan, is analyzed in Lefèvre 2007.

(32.) *Muntakhab al-tavārīkh* (Ranking trans.), 1:378 (*kufār-i etāvah rā mālish-i ʻaẓīm dādah samt-i shihr murājaʼat nimūd*). In referring to Zain Khan Koka's musical abilities, Badauni lauds him as “unrivalled in his age.” *Muntakhab al-tavārīkh* (Haig trans.), 3:327.

(33.) *Maʼaṣir al-umarā*, 2:369–70.

(34.) *Bhānucandragaṇicarita*, pp. 48–49.

(35.) A few variations on Gang and the death-by-elephant motif are Agraval 1970: 9–21. For useful methodological perspectives on the *Mūl gosaīṃ carit* and other legends that accrued to the biography of Tulsidas, see Lutgendorf 1994.

(36.) *Muntakhab al-tavārīkh* (Lowe trans.), 2:164, and *Maʼaṣir al-umarā* (Beveridge trans.), 1:420. Samples of Birbal's purported Hindi compositions are in Sinha 1980: 170–77.

(37.) The manuscript evidence includes entries from *Rājasthānī-Hindī hastlikhit granth-sūcī*, 4:90, 5:28, 10:80, 13:96, 14:56.

(38.) Rahim's Braj literary patronage is discussed in Naik 1966: 280–462. Gang's *praśasti* verses to Rahim are far more numerous than for any other patron. See *Gaṅgkabitt*, vv. 297–318.

(39.) McGregor 1984: 121; on *Kheṭakautukam*, a Sanskrit astrological work with some unusual (Persian) macaronic features attributed to Rahim, see Das 1997. A few of Rahim's putative Sanskrit *śloka*s are in *Rahīmgranthāvalī*, pp. 163–66.

(40.) Tulsidas (fl. 1575), an approximate contemporary, had switched from Avadhi to Braj in mid-career as the latter language gained visibility. Perhaps Rahim did the same.

(41.) See *Barvai* (*bhaktiparak*), vv. 86, 94–96. On Uddhava and the *gopī*s, see n. 53 below. A detailed study is McGregor 1973.

(42.) Rahim is to this day considered the undisputed master of the *barvai* form in Hindi (Snell 1994a). A couple of his signature *barvai*s were discussed in chapter 2. A brief overview of the Hindi compositions attributed to Rahim is Busch 2010b: 108–14.

(43.) *Ā'īn akbarī* (Blochmann and Jarrett trans.), 3:260.

(44.) Sheldon Pollock (2009: xix) notes that Abu al-Fazl knew the Sanskrit *Rasamañjarī* (Bouquet of Literary Emotion, c. 1500) of Bhanudatta. He may also have had some familiarity with the *Śṛṅgāradarpaṇa* (Mirror of passion, 1569), a work of Sanskrit poetics by the Jain monk Padmasundara, who had attracted Akbar's patronage. Abu al-Fazl could also have been drawing on information in Braj *rītigranth*s.

(45.) See chapter 1.

(46.) "*Nāikā anekani ko nāyaka nagara nita, aṣṭa nāikānihīṃ sauṃ manu lāiyatu hai,*" (He is the stately lord of many women, but he devotes himself to studying the eight *nāyikā*s). *Jahāngīrjascandrikā*, v. 34. Compare *Kavipriyā*, 11.23. On the eightfold classification of *nāyikā*s, see chapter 2.

(47.) *Jahāngīrjascandrikā*, vv. 132–201.

(48.) Compare for instance *Jahāngīrjascandrikā*, vv. 185–92, with *Vīrsiṃhdevcarit*, 33.32–47.

(49.) *Jahāngīrnāmah* (Thackston trans.), p. 39.

(50.) Ibid., p. 93. (The original reads, "*bih īn nāzukī-yi māẕmūn az sh'uarā-yi hind kam bih gūsh rasīdah. Bih jaldū- yi īn madaḥ f īlī bih ū marḥamat kardam. Rājpūtān-i shā'ir rā cāran mīguyand*", p. 80).

(51.) Ibid., p. 197.

(52.) Ibid., p. 239. Nalini Delvoye has also called attention to how this passage signals Jahangir's "thorough knowledge of the literary Braj language and his familiarity with the Indian imagery which they employ." Delvoye 1994a: 414–15.

(53.) These delightful poems derive from the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* episodes about Krishna's famous messenger, Uddhava, and his dry sermons to the lovelorn

*gopī*s. The *gopī*s seek Krishna's affections, not Uddhava's philosophizing, and when they see a black bee, they focalize their longing and frustration upon it.

(54.) On the doubtful authenticity of a Jahangir-period colophon attached to the *Phūlmañjarī*, a pedestrian work attributed to Matiram Tripathi, see chapter 5, n. 85.

(55.) Audrey Truschke, personal communication. Other instances of similar category mismatches are evident in how the Persian historiographical tradition views Sundar Kab Ray and Kavindracharya Sarasvati, discussed in the next section.

(56.) The *Bādshāhnāmah* mentions that Lal Khan was rewarded with an elephant and the title *guṇasamudra* (ocean of talents) in 1642. Qanungo 1929: 51–52. I am grateful to Audrey Truschke for the reference.

(57.) Delvoye 1991: 168–74.

(58.) Qanungo 1929: 51.

(59.) Cited in Qanungo 1929: 51.

(60.) On Shiromani, see *Miśrabandhuvinod*, 2:467, and *Śivsiṃhsaroj*, pp. 581–82. On Shiromani and Harinath (here called Haranath), see Bahura 1976: 29–30. For further on Bihari and the Amber court, see chapter 5.

(61.) Sundar's title can be translated in several ways. One alternative is “Resplendent passion.”

(62.) *Sundarśṛṅgār*, vv. 2–3, 10–12.

(63.) G*unina ke guna-taru phalita karanu hai*, *Jahāngīrjascandrikā*, v. 33.

(64.) The visual tradition of the *Sundarśṛṅgār* has been little studied, but a few images have been published. See, for instance, Topsfield 2001: 148. Leaves from a manuscript evidently owned by a German collector have been recently auctioned at Sotheby's, New York. At least one illustrated copy of the text is currently housed at the Allahabad Museum (accession no. 91/1664). On a manuscript from Baroda, see Goetz 1949: 62–66.I thank Holly Shaffer and Audrey Truschke for calling some of this material to my attention.

(65.) *Jī maiṃ jīva āyo*, *sukha aṅga aṅga chāyo*, *iha darasana pāyo sāhijahāṃ jū koṃ jabahī*, *Sundarśṛṅgār*, v. 272.

(66.) The ritual became an important component of the visual culture of Shah Jahan's day. See Koch 1997: 133.

(67.) According to Shahab Sarmadee (1996: ix) during the seventeenth century a classification system was evolving for *rāg*s that was based on *nāyikā*s, *nāyaka*s, and *sakhī*s (female companions to the *nāyikā*).

(68.) *Sundarśṛṅgār*, vv. 373–74.

(69.) Seyller 1999: 14. A retranslation of the same text was ordered during Jahangir's period, too. See Truschke 2007: 14.

(70.) Cynthia Talbot discusses the preference of Jan Kavi, a prolific author active in Shah Jahan's period, for Brajbhasha over Persian. Jan Kavi hailed from the Kyamkhani community, a clan of Rajputs who had converted to Islam. Notably, some of Jan Kavi's works are translations from Persian to Brajbhasha (2009: 229–33). Dasharatha Sharma mentions that he presented his *Buddhisāgar*, a Braj rendition of the *Pañcatantra*, to Shah Jahan (cited in Talbot 2009: 230 n. 55).

(71.) "*Yih kahānī siṃhāsan battīsī kī saṃskṛt meṃ thī—shāh jahān bādśāh kī farmāiś se—sundar kabīśvar ne braj kī bolī meṃ kahī*," *Singhasun Butteesee*, p. 1. Garcin de Tassy, who wrote the first modern history of Hindi-Urdu literature a few decades later, similarly described the *Siṃhāsanbattīsī* as "a work that [Sundar] translated from Sanskrit at the order of Emperor Shah Jahan" (*Ouvrage qu'il traduisit du sanscrit par ordre de l'empereur Schâh Jahân*), *Histoire de la littérature hindouie et hindoustanie*, 3:178.

(72.) *Singhāsanbattīsī*, p. ix.

(73.) There is no way to write a word-final short vowel in Persian, so the word *kabi* ends up being written (and read as) "kab." The switch from "va" to "ba" (i.e., *kavi* to *kabi*) represents a typical seventeenth-century pronunciation.

(74.) Sundar's role as an intermediary between the Mughal armies and Jujhar Singh as well as his intercessions during the rebellions of Babu Lakshman Singh of Ratanpur and Raja Jagat Singh of Nurpur are described in *ʿAmal-i ṣāliḥ*, 2:100–7, 83–84. Additional details (including those that derive from the *Bādshāhnāmah* as well as unpublished court histories) are in Saksena 1958: 70–96.

(75.) In Sanskrit *Kavīndra* means "king of poets" and the title *ācārya* signals great learning.

(76.) Typically *rīti* is the poet's foregrounding of classical literary infrastructure.

(77.) *Kavīndrakalpalatā*, p. 1, vv. 8–13.

(78.) Professions of shame notwithstanding, Kavindracharya seems routinely to have written in *both* Sanskrit and Braj. Extant and attributed Sanskrit works include *Kavīndrakalpadruma*, a collection of devotional *stotra*s, *Padacandrikā*, a

commentary on Dandin's *Daśakumāracarita*, *Jagadvijayachandas*, a *virudāvalī* or necklace of heroic epithets to Jahangir, *Yogabhāskara*, *Mīmāṃsāsarvasva*, and a commentary on the *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa*. Aside from the *Kavīndrakalpalatā*, his known Braj works are an unpublished *Samarasāra*, said to be on astrology, and a *Yogvāsiṣṭhsār* (also called *Jñānsār*), a rendering of an acclaimed Sanskrit Vedanta text into Braj *dohā*s. Brief discussions of his oeuvre are Divakar 1966: 15, 34–39; Rahurkar 1969: 40–41.

(79.) *Kavīndrakalpalatā*, pp. 16–17, vv. 95–100.

(80.) Ibid, p. 23, v. 14.

(81.) Ibid., p. 25, v. 20.

(82.) Kavindra refers to his own vow of renunciation in the opening to *Kavīndrakalpalatā* (p. 1, v. 6): *saba viṣayani te bhae udāsa, bāla dasā meṃ layo sanyāsa* (I became indifferent to worldly pleasures and adopted the ways of asceticism in my childhood).

(83.) "*Kabindar Sanyāsī kih dar tālīf-i dhrupad ū taṣnīfāt-i hindī salīqah-'i durust ū mahārat-i tāmm dārad bih dargāh-i 'ālam-panāh rasīdah rukhṣat bār yāft. Va taṣnīfātish pasand-i khāṭir-i mubārak uftādah bih khil'at ū in'ām-i dū hazār rūpiyah mubāhī gashtah sar-i 'izzat bih awj-i falak bar afrūkht.*" *'Amal-i ṣāliḥ*, 3:122.

(84.) *Dīna ko dayāla doū dīna ke dahata dukha*, ibid., p. 49, v. 7.

(85.) *Parama narama citta, dharama marama jāneṃ*, *Kavīndrakalpalatā*, p. 47, v. 2.

(86.) *Saguna hvai pragaṭa bhayo ju hai brahma niraguna*, ibid., p. 50, v. 11.

(87.) Recent scholarship, however, has painted a more nuanced picture of the figure of Dara Shikoh than the one in the popular Indian imagination. See Kinra 2009; D'Onofrio 2010.

(88.) Translated from a Sanskrit verse cited in Raghavan 1940: 161. Kavindracharya is held to have been Dara Shikoh's teacher; he may also have written his *Yogvāsiṣṭhsār* for the prince but definitive evidence is lacking. See Rahurkar 1969: 42.

(89.) Recall the philosophical content of Keshavdas's *Vijñāngītā*, composed for Bir Singh Deo Bundela.

(90.) *Kavīndrakalpalatā*, pp. 35–46.

(91.) *Mata nānā vidha taise jānauṃ, eka bhānti ko alakhu bakhāno*, ibid., p. 37, v. 5.

(92.) *Kāhe ko nimāja rojā turuka karata hai*, ibid., p. 41, v. 24.

(93.) An interested reader might turn to Raghavan 1940, 1953; Tarachand 1944; Divakar 1966.

(94.) *Kavīndrakalpalatā*, p. 2, v.14, p. 6, v. 14.

(95.) Some information about both poetry collections is in Divakar 1966: 40–48.

(96.) This point has been made forcefully by other scholars, including Bayly 1996 and Novetzke 2007.

(97.) Chundavat suggests this point in her introduction to *Kavīndrakalpalatā*, p. 2. On Shah Jahan's control of the process of history writing at his court see Begley and Desai 1990: xv–xxiii.

(98.) The two manuscripts (the one I was able to view, no. 274, was incomplete) are housed at the Anup Sanskrit Library, Bikaner. The royal family did not permit any reproduction of the documents; thus, my assessment is based on what I could glean from a short trip in December 2005. The likelihood of Mughal patronage and the complexities of dating are discussed by Vidyadhar Mishra (1990: 39–40), who has viewed the manuscripts.

(99.) The reference occurs in *paricchedа* 5, and possibly in other places that escaped my notice during a necessarily brief viewing of the manuscript.

(100.) Azad's biography and literary interests (his writings also include a largely neglected corpus in Arabic) have recently been discussed in Toorawa 2008 and Sharma 2009.

(101.) See chapter 3.

(102.) I have emended the Persian from *ananya* to *ananvaya*, a well-attested figure of speech in which the *upameya* (subject of the comparison) and *upamāna* (standard of comparison) are identical.

(103.) Zuhuri is a famous Mughal poet from the Deccan who was active during the reigns of Akbar and Shah Jahan.

(104.) On *iṣlāḥ*, see Pritchett 1994: chap. 6.

(105.) *Ma'āṣir al-kirām*, pp. 364–66.

(106.) Compare the discussion of the eighteenth-century literary conference convened in Agra, discussed in the next chapter.

(107.) Brown 2007. The standard Hindi textbook narrative is Sinha 1973: 8, 21.

(108.) Sarmadee 1996: xii, xl–xli.

(109.) Chatterji 1979: 185–93 (citing *Ma’āṣir-i ‘ālamgīrī*); Ziauddin 1935: 3 n. 1. According to Shailesh Zaidi (1977: 180 n. 1), poems attributed to “Alamgir” and “Shah Aurangzeb” are found in late anthologies from the nineteenth century, such as the *Saṅgītrāgkalpadrum*.

(110.) Zaidi, one of the few scholars conversant with both Braj and Persian traditions, has tracked numerous Braj poets connected to Aurangzeb, including Ishvar, Samant, Krishna, Dvivedi, Nehi, Madhanayak, and Mir Jalil. Zaidi 1977: 180 n. 1. Cf. Grierson 1889: 72.

(111.) The *qiblah* is the wall of a mosque that faces Mecca

(112.) The translation is slightly modified from Syed 1977: 85.

(113.) Zamir's musical contributions to Mughal society are discussed in Brown 2003: 68–71, 202–23.

(114.) Syed 1977: 114. For further details about Raushan Zamir drawn from the Persian biographers Sher Khan Lodi and Ghulam Ali Azad Bilgrami, see Zaidi 1977: 143–45.

(115.) *Satkavigirāvilās*, p. 84 (v. 310 corresponds to v. 26 in Zaidi's edition); *Sujāncaritra*, v. 5. Sudan also praised Narhari, mentioned above as active in the early Mughal period, as well as Shiromani, who is thought to have been at Shah Jahan's court. For a discussion of how Baldev Mishra's compilation and Sudan's *Sujāncaritra* can shed light on Hindi canon formation in the premodern period, see chapter 3.

(116.) The details of Hindi sponsorship and a few poems by “Miran” are in Zaidi 1977: 181–87. Cf. *Ma’āṣir al-umarā*, 3:948.

(117.) This by all indications remained an extremely popular work well into the nineteenth century, extant in many manuscripts. See McGregor 1984: 187.

(118.) Quoted in Brown 2007: 105.

(119.) Dev may have begun his long and prolific career at Azam Shah's court with a Braj *rītigranth* known as *Bhāvvilās* (Play of emotion, 1689), which was based on the Sanskrit *Rasatarańgiṇī* of Bhanudatta. The colophons of the manuscripts differ in their attributions of patronage. The older (1796) of the two manuscripts I consulted (*Bhāvvilās*, Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute, Alwar, accession number 4771 [2], folio 165) does mention that Azam Shah listened to and appreciated the work, but this statement is absent from a later one from 1837 (*Bhāvvilās*, Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute, Bharatpur, accession number 212, folio 74b). The verse in question is mentioned by (but not printed by) the text's recent editor. See Dindayal 2004: 11, 368.

(120.) A detailed outline of the contents is Ziauddin 1935: 16–32; the section on music is briefly discussed in Brown 2003: 73–76.

(121.) “Books on various sciences and arts are mostly composed in this language” (*aqsām ʻulūm ū anvāʻ fanūn bīshtar badīn zabān taṣnīf kunand*). *Tuḥfat al-hind* (trans. Ziauddin), pp. 34, 53.

(122.) *Tuḥfat al-hind*, pp. 34–35.

(123.) Cf. Delvoye 1991: 179. *Tarjumah-i mānkutūhal va risālah-i rāgdarpan*, pp. 98–99. Comparable remarks about the language of Mathura and Gwalior were made by Faqirullah's contemporaries. See the discussion of Chintamani Tripathi in chapter 3; cf. Alam and Subrahmanyam 2004: 67.

(124.) Alam 1998: 343.

(125.) Cheler 1973: 45–46.

(126.) Note the similarity with “Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth” in Qur’ān 24:3. I thank Muzaffar Alam for the reference. Although Vrind's approach is unusual for a Hindu, the reworking of Indic invocatory paradigms in keeping with a Muslim cultural milieu was common among earlier Avadhi poets such as Jayasi and Manjhan. Eugenia Vanina (1993–94: 74) notes a similarly Islamicate opening to Alam's *Mādhavānal-kāmkandalā*, which was written in Akbar's period.

(127.) *Śṛṅgārśikṣā*, vv. 1–6.

(128.) These traits are expressed with a combination of Sanskrit, Persian, and Arabic epithets: *mahābalī, mihrbān, ṣubiḥān*. *Śṛṅgārśikṣā*, v. 4.

(129.) *Śṛṅgārśikṣā*, vv. 7–9. Recall Kavindracharya's similar portrayal of Shah Jahan in his *dhrupad* verses.

(130.) *Śṛṅgārśikṣā*, v. 10 (and a sentiment repeated in v.11). Keshavdas makes a similar remark about Emperor Jahangir. See n. 63, this chapter.

(131.) Cheler 1973: 82–83. The discussion of *byāh bidhi* is *Śṛṅgārśikṣā*, vv. 18–32.

(132.) Cf. Pachauri 2002: 128–29.

(133.) One attempt at a gender-sensitive literary history is Vanita and Kidwai 2000. On the *mīrzānāmah* texts, see O’Hanlon 1999. The relationship between Hindi texts and emotion in the Mughal period is discussed in Phukan 2001.

(134.) The hierarchy between Persian and Hindi composition at Akbar's court, for instance, has been made clear in Alam 1998: 323. Still, in the same article

variation across reigns is noted, with eighteenth-century emperors such as Farrukh Siyar and Shah Alam II much inclined toward Braj poetry (346).

(135.) Askari 1953: 29–31 (cited in Bayly 1996: 194).

(136.) For a detailed discussion of the commentarial tradition on Bihari, see Mishra 1965a: 174–86.

(137.) See Singh 1992: 7–9, 23–25.

(138.) "*hīch ṭūṭī dar hindūstān bikhūbī-'i kilkish shakar-afshānī nanamūdah va hīch ṭā'ūsī dar īn būstān bih nīrangī-'i fikrish bāl ū par nagushūdah*. *Ma'āṣir al-kirām*, p. 371.

(139.) Ibid., pp. 372–73. Raslin's Braj poetry is discussed in Pandey 1987; Busch 2010b: 115–18.

(140.) A landmark study with a focus on the reception of Avadhi texts by the Mughal elite is Phukan 2000.

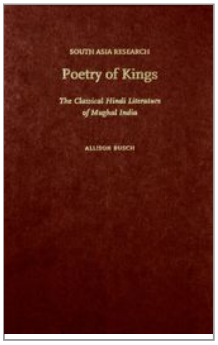
(141.) Pritchett 1994: 4–5; Faruqi 2003: 807–8. Examples of Shah Alam's Braj poetry are in *Nādirāt-i shāhī*.

(142.) The failure to collate Persian and vernacular (as well as Sanskrit) sources from premodern India is symptomatic of a much larger historiographical problem that urgently needs redress. Cf. Aquil 2007: 9–10.

(143.) Phukan 2001: 36.

(144.) Cited in Askari and Ahmad 1987: 59–60.

(145.) Lefèvre 2006. For further analysis of the literary hierarchies as seen from within a Persian episteme, see Phukan 2000: 56–69.



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Rīti Literature in Greater Hindustan

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Abstract and Keywords

Chapter 5 is concerned with *rīti* poetry as a domain of Rajput literature. It looks at the adoption of *rīti* styles by three major courts that had close ties to Mughal power: Amber, Bundi, and Jodhpur. Their patronage helped to pave the way for the wider acceptance of Brajbhasha courtly styles throughout greater Hindustan and some Rajput kings, like Jaswant Singh, are hailed as *rīti* authors in their own right. The transregional circulation of *rīti* literature is exemplified by examining the careers of three major writers who also happen to have been brothers: Matiram, Bhushan, and Chintamani Tripathi. These three were literally brothers, but the larger community of *rīti* intellectuals was also conceptualized in kinship terms, as a *kavikul* (family of poets). Tracing this network reveals much about the literary culture of the period as well as the mentalities and aspirations of early modern intellectuals that were fostered through literary education.

Keywords: Rajput literature, Amber, Bundi, Jodhpur, Jaswant Singh, Bhushan Tripathi, Matiram Tripathi, Chintamani Tripathi, education, kavikul

> Looking at the Sanskrit texts,
>
> I have given shape to their ideas in the vernacular …
>
> I have written this innovative work for the kind of person who is scholarly, skilled in the vernacular, and clever with the literary arts.
>
> —Jaswant Singh

Rajput Literature and Royal Self-Fashioning

Mughal patronage may have been critical to the early efflorescence of *rīti* literature, but Braj poets did not, of course, serve only an Indo-Muslim constituency. Elevated registers of court poetry as well as the more scholarly agenda epitomized by the *rītigranth* garnered a vast circulation over the course of the next two centuries. Braj poets also continued to write for and belong to *bhakti* communities. Vaishnava religious devotion, and one of its concomitants, the performance of *bhakti* texts, was also being embraced at the courts of many Rajput kings in the regional centers that had been absorbed into the imperial system, another factor in the enormous appeal of Brajbhasha literature.

The experiments with scholarly writing in Bhasha, which seemed bold and by no means guaranteed of success during the time of Keshavdas, met with increasing acceptance in later generations. As Braj poets continued to innovate with the classical genres of *kāvya* and *alaṅkāraśāstra*—textual realms that could now be claimed as the domain of Hindi writers—the language began to serve, in the **(p. 167)** manner that Sanskrit had once served, the cultural needs of the Hindu intelligentsia. Braj writers developed greater confidence, became more numerous, and constituted an informal but broad-based sociocultural network that they called the *kavikul*, a kind of nascent *respublica literaria*. In terms of sheer volume of patronage, the most important centers for *rīti* writers were the Rajput courts. By “Rajput,” I mean the rulers from today's Rajasthan but also the subimperial kings, from across northern and eastern India as well as the Deccan, who served as Mughal *manṣabdār*s and contributed to the forging of new styles of kingly self-presentation in this period.

For all its early history in Bundelkhand and the intersections we have traced with the Mughal court, *rīti* textual culture should also be considered a crucial branch of Rajput literature. During the Mughal period, Rajput kingdoms capitalized on new opportunities to augment their power, and these social and political processes were attended by major cultural transformations. A well-studied instance of how contact between Mughals and Rajputs stimulated new forms of court culture is the growth of schools of Rajput painting. Although art historians often use the term “Rajput painting” to capture the generally more conservative, Indic registers of subimperial visual culture in the early modern period, many painters and artistic repertoires were shared between Mughal and regional ateliers, and the traditions of Mughal and Rajput painting are best viewed in concert.[1] The same courts that gave rise to Rajput painting styles also patronized *rīti* literature, and *nāyikā*s and *nāyaka*s from *rīti* classics such as Keshavdas's *Rasikpriyā* and Bihari's *Satsaī* became popular subjects, with the poetry often being inscribed onto the paintings (see figures 2.2, 3.1, 3.2). The development of Braj courtly literature was thus intimately connected with a larger spectrum of contemporary practices. Both *rīti* texts and miniature paintings fed the cultural aspirations of regional kings, who by sponsoring

literary and artistic endeavors made a claim to the world that they were men of cultivation and learning, as well as power.

In contrast to “Rajput painting,” “Rajput literature” has little currency in academic parlance but the term usefully identifies an important cultural trend in early modern India. That it has not been adequately theorized to date perhaps stems in part from the general neglect (and even discrediting) of courtly sources from this period, but also reflects some understandable confusion about a complex linguistic and literary domain that does not lend itself to easy categorization. The modern terminological apparatus of premodern Hindi literary study must be handled with caution because many of the critical literary-historical decisions about the field were made nearly a century ago. Most scholars then were based in Banaras and Allahabad and evidently not always conversant with the traditions of western India.[2] There was, for example, a **(p. 168)** spate of early misinformation about the quintessentially Rajasthani genre of *rāso*s, which was considered by pioneering literary historians like Ramchandra Shukla to be an ancient bardic tradition dating to the twelfth century but is (at least in its written form), like the *rīti* tradition, of largely Mughal-era provenance.[3] Such inaccuracies contributed to the mismapping of literary boundaries during the developmental phase of Hindi literary historiography.

Compounding the analytical confusion, the intended division of labor between modern scholarly categories such as *Hindī sāhitya kā itihās* and *Rājasthānī sāhitya kā itihās* (histories of Hindi and Rajasthani literature, respectively) is frequently left unstated. Is a premodern text to be anachronistically labeled Rajasthani because it was produced within the borders of the modern state of Rajasthan, an administrative unit dating to the mid-twentieth century, or because it bears linguistic features distinct from those of Brajbhasha? Since regional languages were so ill defined in the precolonial period, it is difficult to come up with hard and fast rules about what counts as “Rajasthani” (which for decades was known more commonly as “western Hindi”) and what counts as Brajbhasha. Fuzzy boundaries between languages have resulted in various equivocations such as “Rajasthani-inflected Braj,” “Braj-inflected Rajasthani,” “Braj-inflected Dingal,” and “Pingal,”[4] and indeed some texts from the region are hard to pigeonhole on linguistic grounds, freely combining Braj and Rajasthani language, meters, and styles within the same work.[5] As an overarching cultural category, “Rajput literature” has the additional merit of helping to circumvent the need to render a linguistically based verdict about literatures that are not overly amenable to such precise disaggregation.

It is also far from easy to identify the grounds for distinguishing between *rīti* and Rajasthani literatures. Both are important forms of Rajput literature that helped articulate the cultural and political values of India's western kingdoms in the early modern period. Recall that the *Ratanbāvanī*, Keshavdas's first composition

at the Orchha court in central India, owes much to the *rāso* style, including its *chappay* meter and militant ethos. The same writer went on to develop the neoclassical genres now widely associated with *rīti* literary culture, underscoring that the two literary realms were far from disconnected. Broadly speaking, the term *rīti* references the neoclassical domains of Hindi literature. This transregional cultural style debuted in Bundelkhand and at the Mughal court before being adopted by most of the non-Persianate kingdoms in greater Hindustan during the second half of the seventeenth century. If we must, we can identify as "Rajasthani" texts that are strongly marked by western Indian linguistic forms, such as Marwari (often called Dingal), or genres that tend to be more localized. Rajasthani material covers a broader social spectrum than *rīti*, too, from folk to courtly. Broadly defined, "Rajput literature" was a **(p.169)** crossroads where local western traditions—notably the bardic *rāso*, Dingal poetry, and Jain narrative styles—interacted with a more pan-Indic literary system during the Mughal era. Charans, Bhats, and Bhils were the traditional social base of local Rajasthani styles, whereas *rīti* poets, who were mostly Brahman (and occasionally Kayasth), transmitted the more classical literary modes into a language, Brajbhasha, that was far more accessible than Sanskrit for most communities in this period.[6]

The Rajput rulers of early modern India, no less than the Mughals, had at their disposal a remarkably diverse array of courtly resources. Various *gunī*s including painters, architects, musicians, poets, and scholars, had an important role in the expression of royal style, lending both prestige and pleasure to the court. Although from the late sixteenth century Rajput kings were widely exposed to Persianate culture—whether attending the emperor at court or serving in imperial military campaigns—they did not as a rule patronize Persian literature. Whether thereby asserting resistance or mere cultural preference, they fostered both local Rajasthani traditions and *rīti* styles. Many courts continued to support Sanskrit learning, as well.

Most Rajput kings had to address at least three constituencies: they negotiated their prestige vis-à-vis the Mughals, who set their own high standards in cultural taste; they jostled for power with rival Rajput houses; and they displayed their royal worthiness to local *prajā* (subjects) in the home territory. The court culture and building practices of Bir Singh Deo Bundela discussed in chapter 1 are the perfect example of how a *manṣabdār* staged his power at multiple levels. When Bir Singh Deo built temples in Orchha or in Mathura, he adopted a pan-Rajput architectural idiom that leveraged Vaishnava cultural style to great political effect, declaring his piety and regal stature at home. These building practices also allowed the Orchha king to claim a more encompassing prestige in greater India among fellow *manṣabdār*s, as well as displaying both wealth and taste in an ostentatious manner that would be noticed by his Mughal overlords. Such complex layers of self-fashioning characterize many local kings during this period. Courtliness in India was in part an imitative behavior, which is to say

that courts responded to what other courts were doing, particularly those that were higher in status. At the Mughal court Rajput *manṣabdār*s came into contact with the newest, most sophisticated cultural trends. Some of these—especially in the fields of painting and architecture—they brought home, adapting the styles in creative ways to serve their own needs. *Gunī*s were also shared among courts, and in many cases (for example, miniature painting) imperial and local registers of cultural production were in dialogue.

Different rulers at different moments made their own cultural choices, and it is in some cases possible to theorize the complex political meanings of **(p.170)** these choices. An older style of art-historical scholarship on Rajput-Mughal relationships was too prone to equate the choice of Indic subject matter at regional courts with a traditionalist or rebellious political stance.[7] More recently, hybridity and the fact of cultural interchange are the starting point for more nuanced analyses. For instance, it is mechanical and reductionist to view as a narrowly Hindu, local, or traditionalist decision the commissioning by the Mewar King Rana Jagat Singh (r. 1628–52) of a monumental *Rāmāyaṇa* painting series, as was once the scholarly consensus. For one thing, the *Rāmāyaṇa*, a rich storehouse of kingly rhetoric since the classical period, had been recently appropriated as a *Mughal* political idiom under Akbar, who ordered a magnificently illustrated translation into Persian during the 1590s. Illustrated manuscripts of the *Rāmāyaṇa* were not an ancient art form hearkening back to classical times. They were a new, early modern style inaugurated by a Muslim emperor. Jagat Singh was acutely aware of the recent commissions at the Mughal court, and he may also have been responding to Shah Jahan's contemporary *Bādshāhnāmah*, a similarly illustrated work of history that forcefully proclaimed the stature of the emperor and his Timurid lineage. The visual culture at Mewar was thus critically in dialogue with Mughal trends, even in its commissioning of ostensibly Hindu subject matter.[8] And sometimes, as with *rīti* literature, it was Muslim kings who played a leading role in inaugurating new but distinctly Indian cultural styles.

One major concern of this chapter is to explore the multilayered cultural semiotics available to a Rajput court in Mughal India, especially with respect to the cultivation of literary taste. Although it may not always be a clear-cut matter to disentangle local Rajasthani from translocal Braj practices, it seems that the older ballads and oral traditions of western India were no longer fully adequate for enunciating the kingly prestige of a Mughal *manṣabdār*. During almost the same period, Joachim du Bellay, writing under the French monarchy, called upon his fellow poets to abandon the rustic French genres then current, in favor of a refined, neoclassical style:

> Read and, most important, reread, O future poet! Leaf through, day and night, the pages of Greek and Latin models, and leave off writing these old French rhymes of the flowery games from Toulouse and the literary

> assemblies of Rouen, the rondels, ballads, Virelais, royal chants, songs and other frivolities that only corrupt the taste of our language, or worse bear witness to our ignorance.[9]

New times require new literatures. Under the new conditions of Mughal imperial rule Rajput literary patronage would also be transformed, although western Indian courts did not so much abandon earlier traditions as foster a **(p.171)** palimpsest of styles and genres. Nonetheless, under new political and social pressures within the highly refined and stratified Mughal system, regional kings sought ways of marking distinction within the early modern cultural field.[10] One was to adopt the new style of classicism that now goes by the name of *rīti* literature. *Rīti* poetry became essential at most of the leading subimperial courts from the second half of the seventeenth century onward.

To try to make sense of this complex transformation, I present three case studies of its adoption: at Amber, Marwar, and Bundi. Able to draw on the royal precedents of Sanskrit *kāvya* in a new vernacular idiom, *rīti* writers were ideally suited to articulate the cultural and political aspirations of early modern courts. We will be analyzing the *rīti* movement as a timely strategy of Rajput courtliness and, moreover, a critical tool for the expression of Rajput identity during the Mughal period, while also situating it in a larger context of royal self-expression from the Sanskrit and Persian traditions. Understanding the relationship between Mughal and Rajput engagements with this literary culture is another aim. At the same time, we will learn something about the mechanisms for the diffusion of *rīti* poetry and scholarship well beyond North India, and indeed well beyond the royal court.

Brajbhasha Literary Patronage at the Amber Court

As in the Mughal case, it is not easy to pinpoint exactly how and when the patronage of Braj poets became à la mode at Rajput courts, but it makes good sense that Amber (modern Jaipur) should have been one of the pioneers. The Kachhwahas of Amber played a leading role in the consolidation of Rajput alliances with the Mughal state from the time of Bharmal Kachhwaha (r. 1547–73), who brokered an alliance with Akbar and became the first of the Rajput kings to offer a daughter in marriage to a Mughal emperor, initiating a highly effective mode of political accommodation that would prove consequential for the success of the empire. The court does not definitively enter the literary record until a later generation, however, during the reign of Man Singh (r. 1589–1614), who became Akbar's leading Rajput general and arguably the most powerful Hindu of his day.[11] Already in this early period there were signs in both Sanskrit and vernacular languages of the classicism that would come into vogue in Rajput courts in the next century. Man Singh sponsored several works in Sanskrit: the *Mānaprakāśa* of Murari Dasa, an idealized biography of the king, and Harinatha's *Kāvyādarśa-mārjana* and *Sarasvatikaṇṭhābharaṇa-mārjana*, commentaries on authoritative treatises by two great Sanskrit poeticians,

Dandin and Bhoja, indicators of an interest in literary theory at the court.[12] Man Singh's **(p.172)** connections to Brajbhasha literary culture in particular can be traced both through Mughal ties and more locally. Several Braj poets of his period, including Gang and Keshavdas, glorify Man Singh in their poetry.[13] Two major vernacular works of *prabandha kāvya*, variously labeled *Māncarit* and *Māncaritrāso*, were commissioned at Amber and are harbingers of the *rīti* efflorescence to come. The first, composed by Amrit Rai in 1585, is somewhat more Rajasthani in its linguistic features (with a sprinkling of verses in Apabhramsha); the second, a later but undated work by Narottam from perhaps 1600, is written in a combination of Rajasthani and Brajbhasha, with the addition of a few strategically-placed Sanskrit couplets.[14] The diversity in these two works alone underscores that early Amber court poets did not consciously adopt Braj to the exclusion of Rajasthani (or indeed Sanskrit). The two *prabandha*s have the same general concerns, but Narottam's *Māncarit* exhibits greater thematic range and is an especially fascinating early instance of the new style of Rajput historical literature. In its combining of the rich literary registers of high *kāvya* and *praśasti* with a vivid, quasi-realistic account of the vicissitudes of a Mughal *manṣabdār*, the work bears comparison to the more lavishly executed *Vīrsiṃhdevcarit* of Keshavdas, written a few years later.

Periodically, this study has turned to the question of the beginnings of *rīti* literature, first positing Keshavdas of Orchha as a compelling candidate while recognizing his indebtedness to recent *bhakti* trends. The previous chapter highlighted some telling signs of the role of Muslim emperors in one of North India's critical moments of vernacular literary inauguration. The Amber court is also significant. In a *kavi-praśaṃsā* from the opening of Narottam's work, the poet signals his own sense of literary history:

> Many poets have inhabited the earth, consider them to be gods.
> Nobody is the equal of Vyasa. Revere Kalidasa.
> Bring to mind Vararuchi, clever Magha; remember Bilhana
> and Jayadeva, whose devotion was rewarded with a vision of the lord.
> Immortal is the name of Govardhana.
> Chand [Bardai] created vernacular poetry.
> I worshipped them all and, receiving their grace (*pāiya prasādu*),
> I have recounted the virtues of Man Singh in a biography.[15]

Narottam Kavi, like Keshavdas, was very much aware of the Sanskrit *kāvya* past. Unlike Keshavdas, however, he does not mark the transition to vernacular poetry with himself, but instead with an earlier poet from his own region: Chand Bardai, the eponymous author of the *Pṛthvīrāj Rāso*. This is a more local perspective on vernacular literary beginnings from a western Indian court at nearly the same time; the important point is that for both **(p.173)** authors the transition from Sanskrit to Bhasha literature was a monumental occurrence.

As noted in chapter 1, the beginning of *rīti* literature was not a point but "a longish line." That line can also be extended in the direction of the Kachhwaha court at Amber. The near simultaneity of Narottam's *Māncarit* with Keshavdas's *Vīrsiṃhdevcarit* is striking and is probably no accident. Bir Singh Deo and Man Singh not only knew each other but also were neighbors on the Yamuna riverfront when resident in Agra.[16] These two Mughal *manṣabdār*s were key patrons of a new *kāvya* idiom that was coming into being at regional courts. No other work of Narottam is extant, and there is no good reason to believe he ever wrote one, since he is otherwise quite detailed about signaling his literary mission in his introduction.[17] Keshavdas, it turns out, lived on in literary memory, whereas Narottam was promptly forgotten except at his own court.

The single surviving copy of Narottam's *Māncarit* was prepared at the request of Mirza Raja Jai Singh (r. 1621–67),[18] during whose reign *rīti* literature reached prodigious heights of acclaim and commanded new levels of royal support. The preservation of the *Māncarit* is only one indication of Jai Singh's interest in the typically *rīti* subjects of kingly representation and classicism. Like his great-grandfather Man Singh, Jai Singh was a spectacularly successful politician and general who led many important expeditions under Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb.[19] Maintaining poets and other court professionals such as royal genealogists had been a long-standing practice in western India and Jain communities had been avid manuscript collectors since medieval times,[20] but several signs point to a greater formalization of traditions at the courts of this period. Written texts increasingly supplemented earlier oral practices and Rajput rulers exhibited a new interest in the development of libraries, probably as a result of Mughal influence.[21] Perhaps some Mughal librarians migrated to regional courts, for many books bear indications of imperial practice, including Hijri dates and markings with a Persian seal. The earliest records of the Amber library (later to become the Jaipur *pothīkhāna*, or royal archive) date from the time of Jai Singh, but he inherited manuscripts from an earlier period.[22] Regardless, this new interest in literacy and book culture must have been one factor in the turn toward patronizing formal works of Braj *kāvya*, *praśasti*, history, and literary theory.

Jai Singh's literary and scholarly patronage was not confined to a single language. He robustly supported both Sanskrit and Brajbhasha poets. Sanskrit and Hindi learning begin to flourish in the region; this emphasis on written texts and classicism was a new orientation in Rajput literature. Jai **(p.174)** Singh established a Sanskrit college in far away Banaras, to which he sent his sons for their education; he also convened a *paṇḍitsabhā* (assembly of scholars) at Amber. Numerous works of *śāstra* and literature were collected in the *pothīkhāna* during this period, including manuscripts of the Sanskrit poets Kalidasa and Shri Harsha, as well as Sanskrit commentaries on and Hindi translations of the classics.[23] More germane to this discussion is the illustrated manuscript of Keshavdas's *Rasikpriyā* that was commissioned by Mirza Raja Jai

Singh's Queen Chandravatji in 1639, evidence of the court's interest in *rīti* literature.[24]

When it comes to Brajbhasha literary patronage, Jai Singh is famously associated with Biharilal, whose single surviving work, *Bihārīsatsaī* (Bihari's collection of seven hundred verses, 1662?),[25] is one of the pinnacles of *rīti* poetry. Bihari's exquisite *dohā*s on varied themes, from contemplative Krishna devotion to contemporary politics, were composed with the highest degree of ingenuity and are recited with great enthusiasm even today.[26] They were also frequently illustrated. Very little is known for a historical fact about Biharilal; his celebrity as a poet has made him legend-prone. In a spurious Braj biography, the *Bihārīvihār* (Peregrinations of Bihari), the famous *rīti* author is said to have learned Persian and to have attracted the notice of Shah Jahan.[27] Whether or not these details of exposure to Persian and the Mughal court are true of Biharilal, they are certainly true of his patron Jai Singh, and it is not farfetched to suppose that Bihari—the poet of a leading *manṣabdār*—was familiar with the ways of the imperial court.[28]

Although the poet himself was inordinately stingy with autobiographical detail and the veracity of legends is difficult to assess, the historical record can be filled in somewhat by a more voluble *rīti* poet from the following generation: Biharilal's nephew Kulapati Mishra, who also served the Amber court. Kulapati was tutor to Jai Singh's successor, Ram Singh (r. 1667–89), and—as with Keshavdas—there is intriguing evidence of this Brahman poet's mentorship of some of the palace women.[29] The figure of Keshavdas may be salient for other reasons, too: in Kulapati's *Saṅgrāmsār* (Nature of war, 1676), a Bhasha *prabandha* based on the *Mahābhārata*, the poet makes the following tantalizing remarks:

> Saluting my grandfather, the prominent poet Keshav Keshavray,
> I tell the story of the Bhārata (war), composing it in vernacular verse.
> *Kavivara mātāmaha sumari, kesau kesorāya*
> *Kahoṃ kathā bhārattha kī, bhāṣā chanda banāya*[30]

Much ink has been spilled over the interpretation of this verse, which also relates to an early twentieth-century debate over whether Biharilal was Keshavdas's **(p.175)** father. The crux of the matter is a deep uncertainty about how to interpret the second half of the first line of the *dohā*. “Kesau” (i.e., Keshav) and “Kesorāya” (i.e., Keshavray) are both well-attested signatures of Keshavdas, and it seems likely that Kulapati does indeed refer to *the* Keshavdas here. What other person of that name could have merited the designation *kavivara* (prominent poet) during this period? Elsewhere in his *Yuktitaraṅginī* (River of reason, 1686), the Braj poet pays homage to both Biharilal and Keshavdas (among other literary predecessors) and, not surprisingly, *Rasikpriyā* was a major influence on Kulapati's work.[31] A few of the *gotra* (lineage) details

do not quite add up, however, and some scholars reject the idea that Keshavdas was Bihari's father and Kulapati's grandfather.[32] A three-generation commitment to court poetry on the part of the Mishra family is not only reasonable but entirely likely, but that is insufficient grounds to establish the relationship beyond the shadow of a doubt. Some Bundeli dialectal forms have been noticed in the poetry of both Keshavdas and Bihari, underscoring the links between the two poets as well as the importance of this specific region as the original nucleus for *rīti* literary culture.[33] His lineage aside, Bihari's surviving work is in many respects sui generis: he did not write a major *prabandha* and was one of the rare court poets who ignored the *rītigranth* genre. The interpretation of his work nonetheless depends on the system of classical poetics that was central to *rīti* literature.[34] Perhaps some of Bihari's work was lost, or perhaps the literary-theory gene skipped a generation, for the oeuvre of his nephew Kulapati Mishra includes both high *kāvya* and *śāstra* and is thus far more consonant with that of Keshavdas.

Kulapati provides a good reason for why this should be the case when he mentions his guru, who was none other than Jagannatha Panditaraja, the famous Sanskrit intellectual who attended the court of Shah Jahan.[35] It is fitting that Jagannatha should be considered the last major literary theorist in the Sanskrit tradition.[36] The baton of Sanskrit learning was in the process of being passed to vernacular writers, one of whom was his very own student. While Jagannatha is celebrated for his Sanskrit learning, Kulapati Mishra wrote not one word in the language of the gods, even though he must have had an excellent classical education. Like Keshavdas before him, he devoted himself entirely to Bhasha writing.

Several remarks from his *Rasrahasya* (The secret of literary emotion, 1670), a Braj treatise on aesthetics that closely follows the Sanskrit compendium *Kāvyaprakāśa*, provide a window onto his literary milieu and motivations. In the opening to the work, he explains its patronage circumstances:

> We used to sit in the Victory Palace discussing vernacular poetry. The Kurma[37] prince Ram (Singh) gave a directive: “If all the poetic **(p.176)** strategies manifested in Sanskrit were converted into Bhasha, everybody would understand the ways of *rasa*.”[38]

When Keshavdas introduced himself to his readers in the *Kavipriyā*, his choice of a vernacular medium was profoundly noteworthy, even slightly distressing to him. In contrast, Kulapati speaks nonchalantly about Bhasha poetry, which was now evidently a field in its own right, or at least something that one took the trouble to discuss (*bhāṣākavita vicāra*). Still, for Kulapati Mishra's generation vernacularization was very much an ongoing process, perhaps even a special

mission. In his colophon, he again stresses that he is making available the scholarship of Mammata for a community of Hindi readers:

> I have articulated in Bhasha all of the components of poetry discussed by Mammata, compiling them in *The Secret of Literary Emotion*.[39]

While the transition to the vernacular continued over many years, with both Sanskrit and Braj intellectuals being accorded patronage at Rajput courts, from the middle of the seventeenth century something new and irrevocable was happening in Indian intellectual life: Bhasha scholars were gaining ground. Elsewhere Kulapati mentions that *bhāṣā kavi*s (vernacular poets) were present at Ram Singh's coronation, signaling that they were now among the expected court professionals at Amber.[40] This would soon be the case in Rajput courts everywhere.

Jaswant Singh: Maharaja of Marwar and *Rīti Ālaṅkārika*

The new cachet for vernacular scholarship and literature in Rajput settings from the mid-seventeenth century is exemplified perhaps nowhere better than in the figure of Jaswant Singh (r. 1638–78). Crowned at the tender age of eleven and a half in defiance of the regnal claims of his elder brother, Amar Singh, Jaswant Singh was not only the Maharaja of Marwar (Jodhpur) but also a leading *manṣabdār* and general in the Mughal army (figure 5.1). Like Mirza Raja Jai Singh, he served under both Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb and was rewarded with generous honors and promotions. The maharaja's relationship with Aurangzeb was somewhat rocky, not least because he supported Dara Shikoh in the war of succession, but overall he remained a close ally of the Mughals throughout his career, playing a critical role in countless military initiatives, particularly in the northwest and in the Deccan. It is not, however, his soldierly persona that concerns us here, but rather his poetic persona and what **(p.177)** it reveals about the widespread adoption of *rīti* literary trends by Rajput courts in this period.

Whether Jaswant Singh was truly a gifted writer or had gifted ghost-writers we will never know, but he is credited with an extensive Braj oeuvre, as well as a couple of works in Sanskrit.[41] Some exhibit a metaphysical bent: a treatise on Vedanta known as *Ānandvilās*, as well as Brajbhasha translations of the *Gītā* and *Prabodhacandrodaya*. The king's most important work by far, however, is his *Bhāṣābhūṣaṇ* (Ornament to the vernacular, c.1660), a masterful manual on figures of speech that epitomizes the new *rīti* textual orientation at regional courts. The work was nothing short of a bestseller in premodern India, and is still viewed as a classic of the *rīti* style. More than fifty manuscripts of the *Bhāṣābhūṣaṇ* are attested in those North Indian libraries whose collection development began during the early modern period, and the text's popularity was significant since it inspired at least six commentaries.[42]

As was the norm with *rīti* writers, Jaswant Singh based his vernacular text on Sanskrit sources while giving his work an elegant new Braj flair. The main classical antecedents are Jayadeva's *Candrāloka* (thirteenth century) and a sixteenth-century reworking of its *alaṅkāra* section by Appayya Dikshita: the *Kuvalayānanda*. In the colophon, the king is both aware of and highly articulate about the kind of work he is writing, and for whom it is intended:

> **(p.178)** Looking at the Sanskrit texts,
> I have given shape to their ideas in the vernacular …
> I have written this innovative work for the kind of person who is scholarly, skilled in Bhasha, and clever with the literary arts.[43]

figure 5.1 Portrait of Maharaja Jaswant Singh seated with nobles, c. 1645

Photo © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Whereas just a half-century prior the very collocation "skilled" and "Bhasha" would have been perceived as an oxymoron, here suddenly was a new type of work (*grantha navīna*) written for an implied audience (*tāhi nara ke heta* …) defined in terms of its association with vernacular expertise. The *Bhāṣābhūṣaṇ* is as neoclassical as any text of its day, but note the self-confident tone: Jaswant Singh mentions his Bhasha literary community with a sense of pride. A better sense of the literary activities of this court will emerge only with further research but one recent study credits Jaswant Singh with the patronage of fourteen writers, and the poet Vrind is widely held to have made his literary debut at Jodhpur.[44] One thing is clear: the colophon of the *Bhāṣābhūṣaṇ* is a far cry from the type of *recusatio*[45] about vernacular slow-wittedness seen in Keshavdas's *Kavipriyā*.[46] Alive to the rich new possibilities of Bhasha intellectual life, Jaswant Singh does not belabor his lack of Sanskrit skill but on the contrary adopts a celebratory tone.

It is arresting that one of the premier *rītigranth*s of the seventeenth century should be attributed to the maharaja of Jodhpur, one of North India's most powerful regional kings. Although sophisticated poets were doubtless important to courtly life in much of the premodern world,[47] Jaswant Singh is a particularly good example of the deep investment of Indian royalty in aesthetic pursuits. This relationship cannot be reduced to the simplistic conception that rulers supported court poets out of kingly duty, or that poets through their writings merely served the ideological aims of their patrons. What Sheldon Pollock

critiques as “legitimation theory” is not an adequate explanation for the enormous commitment to aesthetics among Indian kings.[48] The Rajputs who served as Mughal *manṣabdār*s had two classical literary traditions at their disposal: Sanskrit and Persian. Neither met their cultural needs entirely, but both nonetheless contributed to the development of Rajput courtly styles and to the rise of Brajbhasha as a refined literary idiom. Sanskrit *kāvya* and *alaṅkāraśāstra*, the most direct inspiration for *rīti* poets, owed their origins and creative dynamism to centuries of courtly patronage, and had thus been deeply entwined with the personas of kings for more than a millennium. On the whole, the Persian literary styles adopted by the Mughal emperors were not a direct influence on the aesthetics or content of Rajput court poetry, but they were a general cultural model for the newly literate royalty and gentry of western India. In a climate where the emperor's education and the perceptions of his royal **(p. 179)** integrity centered on his knowing the classics of Persian literature, composing and reciting Persian couplets marked one as a person of sophistication and learning, and Persian literati and historians were among the most honored members of the court, the Rajput kings would have been inspired to foster literary elegance in their own settings.

Whether drawing on the older Sanskrit idiom or the newer Persian one, literature was one of the cornerstones of Indian court culture in the early modern period.[49] The literary arts brought grandeur, dignity, and beauty to courtly life, but they also helped to constitute the very atmosphere that made a court possible. Literature served rhetorical aims; it was educational; it also aided in the refinement of the nobility's moral and sensory faculties. That Indian treatises on statecraft enjoined kings to know as much about the composition and hermeneutics of classical literature as about military matters is more than a matter of passing curiosity. If kings were expected to rule justly, they were also expected to define cultural refinement. It is unsurprising that they should be patrons, commissioning important artistic and literary works, as well as viewing cultural performances. Not all the world's kings were expected to be writers or scholars, however. This element of learning was particularly stressed in South Asia. A list of kingly duties from a seventeenth-century Telugu treatise, the *Rāyavācakamu*, reads in places like an index to a work of rhetoric rather than a document about state policy. Among other subjects, a king is enjoined to know the nine *rasa*s; the ten typological stages of love; and the canonical eighteen types of literary description. He must know the intricacies of figures of speech and metrics and how to steer clear of literary flaws. These same topics were central to the *rītigranth*s produced in northern India in the same period. According to the *Rāyavācakamu*, kings were also expected to “search out and patronize good poets who can teach poetry, drama, and poetics through both definition and example”; good kings were comfortable with several literary dialects; they should beget the “seven progeny,” one of which is a literary work.[50] A crucial part of a prince's training was to cultivate his literary side; he

was to be molded into a connoisseur-king who could both appreciate and write poetry.

All of this helps explain why Jaswant Singh, king of Marwar, should have written (or be credited with) a treatise on *alaṅkāraśāstra*. Writing poetry and rhetoric was not a duty undertaken by all kings, to be sure, but it was fulfilled by surprisingly many. In fact, I would venture that with cosmopolitan cultural models available from both the Sanskrit and Persian traditions, South Asian kings moonlighted as poets and theoreticians of literature to a degree unprecedented in world history. An astounding number of Indian kings have been credited with works of literature or literary theory **(p.180)** (or both): Harsha of Kannauj, Bhoja of Dhara, Rana Kumbha of Mewar, Krishnadeva Raya of Vijayanagara, Ibrahim Adil Shah II of Bijapur, Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah of Golkonda, Indrajit of Orchha, Savant Singh of Kishangarh—the list could become very long. Mughal royalty were no less active as writers: Babur composed a Divan in Turkish; he and Jahangir both wrote autobiographies; Humayun's sister Gulbadan Begum penned a biography of her brother.[51] Jahangir's brother Danyal wrote Hindi poetry. Recall from chapter 4 how Abu al-Fazl praised Akbar's *guftan-i naẓm* and *sh'irī-yi nuktah-sanjī* (poetic skill and literary-critical acumen).[52] Even if kings did not always compose the poetry themselves but instead had their name ascribed to works written by others, Indian posterity somehow thinks they should have. In short, canonical models of Indian kingship stressed political and military might but were also profoundly concerned with literary culture.[53]

Jaswant Singh's court was also the site of an important development in Hindi historical writing that, like *rīti* literature, was new for Rajput communities. There the Jain writer Mumhata Nainsi, who had also served under Jaswant Singh's predecessor, Raja Gaj Singh (r. 1620–38), researched the history of the region, giving it a new formal shape in *Naiṇsī rī khyāt* (Nainsi's chronicle, 1637–66). Again, whereas Mughal influence may not have determined the language, style, or content of a new Indic genre, the general historicizing impulses of the Mughal state since Akbar's day made available a Persian model that contributed to the enrichment and in some cases retooling of more culturally resonant local historical practices.[54] Nainsi's monumental work drew upon earlier genealogies and accounts of the bards of western and central India while implementing unprecedented documentary standards: a more chronological focus, new methods of ordering knowledge, and sophisticated negotiations between the truth claims of different sources. Significantly, Nainsi's source for the Bundela polity was the *rājavaṃśa* from Keshavdas's *Kavipriyā*, further evidence of the circulation of texts among *manṣabdārī* courts in this period via diffusion mechanisms that we do not yet fully understand.[55]

Rīti Literary Practices at Bundi

That new forms of history and classicism arose among the Rajputs during this period is amply illustrated in Bundi. Bundi came to prominence at the time of Surjan Rao Hada (r. 1554–85), whose treaty with Akbar in 1569 brought the court into the Mughal ambit after the dispiriting loss of Ranthambhor Fort. As at Amber, the court patronized both Sanskrit and Brajbhasha poets. The **(p.181)** career of Surjan Hada, for instance, was given lavish historical (if not entirely factual) treatment in *Surjanacarita* (Biography of Surjan, c. 1590), a Sanskrit *kāvya* by Chandrashekhara, court poet to the Hada rulers.[56] Bundi enters Hindi literary history during the reign of Raja Bhao Singh (r. 1658–82), for whom Matiram Tripathi, the brother of Bhushan and Chintamani Tripathi, wrote his *Lalitlalām* (Finest lover, c. 1660[57]), a short treatise on *alaṅkāra*s and a classic example of a *rīti* text that exhibits the courtly aspirations of a Rajput *manṣabdār*.

The preamble to the work, which does not begin its ostensibly literary subject in earnest for several pages, is an assertive proclamation of Bundi's courtly grandeur. After formulaic invocations to Ganesha and Krishna, the poet embarks upon a *bundī-varṇana* (description of Bundi), whose mission is to tell the reader about the opulence and beauty of the city in keeping with the norms of Sanskrit *kāvya*. The poet begins,

> The city of Bundi is world famous, a center of happiness and wealth.
> The Golden Age (*satyayuga*) reposes here, even in the Iron Age (*kaliyuga*).
> In Bundi the people are clever, reading and listening attentively to the Vedas, Purāṇas,
> and authoritative traditions; they are connoisseurs of singing, poetry, and the arts.…

The description elaborates on everything that makes Bundi a major center of culture: its architecture, painting and music, markets with purveyors of finely embroidered clothing, heart-ravishingly beautiful women, gardens, ponds, and song birds.[58] Such descriptions are common in both Sanskrit and Braj courtly texts and must be viewed as indispensable to the *rīti* enterprise.[59] Matiram's descriptions are stylized—poets are supposed to depict the grandeur of royal settings in accordance with classical norms[60]—but there are often a few local inflections. Certainly *rīti* poets proclaimed the stature of their courts in the here and now by highlighting their patrons’ contributions to culture, learning, and the built environment.

The other passage of note in Matiram's preamble, similarly congruent with both textual and political trends elsewhere in North India during this time, is a *vaṃśāvalī* (genealogy) of the Bundi kings. In a telescoped history of the dynasty, Matiram celebrates the exploits of each of his patron's ancestors in a combination of idealizing and more factual registers. Surjan Rao's son Bhoj Hada (r. 1585–1607) is said to have “protected the honor of the Hindus,

rendering lame the foot of the Mughal Emperor's authority.” The grounds for Matiram's assertion are not further elaborated in the *Lalitlalām*, although the *Ma’āṣir al-umarā* refers to a dispute that putatively arose when Jahangir sought to marry the daughter of Jagat Singh (Man Singh Kachhwaha's son).[61] Elsewhere **(p.182)** in the genealogy the exigencies of Mughal militarism loom large, as when Ratan Singh Hada (r. 1608–32) is said to have “prospered in the joys of imperial battles” or Bhao Singh's father, Satrusal Hada (r. 1632–58), who died fighting for Dara Shikoh in the war of succession that broke out in 1658, “held his ground on the battlefield, knowing it to be a Kshatriya Kashi (city of liberation for warriors).”[62]

The *Lalitlalām* is most directly concerned with Bundi's present-day ruler, who is shown in a multifaceted light. The slightly cryptic title of the work appears to signal the concept of a *lalita nāyaka* (romantic hero) from Indian literary theory.[63] This makes good sense for a work that is ostensibly about *alaṅkāraśāstra*, but it may also be a flattering gesture toward the patron, for whom Matiram actually uses the epithet *lalitlalām* in one verse.[64] Perhaps he means to suggest that in the manner of a *lalita nāyaka* (and indeed, in the manner of many idealized kings from Sanskrit texts), Bhao Singh Hada is sophisticated, attractive to women, and knowledgeable in the ways of love. While the erotic verses generally cast Krishna in the role of the *nāyaka* rather than the king, Bhao Singh is in one case depicted playing Holi in a manner that strongly recalls Kavindracharya's portrayal of Shah Jahan.[65] Such similarities in representation are not merely coincidental but are yet another instance of shared Rajput and Mughal cultural styles during this period.

Although crafted in a completely different idiom from a text like Shah Jahan's approximately contemporary *Bādshāhnāmah*, the *Lalitlalām* is in its own way very much about contemporary history. This brings us to a special feature of this *rītigranth*: political concerns are often at the core of its aesthetic logic. Matiram's definition verses are unremarkable, explicating the principal tropes from the Sanskrit literary imagination for the benefit of his patron, but some of the example poems do an entirely different kind of work, doubling as *praśasti* verses that feature Bhao Singh or, on occasion, one of his illustrious ancestors. Matiram's first example verse on the subject of the *upamā* (simile) sets the tone:

> Diwan Bhao Singh is the one Rajput whose spirit
> grows fourfold upon engaging in battle.
> Matiram says, this is why the fame of Satrusal's son
> spreads in the circles of kings.
> The blazing heat of the Delhi sun has dried up the luster[66]
> of Indian kings like water in a pond.
> Under such conditions, all kingly pride (*rāva maiṃ saram*) has contracted,
> dissolving like salt in the ocean.[67]

(p.183) Here and elsewhere in the work, the king of Bundi is presented as a savior of Rajput sovereignty. Although the Sanskrit literary heritage upon which so much of *rīti kāvya* is based had many ways of giving voice to *vīra rasa*, this verse and many others like it speak not of the timeless ideals of kingly classicism but of the here and now, getting to the heart of *manṣabdārī* anxiety in Mughal India.

Rīti Political Culture

As these case studies show, *rīti* genres became an integral part of *manṣabdārī* court culture from around the middle of the seventeenth century. Whether writing poetics manuals on the principal topics from Sanskrit *alaṅkāraśāstra* or *prabandha kāvya*s on royal themes, Brajbhasha authors like Matiram in Bundi, and his close contemporaries Biharilal, Kulapati Mishra, and Jaswant Singh from the nearby courts of Amber and Marwar, were in an important sense carrying forward the classical past into the Mughal present. How are we to understand this extraordinary commitment to classical aesthetics, which was so intense that *rīti* poetry was almost universally adopted by the courts of the day?

Neoclassicism had much to offer the Rajput patrons who adopted it as a literary style, both culturally and politically. When Brahman poets brought new types of high vernacular rhetoric into the purview of Rajput courts, they made the resources of a long-standing tradition of royal *kāvya* available for a new audience that was no longer universally familiar with the older language. Brajbhasha was unusually versatile as a linguistic medium because it could be refined like Sanskrit, without sacrificing broad comprehensibility. Formal *rīti* works—particularly those with intense compounding—are not very distant in register from Sanskrit. Thus, adopting a vernacular idiom could allow for the elevated feel of classical *kāvya* and theoretical works while remaining responsive to the needs of a changing interpretive community. Although Rajput kings no doubt had the functional Persian required for participation in Mughal court life, Brajbhasha was more culturally relevant in their kingdoms than Persian could ever be. The new Braj genres brought elegance, entertainment, but also potent forms of erudition as well as vocabularies of political expression to the court. Mastering *rasa* theory, knowing the principles of poetic excellence, understanding the subtleties of *nāyikā*s, *alaṅkāra*s, and all the dimensions of *śṛṅgāra* poetry were skills that distinguished a person of learning. As already suggested in the discussion of Vrind (chapter 4), poetry and *alaṅkāraśāstra* were beautiful literary arts, but they were also prerequisites—even cultural technologies—of kingship because they contributed to the sensory, moral, and literary education of the patron and other members of the court.

(p.184) Regardless of the traditional ideas about rulers enunciated by Indian canons of *dharmaśāstra* (formal social and behavioral codes), such as the stipulation that they be of Kshatriya caste and thus somehow congenitally suited to kingly behavior, culture is by definition learned. And the acquisition of literary

culture, with all its emotional and ethical accoutrements, was a mission to which *rīti* poets were ideally equipped to contribute.[68] The fact that the premier vernacular court genre of the day—*rītigranth*s—were literally handbooks is highly consequential in this regard. Kings were in a very real sense commissioning how-to manuals on courtliness.[69] And many *rīti* poets doubled as mentors who shared their cultural knowledge with the court.

Whatever overlay of ancient classicism characterizes *rīti* textual culture, present-day, local concerns were also articulated. Many *rītigranth*s and *prabandha*s gave rhetorical shape to contemporary political power. In a day when the Mughal elite set the cultural and political agenda, Rajput royalty sought ways to exercise their own autonomy. We see in the texts of the time a strong genealogical imperative, which was a way of establishing their own pedigrees and claims over their regions but also a response to the system of Mughal rankings that helped to underwrite political success.[70] The seventeenth century was precisely when prominent Rajput houses were consolidating their identity, moving away from an earlier, more open-status warlord ethos toward the closed aristocratic lineages normalized only in the early modern period. *Rīti* texts, many of which contain *vaṃśāvalī*s, articulated the new "genealogical orthodoxy" of their courts.[71]

Another response to Mughal power, albeit somewhat sporadic, was a new orientation toward history. The Braj and Rajasthani poets working in *manṣabdārī* courts took a different tack from their Persian counterparts. They were not annalists, documenting dates and details; rather, Braj poets generally wrote what I call enriched histories, informed by *kāvya* standards and enduring patterns of kingly protocol rather than attention to quotidian fact. *Rīti* histories could be counter-histories as well, in which Rajput courts presented their own version of the story. Keshavdas's *Ratnabāvanī*, a narration of the Mughal takeover of his court radically different from that found in Mughal sources, is a case in point.[72] The *Māncarit* and the *Lalitlalām*, in their own ways instances of Braj historical culture, are also filled with insights into the nature of Rajput political culture.[73] It is highly significant that the *rīti* genre of historical writing was almost completely absent from the Mughal repertoire in Brajbhasha but emerged as a powerful cultural technology at Rajput courts, an opportunity for textualizing and thereby processing the Mughal present, but also for the self-narration of Rajput courtly pasts. The Mughals, for their part, wrote their pasts in Persian.

(p.185) *Rīti* poets were highly versatile and responsive to the various needs of Rajput rulers who served in the Mughal administration as *manṣabdār*s. Their patrons were interested in *rīti* literature because of its aesthetic attractions. They must also have been drawn to the types of political self-fashioning afforded by Braj texts, some elements of which stemmed from earlier forms of transregional Sanskrit court *kāvya*. Modern updates to the *kāvya* tradition that stressed *bhakti* sensibilities were also culturally resonant, given the Vaishnava

public persona of many Rajput polities. One does not want to be too mechanistic about all this—sometimes poetry is just poetry, after all—but the enormous commitment to classicism, which could still be expressed through Sanskrit literary patronage but was increasingly channeled toward the support of *rīti* poets, augmented the dignity of Rajput courts, affiliating the rulers with ancient traditions of Hindu kingship while serving as a response to the Mughals' own classical idiom in Persian.

For Rajputs, who generally did not host Persian scholars and poets at their courts, *rīti* intellectuals working in Brajbhasha were also appreciated as an important class of court professionals. To write or to **(p.186)** sponsor a *rītigranth* betokened a king's participation in the sophisticated circles of the *kavikul*, which not only added status to the court but also helped to foster the development of vernacular intellectual life. All the courts of the day were sponsoring short poetry manuals but Rajput kings were the most likely to patronize complex works of *rīti śāstra* in Sanskritized style, such as the *Rasrahasya* of Kulapati Mishra. Learned discourse of this type would naturally have been of greatest relevance outside the Mughal court where the Hindu, and increasingly Hindi, intelligentsia held sway. As R. S. McGregor has suggested, a high Braj prose style grew up in North India from the seventeenth century because it served "as a means of communication between Hindu courts, and educated Hindu speakers of different local Western Hindi dialects, in much the same way as modern standard Hindi now unites educated speakers of all the regional dialects of Hindi."[74]

Who Sponsored *Rīti* Poets First, the Mughals or the Rajputs?

The question of how Brajbhasha took root at Rajput courts bears further reflection. Based on the linguistic logic of today's subcontinent, where Hindi has become Hindu language, it is common sense to assume that Hindu Rajputs transmitted *rīti* literary trends to the Mughal court. They, one might assume, were the principal users of Hindi dialects, not the Mughals. We do know that Man Singh Kachhwaha, the leading Hindu ruler of his generation, was an early sponsor of vernacular *kāvya* in a royal idiom. Keshavdas, who similarly served a Rajput statesman of great importance, wrote his last work in a Mughal context, not his first one, again suggesting something potentially important about the direction of transmission. Jahangir reported in his memoirs that the Raja of Marwar, Suraj Singh (r. 1595–1620), the grandfather of Jaswant Singh, brought a Hindi poet to court, whom he labeled as a local bard or Charan,[75] another seeming indicator that the trajectory of this cultural contact was from Rajput to Mughal.

The process was almost certainly more interactive than this, however. The evidence for large-scale Rajput patronage of *rīti* literature at courts outside of Bundelkhand is surprisingly scant for the period before 1650 (the mixed Rajasthani *carita*s patronized by Man Singh are not yet fully *rīti* in their profile);

after this date, and quite suddenly, Braj poets can be traced at most of the subimperial courts. With the proviso that no monocausal account would explain something as complex as literary taste, one cannot help but be struck that the *rīti* authors of the seventeenth century who worked in Rajput rather than Mughal contexts operated out of regional centers that were intimately tied to Mughal power, whether in Orchha, Amber, Jodhpur, or Bundi.[76] They were, conspicuously, not to be found in Mewar, the court that was constantly rebelling against imperial authority. The Mewar court did sponsor a couple of illustrated manuscripts of vernacular works, including the spectacular Sahibdin *Rasikpriyā* dating to the 1630s (figure 2.2), but it was not a major contributor to the development of Braj courtly literature, commissioning not a single original work of the *rītigranth* genre. The court did offer patronage to one Braj poet late in the reign of Raj Singh (1652–80), the Jain ascetic Man Kavi, whose *Rājvilās* is a major *prabandha* on the life of the king composed between 1677 and 1680. Raj Singh also sponsored a few Rajasthani works. Mostly, however, the Mewar court followed an older pattern of Sanskrit literary patronage during the seventeenth century, which accords well with their nostalgia for pre-Mughal building practices.[77] The inaugural works of *rīti* literature come from places with close ties to the Mughals, a pattern that only makes sense if *rīti* literature was as an integral part of imperial and *manṣabdārī* court culture.

It may seem counterintuitive—even preposterous—to Hindi scholars of today, but the substantial evidence presented here suggests that the leading courts of the mid-seventeenth century adopted *rīti* practices because they were exposed to formal Braj styles through Mughal contact. Whereas evidence for the Rajput cultivation of *rīti* poetry is scant before 1650, the evidence for it in Mughal contexts is ample. To recapitulate just a few highlights from chapter 4, Birbal wrote Braj poetry under the *takhalluṣ* “Brahma” and was rewarded by Akbar with the title “Kaviray”; Gang wrote *praśasti*s to most of the princes and leading *manṣabdār*s of his **(p.187)** day; three lost *rītigranth*s are associated—in this case somewhat nebulously—with the court of Akbar; the attributed oeuvre of Rahim, a leading Mughal general, epitomizes both *bhakti* and *rīti* themes of the late sixteenth century; Abu al-Fazl goes out of his way to mention a class of texts on *nāyikābheda* in his *Ā’ īn-i akbarī*; Keshavdas, who specifically references Jahangir's knowledge of *nāyikābheda*, may have visited the Mughal court and was in contact with Birbal much earlier, prior to the latter's death in 1586; Rahim's son Iraj Shahnawaz Khan is the probable patron of Keshavdas's last work, *Jahāngīrjascandrikā*. Moreover, the next *rīti* poet to emerge after Keshavdas—and this is particularly hard to explain unless one considers *rīti* literature a Mughal practice—was Sundar, a confidant and trusted ambassador of Emperor Shah Jahan, who was awarded titles and gifts for his Braj poetry. The other leading author of Braj *alaṅkāraśāstra* during that same period is Chintamani Tripathi, who was also extensively patronized by Indo-Muslim

nobility in both the Deccan and the north, and possibly by Emperor Shah Jahan himself.

The clustering of *rīti* poets at the Mughal court during the late sixteenth century and the first decades of the seventeenth, and the near absence of records of *rīti* poets throughout western India during this time, at the very least demonstrates that Indo-Muslim patronage was foundational to rather than peripheral to the success of classical Hindi. It seems likely that the cachet accorded Brajbhasha poets by the Mughals made them in demand as *gunī* in other contexts. Somewhere in the process of Mughal-Rajput alliance building and rapprochement poetry, not just politics, mattered. The evidence is of course limited and imperfect, and naturally some texts could be lost or still unavailable to scholars.[78] But texts that really mattered, in early modern India at least, are usually the ones that have been preserved—recopied or at least mentioned by later people. And we do have some consensus about the literary canon from premodern sources, especially from the *kavi-praśaṃsā* genre written by knowledgeable poets and intellectuals.

The hypothesis of a Mughal-Rajput vector—that *rīti* literature was first seriously cultivated largely in Mughal circles[79] and only afterward radiated out to subimperial courts across India, even those hostile to the Mughals—accords well with related evidence about artistic practice and also with what we know about vernacular inauguration among Indo-Muslim communities from an earlier period. Although regional Indian painters were hired by the imperial atelier and contributed creatively to the development of Mughal painting idioms, the main trends were always set at Agra and Delhi, from where they spread to Rajput courts—not the other way around. Rajput libraries, such as that at Amber, were inspired by Mughal practice. Why should a similar situation not **(p.188)** obtain in the case of Braj court poetry? If this offends common-sense notions that Hindi must be Hindu, it is because that common sense is anachronistic, and largely based on nationalist thinking.

Indo-Muslim communities had already contributed many beginning points in Hindi literary history, not least of which is the first extant work of Avadhi literature: *Candāyan* by Maulana Daud.[80] That they should also play a pivotal role in the invention and early development of the *rītigranth* genre is fitting, since one function of these manuals was to be gateways into Indian literature for non-specialists. Although most of the *content* of Braj *rītigranth*s derives from *alaṅkāraśāstra*, a thousand-year-old tradition of Sanskrit literary theory, the *rītigranth* form—a truncated, relatively simple work on (usually) a single topic of literary theory (whether *nāyikā*s or *rasa*s or *alaṅkāra*s), as opposed to a complex, wide-ranging scholarly discussion—attained prominence only in the early modern period, with significant impetus from Muslim patrons. Indeed, the first independent *nāyikābheda* work in the Sanskrit tradition, Bhanudatta's *Rasamañjarī* (Bouquet of literary emotion, c. 1500), was probably commissioned

by the Nizam Shah of Ahmednagar, which puts the very invention of the genre in an Indo-Muslim patronage context.[81] The *Chhand chhandān* and *Bhāv'o bhed* (on metrics and rhetoric, respectively) of the Sufi writer Khub Muhammad Chishti (1539–1614) are quasi *rītigranth*s in Old Gujarati, a dialect closely related to Braj.[82] It seems highly plausible that Muslim communities were the force behind the early adoption of the signature Hindi genre of Mughal-period courts, even if Hindu communities later developed it into a major vehicle of intellectual life.

The Brajbhasha *Kavikul*

Regardless of exactly how it all started, the spread of the *rīti kavikul* was both astonishing and far-reaching. If one could take a snapshot of Indian courtly life, it would reveal that just about every king in the north and several in the Deccan had *rīti* poetry in his cultural repertoire by the turn of the eighteenth century (see map 2). Mughal and Rajput elites regularly sponsored Braj writers, and a growing network of itinerant poets transmitted literary styles and techniques from court to court. Since cultural historians of India know so little about the functioning of premodern literary communities, it is worth trying to reconstruct some of this picture, with the usual caveat that the data are unsatisfactory (although in this case not impossibly scarce).

A compelling designation that aptly encompasses both the classicism of *rīti* poets and the dynamism of their circulation is a term they used themselves: **(p.189)** *kavikul*. This collocation of *kavi*, poet, and *kul*, family, gestures toward an important, if little discussed, mechanism of community formation in the premodern period. The word is of Sanskrit origin, but it took on a new importance for Braj writers of the Mughal era. Early scholars of Bhasha *alaṅkāraśāstra*, including Kriparam and Keshavdas, were already using the term,[83] and for later theorists it became a demonstrably central concept. *Kavikul* can refer to both a conceptual and a physical community. In carefully researching and crafting their texts, *rīti* poets were in dialogue with their literary forefathers from the Sanskrit tradition, a *kavikul* of bygone days: they were deeply invested in the formulations of *alaṅkāraśāstra* stretching back over a millennium and concerned with developing a new body of Brajbhasha theory that would hold poets to the older standards and methods of classical literary composition while still permitting vernacular innovation. Simultaneously, *rīti* writers were also in conversation with contemporary peers, which signals another aspect of the term *kavikul*: as Braj poets embraced new trends and an expanded range of patronage opportunities, they forged a new and highly self-conscious vernacular community of poet-scholars.

This idea of a *kavikul* can in some cases be understood absolutely literally. Recall the family connections linking Bihari to Kulapati Mishra, and possibly even to Keshavdas. Presumably, once a poet established a foothold at a court, the chances were greater that one of his relatives could gain an entrée. Another notable case of a Brajbhasha *kavikul*—this one spectacularly peripatetic—is the

Tripathi family: Matiram Tripathi, Bhushan Tripathi, and Chintamani Tripathi, whom Hindi tradition remembers as brothers. Striking correspondences such as their birthplace (Tikvanpur, near modern Kanpur), connections between patrons, probable instances of textual borrowing, and the frequent juxtaposition of their names in premodern works confirm the reliability of the consensus on this point.[84] Briefly tracing a few additional details about the lives and works of these three poets, a "*kavikul*" in an ultra-literal sense, can serve as a springboard for further discussion of the other, more abstract notion of a *kavikul*—the extensive community of Braj court poets that rose to prominence in seventeenth-century India—and yield insight into how it functioned.

Concerning Matiram, we know regrettably little with certitude. Once again, the Mughal portion of a *rīti* poet's attributed oeuvre poses difficulty. A short collection of *dohā*s that goes by the name *Phūlmañjarī* (Bouquet of flowers) contains a colophon that claims the work to have been commissioned by Jahangir (r. 1605–27). The last verse of a work is easily interpolated, however, and such a provenance seems suspiciously early given Matiram's much more securely dated *Lalitlalām*, which must have been written after 1658 since it mentions the succession struggle that began that year.[85] His *Rasrāj* and *Satsaī* **(p.190)** are well substantiated as authentic but undated and undateable. The former is a major treatise on *alaṅkāraśāstra*, far more comprehensive (and less concerned with Mughal politics) than the *Lalitlalām* that he wrote for Bhao Singh of Bundi. The *Satsaī*, which shares the same title and format as Biharilal's more famous poetry compilation, is an outstanding collection of seven hundred *muktaka* verses. Intriguingly, one of these is a tribute to the Maratha king Shivaji, the patron of Matiram's brother Bhushan; other verses from the same work laud one "Bhognath," about whom nothing is known, but he is the likely patron.[86] An *alaṅkārpañcāśikā* (Fifty verses on ornament, 1690) is dedicated to Prince Jnancand of Kumaon, which suggests that he migrated north to the hills late in life.[87] We can, in the end, confirm little about Matiram beyond the fact that he was a fine poet and literary theorist who traveled extensively; he also shows occasional interest in recording aspects of the political life of his day.

The historical record is slightly better preserved when it comes to Matiram's brother Bhushan, who is famous in the annals of Hindi literary history (especially nationalist literary history) as the Braj court poet of the Maratha king Shivaji (r. 1674–80). In his principal work, the *Śivrājbhūṣaṇ* (Ornament to King Shivaji), a *rītigranth* on the subject of *alaṅkāra*s, Bhushan reveals how he joined the throng of *gunī*s who presented themselves at the court:

> Shivaji built his capital there [at Raigarh], having defeated all the Turks.
> He set his heart on acts of munificence,
> and his fame spread throughout the world.
> From every region talented men (*gunī*) arrived, seeking favor.

Among them was a poet called Bhushan.…
Having listened carefully to good poets,
and understanding something of the path of poets (*kachuka samujhi kavina ko pantha*),
Bhushan was inspired to write poetry ornamented with figures of speech.
He composed the beautiful work *Ornament to King Shivaji*.

The last line contains an almost untranslatable play on the word *bhūṣaṇ*, which simultaneously references the poet, the title of his book, and the *alaṅkāra*s of classical poetry.[88]

Bhushan wrote his *Śivrājbhūṣaṇ* in the momentous year 1673 (the text is clearly dated by the author himself), when preparations were underway for Shivaji's coronation. One of this Deccan king's pivotal strategies for asserting his royal worthiness was to align himself with a transregional Rajput court culture that had developed over the preceding generations. Another concern was an ancestry problem that threatened to derail his coronation: Shivaji was **(p.191)** not a Kshatriya as required by classical political thought. This proved not to be insuperable, however. Shivaji postponed the coronation until 1674 and hired Gaga Bhatt, a celebrated pandit, who was able to trace the Maratha king's ancestry back to the Sisodiyas of Mewar, the highest ranking Rajput clan.[89]

Knowledge of the king's genealogical obstacles lends a special significance to the *vaṃśāvalī* of the Bhonsles (the Maratha family from which Shivaji hailed) that Bhushan provides in the opening to *Śivrājbhūṣaṇ* and is yet further evidence, should it be needed, that *rīti* literature was an important instrument of statecraft for regional kings of the day. Some highlights from Bhushan's genealogy of the Maratha king are as follows:

The solar race reigns, adorning the earth,
in which Lord Vishnu, slayer of the demon Kamsa,
took birth again and again.
A heroic king was born in that race,
who gave his head to Lord Shiva,
and thus took the title “Sisodiya.”[90]
In that family all the kings were graced by good fortune.
A protector of the earth was born among them,
the great Mal Makarand [Maloji, Shivaji's grandfather].…
He was a close companion of the Nizam Shah [of Ahmednagar],
a pillar of the Devagiri fort.…
Bhushan says, To him was born King Shahji, an ornament to the world;
all the kings remained in fear of him day and night.…
Just as Rama was the son of Dasharatha, and Krishna of Vasudeva,
So the illustrious king Shivaji was born of Shahji.
When Shivaji was born, Brahmans and gods delighted,

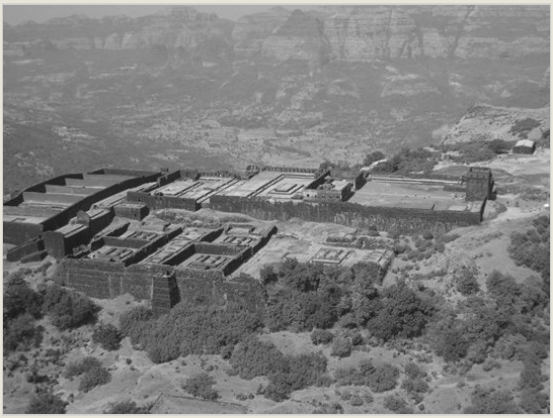
the *kaliyuga* was over,
the arrogance of the *mlecchas* was checked.
The very day he graced this earth,
the Bhonsle crushed the spirit of his enemies....
Bhushan says, It was child's play for him to vanquish forts....
In his boyhood, he captured Bijapur and Golkonda,
with the onset of youth he conquered the emperor of Delhi.[91]

Taking some cues, it seems, from his brother Matiram, court poet to the Bundi kings, Bhushan goes on to give an elaborate, idealizing description of Shivaji's capital at Raigarh in the familiar *nagara-varṇana* genre. The opening verse stresses the grandeur of Shivaji's fort at Raigarh (figure 5.2), as impressive as it was impregnable:

(p.192) The court of Shivaji, son of Shahji, was splendid as Indra's.
Bhushan says, seeing its riches, Kubera felt ashamed.
Raigarh encompasses all three worlds.
The water of its moats reaches down to the netherworld;
the fort towers above, illuminated by the luster of the heavens.[92]

Bhushan then begins his treatment of *alaṅkāraśāstra*—this too perhaps a technique adapted from his brother's book—that uses the *rītigranth* genre as a forum for political poetry, the tenor of which may already be evident from phrases such as “the arrogance of the *mlecchas* was checked” and “he conquered the emperor of Delhi.”[93]

No less arresting than the style or content of the work is its provenance. How did Bhushan Tripathi, a Braj poet whose family hailed from the midlands of North India, find himself in the Deccan alongside Marathi and Sanskrit writers as one of Shivaji's coterie of *gunīs*?[94] That Sanskrit, Marathi, or even Persian writers (Shivaji is himself the author of a major epistolary corpus in Persian) might have been in attendance at Shivaji's court comes as no great surprise, but it required a dramatic change in Hindi's prestige factor for a Braj



(p.193) poet to thus reach a southern audience, receiving a generous remuneration that would command the admiration, indeed envy, of future generations of writers.[95] That the Maratha king should have bestowed his favor upon Bhushan is an index of a much broader cultural trend: not just a particular poet, but a whole language and literary culture had found favor. It is hard to think of a more telling index of Brajbhasha's prestige than for it to be adopted as a cultural style far beyond the region where Hindi

was spoken as a mother tongue. Brajbhasha was becoming the new cosmopolitan idiom of its day and an important component of a pan-Rajput court culture. To be suitably royal, Shivaji needed the correct genealogy, but he also needed *rīti* poetry.

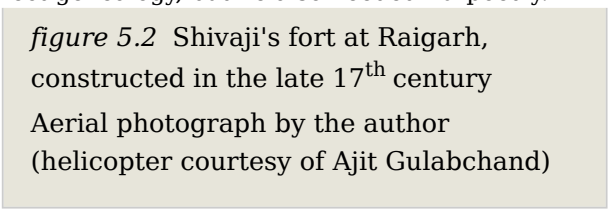


figure 5.2 Shivaji's fort at Raigarh, constructed in the late 17th century
Aerial photograph by the author (helicopter courtesy of Ajit Gulabchand)

Further details about Bhushan's stay at the Maratha court are unavailable, but we can track his ghostly footprints in a few other localities. He seems to have begun his career at the court of an obscure raja, Rudrashah Solanki of Chitrakut, located south of modern Lucknow on the border between Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. There, the poet tells us, he was awarded the title “Bhūṣaṇ” (ornament),[96] which was so thoroughly to eclipse his given name that the Hindi tradition came to know him only by this sobriquet. At another unspecified moment in his career, Bhushan appears to have traveled to Panna in what is today eastern Madhya Pradesh, which was then under the rule of Chatrasal, yet another regional king who actively sponsored Braj poets. That Bhushan visited Chatrasal's court is a logical conclusion to draw from the ten surviving verses in honor of the famous rebel leader from Bundelkhand, which have been collected in *Chatrasāldaśak* (Decade on Chatrasal).[97] Other places Bhushan may have visited and patrons for whom he wrote are suggested, if not proven conclusively, by the many *phuṭkal* (miscellaneous) poems that bear his *chāp* (poetic signature). Attributed to Bhushan are freestanding panegyric verses to several Rajput royalty, including Mirza Raja Jai Singh, his son Ram Singh, Aniruddh Singh (r. 1682–95) and Buddh Singh (r. 1696–1735) of Bundi, and King Avadhut Singh of Rewa (1700–55).[98] Bhushan may not have personally sought patronage at the courts of all these kings. He may have encountered some at the courts of others, or have been imagined to do so by later redactors. Regardless, Bhushan evidently had a remarkably cosmopolitan life—taking him across modern Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh, and farther south to the Deccan—that would have been unthinkable for an earlier Hindi poet like Keshavdas.

Chintamani, assumed to be the eldest of the Tripathi brothers, was the most peripatetic of them all. Although shockingly little known to Hindi scholars today, Chintamani moved in all the courtly literary circles that mattered in seventeenth-century India: Mughal, Rajput, and Deccani. In the last chapter, we were also able to track some of his movements in elite Indo-Muslim patronage **(p.194)** settings; it has been conjectured that *Rasvilās*, his first *rītigranth*, was written at the court of Shah Jahan. He can be connected to Kavindracharya Sarasvati, who interceded with Shah Jahan to abrogate the pilgrimage tax: when the Braj *kavikul* feted the pandit, it was Chintamani who contributed seventeen praise addresses, more verses than any other poet, for the occasion.[99] Recall how he also received a warm reception in the *maḥfil* of Sayyid Rahmatullah, diwan of Jahanabad, whose knowledge of *rīti* poetic systems betokened his literary connoisseurship. Indo-Muslim communities in the Deccan, too, were

reading and evaluating handbooks on Indian *alaṅkāraśāstra*, a process to which Chintamani actively contributed when he moved to Golkonda, where he translated into Brajbhasha a Sanskrit aesthetics treatise that drew inspiration from the Sanskrit *ālaṅkārika* Bhanudatta: Akbar Shah's *Śṛṅgāramañjarī* (Bouquet of passion, c. 1670).[100] Chintamani's tenure at Golkonda was evidently the culmination of a lengthy stay in the Deccan, for the poet had formerly served the father of Shivaji, Shahji Bhonsle, yet another striking instance of how the reach of the Braj *kavikul* extended well beyond North India. Shahji commissioned him to write the *Bhāṣāpiṅgal* (Vernacular prosody, c. 1662), a treatise on metrics that would garner a massive readership in the following centuries.[101] Chintamani's presence at that court was also recorded in the mixed Sanskrit-Bhasha *kāvya* sponsored by Shahji: Jayarama's *Rādhāmādhavavilāsacampū*.[102]

The poet's last known work, the *Kavikulkalptaru* (Wish-fulfilling tree for the family of poets, c. 1670), a monumental treatise on *alaṅkāraśāstra*, some excerpts of which have already been discussed in chapter 3, is thought to have been produced not in the Deccan but at a minor Rajput court further north: that of Rudrashah Solanki in central India. The only published edition of the text, a lithograph from 1875, does not contain an attribution of patronage, but Shivsingh Sengar, the author of a pioneering Hindi literary history written in 1878, cites a dedication to Rudrashah Solanki of Chitrakut, which if authentic means that Chintamani shared this patron (as well as a connection to the Maratha court) with his brother Bhushan.[103] The most important specimen of Chintamani's *alaṅkāraśāstra* to survive (the *Kavittvicār*, which was much praised by Mir Ghulam Ali Azad in his biography of Hindi and Persian poets, the *Ma'āṣir al-kirām*, is not extant), the *Kavikulkalptaru* is a compendious, reasoned work that elegantly synthesizes the major arguments of classical literary theory. Note how the idea of a *kavikul* was so central to Chintamani that he featured it in the title of his magnum opus.[104]

Mapping the careers of Matiram, Bhushan, and Chintamani Tripathi helps in visualizing the phenomenal spread of *rīti* literary culture during the second half of the seventeenth century. Just these three brothers can be traced to at least a dozen courts throughout northern, southern, western, and central India, **(p. 195)** and they typify a whole new class of circulating Braj court poets. Hundreds of writers constituted the *kavikul* of early modern India, as *rīti* poets became truly ubiquitous in both imperial centers and the regional courts of the realm.[105] *Rīti* poets were working in Mughal circles; scattered throughout Bundelkhand; in Bengal; at most of the courts of Rajasthan. Eventually, as with Indian painting traditions, *rīti* poetry developed an even more extensive clientele in both Hindu and Sikh courts in the hills. Braj poets were also attracting readership and patronage in the Deccan, at the Maratha court and Golkonda. Truly, Braj was now the language of an extended “family”of poets.

The cultivation of Braj literature well beyond the domain of its currency as a spoken language in North India may seem surprising at first, but we can identify a number of factors that explain this trend, especially for the Deccan. The popularity of Hindi far to the south of its traditional linguistic zone is readily comprehensible if we recall that as early as the fourteenth century, the southern forays of the Sultanate armies had carried North Indians, and with them their language, to the Deccan. Also in place was a long-standing tradition of itinerant Marathi poets who moonlighted as Hindi writers. The *sant* poets Namdev (1350?) and Tukaram (b. 1598) are famous examples, but bilingualism along this particular literary frontier was quite common.[106] That the Mughal court was on occasion stationed in southern cities such as Burhanpur and Aurangabad also contributed to Hindi transregionalism. For all we know, the Braj poetry of Rahim and Jaswant Singh could have been composed while these generals were camped in the Deccan fighting the Mughal wars. It is telling that Bhao Singh of Bundi, Jaswant Singh, and Jai Singh, all major patrons or writers of *rīti* literature from the key *manṣabdārī* courts, served together in these southern military campaigns. And it was in the south that the poet Vrind from the following generation, who was sponsored by both Mughal and Rajput courts (he later took up residence in Dhaka), wrote several of his works.[107]

A more general factor in the mobility of Braj poets was Mughal political expansion and the peripatetic nature of the Mughals' own ruling style, which favored the development of the networks of circulating people and texts that enabled *rīti* literary culture to flourish. The tendency toward cultural emulation among rulers has already been mentioned. Whereas for the kings of classical India Sanskrit *kāvya* was an index of courtly status, in the early modern era, Rajput and Mughal court cultures—which now included Braj literati—were the high-status transregional styles. Thus, literary Braj was never limited to one community or place—certainly not the geographical place from which the language is believed to hail. Indeed, the circulation of Brajbhasha belies its very name, "language of the Braj area." The literary salons of India were populated by large numbers of traveling court poets; as Bhikharidas once remarked, "one need **(p.196)** not live in Braj to write in Braj."[108] An overt theorization of Brajbhasha as a cosmopolitan language of letters may have awaited the perspicacity of that eighteenth-century *rīti* writer, who often made interesting observations about the language practices of his day, including those of his own court—Pratapgarh in remote Avadh—but for seventeenth-century poets like Chintamani, Vrind, and Jaswant Singh, who moved between North India and the Deccan, between Mughal and subimperial courts, and between Persianate and Indic milieus, this Braj transregionalism was a matter not just of theory but of practice. When *rīti* poets traveled from court to court, from city to city, they participated in their community intellectually and also enacted it physically by traversing space and taking along their texts, their ideas, and other forms of cultural capital.

The circulation of poets and texts across a broad geographical range had once been the defining characteristic of Sanskrit cultural space.[109] More recently, with the spread of Indo-Muslim rule, Persian was cultivated as a major transregional language. Such cosmopolitanism is thought to characterize only classical languages, and much of this study has been concerned with the rise of Brajbhasha literature as a process of vernacularization. But as the Braj *kavikul* gained an enormous following in far-flung courtly circles due to the favorable patronage opportunities available in Mughal India, the language also underwent cosmopolitanization. The brothers Tripathi serve as a paradigmatic case for how Braj texts and practices—and, naturally, the court intellectuals who created them—began to move in a much larger world and define a new cultural space during the early modern period. These were the *gunī*s, the "talented" professionals, without whom the very existence of court culture was impossible.

Literary Communities and the Reproduction of Tradition

Much evidence about the Brajbhasha *gunī*s of early modern India projects the image of a network of like-minded writers who shared literary presuppositions, practices, and courtly predilections across vast spaces, as when Jaswant Singh invoked the fellowship of skilled vernacular literati in the colophon of his *Bhāṣābhūṣaṇ*. Similar references to literary community are ubiquitous in *rīti* literature, as two examples from the works of the Tripathi brothers demonstrate. In the colophon of his *Rasrāj*, Matiram remarks,

> I have composed this new work, *The Primary Rasa*, for the delectation of connoisseurs. May the community of master poets understand my work and take pleasure from it.
> **(p.197)** *Samujhi samujhi saba rījhihaiṃ, sajjana sukabi samāja*
> *Rasikana ke rasa ko kiyo, nayo grantha rasarāja*[110]

In a more technical verse by Bhushan, the poetic community is invoked as a means of authorizing the writer's definition:

> When two separate objects resemble each other and cannot be told apart
> Bhushan says, The community of poets calls this the rhetorical device of "similarity."
> *Bhinna rūpa aru sadṛsa meṃ, bheda na jānyau jāya*
> *Tāhi kahata "sāmānya" haiṃ, Bhūṣana kavisamudāya*[111]

If these references to literary community were merely sporadic, they might be passed over as merely formulaic expressions. It was always something of a trope for Indian writers to address the *kavikul*, often with a request that their errors be overlooked.[112] Sometimes these expressions also acted as "verse-fillers."[113] But the sheer number of such references, especially when combined with the prodigious number of poets and *rītigranth*s, proclaims across the gap of

centuries the pride of an articulate and self-aware literary movement that was confident in its expertise.

These formulations prompt questions about the boundaries of the *rīti* community and the mechanisms by which poetry and literary values were shared among its members. The focus of this book has been almost exclusively on the elite social spheres of Brajbhasha literary culture, with an emphasis on its courtly heritage. *Rīti* poetry was in fact much wider in appeal and social basis, its audience including members of the nobility, the intelligentsia, soldiers, and merchant classes. Banarsidas, a prolific author resident in Agra who was active in the vernacular *kavikul* toward the middle of the seventeenth century, speaks of his immersion as a youth in the formal disciplines of poetry such as metrics and *alaṅkāra*, clear evidence of the accessibility to Jain merchants of *rīti* literary culture from an early point in the tradition.[114] By the late eighteenth century, *rīti* literature, perhaps via some kind of "trickle-down" effect, had permeated much of Indian society.[115]

A rare chance to observe how the *kavikul* came to operate outside of courtly contexts is the opening to the unpublished *Sarassār* (Essence of the aesthetic) of Ray Shivdas, who provides a lively account of a gathering of Brajbhasha poets that took place in Agra in 1737 under the direction of the Braj scholar Surati Mishra:

> In Agra there was once a meeting of the poets' community (*kavisamāja*).
> **(p.198)** Those who had a penchant for poetry came and met with glad hearts.
> Together the wise poets resolved to create a new book,
> excited by the prospect of new categories (*nae bheda rasa ṭhāna*?)
> The poets collectively shared their ideas,
> each according to his ability, mindful of the literary system (*lahi rīti*).
> With pleasure, all who were present listed the possible categories.
> To the extent of their knowledge (*apanī mati paramāna so*),
> they set out the extensive range of categories (*bheda vistāra*)
> When poets perceived an error they would correct it.
> The poets were of differing opinions, but wise authorities presided,
> in keeping with whose opinions this new book was composed.[116]

Shivdas specifically references the concept of a poets' community, while also using many of the technical terms associated with *rīti* literature. A detailed awareness of the plethora of classical poetics formed the core knowledge that allowed the members of the *kavikul* to be in dialogue with one another and participate in a system of meanings intelligible to all. Literary values were authorized by consensus: poets gathered together to assess the continuing viability of their *rīti* literary system, reconfigured elements as necessary, and also proposed some new formulations. Although too much remains unclear about

the mechanisms of premodern literary culture, similar evidence from music contexts of the seventeenth century suggests that such gatherings among aficionados might have been routine.[117]

Another means of achieving a widespread consensus about literary norms was education. Although few educational records survive from the precolonial period, *rītigranth*s were clearly an important component of the curriculum. That some *rīti* manuals had an educational mandate is not in question: the *lakṣaṇ*s of these texts are peppered with imperatives and vocatives that directly address the audience. Such vestiges of oral culture intimate that some of these texts might be the formalized lecture notes of early modern teachers. Keshavdas, as already remarked, repeatedly uses the word "Pravin" in his *Kavipriyā*, as though calling out to his student Pravin Ray. Also evoking a teaching context are phrases like *kabikula*, *tajahu prasaṅga* (Community of poets, avoid [such] scenarios!), and *sunahu*, *sakala kabirāja* (Listen, all you master poets!).[118] One can almost picture the author addressing students in a classroom. Nor is there a shortage of evidence that *rīti* poets served as teachers. Kulapati Mishra taught not only Raja Ram Singh Kachhwaha but also some of the palace women and was himself taught by Jagannatha Panditaraja, author of a Sanskrit *rītigranth* of sorts (if a highly complex one). Vrind was probably a teacher of the Mughal **(p. 199)** Prince Azim us-Shan, as well as—or so seems likely from the context and content of *Śṛṅgārśikṣā*—the family of the governor of Ajmer.[119] Udaynath Kavindra, the court poet to King Gurudatt Singh of Amethi, and Mohanlal Mishra of the Charkhari court mention that they wrote *rītigranth*s for the education of their own sons.[120] Occasionally evidence surfaces about more formal establishments, such as the Sanskrit school founded by Mirza Raja Jai Singh. There were also Brajbhasha poetry schools.

One remarkable institution was the Brajbhasha *pāṭhśālā* of Bhuj, founded in 1749 by Lakhpati Sinha (r. 1741–61), the raja of Kutch. The catchment area for the school was vast: it naturally included parts of the traditional Hindi belt as well as western Gujarat, where the school was located, but students were also drawn from much farther afield, including the Marathi and Punjabi linguistic zones. Regional kings underwrote the five-year training program of some of the students, who were evidently sent there in preparation for the vocation of court poet. This particular school attracted diverse social groups, but especially clientele from the bardic castes.[121] Students were trained in the cosmopolitan techniques of *rīti kāvya*, as well as in regional literary styles like Dingal. They were taught singing, the preparation of manuscripts, and performing in the *samasyāpūrti* contests that rewarded virtuosity in extemporaneous composition, as well as less literary topics such as the military arts, medicine, and horsemanship.[122] It is difficult to say how typical the Bhuj *pāṭhśālā* was in the eighteenth century or whether its curriculum, which included works by Nanddas, Keshavdas, Sundar, Bihari, Kulapati Mishra, Jaswant Singh, and Vrind, among many others, is representative. That numerous manuscripts of all these

authors are well attested in western India from the early modern period suggests that it was not an exception. The broad social and geographical base of the student body, together with the very fact of a Braj school being founded in Gujarat, testifies to the transregional importance of this literary culture and hints at well-developed infrastructural mechanisms for its reproduction from generation to generation.

Conclusion

This and the preceding chapter have tracked the diverse constituencies of *rīti* literature as well as where it went, who transmitted it, and what kinds of cultural needs it served. We have studied the movement of *rīti* poets and their texts as an important development in its own right; along the way, we have also explored some of the literary publics and social spaces of premodern literary culture. Much social science theory used to explain both vernacularization and **(p.200)** "imagined communities," to use Benedict Anderson's term, has tended to focus on the modern period, emphasizing factors like print culture, the expansion of literacy, and a heightened cognition of and investment in national belonging.[123] None of these was an important factor in Brajbhasha's diffusion.

As evidence presented here has shown, this was a widely successful tradition that was exclusively a manuscript culture, written by a literate few although heard, appreciated, and disseminated by many more. The aesthetic world in which its exponents participated did not require allegiance to any specific geographical, religious, or political group. Many people partook of this culture, and all had their reasons and readings. Although a vastly important component of Brajbhasha literature—the Radha-Krishna narrative cycle—conjures up a localized Hindu world, the divine play of god among the cowherd communities of Vrindavan and Gokul, the circulation and readership of the Braj language was never exclusively tied to that region. Nor was it solely a carrier of Vaishnava sensibilities. Moreover, whereas Rajput painting traditions, which offer a useful visual parallel to *rīti* literature, are marked by and indeed classified in terms of regional styles such as "Mewar" and "Bundi," Brajbhasha court poetry maintained a remarkable uniformity of style and substance across regions.[124]

This uniformity reflects the growing cosmopolitanism of Hindi at the time, as well as the collective understanding of a broad-based *kavikul*. At the 1737 conference hosted in Agra, a group of Brajbhasha intellectuals came together to deliberate on theories of poetics, which shows how the components of the classical literary system were, quite literally, the focal point around which premodern scholars converged. In a teaching environment such as the Bhuj literary college, educational practices, literary canons, and textbooks helped to ensure the continuation of the system. But the *kavikul* was far more extensive than a single gathering of people at a particular court or school. The actual physical co-presence of poets, students, and scholars was not necessary for the constitution of a shared literary culture. It was a more abstract, conceptual

entity, a cognitive space where writers felt themselves to be part of a larger **(p. 201)** cultural network whether or not they actually met. The textbook genre favored by *rīti* poets, which invoked classical authority, illustrated the mechanisms of literary composition, and at the same time underwrote practices of connoisseurship, was particularly well suited for structuring a powerful sense of literary belonging within the confines of a manuscript culture. The most successful of these works, such as the *Rasikpriyā* of Keshavdas, were widely disseminated (and illustrated); thus, the will of the *kavikul* was also expressed through physical artifacts like manuscripts that extended beyond the chronological moment of a poet's lifetime as an enduring legacy. Whatever moment of fame literary theories and compositions enjoyed in the present, they also survived in cultural memory through the recognition of the *kavikul* as it sifted and selectively remembered, bestowing the prize of long-standing recognition in the canon. This cultural capital translated into the continued reproduction of manuscripts and the generation of poetry collections and commentaries by future connoisseurs and scholars.

The *kavikul*, in short, was a complex structure of cultural power. At the center of early modern literary life across greater Hindustan was a well-defined knowledge system in which poets participated, a set of ground rules that were sanctioned by community consensus and subject to periodic reformulation. It was a mechanism by which writers transmitted cherished cultural traditions. These traditions would not, however, be allowed to continue indefinitely. Radical shifts in the norms and practices of the *kavikul* during colonial rule and its nationalist aftermath subjected Brajbhasha literary culture to devastating interruptions, from which it would never recover.

Notes:

(1.) Desai 1990; Beach 1992; Joffee 2005.

(2.) It was in Banaras in 1893 that the Nāgarī Pracāriṇī Sabha, an organization devoted to the propagation of Hindi in Devanagari script and one of the most important early institutions of the Hindi movement, was founded. Slightly later but no less influential was the Hindī Sāhitya Sammelan, founded in Allahabad in 1910. All the major literati of the day belonged to these institutions, and some of the same people who were active in them, such as Pandit Madanmohan Malviya in the case of Banaras Hindi University, lobbied for the foundation of the new universities and programs where academic approaches to Hindi would take root.

(3.) On the textual problems and dating of the *Pṛthvīrājrāso*, see Dvivedi 1957: 54–57; Talbot 2007: 26–28.

(4.) Pingal, named after a shadowy figure who purportedly contributed to both Sanskrit metrics and Prakrit grammar, is a synonym for Braj, often used in western India in contrast to Dingal, a literary dialect of Marwari. Typical of the

vacillation that attends the linguistic categorization of some texts from this period is Jinavijay's description of the *Binhairāso* of Maheshdas, a historical poem that foregrounds the succession struggle of Shah Jahan's sons, as "*brajbhāṣā-prabhāvit ḍiṇgal … jisko ki rājasthānī hī mānnā cāhie*" ([a work of] Brajbhasha-inflected Dingal, which should be considered Rajasthani). Jinavijay 1966: 2.

(5.) The *Pṛthvīrājrāso* exhibits a classic profile of Braj-Rajasthani admixture. See Talbot 2007: 32 n. 49. On differentiating the literary languages of early modern western India, especially Dingal and Pingal, see Kamphorst 2008: 32–36. On the language topography of precolonial India more broadly, with its "fuzzy boundaries" between dialects, see Kaviraj 1992: 39–41.

(6.) To loosely characterize them, Charans were agricultural professionals trained as oral bards; Bhats were literate poets; Bhils were singers from western India's nomadic communities. A recent study of Dingal poetry with a special emphasis on its diverse caste groups is Kamphorst 2008.

(7.) Paradigmatic is Coomaraswamy 1916. Useful reflections on the historiography of Rajput painting with particular reference to conceptualizing its relationship to Mughal styles are Desai 1990; Diamond 2000: 42–46; Aitken 2010: 11–14.

(8.) Joffee 2005: 63–79; Talbot 2007: 23–24.

(9.) "Ly donques et rely premierement (ò Poëte futur) fueillete de main nocturne et journelle les exemplaires grecz et latins: puis me laisse toutes ces vieilles poësies francoyses aux Jeuz Floraux de Thoulouze et au Púy de Rouan: comme rondeaux, ballades, vyrelaiz, chantz royaulx, chansons, et autres telles episseries, qui corrumpent le goust de nostre langue, et ne servent si non à porter temoingnaige de notre ignorance. Du Bellay 1904: 201–3.

(10.) Useful theorizations of the concepts of distinction and the cultural field are respectively laid out in Bourdieu 1984, 1993.

(11.) When Akbar promoted Man Singh to the rank of 7000 in 1601, Man Singh was for a time ranked higher than any other Mughal noble. Blochmann, in *Ā'īn-i akbarī*, 1:363.

(12.) For details of the *Mānaprakāśa*, see Dube 1991. The literary patronage of Man Singh as well as the less traceable heritage of the courts of his predecessors at Amber is discussed by G.N. Sharma (1970, 50–51) and G.N. Bahura (1976, 5–34). Unfortunately, the general inaccessibility of the Jaipur palace archives to modern scholars precludes a comprehensive account of Amber literary history.

(13.) Gang's *praśasti* poems to Man Singh are in *Gaṅggranthāvalī*, pp. 244–48; compare Keshavdas's *Vīrsiṃhdevcarit*, 1.2 and *Jahāngīrjascandrikā*, v. 65.

(14.) Amrit Rai's text is unambiguously dated to the twenty-ninth regnal year of Akbar (i.e., 1585). Narottam's *Māncarit* does not refer to any event after Man Singh's founding of Rohtas, which means it could be as early as 1597. Cf. Bahura 1990: 20, 34.

(15.) *Māncarit*, v. 19.

(16.) Kolff 2002: 128. Keshavdas also includes Man Singh in a list of notable people who attended Bir Singh Deo's coronation. See *Vīrsiṃhdevcarit*, 33.15.

(17.) See *Māncarit*, vv. 19–53.

(18.) Bahura 1990: 34. The manuscript was copied in 1640.

(19.) He has been considered a “principal advisor” to the latter. Chandra 1989: 37. Some details of his military career are in *Ma’āṣir al-umarā*, Beveridge trans., 1:731–34.

(20.) Cort 1995 highlights Jain practices of manuscript collection.

(21.) Ziegler 1976 discusses several indicators of the transition to literacy among Rajasthani bards from the late sixteenth century, probably because they were exposed to new trends in Mughal historiography and, while Dingal traditions may date back to the thirteenth century, written records survive from only a much later period: from the sixteenth century onwards. Also see Kamphorst 2008: 43–45.

(22.) On the history of the *pothīkhāna*, see Bahura 1976: 12–21; Das (2000: 44) suggests that the library was founded during Man Singh's reign.

(23.) Bahura 1976: 38–39.

(24.) Das 2000: 44. I thank Patton Burchett for the reference.

(25.) Not all manuscripts of his *satsaī* contain a colophon dating the text to 1662. The relevant verse is printed in *Bihārīsatsaī*, v. 708.

(26.) Bihari's literary craftsmanship is discussed in Snell 1994b.

(27.) The original text of *Bihārīvihār*, edited by Shyamsundar Das, is reprinted by Sudhakar Pandey (1999: 32–35).

(28.) The general congruence of Mughal and Amber court culture in Jai Singh's time is well known. See, for instance, Asher and Talbot 2006: 211–13. Bhagirath Mishra mentions that Bihari learned Persian poetry and met with Shah Jahan, on

what grounds it is difficult to say (1973: 348). Bihari certainly uses Perso-Arabic vocabulary in striking ways. See Dewhurst 1915.

(29.) Bahura 1976: 39.

(30.) Cited by Vishnudatt Sharma (1970: 49 n. 1).

(31.) Kulapati also mentions Pingalacharya, Surdas, Alam, Gang, and Bihari. Ibid., 70–71.

(32.) Arguments in favor of the proposition are ibid., 48–52; Ganapaticandra Gupta 1972: 106–18; Vijaypal Singh 1993: 49–55. The influential scholar Vishvanathprasad Mishra had rejected the possibility (1966: 503).

(33.) Vishvanathprasad Mishra is just one of many scholars to note the Bundeli forms (1965a: 155, 179).

(34.) Ibid., 8–9.

(35.) Kulapati Mishra mentions his guru directly in a passage excerpted in Vishnudatt Sharma 1970: 55.

(36.) See Pollock 2001a: 404–12.

(37.) Kurma is a title of the Amber kings.

(38.) *Rasrahasya*, folio 2a, vv. 9–10 (*vijai mahala baiṭhe karata, bhāṣākavita vicāra, tahām hukuma kīno …* (*sahaja*?) *kūrama rāma kumāra/jitī devavāni pragaṭa hai kavitā kī ghāta, bhāṣā meṃ jo hoi to saba samujhaiṃ rasa bāta*). The ellipsis indicates a word obscured by an ink blot.

(39.) *Rasrahasya*, folio 84, v. 570 (*jite sāja haiṃ kavita ke māmaṭa kahe vaṣāni (bakhāni), te saba bhāṣā me kahe rasarahasya mai āni*).

(40.) “Many scholars were present there, as were numerous Hindi poets” (*hute tahāṃ paṇḍita bahuta, bhāṣā kavyau aneka*), cited by Vishnudatt Sharma 1970: 59.

(41.) The maharaja also sponsored Rajasthani poetry. Ladhraj, for instance, is an acclaimed Dingal poet associated with the courts of Jaswant Singh and Gaj Singh (Jaswant Singh's father). See Kamphorst 2008: 47–49.

(42.) Jaswant Singh's oeuvre and its manuscript and commentarial history are outlined by Vishnvanathprasad Mishra (1972: 31–51) and Kaliprasad Singh (2009: 30–37). Examples of his poetry are in chapter 2 of this book.

(43.) *Bhāṣābhūṣaṇ*, vv. 207, 209.

(44.) Kaliprasad Singh (2009: 24–26) provides a brief overview of writers said to be associated with Jaswant Singh's court. One wishes the evidence were more robust. Sudhir Sharma (1998: 10–11) discusses the association between Vrind and Jaswant Singh.

(45.) In a recusatio, a trope from Latin literature, the poet introduces his work with a diffident statement or even an overt disavowal of his competence as a writer.

(46.) See the discussion of “the slow-witted Hindi poet” at the beginning of chapter 1.

(47.) According to Geoffrey Lewis, seventeen of the thirty-six Ottoman Sultans wrote (generally Persian) poetry (1999: 11); on the centrality of poetry in ancient and medieval China, see Yu 2005.

(48.) Pollock 2006: 18–19, 514–24.

(49.) A suggestive description of how poetic performance was an integral part of the daily life of Rajput kings is Bahura 1983 3–7; cf. Bangha 2007: 312–14. Although their examples are drawn from eighteenth-century *rīti* texts, the practices are almost certainly generalizable for an earlier period.

(50.) Examples culled from Wagoner 1993: 90–94.

(51.) All three Mughal memoirs have been translated by Thackston: *Bāburnāmah*, *Jahāngīrnāmah*, and *Humāyūnnāmah* respectively.

(52.) *Akbarnāmah*, 1:270–71.

(53.) Rosalind O’Hanlon has suggested that this emphasis on the literary and aesthetic in royal circles may have something to do with forms of specifically Indian political culture, where kings projected power through close personal ties that could be better fostered through the moral and emotional codes of poetry and the bonding at literary gatherings than through political coercion (2007b: 368–69).

(54.) Ziegler 1976: 131–35; Sreenivasan 2007: 80–84.

(55.) *Naiṇsī rī khyāt*, 1:128–31. I thank Dalpat Rajpurohit for the reference.

(56.) See Talbot (forthcoming). Hada is a title of the Bundi kings.

(57.) The *terminus post quem* for the work is 1658, since the *Lalitlalām* mentions the war of succession between Aurangzeb and his brothers.

(58.) *Lalitlalām*, vv. 6–22.

(59.) Compare the descriptions of Amber and Rohtas in the *Māncarit* of Narottam (vv. 82–87, 100–120, 406–410); Orchha in the *Vīrsiṃhdevcarit* of Keshavdas (especially chaps. 16 through 18), and Raigarh in the *Śivrājbhūṣaṇ* of Bhushan (vv. 15–24), this last segment briefly referenced below.

(60.) Recall Keshavdas's injunctions from the *Kavipriyā* about how to describe a court, discussed in chapter 1.

(61.) "*Hinduna kī rākhī sarama…sāhi ko hukuma-paga paṅga bhau*." *Lalitlalām*, vv. 25–26. *Ma'āṣir al-umarā*, Beveridge trans., 1:408–9. The historian R.S. Mathur (1986: 81–83) is not inclined to believe the account given in the *Ma'āṣir al-umarā*, which was written more than a century later.

(62.) "*Sāhani sauṃ rana-raṅga maiṃ jītyo bakhta-bilanda*," and *"jisa jāni kai chatrina kauṃ rana-kāsī*." *Lalitlalām*, vv. 27, 33. On the succession struggle, cf. v. 195. Satrusal's death is also given brief attention in *Ma'āṣir al-umarā*, Beveridge trans., 1:405.

(63.) Omprakash Sharma (1983: 7) suggests other possible ways of resolving the compound in Matiram's title *Lalitlalām*, settling on *cāru–camatkār* (beautiful wonderment). That *Lalām* can mean "finest" as the second member of a compound is attested in Tulsi's *Rāmcaritmānas* 1.178.2 where Mandodari is described as "*parama sundarī, nārī-lalāma*" (supremely beautiful, the finest of women).

(64.) The patron is called "*lalitlalām*" in v. 250. Cf. v. 122, where Bhao Singh is described as *saina sobhā ke lalāma* (ornament that gives luster to the army).

(65.) Compare *Lalitlalām*, v. 103 with *Kavīndrakalpalatā*, p. 25, v. 19.

(66.) The Braj word *pānipa* means both water and luster.

(67.) *Lalitlalām*, v. 41.

(68.) Asher and Talbot deemphasize the importance of education among Rajput communities (2006: 214), but clearly *rīti* poets and their texts did play some kind of an educational role in these settings, while also generally promoting codes of elegance, civility, and gentlemanly comportment. Formal works of Sanskrit *śāstra* and *kāvya* similarly helped to foster a courtly ethos during the medieval period. See Ali 2004.

(69.) Such manuals were also common in Europe during the same period. A celebrated example is Castiglione's manual on etiquette, *Il Libro del Cortegiano* (The Book of the Courtier), discussed in Pugliese 2008. A sampling of French manuals on rhetoric is Goyet 1990.

(70.) Ziegler 1976: 133–34.

(71.) Kolff 2002: 73.

(72.) See chapter 1.

(73.) Also see the discussion of Bhushan's *Śivrājbhūṣaṇ* in chapter 2 and below, this chapter. Such texts from the *rīti* tradition are the focus of my forthcoming book on vernacular histories of the Mughal period.

(74.) McGregor 1968: 10. Several early modern writers, including Nanddas, even refer to scholarly communities that were no longer using Sanskrit. See McGregor 2003: 925.

(75.) See chapter 4.

(76.) Bhushan, for his part, worked for Shivaji, one of Aurangzeb's arch-rivals, who had tried his hand at *manṣabdārī* politics but then distanced himself. On the breakdown of Mughal-Maratha relations under Shivaji, see Gordon 1993: 70–80.

(77.) I am indebted to Cynthia Talbot for bringing the Braj *Rājvilās* to my attention. Mewar literary and architectural initiatives under Raj Singh are discussed in Joffee 2005: 95–123. On Rajasthani and Sanskrit literary patronage at Mewar, see various discussions by G. N. Sharma (1962: 198–99; 1965: 75, 83–84; 1968: 259; 1974: 116–17).

(78.) It is also possible, given the uneven publishing record for *rīti* manuscripts, that entire literary histories of Rajput courts are still waiting to be written. If two *Māncarit*s about the leading *manṣabdār* of their day were published only in 1990, then perhaps other important *rīti* texts from this period may still be brought to light.

(79.) Here I distinguish courtly poetry from *bhakti* literature and Braj song traditions, which both have demonstrably earlier links to the Braj *maṇḍal* and to Gwalior.

(80.) The defining role played by Indo-Muslims in North India's vernacular literary inauguration is recognized in McGregor 1984: 1–28; Shackle 1993: 281–282; Pollock 2006: 392–93; Busch 2011.

(81.) See Pollock 2009: xx–xxiii.

(82.) Faruqi 2003: 832.

(83.) *Hittaraṅginī*, v. 11; the colophon of Keshavdas's *Rasikpriyā* (16.14–16), which is translated in chapter 1, contains one of Keshavdas's invocations to the *kavikul*.

(84.) Vidyadhar Mishra outlines the arguments in favor of their fraternal ties (1990: 12–19). A fourth brother, Jatashankar Tripathi, is also mentioned in several sources, but he evidently chose a different line of work. The medieval Hindi consensus is also confirmed by the Persian writer Azad, whose biographies of Hindi poets were discussed in chapter 4.

(85.) It is suspicious that, aside from the final verse, no other *dohā* in the *Phūlmañjarī* contains Matiram's signature. To my mind, this collection of manifestly pedestrian poetry about flower types is not consistent with the more accomplished, certainly attributed works of the poet. Krishnabihari Mishra (1964: 174–75) wonders if Matiram could have written the work as a teenager and presented the composition to Jahangir at the Navroz festival held at the beginning of his sixteenth regnal year in 1621 (Jahangir here mentions the Nurafshan Garden, see *Jahāngīrnāmah*, Thackston trans, p. 359) but concedes that he is merely speculating. Jahangir was demonstrably interested in Indian flowers, but there is no compelling reason to link this or any other passage from the *Jahāngīrnāmah* to the *Phūlmañjarī*.

(86.) Shivaji is mentioned in v. 324; verses in praise of Bhognath are 612–13, 623, 643, 693–99, 701.

(87.) Krishnabihari Mishra excerpts a few of the verses from this (lost?) work (1964: 177–79), one of which contains an intriguing reference to vernacularization: "*saṃskirata ko artha lai, bhāṣā suddha bicāra*" (I have taken the Sanskrit meanings and carefully rendered them in Bhasha).

(88.) Excerpted from the opening to *Śivrājbhūṣaṇ*, vv. 24–25, 29. The last line reads, "*bhūṣaṇa bhūṣaṇamaya karata, siva bhūṣaṇa subha grantha*."

(89.) Gordon 1993: 87.

(90.) Here the poet inventively explains the exalted Mewar title "Sisodiya" by giving a Brajbhasha etymology: "*diyau īsa ko sīsa*" (gave his head to Lord [Shiva]).

(91.) *Śivrājbhūṣaṇ*, vv. 4–7, 9, 11–13.

(92.) Ibid., v. 15.

(93.) Examples of Bhushan's special blend of *praśasti* with satire were analyzed in chapter 2. Bhushan and his brother Matiram may have known the Sanskrit works *Pratāparudrīya* of Vidyanatha and the *Ekāvalī* of Vidyadhara (from the fourteenth-century Deccan), which similarly embed political encomium within works of rhetoric.

(94.) According to Rajmal Bora, there were three main literary languages in use at Shivaji's court: Sanskrit, Marathi, and Braj (1987: 35).

(95.) Bhikharidas remembers Bhushan (alongside Keshavdas and Birbal) as a poet whose literary success brought him great wealth: "*Ekai lahaiṃ bahusaṃpati kesava bhūṣaṇa jyoṃ barabīra baṣāī.*" *Kāvyanirṇay*, 1.10 (the full verse is excerpted in chapter 3).

(96.) *Śivrājbhūṣaṇ*, v. 28.

(97.) Vishvanathprasad Mishra considers only the six verses that contain the signature of the poet to be authentic (1994: 75–80). A connection between Chatrasal and Shivaji (and therefore a greater likelihood of overlap between their court poets) is recorded by the *rīti* poet and historian Lal in his *Chatraprakāś* (Light on Chatrasal, 1710?), who mentions a visit by Chatrasal to Shivaji's court in 1670. *Chatraprakāś*, pp. 88–89; also see Busch 2003: 243–53.

(98.) I have culled these names from Vishvanathprasad Mishra's discussion of Bhushan's possible patrons (1994: 93–105). Other not entirely certain verses attributed to Bhushan include addresses to Bajirao Peshwa, Aurangzeb, Dara Shikoh, Sawai Jai Singh II, Fateh Shah of Garhwal, Bhagvant Rai Khichi of Asothar, and Jnancand of Kumaon (also a patron of Matiram). See Divakar 1969: 124, 126, 133.

(99.) See chapter 4 and *Kavīndracandrikā*, vv. 68–84.

(100.) As noted in chapter 3, n. 58, the Sanskrit source text contains important evidence that members of the Golkonda court were reading two Braj authors from the North: Keshavdas and Sundar.

(101.) Krishna Divakar (1969: 8, 36) notes that this work (which goes by several names, including *Chandlatā*) is found in several scripts and was collected by the major libraries of premodern India (one copy is at Alwar). It has never been published.

(102.) *Rādhāmādhavavilāsacampū*, p. 275. An insightful contextualization of this *campū* is Guha 2004: 27–28.

(103.) See Divakar 1969: 47–48; Mishra 1990: 55–56.

(104.) Several later *rīti* works have comparable titles. Ramanand Sharma (2003: 16) mentions the *Kavikultilakprakāś* (Light of the forehead ornament of the family of poets, 1709) by King Himmat Singh of Amethi, who used the *takhalluṣ* "Mahipati." Better known is the *Kavikulkaṇṭhābharaṇ* (Necklace of the family of poets) of Dulah Trivedi (fl. 1750).

(105.) A reader interested in the phenomenal explosion of Hindi courtly texts might begin by looking to Tivari 1972: 338–45; Snatak 1973: 132–36.

(106.) On Namdev, see Callewaert and Lath 1989; Novetzke 2008; more general studies are by Krishna Divakar (1969) and Vinaymohan Sharma (2005).

(107.) See the entry on Bhao Singh Hada in *Ma'āṣir al-umarā*, Beveridge trans., 1:406. According to Cheler (1973: 75–82), Vrind's *Akṣarādi dohe*, *Nainbattīsī*, and *Bhāvpañcāśikā* were composed in the Deccan in 1685–86.

(108.) "*Bṛjabhāṣā heta Bṛjabāsa hī na anumāno*," *Kāvyanirṇay*, 1.16. Note the poet's use of *yamaka*, made possible by the similarity between the words *bhāṣā* (language) and *bāsa* (residence).

(109.) Pollock 1996 and 2006: 115–34.

(110.) *Rasrāj*, v. 427.

(111.) *Śivrājbhūṣaṇ*, v. 281.

(112.) Typical are *Rasikpriyā*, 6.57 and *Kāvyanirṇay*, 1.7.

(113.) In the second example by Bhushan, the phrase "*Bhūṣana kavisamudāya*" conveniently has the eleven-*mātrā* (count) metrical weight to fill out the last quarter of the *dohā*.

(114.) See, for example, *Ardhkathānak*, 168–69, 177, 455.

(115.) R. S. McGregor has suggested that court poetry underwent a process of popularization in the late eighteenth century (1984: 155, 199). Compare the remarks of Sudhakar Pandey (1969: 90). Also see the discussion of *Selections from the Popular Poetry of the Hindoos* (1814), compiled by Thomas Broughton, in chapter 6 of this book.

(116.) This portion of Ray Shivdas's unpublished *Sarassār* is excerpted in Gupta 1982: 21–22.

(117.) Aurangzeb's minister Faqirullah reported that in the days of Man Singh Tomar of Gwalior (r. 1486–1516), various experts had gathered to codify *rāgas*, and a book known as *Mānkutūhal* (Investigations of Man Singh) was compiled from the proceedings. *Tarjumah-i mānkutūhal va risālah-i rāgdarpan*, pp. 10–13.

(118.) *Kavipriyā*, 3.14, 15.

(119.) See chapter 4.

(120.) In the colophon of his *Rascandroday* (Moonrise on *rasa*, first quarter of the seventeenth century) Udaynath Kavindra says, "Kavindra had a son named Dulah, and he conceived the idea to write the *Rascandroday* for his education" (*tāsu tanaya dūlaha bhayo, tāke paṛhibe hetu/rasacandrodaya taba kiyo, kavi kavindra kari cetu*, v. 282, cited in Ramanand Sharma 2003: 20). Dulah

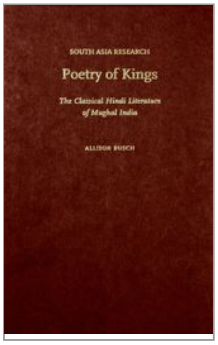
Trivedi is the author of the *Kavikulkaṇṭhābharaṇ*, mentioned above. On Mohanlal Mishra's *Śṛṅgārsāgar*, see Asnani 1997: 28. Francesca Orsini (2002b: 45) found similar evidence of such “family saṃskāras” among Brahman literatteurs of the early twentieth century.

(121.) The alumni included Dalpat Ram, one of the early modernizing Gujarati poets of the mid-nineteenth century. See Mallison 2011: 173–75.

(122.) This paragraph on the Braj *pāṭhśālā* at Bhuj draws on Asnani 1996 and Mallison 2011.

(123.) Anderson 1991; Lodge 1993: 128–35.

(124.) One does see some regional inflections in Brajbhasha usages. The Bundeli touches in the work of Keshavdas and Bihari were mentioned above. Another example (and many more could be given) is the language of Sudan, court poet to three generations of Bharatpur kings, whose Brajbhasha exhibits Khari Boli and Punjabi features. See McGregor 1984: 197.



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The Fate of Rīti Literature in Colonial India

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Abstract and Keywords

This chapter examines the fate of *rīti* literature under the new political and epistemological regimes of colonialism and nationalism. Radical upheavals were spurred by new nineteenth-century developments in print culture and the textbook industry stewarded by colonial officials, along with reforms in language and literary tastes. Hindi modernity meant that new genres such as the essay and the novel began to supplant the older Brajbhasha verse forms. By the early twentieth century, many Hindi intellectuals, such as Mahavir Prasad Dvivedi, were publicly distancing themselves from traditional Indian poetics and repudiating Brajbhasha, Hindi's preeminent literary dialect, in favor of Khari Boli. Also considered here is the nationalist vision of Hindi literary history epitomized by the writings of Ramchandra Shukla. Under the new historiography dictated by the discourse of Hindi modernity, *bhakti* literature became the language's salvageable past and Hindi's once thriving courtly traditions would now carry the taint of medieval decadence.

Keywords: Mahavir Prasad Dvivedi, Ramchandra Shukla, colonialism, nationalism, reform, print culture, Khari Boli, Brajbhasha, modernity, historiography

> Science and literature are in a progressive state of decay among the natives of India.
>
> —Lord Minto, 1811

> Though nearly everything in India after Shankara may be said to have entered a state of decline, nonetheless literature should be regarded as an exception.… Our depth of literary expression is excellent—we just do not have the range of subjects of English. After living in a state of decline and dwelling upon our inferiority in every discipline, our self-reliance has sunk to such depths that nothing of our own seems of any value when compared to its Western counterpart.
>
> —Mishra brothers, 1913

A New Order

We may already know the unhappy ending of the story of the fateful meeting of Brajbhasha poetry and colonialism—Brajbhasha is the losing party—but no account of *rīti* literature can conclude without explaining the circumstances of its demise. Examining the moment of transition to colonial rule will function as a prelude to understanding the changes to the literary field under print culture and the new conceptions of language and prescriptions for literary excellence that were a direct result of British cultural hegemony. Much of this **(p.203)** ground has been well traversed in other studies.[1] Here the aim is to provide an overview of modern Hindi literary history that highlights the points most germane to understanding the fate of *rīti* genres and styles as the tides of colonialism and later nationalism washed over them. Exponents of the old order would increasingly give way in their losing battle with reformist Hindi intellectuals who advocated radically new approaches to literature. Brajbhasha had more than three strikes against it in the serious game of culture that played out amid the conceptual revolutions (or tyrannies) of the nineteenth century: the morality police of the Victorian era who sought to proscribe sensuality; the crystallization of colonial and later nationalist ideas about India's cultural weakness under “Muslim” rule; a general unease about courtliness and literary ostentation in the face of Protestantism and utilitarianism; and new social and educational endeavors directed at India's uplift. The very language of Brajbhasha would come under serious threat in the early twentieth century, to be abruptly replaced within a few decades by a newly standardized Khari Boli dialect, the style of Hindi now in wide use today. The birth of Hindi literary historiography played a role, too, which was constrained by colonial and nationalist cultural logic. The very idea that Hindi literature has separate and unequal literary eras marked by *bhakti* and *rīti*, which is taken for granted today, is an entirely modern notion proposed by Ramchandra Shukla, one of the founding fathers of modern Hindi academic study. The basis of this conception and its implications for the future reception of Hindi's precolonial past need to be carefully examined.

Rīti Literature on the Eve of Colonialism

The eighteenth century was a time of consolidation but also continued invention in the *rīti* tradition. The emphasis of this study has been on the early Mughal period, with the spotlight on the imperial court and the rise of new forms of cultural expression among leading Rajput polities of the seventeenth century. A separate book-length study would be required to do justice to the complexities of the later *rīti* period, an age of political repositioning in which *rīti* poets were in even greater demand. New *rītigranth*s continued to be composed, as well as *prabandha*s on both classical and topical themes. As noted in chapter 3, eighteenth-century writers such as Baldev Mishra exhibited more confidence about the status of Bhasha, increasingly turning to Hindi authorities rather than ancient Sanskrit ones for validation. More than two centuries of continuous literary production and refinement had given the members of the Braj *kavikul* a tremendous sense of pride in their own achievements. By any measure this was **(p.204)** a highly rational and sophisticated literary community with well-developed canons and critical protocols, although Brajbhasha writers proved ever-versatile, continuing to adapt creatively to new circumstances and patrons.

Outside the domain of Brajbhasha texts, however, the world began to change dramatically, as Mughal hegemony experienced ever more serious fissures and new contenders for power asserted their claims. The British were now a force to be reckoned with, even if their influence was at first largely confined to the coastal areas of Bengal rather than the Hindi heartland. It would become almost obligatory in colonial India to represent this late Mughal period as one of precipitous decline. According to the narrative that gained currency in the nineteenth century and was to become standard, the orthodoxy of Emperor Aurangzeb led to disaffection among the Rajput and Mughal nobility. Centrifugal tendencies, economic downturn, and, after his death, a series of weak, dissipated, and often short-lived rulers hastened the deterioration of empire, leaving a power vacuum that was filled by Afghan invaders from the northwest and upstart groups like the Marathas, Jats, and Bundelkhand warlords from closer to home. In the last three decades, historians of Mughal India have added considerable nuance to the way we view the eighteenth century.[2] Although no longer seen as a time of unmitigated disaster for India, this was a period of decentralization of power and devastating incursions by the Afghans Nadir Shah in 1739 and Ahmad Shah Abdali from the 1750s. Delhi was sacked, and so was Mathura, the very center of Braj religious, although not literary, culture. On the watch of the beleaguered Emperor Shah Alam II (r. 1759–1806), the East India Company took decisive control of the subcontinent.[3] The question for us is how *rīti* literature, which had such close links to court patronage, fared amid such upheaval.

Despite a rapidly changing political climate, nothing very significant happened in the realm of Braj belles lettres, at least not right away. Just because the residents of Delhi or Mathura experienced hardship does not mean that all

literary culture suddenly imploded. Older historiographical models made the crudest of links between the robustness of an era's polity and the robustness of its literature. The case of *rīti* belies such facile linkages, no less than Urdu, which rose to prominence as a major literary tradition in precisely this period of "Mughal decline" from the eighteenth century. Similarly, at least by some measures, such as self-confidence of writers and number of poets and patrons in the literary field, the domain of *rīti* literature was stronger in the eighteenth century than at any other point in its history.[4]

Rīti poets had typically operated within multiple networks in North India. Although supported in healthy numbers at the Mughal court, they would always be especially tied to regional polities. The *manṣabdārī* courts of Orchha, **(p.205)** Amber, Bundi, and Jodhpur were the pioneers of the *rīti* style, but eighteenth- and nineteenth-century rajas were no less significant patrons, including the chiefs of entirely new courts that had proliferated. Nearly all courts of the day hosted Brajbhasha writers: Amethi, Asothar, Charkhari, Panna, Rai Bareilly, Rewa, Banda, Banaras, Jaitpur, Nimrana, Samthar, Patiala, Darbhanga, and Pratapgarh, alongside dozens of others (see map 2). Vernacular poets were part of an expansive, cosmopolitan community, but the actual practice of poetry was a decentralized operation; if one court was in political turmoil, Braj writers always had somewhere else to go. For instance, when Mathura was sacked by Shah Ahmed Abdali in 1757 and then again in 1760, the Radhavallabhan poet Vrindavandas first took refuge at the court of Sujan Singh, the Jat ruler of Bharatpur, later moving on to Kishangarh, where he was patronized by Bahadur Singh (the brother of the famous poet-king Nagridas). In his writings, Vrindavandas did not fail to take note of the changed political circumstances, but when he records his outrage with the Afghan invasions that were tormenting North India, he does so in fully Krishnaite genres such as *Harikalābelī* (Vine of Hari's art, 1760), the *Lāṛsāgar*, a story of the childhood and marriage of Radha and Krishna composed in c. 1775, and *Ārtipatrikā* (Discourse on worship, 1778). Braj writers as a rule continued in the same modes and genres that had animated them since the days of Keshavdas, but generally with local inflections and important variations upon traditional themes. Somnath, court poet to three generations of Bharatpur rulers, wrote the expected *rītigranth*s and *vaṃśāvalī*s for his patrons, but also brought new genres into play, such as his *Saṅgrāmdarpan* (Mirror of war), a remarkable Braj treatise that combines elements of astrology, weaponry, and medicine.[5] Sudan, working at the same court, wrote a lively historical work, *Sujāncaritra*; he employs many classical motifs but is also deeply concerned with the present day: he recounts in detail Bharatpur's skirmishes with the Mughals, the Afghans, and the Marathas. In short, the rulers of central and western India continued to depend on Braj *gunī*s to serve as literati, knowledge professionals, and historians.

Braj and *Rīti* Traditions in Early Colonial India

Long after the British took Delhi in 1803, and their influence began to radiate across North India, *rīti* poetry remained very much alive. Soon alien cultural infusions would begin to complicate the literary terrain. It has generally been held, at least in Western scholarship, that radically transformative ways of understanding the world were engineered by the British through their institutions, notably (especially in the case of language and literature) at Fort William **(p.206)** College in Calcutta.[6] An often-heard assessment of Indian languages by the British in this period is that they were disorderly, needing rectification through the colonial discipline of grammars and dictionaries, the production of which was a major industry of the college. Depending on one's definition of disorder, there is some truth to this claim. Braj poets were as a rule manifestly uninterested in linguistic conformity. Yet poets knew very well what they were doing in the domain of language use, and this, along with the rigorous codes of literary systematization central to the *rīti* tradition, suffices to render British accusations about Hindi's disorderliness, in any deep sense of the concept, absurd.

Despite the colonial state's major intrusion into India's cultural life from the early nineteenth century, the literary effects on Hindi were relatively minor before the middle of the century. Fort William College was at any rate only marginally interested in Hindi (Hindustani, also called Urdu, was another story). Most of the college-sponsored Hindi texts were of a distinctly traditionalist bent, even when their linguistic features were manipulated to subserve non-traditionalist (not to mention ill-informed) British notions about “Hindi” and “Hindustani.”[7] Just consider the oeuvre of Lallulal (c. 1763–1825), the most prominent of the staff of munshis working on Bhasha. As R. S. McGregor has rightly noted, “Although Lalluji's fame is as an innovator, almost all his work is concerned directly or indirectly with Brajbhasha.”[8] His *Rājnīti* (Conduct of kings, 1809), an adaptation of the Sanskrit *Hitopadeśa*, was written wholly in Braj, and even the munshi's Khari Boli works owe much to Braj precedents. Despite being part of a cadre charged with the mission of modernizing Hindi, Lallulal's most popular work paradoxically proved to be the *Premsāgar* (1803–10), a Khari Boli adaptation of a now-lost seventeenth-century Braj text by Chaturbhuj Mishra, the *Dasam skandh* (tenth book of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*).[9] Several early books from Fort William College can also be linked to specifically *rīti* traditions. The *Sinhasun Butteesee* (Thirty-two tales of the lion throne), as this edition transliterates the title, compiled by Mirza Kazim Ali Jawan with the help of Lallulal in 1801, turns out to be basically a Khari Boli rendition of a now-lost *rīti* text of the same name authored by Sundar Kaviray at the Mughal court.[10] The Khari Boli translation of the *Sakuntalā* of Nevaj, published in 1802 by Fort William College, was also a Mughal *rīti* text in its earlier Braj incarnation. Several other works by Lallulal can equally be connected to courtly traditions, including *Lālcandrikā* (Moonlight of Lal, 1818), a commentary on the

Bihārīsatsaī, and *Sabhāvilās* (Delight of the assembly, 1828), an early printed collection of Braj verse.

Another site of early contact between the British and the Braj literary sphere was the British army. That *rīti* poetry was very much in circulation among the Indian *sipāhī*s (sepoys) is something we know from Thomas Duer **(p.207)** Broughton, who took an interest in Hindi poetry for aesthetic reasons, in contrast to the more pragmatic concerns of his Fort William College contemporaries. In his *Selections from the Popular Poetry of the Hindoos* of 1814, which has the distinction of being the first published collection of Hindi poetry, Broughton vividly describes how he sat with his soldiers (overwhelmingly Brahmans and Rajputs, he reports) and documented the Brajbhasha poems that they knew by heart; the soldiers in the process transmitted their sense of their own literary heritage.[11]

Broughton's collection represents two major styles, here called the “Bukt-marg” (*bhakt/bhakti mārg*, i.e., devotional style) and the “Rusadik” (*rasādik*, termed “amatory” by Broughton).[12] The “amatory” poems focus on aspects of *śṛṅgāra rasa* and correspond closely to the category of *rīti* literature as we understand it today. Although Broughton misunderstands some of the terminology, it seems clear that his well-educated informants were versed in the technical details of Braj poetry, including metrics, knowledge they perhaps gained from *rītigranth*s.[13] Religious poets such as Surdas and Tulsidas are acclaimed in Broughton's introduction, but only a few *bhakti* poems actually made it into the collection (three by Surdas, and a handful by lesser known devotional authors). Perhaps it was the broad appeal of *rīti* literature that informed his editorial decision: “The Rusadik, or amatory Kubits [i.e., *kavitt*s], are the most admired, and of course the most common.”[14] Compositions by Biharilal and Keshavdas dominate the Broughton collection, with sixteen and twelve verses anthologized, respectively.

Broughton's anthology provides a precious glimpse of Hindi canons and literary taste prior to the penetration of colonial thought. In the year 1814 and for decades after, “amatory” poems were considered one of the highlights of the Hindi classical tradition. Within just a century, however, Indian poetry values would be radically transvalued. Another striking feature of Broughton's collection, to which the text's editor, Imre Bangha, calls attention, is that it challenges the common perception that *rīti* literature was only an elite, courtly tradition. By 1814, these poems could even be considered “rustic” and “popular”; if the poems of Bihari and Keshavdas were on the tongues of soldiers, the social reach of *rīti* literature may have become as vast as its geographical one.

Rīti Literature in Nineteenth-Century Indian Courts, 1800–1860

Other documentation of the circulation—and, it should be stressed, continued production—of *rīti* literature in this period must be sought in non-British sources. Accounts of Hindi from 1800 have tended to present the nineteenth **(p. 208)** century in overly deterministic terms as one long, teleological progression toward *ādhuniktā* (modernity). Most Hindi literary historians begin discussions of this period with Fort William College and then skip to Harishchandra (1850–85), with brief stopovers in the oeuvres of a few select figures, usually Raja Shivprasad Singh (1823–95) and Lakshman Singh (1826–96), two early Hindi prose stylists, each with different agendas, who contributed to the development of modern Khari Boli.[15] The period from c. 1820 to 1860 is almost completely elided. This was, no doubt an inactive time for the colonial state in the realm of Hindi literature, and only an incipient one for Hindi print culture (in general, Hindi publishing lagged decades behind that of Bengali and Urdu, the other major languages in the North Indian literary field). A few early Hindi books were produced in Calcutta, where publishing houses were well developed owing to the British and Marwari presence, but financially viable printing ventures in the Hindi heartland were not in place until after 1857 and print did not really take off until the 1860s.[16] If we accept that printing was largely confined to a few fits and starts, can these begin to account for the sum total of Hindi reading, writing, and literary connoisseurship throughout greater Hindustan in the nineteenth century? In particular, what was happening between 1820 and 1860, that is, between the dwindling of the Fort William College enterprises and the time when print culture really began to thrive? Was it as empty an interstice as literary history suggests? Are the extent and nature of Brajbhasha textual culture during the first half of the nineteenth century so little studied because there is so little to study? What do we actually know about any of this?

The first point to make is also the most basic: there was very much a lively sphere of *rīti* literary production in the nineteenth century. Even if reliable details about written Hindi culture outside the zones of colonial control are hard to come by, the available evidence suggests that many practices of *rīti* literature continued under the radar of colonialism and nascent print culture. Some texts remain unpublished, making it difficult to say for sure how many there are, but even a conservative estimate—they seem to number in the hundreds—suggests that *rīti* textual culture utterly dwarfed anything that was happening elsewhere.[17]

Nineteenth-century *rīti* literature merits a much fuller treatment than is possible here, but it is worth glancing at a few examples, since the whole topic has fallen off the conceptual grid of scholarship on modern Hindi and is hardly known except to a few specialists in India. Literary historians who do bother to mention nineteenth-century *rīti* literary culture tend to see it as a mere prolongation of earlier tendencies, hardly worthy of remark.[18] In a world where modernity was everywhere in the air, *rīti* poets, it is thought, ignored it and continued **(p.209)**

to write age-old *śṛṅgāra* poetry, treatises on *rasa*, and royal panegyrics, laboriously copying manuscripts when everybody else was upgrading to the new material technology of print and conceptual technology of reform.

We have seen repeatedly that *rīti* poets, conservative in the sense of honoring and preserving a successful literary tradition, were not immune to change. Braj poets frequently updated earlier Sanskrit concepts—recall that oft-repeated proclamation of the *rīti* writer that he had composed his work *apanī mati anusāra* (according to his own understanding); in some cases, they actively pursued new aesthetic approaches. Mughal cultural contexts prompted some Braj poets, including Keshavdas and Kavindracharya Sarasvati, to experiment with unusual forms of Persianized register. Bhushan, Matiram, and Lal Kavi, among others, proved highly sensitive to their political environment. Yet we can also find Braj poets like Sundar Kaviray, who hardly mention the world beyond their immediate literary concerns, even when that world seems unusual enough—he was, after all, a pandit employed as a diplomat at the Mughal court—to have merited comment. The level of engagement with the world outside the text was thus highly varied, in the nineteenth century as in the seventeenth.

Whether they talked about British power or not, whether they responded to their changed cultural environment or not, *rīti* poets continued to be sponsored in countless local courts well into the colonial period.[19] When Anupgiri Gosaim (d. 1804), a Bundelkhand warlord who made trouble for the British and just about every other claimant to power in the late eighteenth century,[20] strategically situated himself as a maharaja in the last ten years of his life, he did what kings had been doing for centuries: he hired a *rīti* poet. But if one were trying to gauge how the advent of the British was perceived by this court, there would be little gleaned from the work that he sponsored, Padmakar's *Himmatbahādurvirudāvalī*, a *vīr kāvya* consistent with a centuries-old pattern of Braj (and Sanskrit) political poetry. The work does contain many contemporary vignettes, including a vivid description of a famous battle between Anupgiri and his rival Arjun Singh in which the latter lost his life, but the British presence in the region is intimated in a single line.[21] When a few years later Padmakar, who would go on to establish himself as the leading poet of his day, wrote his *rītigranth Jagatvinod* for Sawai Jagat Singh (r. 1803–18), the Jaipur ruler crowned the same year that Lord Lake took Delhi, he seems to have been far more concerned with *vinod* (pleasure) than *jagat* (the world).[22]

Not all late *rīti* texts disappoint the reader who insists on trawling for evidence of literary and cultural change. It is not voluminous, but it is there for those who have eyes to see. Even the conservative Padmakar is credited with **(p.210)** the following *praśasti* verse to the Gwalior ruler Daulat Rao Scindia (r. 1794–1827), in which he speaks out vociferously against the British:

May you conquer Minagarh and render Bombay impotent.

May you shut down their ports so that
they revert to a jungle inhabited by monkeys.
Padmakar says, may you raze Kashmir, too,
and liberate Kalinjar [a fort town in Bundelkhand], encircling it like a cage.
Brave King Daulat Rao, may you marshal your troops,
attack, and crush the *firaṅgī*s.
Ravage Delhi, pounce on Patna, too.
When will you tear Calcutta to shreds?[23]

In his approximately contemporary *Ānandraghunandan*, Maharaja Vishvanath Singh (1789–1854) of Rewa (in eastern Madhya Pradesh), scion of a court that had a long and distinguished tradition of Braj patronage, mentions cannon salutes; the work also contains examples of (notably incorrect) English.[24] The poetry of Gwal (d. 1868), whose voluminous oeuvre includes *Vijayvinod* (Celebration of victory), which partly concerns the Sikh leader Ranjit Singh, also contains topical references, such as a satirical verse on *rel kī savārī* (train travel).[25] There is even a small corpus of Braj poetry that deals with the Indian revolt of 1857, incorporating words such as “angrej” (English), “company,” “captain,” and “lat (lord) sahib.”[26] This evidence of *rīti* poets’ linguistic adaptation to English is consistent with a long-standing tradition of Brajifying the exogenous, but is also an inkling of modernizing themes that would be further developed during the following generation under the literary stewardship of Harishchandra. *Rīti* textual culture was beginning to be cognizant of colonial rule. There were also changes of a more material nature, as print culture interacted with traditional modes of book production.

Rīti Texts and the Transition to Print Culture

The book culture and literary tastes of centuries past lived on well into the age of Indian print.[27] Indian maharajas and older courtly practices played a significant role in the transition, which means that often early nineteenth-century literary styles and the first of the newfangled books do not look very new, at least to the casual observer. Good illustrations of this principle emerge from surveying the literary habits of the Banaras court. Just a few hundred miles inland from Calcutta it is difficult to find evidence of colonial contact in the **(p. 211)** writings of Gokulnath, a Brajbhasha poet active during the reign of Maharaja Udit Narayan Singh (r. 1795–1835). To all appearances, his *Cetcandrikā*, a family history of the Banaras rajas, as well as the *Rādhākṛṣṇavilās* and *Kavimukhmaṇḍan* (respectively on *rasa* and rhetoric), could just as easily have been written two hundred years earlier, which is perhaps the effect intended: to reduce colonial power to a virtual cipher by barring any trace of it from one's repertoire of literary and political expression. More overtly revolutionary in its mode of production, at least, is a monumental Braj *Mahābhārata*, a collaboration undertaken by Gokulnath, his son Gopinath, and his son's pupil Manidev. Upon its completion, the *Mahābhārata* was sent to Calcutta for publication in 1829, becoming the first text of this court to enter

print culture. Udit Narayan's successor, Maharaja Ishvari Narayan Singh (r. 1835–89), continued to sponsor *rīti* texts. Sardar Kavi (fl. 1850) was well-regarded for his writings on metrics and rhetoric, as well as commentaries on classics of *rīti* literature: *Bihārīsatsaī*, *Kavipriyā*, and *Rasikpriyā*.[28] The dynamic success of print culture in the second half of the nineteenth century made some of these and many other Brajbhasha works readily available well beyond the court, but these changes were quantitative shifts in numbers of readers, not qualitative shifts in literary theme.[29]

This coexistence of multiple production and reception modalities points to an interesting feature of nineteenth-century literary culture that belies the idea that poor outmoded *rīti* literature came to an unceremonious end the moment that the British exhibited their more enlightened ways. Many works that originated in traditional *rīti* settings early in the nineteenth century found their way into print after a time lag. Just consider the fate of a few of the texts already mentioned. Padmakar's *Jagatvinod*, commissioned by the maharaja of Jaipur, may epitomize age-old themes and production values, but it became a major commercial success with at least eight print runs between 1865 and 1896.[30] The *Ānandraghunandan* of Maharaja Vishvanath Singh was first composed at the court of Rewa, but was eventually printed in 1871.[31] The Banaras court's *Mahābhārata*, though composed by Braj intellectuals working in a traditional fashion, was reissued three times after the text's Calcutta debut, by Naval Kishore Press from 1874 to 1891.[32] Traditionalist practices thus interacted with newer colonial ones, and not in entirely predictable ways.

Many (supposedly) traditionalist courts, in fact, were the first to partake of the new print technologies. Who better than kings, after all, to lay out the capital for presses and to underwrite expensive and risky printing ventures?[33] The *Banāras akbhār*, the first Hindi periodical in Nagari script to be printed outside of Calcutta, was made possible only with a large subvention from the maharaja of Nepal. Several books in Hindi were commissioned by the maharaja of **(p.212)** Banaras in the 1850s, during the same time that Sardar Kavi would have been blotting the ink on his *rīti* commentaries. Maharajas were still acting as the major literary patrons and thus had a say in selecting the earliest texts to be printed. The *bhakti* classic *Rāmcaritmānas* was a major popular success, as were collections of *śṛṅgārik* poetry and the classics of the Brajbhasha canon by Bihari, Keshavdas, and Sundar. Editions and commentaries on older *rīti* books were published in this period, as well as contemporary anthologies and manuals on traditional poetics themes, allowing a widening reading public to partake of the Hindi literary heritage.[34] In short, *rīti* literature remained a vibrant enterprise long into the colonial era.

Literary Reform and Early Experiments with Modernism

With the growing influence of reformist movements during the second half of the nineteenth century, some of the themes and premises of Hindi literature began to seem fatally unmodern. Various aspects of Indian culture were constructed as outmoded, or worse, degraded, and literature quickly emerged as a prime candidate for a makeover. It did not matter that Hindi literature had centuries of tradition and the self-reflection of a sophisticated *kavikul* behind it. Under high colonialism, Europeans set the standards to which Indian literature should aspire, and across the many Indian regional languages, Western genres and themes were widely adopted. Upon the establishment in 1854 of the Education Committee (which later became the Education Department), the lack of good vernacular books for teaching was raised as an urgent concern.[35] With the increasing penetration of colonial power and educational institutions, not to mention the brutal crackdown on “disloyal princes” in the aftermath of 1857, the traditional patronage structures for Indian literature began to crumble. The British stepped into this vacuum—one they of course created—by sponsoring poetry competitions and offering prizes for the best examples of new plays, essays, and novels. Poets everywhere in India were modifying their styles in accordance with Western norms. The literary function, once primarily aesthetic, now veered sharply toward the utilitarian; the point was to raise awareness of society's ills and to enact social change.

Bengali writers were the first to embrace reform. Whereas in the Mughal period Bengali Vaishnavas had taken many a literary cue from Brajbhasha poets, in the nineteenth century the direction of cultural flow was reversed.[36] Not only were the earliest presses located in Bengal, but so too were the most zealously modernizing literati, among whom Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and Michael Madhusudan Datt are two of the more famous examples.[37] In **(p.213)** irony that cannot be lost on anybody who has studied *rīti* literature, one of the most important “modernist” literary trends of the nineteenth century was adapting the Sanskrit and Western classics into modern vernacular prose. Constituting a “new” tradition, even a radically reformist one, meant looking to respected models of the past. It is a wonder that modern literary historians have not denounced this “derivative” literature, as they have so resoundingly denounced *rīti* styles.[38]

Alongside the new iteration of classicism, Indian writers were also pressured to shun merely decorative themes. Poets had an obligation to contribute to the uplift of their “fallen” society, a transformational literary bent that characterized most of India during this period. Susie Tharu has commented on how a majority of the early novels written in Indian languages were responses “to an ideological ambience in which a totally new sense of the responsibilities of the writer as well as the social function of literature and literary study featured prominently.”[39] The proceedings of a meeting of the *Anjuman-e Panjāb* (Punjab society) convened in 1874 by the British administrator Colonel Holroyd dramatically

illustrate this point. Holroyd enjoined Urdu poets to give up their proverbial attention to wine and intractable beloveds in favor of more practical and edifying subjects. His rather dreary new *mushā'irah* (literary soirée) themes, designed to help Urdu poets rescue themselves from the harmful decadence into which they had supposedly fallen, included subjects like "patriotism," "peace," "justice," "compassion," "contentment," "hope," and "civilization."[40]

Hindi writers, too, took to this reformist enterprise with zeal. In their case, it was not just the themes of literature that needed reform. The Hindi language itself was subject to unprecedented scrutiny, with the dialect of Khari Boli Hindi (spoken especially in the Delhi-Meerut region) increasingly fostered as the language of modern prose. Braj was still the choice of most poets for aesthetic undertakings, but workaday topics and especially new Western genres—essays, travelogues, histories, educational material—were now to be handled in Khari Boli. One influential Holroyd-like figure for Hindi was the civil servant Mathew Kempson, head of Bareilly College, who encouraged Hindi writers to compose Khari Boli versions of Sanskrit works and offered prizes for good translations from English. The scheme was not a resounding success. Useful book initiatives made more headway in Urdu than in Hindi during this period.[41] In fact, Urdu's literary arena as a whole was much more energetic than Hindi's, and would remain so until the second decade of the twentieth century.

Banaras is an important exception. No discussion of Hindi literature in the nineteenth century would be adequate without at least a few remarks about Bharatendu Harishchandra, a leading member of the Banaras aristocracy and **(p.214)** a remarkable cultural innovator. With his enthusiasm for writing Western-style dramas and essays, Harishchandra was instrumental in some of the first processes of literary modernization in the Hindi milieu. His play *Bhāratdurdaśā* (India's deplorable condition, 1880) as well as countless essays and editorial pieces on language were infused with a reformist vision that prefigures many elements of Hindi's twentieth-century career under nationalism. His editorship of periodicals like *Harishcandra Magazine* and *Kavivacansudhā* (Nectar of poetic expression) was foundational to the modern Hindi public sphere, a latter-day incarnation of the Brajbhasha *kavikul*, for in venues such as these new identities for Khari Boli writing were being conceived. In-depth studies by Sagaree Sengupta and Vasudha Dalmia have done much to elucidate his extensive oeuvre, his pioneering endeavors on behalf of Hindi, and his place in the social and intellectual history of the period.[42] None of this ground needs to be tread again here.

Hindi textbooks today generally venerate Harishchandra as the "father of modern Hindi," an adage that obscures the degree to which traditional literature was very much alive to him and not in the least incompatible with his active role in propagating new genres and media. Harishchandra and his contemporaries are not easy to pigeonhole, and being too quick to label them "modern" flattens

out the complex interplay of cultural streams that fed into the thought-worlds of colonial-period intellectuals and writers. Much about Harishcandra's poetic oeuvre and social positioning as a *zamīndār* from a prosperous Agrawal trading family links him to earlier practices: his fervent Vaishnavism (his family were adherents of the Vallabhan *sampradāy*) situates him squarely in the literary universe of *bhakti*, whereas his elite social circuit—in terms of both the patronage he afforded poets and the poetry he himself wrote in an erotic vein—link him unequivocally to *rīti* traditions.

Harishcandra advocated change, but his program called more for supplementing than superseding existing Hindi literary practices. He was an avid, sensitive reader of the classical Braj heritage, and some of the earliest examples of modern Hindi literary criticism can be found in the pages of his journals. Clearly, the conceptual divide between *bhakti* and *rīti* literature that is entrenched in the field of Hindi today was not relevant to him; or, both styles were equally relevant to him. He wrote criticism on Surdas, but also fashioned *kuṇḍaliyās* (sextets) based on the *Bihārīsatsaī*.[43] *Rīti* literature was a crucial domain of the emerging literary canon for Hindi, and it was still held in high esteem by even writers of "modern" sensibility during this period.

Besides being an early adopter of the new Khari Boli prose, the single most important force behind the development of Hindi print culture during his lifetime, and a major literary critic, Harishchandra was also, like his father **(p. 215)** Giridhardas (1833–60) before him, a Brajbhasha poet.[44] Given his stature today as Hindi's great modernizer, the amount of his work in a traditionalist vein is surprisingly large: a *Kṛṣṇacarit*, or biography of Krishna; a *Candrāvalī*, on the subject of age-old *rāsapañcādhyāyī* themes; an *Uttarārdhbhaktamāl* (Latter-day garland of poets) that hearkens back to Nabhadas in the early seventeenth century. Even his texts centered on contemporary themes are filled with Braj poetry, since Harishchandra generally mixed Khari Boli prose and Braj verse in his dramas.

Although Khari Boli prose was gaining much ground in the nineteenth century, Hindi poetry was mostly still written in Braj. By the 1870s a few poets had begun to experiment with Khari Boli, but for many, the very thought that poetry could be composed in this upstart language engendered disbelief, if not outright ridicule. Experts no less authoritative than George Abraham Grierson, founder of that modernist project par excellence, *The Linguistic Survey of India*, had dismissed the very idea,[45] while Harishchandra himself, otherwise hardly one to eschew innovation, made it amply clear in *Hindībhāṣā* (The Hindi language, 1883), an essay written late in his career, that he considered Khari Boli too harsh and unsophisticated for poetry. This verse lampooning Khari Boli poetics makes his position amply clear:

> Sing the glories of Lord Krishna, everyone together!

All your desires will be fulfilled, all sorrow will vanish.
Bhajan karo śrī krṣṇa kā, mil kar ke sab log
Siddh hoygā kām aur chutaigā sab sog[46]

The long vowels that dominate here, which are generally characteristic of Khari Boli Hindi, would have sounded disastrously clumsy and cacophonous to a nineteenth-century ear attuned to the mellifluous cadences of Braj.[47] This is to say nothing of the utterly pedestrian quality of the verse, a flaw that would continue to mar many an experiment with Khari Boli poetry decades into the future. For Harishcandra and the majority of his contemporaries in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Brajbhasha unquestionably remained the literary dialect of choice.

Whatever its relationship to the Vaishnava and courtly past, for Harishchandra's generation Brajbhasha poetry was not yet seen as incommensurate with Indian progress. Hindi literary modernity felt like a capacious enterprise. It will sound oxymoronic to those schooled in nationalist literary historiography, but even *rīti* literature could be a vehicle for *ādhuniktā* (modernity) well into the twentieth century. The tremendous genius, productivity, and stature of Harishchandra tend to eclipse the contributions of other writers of this period, many of whom were closely associated with the literary giant. **(p.216)** Thakur Jagmohan Singh (1857–99), a lifelong friend of Harishchandra, shared his penchant for poetic experimentation and is emblematic of a whole generation of Hindi writers who grappled intensely with the penetration of colonialist thought without necessarily rejecting their own literary heritage.

Jagmohan Singh, like Harishchandra, was a member of North India's landed elite. He hailed from the obscure princely state of Bijeraghogarh in central India, whose fortunes had waned since 1857. During his childhood, upon the suicide of his father, Raja Saryuprasad Singh, who was arrested for treason in the aftermath of the Indian revolt, Jagmohan became a charge of the Court of Wards and was catapulted into a social and intellectual universe drastically different from the world of Rajput privilege into which he had been born.[48] The British-style education he received in Banaras, coupled with the general spirit of reform, afforded him access to a literary world nothing like the traditions of *rīti* poetry that had been fostered in India's courts for centuries.

Jagmohan Singh's oeuvre epitomizes how poets were able to use a “traditional” medium like Brajbhasha while contributing creatively to modernizing literary trends. His *Pralay* (The deluge, 1889), a Brajbhasha poem about a flood that beset the village of Seorinarayan during his tenure as a civil servant in the Central Provinces, combines the older forms of *kāvya*-style poetic description with newer modes, such as the expectation that literature be *anubhav-siddh* (based on experience).[49] Another modernizing turn is the poet's Khari Boli preface, which reports on the customs and general backwardness of the

villagers in a tone reminiscent of contemporary colonial sociology. His *Omkārcandrikā* (Moonlight of the sacred syllable, 1894) is, like *Pralay*, a hybrid work that ingeniously combines a long tradition of *māhātmya*s on Hindu holy places (in this case, Omkareshwar in southern Madhya Pradesh) with the imported genre of the travelogue told from an eyewitness perspective. In Jagmohan's conceptual world, reverence for a Shaiva temple is not incompatible with a eulogistic treatment of the modern convenience of rail service.

New forms of literary experimentation were not the only changes in the Hindi heartland during the late nineteenth century. This is not the place to enter into a discussion of the increasing polarization between Hindi and Urdu supporters—another defining feature of the period—as a crystallization of Hindu and Muslim religious identities, in combination with the competition for employment opportunities in colonial India, led to ever more strident feelings of linguistic and religious nationalism.[50] The pluralism that was inherent to Brajbhasha literary culture would soon be a thing of the past. As the investment in Hindi as a language of one nation and one religion grew ever greater, so too did the investment in fostering awareness about it, and an infrastructure was developed to subserve the aims of its vociferous advocates. The Nāgarī Pracāriṇī **(p.217)** Sabhā, founded in Banaras in 1893, was just one of the important institutions to arise in this period. Another, equally consequential, development was the birth of Hindi literary history.

The New Science of Literary History

The *kavikul* of precolonial North India ordered literary knowledge in many different ways. Only one was chronological. When Bhikharidas mentioned the canonical writers of Brajbhasha literature in his *Kāvyanirṇay*, he began with two of the earliest: Surdas and Keshavdas. Sudan Kavi, employing the same convention in his preface, exhibits a historical sensibility (he starts with Keshavdas) but then proceeds alphabetically.[51] The most common way of conceptualizing literary collectivity, however, was to compile favorite poems in a *saṅgrah* (anthology), the organizing principle of which had nothing to do with historical time. Some anthologies were driven by a commemorative impulse, as with the *Kavīndracandrikā*, the collection of *praśasti* poems honoring Kavindracharya Sarasvati, or the *Sarvāṅgī* of Gopaldas, which memorialized the key poets of the Dadupanthi community.[52] In Vaishnava circles, collocations of authors, and not just poems, took on a special importance, signifying prominent figures in the spiritual lineage; thus, for example, the designation *aṣṭatachāp* (eight signature poets) among the Vallabhans.[53] The *Vaiṣṇavan kī vārtā* and the *bhaktamāl* genres—collections of biographies or indeed hagiographies of exemplary spiritual figures—helped to circumscribe the boundaries of a religious community that sometimes overlapped with a literary one.[54] Groups of *bhakta*s were collected in sets that filled out auspicious numbers such as eighty-four or two hundred and fifty-two. But there was no unambiguous chronologic logic to the *bhaktamāl* genre, any more than there is to the beads of the *mālā* (garland)

that grounded the analogy. The members of the premodern *kavikul* could inhabit the same cultural space across great expanses of time and place.[55]

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, however, the historical mode emerged as a new and increasingly dominant way of conceptualizing Hindi literature, superseding the more diverse logics of earlier practices. Although it is difficult to argue against the relevance of historical circumstances to the creation of literature—the rise of Brajbhasha literary culture is, after all, a historical fact closely tied to the rise of a new historical political formation, Mughal rule—literary history is susceptible to extremes of mechanical thinking. The model frequently falls prey to the biological narrative that literatures come into being, experience a period of growth, mature, and then fall ineluctably into **(p.218)** senescence. Furthermore, great political dynasties are thought to engender great literature, whereas weaker polities are assumed a priori to give rise to works of inferior quality. There is no reason at all that literature should conform to such a simplistic pattern, but this proposition is strangely widespread.[56] In the case of Hindi, it is possible to trace with uncommon precision the advent of literary-historical thinking and to pinpoint the assumptions that marred the new formulations. The most detrimental by far was the notion that the subcontinent had sunk into a period of lamentable cultural decline prior to British rule.

The power of this notion to alter Indians' sense of their literary past becomes clear when we scrutinize the process of transition to the new model of literary history. Garcin de Tassy's *L'Histoire de la littérature hindouie et hindustanie* (1839) and Shivsingh Sengar's *Śivsiṃhsaroj* (Lotus of Shivsingh, 1878), two influential early works about the premodern Hindi-Urdu tradition, have much more in common with Indic *taz_kirah*s and *saṅgrah*s than with modern literary histories.[57] Poets, patrons, and *floruit*s are duly noted, and both authors are aware of the need to identify broad trends and major poets, but neither tried to construct a totalizing narrative that would explain centuries of multifaceted literary achievement in terms of a single, brute, temporal logic.[58] More significant, neither set out to account for North Indian literature's supposed precolonial decline, which would become a central topos of subsequent works in the genre. Garcin de Tassy and Sengar did not even perceive a decline, let alone one that needed to be explained. To go back and read the work of Sengar in particular today, after an interval of nearly a century of derisive accounts of *rīti* literature, is to reconnect with an ethos refreshingly untainted by either colonial or nationalist prejudice. With reference to the seventeenth century of the Indian *Vikram* era (c. 1650–1750), Sengar caps a long list of writers with the statement, "They wrote really spectacular works of vernacular poetry." Concerning the next century (c. 1750–1850), he is even more enthusiastic: "There were never better poets in any other century than in the eighteenth."[59]

A decade after Sengar, George Grierson presented a very different view in *The Modern Vernacular Literature of Hindustan* (1889), the first historical account of Hindi literature to be written in English. Along with Garcin de Tassy, Grierson is to be credited for his advocacy of vernacular literature, marking a break from previous Indologists, who had for the most part concentrated on classical texts.[60] This was coupled, however, with the irrepressible arrogance of many British civil servants toward Indian culture. In some respects, the work is patently derivative: Grierson drew much of his data from the work of Sengar, a fact that he was at least candid enough to admit.[61] Aside **(p.219)** from writing in English, his crucial alteration was the addition of a new chronology. Since most subsequent Hindi literary histories reprise themes taken up in Grierson's work, it is worth recording in full his conceptualization of the Hindi literary tradition. He divides his book into eleven chapters:

1. The Bardic Period (700–1300)
2. The Religious Revival of the Fifteenth Century
3. The Romantic Poetry of Malik Muḥammad (1540)
4. The Kṛṣṇa-cult of Braj (1500–1600)
5. The Mughal Court
6. Tulsī Dās
7. The Ars Poetica (1580–1692)
8. Other successors of Tulsī Dās (1600–1700)
9. The Eighteenth Century
10. Hindustan under the Company (1800–1857)
11. Hindustan under the Queen (1857–1887)

Grierson manages to capture what many scholars would still agree are the major milestones of premodern Hindi literature. For instance, it is possible to trace the origins of Ramchandra Shukla's *Vīrgāthākāl* (age of heroic songs, see below) in Grierson's "bardic period," even if extending it back as far as 700 CE claims an antiquity for Hindi not endorsed by serious scholars today. Several chapter headings anticipate what came to be known as the *bhakti* period (chapters two, three, four, and six). The *rīti* period of post-Shukla historiography is encompassed by chapters five (the Mughal Court), seven (The Ars Poetica), eight (Other Successors of Tulsī Dās), and nine (The Eighteenth Century). The chapter headings in themselves are not the issue.

The glaring problem with Grierson's model is the larger narrative that overdetermines it: Hindi literary culture is made to follow a trajectory that culminates in colonial rule. The early chapters contain favorable appraisals of Hindi's literary heritage, but all positive judgments cease abruptly in chapter nine, ominously entitled "The Eighteenth Century," as though that in itself were enough to be said on the subject. His teleological approach is also painfully evident from the fact that, whereas all the previous chapters reference themes more or less relevant to Hindi literary processes, the last three (coinciding with

the rise of British power) describe instead the course of colonial history. Grierson did not lack opinions on the literature of these three periods, however. In marked contrast to Sengar's glowing view of eighteenth-century literature, Grierson finds it a cultural wasteland emblematic of India's political turmoil:

> **(p.220)** Bards there were few, and, as these could only sing of bloodshed and treachery, they preferred to remain silent. In other branches of literature there was a similar decay. No original authors of the first rank appeared.[62]

The Hindi literary tradition, in earlier assessments perceived to be characterized by sustained virtuosity and excellence, had suddenly encountered a late precolonial hitch. British rule is presented as the beacon of a more optimistic future:

> The first half of the 19th century, commencing with the downfall of the Maratha power and ending with the Mutiny, forms another well-marked epoch. It was the period of renascence after the literary dearth of the previous century.[63]

It is hard to envision a cruder model of literary history than one that so transparently links Hindi's sophisticated centuries-old traditions of poetic engagement to the rise and fall of India's political fortunes, and its chances for future success to colonial intercession. Astonishingly, its premises would be given even greater credence by colonial subjects themselves in the coming decades, due in no small part to Mahavir Prasad Dvivedi and other nationalist writers fervently devoted to the cause of Hindi's renaissance.

Mahavir Prasad Dvivedi, Hindi's “Renaissance,” and the Repudiation of Brajbhasha

Mahavir Prasad Dvivedi (1864–1938), whose powerful persona lent his name to a literary epoch and a considerable amount of ideological backing to the nationalist literary enterprise, was one of the most significant architects of Hindi modernity even if Bharatendu Harishchandra would be the one to nab the title “father of modern Hindi. ” As Maithilisharan Gupta, one of the leading poets of the early twentieth century and a student of Dvivedi, aptly put it: “If Bharatendu gave a new birth to Hindi, it was Dwivedi-ji who brought it up.”[64] Dvivedi's views were espoused by many like-minded Hindi reformers, but his long tenure (from 1903 to 1920) as editor of *Sarasvatī*, the most influential Hindi journal of the period, gave him far-reaching power in the burgeoning Hindi public sphere.

In a region where rigid grammar regimes had never dictated the uses of vernacular language, *Sarasvatī* became a new authority on correct Hindi. And “correct Hindi” would now have a highly circumscribed range. In a linguistic coup d’état to which he recruited many willing soldiers, Mahavir Prasad Dvivedi **(p.221)** set out to enthrone Khari Boli as the only legitimate form of Hindi

literary expression. He implemented a draconian editorial policy for *Sarasvatī* magazine, accepting only Khari Boli poetry submissions. He generally frowned upon dialectal variants, promoting a new kind of standardized, and frequently Sanskritized, Hindi. It would be difficult to overstate the extent to which this reformed Khari Boli Hindi, naturalized today, was to many an unfamiliar idiom in its own day. Nirala, a native speaker of the Baisvari dialect of Hindi and a leading voice in the turn to *Chāyāvād* (Romanticism) during the following generation, would later recall his humiliating ignorance of Khari Boli as a youth and the tutoring that he sought in the pages of nationalist periodicals like *Sarasvatī* and other arbiters of the modern style.[65]

Brajbhasha was far too cherished a literary language to be ushered out of existence quite so easily, but Dvivedi's vociferous rejection of it was as unsparing as it was influential. An early essay entitled “Kavikartavya” (The responsibility of a poet), first published in *Sarasvatī* in 1901, was larded with disdain for Braj. He ridiculed what he perceived to be Braj poets’ unrelieved repetitiveness: “Enough already! Do we really need any more poetry about the dalliances [of Radha and Krishna] on the banks of the Yamuna River?” This single cruel sentence reduced the extensive literary corpus to a caricature, and he wrote thousands just like it in the course of his career.[66] Another target was the crystallizing diglossia between older Braj poetry genres and the new forms of Khari Boli prose that had been cultivated in response to colonial education mandates. This appeared to Dvivedi a bizarre and illogical division of linguistic and literary labor:

> The language of prose and poetry should not be separate. It is only in the case of Hindi that different types of language are used for prose and poetry. The language of a civilized society should have both prose and poetic literature…. To speak one language, and to write poetry in another, goes against every natural principle.[67]

Although a prose tradition was inarguably a long-standing component of the classical Hindi heritage—a fact ignored by Dvivedi and many scholars since—it is true that verse had always been the preferred medium, even for scholarly pursuits such as composing *śāstra*.[68] Regardless, the continuing use of Brajbhasha was now being constructed as a sign of cultural backwardness. The language's long association with both religious poetry and the early modern courts appeared to render it congenitally unsuited to the modernizing, democratizing, and technologizing needs of an India ever more sensitized to the need for combating colonial oppression. It was stigmatized as “decadent” in the manner of so much of premodern Indian culture during this period, and **(p.222)** increasingly came to symbolize the *sāmantvād* or medieval feudal order from which Indians needed urgently to disassociate themselves.

During this period of nationalist fervor, Hindi poets—increasingly narrowly construed as Khari Boli poets—were assigned a mission that would have had Colonel Holroyd and his compatriots of the previous generation nodding their approval from the grave: to write on *upadeśjanak* (edifying) themes. In the words of Charu Gupta, during the Dvivedi Age—for such was his influence that later literary historians would name the whole era after him—"aesthetics became an exercise in ethics."[69] Hindi poets were now enjoined to be foremost patriots, and to speak about urgent social and political topics such as untouchability, widow remarriage, *khādī* (homespun cloth), and the *carkhā* (spinning wheel), these last two particularly laden symbols of Indian self-sufficiency in the growing anticolonial struggle.[70]

Khari Boli poetry was perhaps not beautiful the way Braj was (recall Harishchandra's disparaging remarks on this subject), but it had modern, utilitarian virtues.[71] Besides, the very *mādhurya* (sweetness) that even detractors had to admit was Braj's special attraction would now be posited as an embarrassing flaw. When Indian nationhood was at stake, what good was a literary system founded on concepts like *alaṅkāra*? Brajbhasha was now evaluated in the terms of colonial and nationalist discourse that constructed premodern Hindus as effete or too feminine.[72] "In an age when India needed men," averred a scholar who spoke at the second annual assembly of the Hindī Sāhitya Sammelan of Allahabad in 1911, "the excessive sweetness and melodiousness of Braj had turned Indians into eunuchs."[73] Khari Boli was promoted in its stead as a "virile" language for the nation. The days of Brajbhasha's viability were now numbered.

Some of this story, centering on a dramatic reconceptualization of literary values under colonialism and nationalism, epitomizes a trend generally mirrored in regional languages throughout India from the nineteenth century, but the sweeping linguistic reforms in the Hindi belt are unparalleled. During the first decades of the twentieth century, known by specialists today not just as the *Dvivedī yug* (Dvivedi period) but also styled more grandiosely as the *Hindī navjāgaraṇ* (Hindi renaissance), Hindi was called upon to do more ideological work than its counterparts in other provinces because it alone of India's languages had a strong transregional presence with nation-building potential. A concomitant to the drive for independence was the need to promote a language that could represent all of India. Hindi's unique status as a *deśvyāpak bhāṣā* (language with national reach) was one of Dvivedi's main arguments for its suitability as a national language.[74] Of course, that Hindi could become *deśvyāpak* at all was in no small measure due to the Brajbhasha *kavikul*.

(p.223) Dvivedi's was not the only vision for Hindi. His linguistic eugenics seemed dysgenic to some, and ardent supporters of Brajbhasha retained their influence for a couple more decades. The figure of Dularelal Bhargava, chief editor of *Mādhurī*, which became even more influential than *Sarasvatī* after its

founding in 1922, serves as a counterweight. As rightly noted by Francesca Orsini, the Hindi public sphere was a diverse arena in which many literary *saṃskāra*s (loosely: tastes or proclivities) intersected, as poets, journalists, teachers, and intellectuals from different backgrounds (landed aristocrats, merchants, Brahmans, Persianized Kayasths) joined forces to serve the cause of Hindi and the nation.[75] In contrast to the more circumscribed linguistic and literary styles found in the pages of *Sarasvatī*, the profile of *Mādhurī* was far more open and eclectic. The new *Chāyāvād* or Romantic poetry was featured, but so were venerated *kavitt*s of old. There was even a regular column on Brajbhasha literature, known as *kavi-carcā* (featured poet). The younger generation flocked to this journal, and even some stalwarts of the *Dvivedī yug* became ardent supporters.[76] Many who were perfectly content to adopt the new Sanskritized Khari Boli for poetry still drew heavily on the Brajbhasha past. Age-old literary staples such as the *bārah-māsā* and *śikh-nakh* were by no means phased out overnight, and Braj verses were integral to the early Hindi novel (as they had been to Harishchandra's plays).[77] Thus, Brajbhasha literary culture, though mortally wounded during Dvivedi's generation, did not expire at once.

On the contrary, there was even a brief moment of revival during the 1920s. Pandit Jagannathdas Ratnakar (1866–1932), a prolific early editor of *rīti* texts and a leading contributor to the *Sūrsāgar* project at the Nāgarī Pracāriṇī Sabhā, continued both to write and to advocate for Brajbhasha poetry throughout his career. Much of his oeuvre is consistent with age-old themes of *rasa* and *nāyikābheda*, but in the manner of writers such as Harishchandra and Thakur Jagmohan Singh, Ratnakar also considered Braj an entirely appropriate vehicle of modernization and reform. Like Dvivedi, he concerned himself with linguistic standardization, but he directed his energies toward Brajbhasha. In 1925 he gave a public address calling for Braj poets to update their repertoires.[78] His contemporary Ayodhya Singh Upadhyay “Hariaudh” was just such a self-conscious modernizer of older Braj motifs. His *Priyapravās* (Lament for a departed lover, 1914) only sounds like a tale about a lovelorn *gopī* from classical poetry; it actually presented an earnest new reformist message, with Radha portrayed not as a physical lover but as a woman selflessly dedicated to social service.[79]

In fact, numerous intellectuals of the day found it possible to live in radically different cultural worlds simultaneously. Yet another case are the brothers Shyambihari, Shukdevbihari, and Ganeshbihari Mishra, bicultural **(p.224)** intellectuals from an old aristocratic family based in Lucknow, who played a major role in Hindi literary life.[80] The younger two were English-educated but still steeped in traditional cultural values, employed in the modern British civil service but also as administrators in the princely states of Orchha and Bharatpur. They warrant special attention as coauthors of the *Miśrabandhuvinod* (Delight of the Mishra brothers), a monumental work of Hindi literary history

completed in 1913. Their *Vinod* straddles the divergent social landscapes and thought-worlds of the period, as did the careers of the authors.

The Mishra brothers frequently evince acute Dvivedism, as when they express concern that Braj poetry is too narrow in scope, which with charming illogic they blame on India's dearth of the communication infrastructure that colonialism would bring:

> Hundreds of books were lost or destroyed in ancient times because we did not have trains, telephones, a postal system, printing presses or libraries.... Poets could not find out what others were writing, with the result that hundreds and thousands of books kept getting produced on the same subject.[81]

“Hundreds and thousands of books” seems to be a thinly veiled critique of the *rītigranth*, whereby the actions of a centuries-old Brajbhasha *kavikul* with its well-structured systems of articulating literary consensus are made to appear, through the skewed interpretive lens of colonial and nationalist discourse, as simply mindless. The Mishra brothers also at least pay lip service to the idea of Hindi's deficiencies and herald the dawning age of literary reform: “Until now our language was characterized by pleasing but impractical subjects, but now with British rule, people have become more concerned with subject matter that can benefit society.”[82] This emphasis on social benefit also figured prominently in their mission as literary critics. In *Hindī Navratna* (Nine jewels of Hindi, 1910), Ganeshbihari and Shukdevbihari Mishra had weighed the merits of ten prominent poets from the Hindi past: Tulsidas, Sur, Dev, Bihari, Matiram and Bhushan Tripathi, Keshavdas, Kabir, Chand Bardai, and Harishchandra. (The reason they list ten poets instead of the expected nine of a *navratna* is that the two Tripathi brothers are oddly considered a single unit.) One of the criteria for excellence was whether a given poet's work could be said to contain a *sandeś* or message.[83] The Mishra brothers clearly have immense regard for the artistry of *rīti* poetry, but their *Navratna* already exhibits a tendency that would come to dominate Hindi criticism over the next century: to treat *bhakti* poets with greater reverence than court poets because of the moral lessons to be gleaned from their work. The Mishra brothers even **(p.225)** dignify *bhakti* poets with titles such as *gosvāmī* and *mahātmā*, whereas other writers are simply styled *kavi*s.[84]

Although the Mishra brothers were adapting to the new criteria for successful literature that were promoted in *Sarasvatī* and like-minded forums during this period, their work is refreshingly free of disparaging remarks about their literary past. On the subject of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century poetry, for instance, their opinion could not be more at odds with the sentiments of Dvivedi (and Grierson):

> Many of the finest poets lived during this period. One hears their names and wonders how anyone can speak of any kind of a deficiency when there are such fantastic poets! In truth, Hindi literature is excellent and glorious.[85]

One senses throughout their oeuvre that the Mishra brothers were struggling to incorporate into their understanding of Hindi's literary past the dominant idea, espoused by colonizers and nationalists alike, of India's recent civilizational collapse. Such intellectual confusion illustrates the striking blend of nationalist pride with shame that a colonized people could be made to feel toward their cultural heritage.[86] Shamsur Rahman Faruqi's comment on the addled reformers of Urdu poetry is relevant to Hindi littérateurs: they were “in love with the old poetry, but also want[ed] it dead.”[87]

Working through the 1,500 rambling pages of *Miśrabandhuvinod*, a remarkable period piece little visited by Hindi scholars today, leaves the unmistakable impression that the Mishra brothers are, in the end, only half-hearted in their condemnation of Hindi's supposed decline and fall. You can just see them in their studies during an unguarded moment, lovingly poring over old Brajbhasha *kavitt*s on Krishna and Radha, and in all likelihood not relishing the more bracing airs of a Khari Boli verse on a citizen's duty to the nation. Like many Hindi intellectuals of the period, they outwardly subscribed to a belief in the merits of a stridently reformist literature, without always putting their hearts in it. Indeed, if one looks beyond the pages of nationalist literary history with its insistence on the paradigm of Hindi's renaissance, it is striking just how many literati continued to cherish the classical culture. The Braj classics were still performed in assemblies of poets and maintained a broad appeal. They were included in the new textbooks being produced for schools and colleges and by the 1920s were enshrined in the university curricula for Hindi, although the importance of “uplifting” themes meant that the *rīti* literature of the courts would have little role to play in the new public face of Hindi.[88]

(p.226) Ramchandra Shukla and the Category of *Rīti* Literature

We owe much of our understanding of the classical Hindi canon to the publication of Ramchandra Shukla's *Hindī sāhitya kā itihās* (History of Hindi literature, 1929, henceforth *Itihās*), which represents the culmination of several decades of radical rethinking of the Hindi literary field under early nationalism. Shukla's major contribution was a more comprehensive vision of the historical development of Hindi literature than any to date, and new perspectives for understanding it. For Shukla, Hindi was a capacious category that extended well beyond Brajbhasha or Khari Boli, including Sufi literature in Avadhi (albeit subsumed under and arguably co-opted by the Hindu category of *bhakti*), the poetry of medieval saints and, more problematically, scattered verses of Apabhramsha, which helped him to lend the tradition greater historical depth.[89] New nations need old literatures. It cannot be my task here to assess all the

successes and failings of Shukla's far-ranging work,[90] but his findings on the subject of *rīti* literature must be examined, not least because he is the one who bequeathed us the very category.

Shukla's *kāl vibhāg* (periodization) sought to improve upon earlier literary-historical conceptions with a more streamlined system, reproduced here in full (the terms marked with an asterisk are the ones still current today[91]):

NAME	CHARACTERISTIC STYLE	DATE
I. Beginning period	Age of Heroic Songs	993–1318 CE *Vikram 1050–1375*
*Ādikāl**	*Vīrgāthākāl*	
II. Early medieval period	Age of Devotion	1318–1643 CE *Vikram 1375–1700*
Pūrvmadhyakāl	*Bhaktikā2**	
III. Late medieval period	Age of Style	1643–1843 CE *Vikram 1700–1900*
Uttarmadhyakāl	Rītikāl*	
IV. Modern period	Age of Prose	1843–1927 CE *Vikram 1900–1984*
*Ādhunik kāl**	*Gadyakāl*	

That Hindi's earliest and latest stages are labeled “beginning” and “modern,” respectively, is no surprise, nor do intervening periods termed “medieval” raise an eyebrow. In adopting the term “medieval,” Shukla was reusing a label already in circulation for Hindi since at least the time of the Mishra brothers.[92] But whereas they ended Hindi's “medieval period” in 1623, Shukla extended it to 1843. As if the somnolence implied by a mid-nineteenth-century medievality were not enough, Shukla offers the historiographically unprecedented idea that the *bhakti* component of Hindi's premodern literary heritage belongs in an **(p. 227)** entirely separate, earlier period from its *rīti* counterpart. He took two major trends in premodern Hindi literature, the devotional and the courtly, which are far more logically distinguishable in terms of stylistic features, performance factors, and patronage contexts, and accorded them a new temporal significance. Although the devotional styles in Brajbhasha are arguably attested a few decades earlier than the courtly, the two are historically intertwined, and often indistinguishable within the oeuvres of the many poets who wrote both religious and more secular poetry.

Nowhere does Shukla justify dividing the category of medieval Hindi literature into two at the particular point he proposed, and nothing in the year 1700 of the Indian *Vikram* calendar (equivalent to 1643 CE) serves to elevate it into a turning point for Hindi literature. No major political event occurred, nor was any epoch-making literary text produced. On the contrary, the 1640s was a decade of almost-total quiescence in the otherwise remarkably dynamic seventeenth century. Perhaps it was just convenient to mark a milestone with the round number of 1700 in the *Vikram* calendar. There is no argument from convenience, however, to salvage Shukla's handling of the poet Keshavdas, which exemplifies the historiographical confusion that plagued this new division between *bhakti* and *rīti*. Once Shukla decided on 1700/1643 as a cut-off point, he had no choice but to place Keshavdas in the *bhakti* period. A potent illustration of the mismatch is that Shukla relegated his work to an appendix-like section on *phuṭkal racnāeṃ* (miscellaneous texts). This was a considerable demotion for a poet who had once been venerated as *ādi kavi* (inaugural poet).[93]

New periods were not all that was being proposed in Shukla's *Itihās*. Inherent in his model (although its full enunciation would await the rash of post-Independence literary histories) is a sense of pronounced hierarchy between *bhakti* and *rīti* in terms of literary and sociocultural merit. Whereas the category of *bhakti*, pregnant with positive connotations of spirituality, betokens a hallowed Indian cultural trait, the very idea of *rīti*, a term that since Shukla's day has stigmatized Brajbhasha courtly literature, suggests stilted pedantry. Frequently glossed in English by the unfortunate term “mannerist,” the word *rīti* does not just innocently connote “style,” a reasonably accurate translation of the Hindi word, but carries the derogatory implication of “too much style.”

Shukla was not one to mince words, and he leaves no doubt about his view of the literature he was newly terming *rīti*: he found it disappointing on linguistic, literary, and intellectual grounds. Recapitulating the consensus that had evolved during the *Dvivedī yug*, Shukla laments that “medieval” Hindi writers never developed a strong prose tradition, nor did they adequately refine Brajbhasha with the requisite attention to grammar (he levels particular **(p.228)** criticism against poets’ conjugating the same verb in completely different ways according to the exigencies of meter and rhyme). Lexical miscegenation also disturbed him: in an age that saw Hindi moving further and further away from its more pluralistic Hindustani past to a restrictive—and some might say sterile—*śuddhatā* (purity), Shukla disapproved of the use of too many *videśī* (foreign) words, a criticism clearly directed at the Perso-Arabic vocabulary employed by many Braj poets of the early modern period.[94] Brajbhasha's hybridity is a linguistic fact, but the cultural evaluation of that fact and its history had shifted. For centuries, *rīti* writers had lovingly experimented with the possibilities of their quirky, pliable language and their mixed-register wordplay is an important component of Brajbhasha's poetic appeal and a condition of its transregional and trans-social success. For Shukla and others schooled in the linguistic puritanism

of the Hindi movement, this multicultural hybridity was a derisible flaw that a better class of poets would have expunged from the language. Although Shukla cannot help but concede that *rīti* poetry is beautiful,[95] beauty itself had become suspect for nationalists. Literature was now supposed to be useful, not beautiful.

Most of all, Shukla regretted the proliferation of the *rītigranth*, denouncing the genre for stifling literary creativity. This was the first time a modern Hindi critic had ever paid sustained attention to the *rītigranth* texts as works of scholarship, and in this respect too, he set the tone for the future reception of the corpus. Grierson, whatever one might say about his teleological model of an Indian literary history that culminated in the British civilizing mission, had lauded the seventeenth-century Braj poetics texts as evidence of an Indic "Ars Poetica."[96] The Mishra brothers, while expressing bewilderment at their vast quantity, did not so much decry the trend as wish writers had done something more useful than all ending up, as they saw it, writing the same book over and over again. But no earlier literary historian had weighed the merits of Braj *alaṅkāraśāstra* as an intellectual practice. One wishes that Shukla had not broken the silence. Misperceiving the very objectives of *rīti* classicism, he tirelessly laments the lack of original ideas in Brajbhasha poetics theory. Worse, he accuses *rīti* poets of not even being able to transmit the Sanskrit ideas properly.[97] In his extended account of the *rīti* period's preeminent genre, Shukla catalogs the poets' "errors" (*bhram/bhrānt dhāraṇā*), repeatedly referencing their "bungling" (*gaṛbaṛī*), and their "mistaken" (*pramādvaś*) and "incoherent" (*asaṅgat*) ideas. The ironies here are rich, for it is often in discussing precisely the *rīti* poets' innovations that Shukla unleashes his harshest criticism. On the one hand, he says the poets lack originality, but on the other, when they did invent new *bheda*s (categories) of *alaṅkāra*s or *nāyikā*s, which we saw in chapter 3 was one of the primary **(p.229)** strategies for intellectual innovation in the Braj *kavikul*, he denounces them for departing from the Sanskrit tradition.[98]

The estimation of Brajbhasha courtly writing had suffered from three decades of Dvivedi-style reform, but the publication of *Hindī sāhitya kā itihās* sealed its fate. Shukla excoriated *rīti* authors so thoroughly, and so completely misrepresented the very premises of their literary and intellectual existence, that there was no hope of their ever recovering their standing. *Rīti*'s loss was *bhakti*'s gain: devotional poetry with its spiritual and edifying content was accorded the highest status in literary history, a position it has retained ever since.[99]

Shukla's idea that *rīti* writers lacked the intellectual strengths of their Sanskrit forebears can, some might argue, be traced to early modern poets themselves. Keshavdas, after all, introduced himself to his readers as a slow-witted *bhāṣā kavi*. Kavindracharya Sarasvati, who, unlike Keshavdas, composed both Bhasha and Sanskrit works, spoke of his *lāj* (shame) at writing in the vernacular, which can hardly be taken as a compelling vote of confidence in Hindi's intellectual

merits. Sudan, for his part, conceptualized Bhasha writing as a necessary concession to the *kaliyuga*, an ancient notion of India's ineluctable periodic regression.[100] Although these seem to be stereotypical professions of literary humility rather than heartfelt belief, they need at least to be recorded as evidence of misgivings about Hindi's scholarly traditions that long predate Ramchandra Shukla.

In addition to expressing the general notion that the very act of writing in the Hindi language is automatically a fall from a Sanskrit state of grace, occasionally premodern poets voiced more specific forms of discontent with literary trends and methods; however, interpreting their intentions is far from easy. Premodern writers sometimes express even their own opinions typologically. In a verse that has sometimes been read as a harbinger of the need for Hindi's reform, the late eighteenth-century poet Thakur speaks with apparent exasperation of the stock imagery so central to *rīti* literature:

> They have learned to say that eyes are fish, deer, wagtails, or lotuses;
> they have told of [the patron's] fame and valor;
> they have learned of magical trees, cows, and jewels that bestow wishes;
> they have learned when to say Mount Meru or Kubera.
> But Thakur says: poetry is a most difficult matter.
> Never think for a moment that words could possibly confine it;
> still people churn it out and introduce it to the assembly.
> They think writing poetry is an easy game.[101]

Some remarks by Bhikharidas to the effect that poetry, if it fails to please, can at least be a pretext for the worship of Radha and Krishna (*rādhikā kanhaī¯* ***(p. 230)*** *sumirana ko bahāno hai*), have been interpreted by Hindi scholars as marking a consciousness of the weakening of *bhakti*, an idea not dissimilar from the modern notion that *rīti* marks a decline from an earlier period of *bhakti* vitality.[102]

Nor did Shukla invent out of whole cloth the idea of a separation between *bhakti* and more erotic courtly compositions. General Broughton's sepoys (canvassed in the early nineteenth century) had identified the *bhukt mārg* and *rusādik* poetry as two major literary styles. While Broughton's informants evidently found the latter worthier of transmission, several early modern poets articulated a contrasting preference for religious poetry. As noted in chapter 3, Keshavdas had stipulated that the highest form of poetry was *harirasalīna* (steeped in the *rasa* of Hari), after which he ranked poetry written for kings. Surati Mishra, who described himself as an author of *bhaktikāvya*, expressed misgivings about writing poetry for men instead of god. And yet whatever these two authors might have professed (and one senses that the profession counted more than anything else), they wrote both *bhakti* and *rīti* poetry and are especially remembered for

the latter: they not only wrote for kings but also did their best work under royal patronage, as was the case for many poets of the day.

The fact is that any kind of strict boundary between *bhakti* and *rīti* tends to crumble when we apply the slightest bit of pressure. This principle is perhaps best illustrated by a famous verse from Bhikharidas's *Kāvyanirṇay*, the most explicit conceptualization of the Brajbhasha literary canon that we have from the precolonial period:

> We all know of Sur, Keshav, Mandan, Bihari, Kalidas [Trivedi],
> Brahma [i.e., Birbal],
> Chintamani, Matiram and Bhushan.
> Liladhar, Senapati, Nipat [Niranji], Newaj and Nidhi,
> Nilkanth Mishra, Sukhdev, and Dev are respected.
> Alam, Rahim, Raskhan, Sundar, and others—
> so many insightful poets! They cannot all be listed here.
> One need not live in Braj to write in Braj,
> for one can learn the language from these poets of the past.
> Tulsi and Gang, whose works are varied in language,
> are heralded as the master poets (*bhae sukabina ke sardāra*).[103]

Here famous *bhakti* poets like Sur, Nipat Niranji, Raskhan, and Tulsi dwell comfortably among their *rīti* companions, underscoring that for this eighteenth-century literary scholar, poets we today distinguish as either *bhakti* or *rīti* inhabited the same literary universe. Religious poets were not ranked higher **(p. 231)** than courtly ones. Of the two heralded as "masters," one (Tulsi) was from the *bhakti* tradition and the other (Gang) was at the Mughal court.

Although traces can indeed be found of distinctions ("poetry for god" versus "poetry for kings"), even hierarchies, between *bhakti* and courtly literature in the premodern period, more often the two styles overlapped. It is fair to use the terms *rīti* and *bhakti* to designate different social worlds, roughly captured by the idea of court versus temple, but as literary tendencies they are, again, often present in one and the same author, and sometimes even within the same work.[104] And nowhere in the centuries that preceded the colonial period do we find evidence for Shukla's notion of an earlier devotional period of great literary merit succeeded by two-hundred years when creativity was scarce, if not outright imperiled. What are the origins of this idea?

Bhakti Literature and Hindi's Salvageable Past

The idea of Hindi literature's late precolonial decline suspiciously mirrors another story: that of India itself in colonial and nationalist history. Grierson's 1889 account of the Hindi past contained, as we saw, a worrisome eighteenth-century interlude marked by "decay." Although there is a time lag before Indian decline becomes a central organizing principle of Hindi-language literary history,[105] it was easy enough for the Hindi literati to imbibe the idea from other sources. The conceptual underpinning of reformist movements since the

nineteenth century was that India had lost its way. A fundamental premise of orientalists, absorbed by Indians through new translations of the Sanskrit classics under the auspices of colonial education departments, was that the classical Hindu past was India's civilizational peak. The glory days of the Gupta monarchs and the great poet-playwright Kalidasa (fourth or early fifth century) were long gone, however; the question was how India had been allowed to fall into its present, weakened state. Many narratives about India's decline and decadence entered cultural discourse in this period.

Muslims became a compelling new scapegoat in the evolving historiography. If Indian Muslims were wringing their hands over having lost their great Mughal Empire to a British trading company, the Hindus faced a double dose of shame: they had been conquered by the Muslims *and* the British. As Partha Chatterjee has shown, by the 1870s a new mode of framing Indian history had gained currency, with the Hindu nation as its subject.[106] This entwining of Indian history with conceptions of the Hindu self (and its Muslim other) was adopted by Hindi literati, perhaps under the influence of Colonel Tod, **(p.232)** whose *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* is thought to have been translated into Hindi in the 1880s.[107] India's long period of Muslim rule served as a critical rallying point, with Muslims being blamed in some accounts (although by no means all)[108] for the pain and humiliation of colonial rule. It was Muslims (or so the story would now run) who first conquered India and came in wave after marauding wave over the centuries, at once looting temples and trampling Hindu self-esteem. It was the Muslims who had enslaved themselves with luxury, giving way to decadence, instability, and—inevitably—political defeat.

If Hindus had a double shame to atone for after being defeated by two civilizations, the Muslims were accorded double blame, first for conquering Hindus and then for being conquered by the British. The story of Hindi, whose supporters in the period 1890–1947 were embroiled in a pitched battle against Muslim advocates of Urdu, could not help but be inflected (and infected) by the anti-Muslim and anti-Mughal rhetoric that was becoming more and more a part of mainstream Hindu thought. Brajbhasha literature, whose courtly component always had a sizable contingent of Muslim writers and patrons, was caught in the crossfire. Now courtly texts, already a weak link in Hindi literary history for those of a utilitarian bent, seemed more and more suspicious: who could defend all those *praśasti* poems to Mughal emperors and their Rajput collaborators? And what about those works of *nāyikābheda* filled with erotic poetry meant to satisfy the lascivious tastes of depraved rulers during Hindus’ period of disgrace?

Erotic poetry in general became a severe problem for the Hindi intelligentsia from the late nineteenth century. Modernizing conceptions of Hindi began to take shape amid a flurry of anti-Muslim sentiment, but Victorianism also had a role in shaping new standards of literary taste. A natural target for reform was

Brajbhasha poets' customary emphasis on *śṛṅgāra*. The British did not distinguish between the obscene and the erotic, tarring anything that sniffed of sensuality with the same crude brush.[109] Although the other major staple of the Braj literary canon, Krishna-Radha poetry, evinced at least the arguable merit of having god on its side, if even this more sacred domain of aesthetics could hover dangerously close to *aślīltā* (obscenity), nothing could redeem the more courtly styles.

Complex gender issues also entered into play in an age when reformist debates raged over what to do about the education of women. On the one hand, Indian women were held to be backward, abject slaves, mere objects of pleasure and not spousal companions in the manner of better-educated European women. Education would bring about both their moral and social uplift. On the **(p.233)** other hand, the type of woman who had traditionally been educated (such as Keshavdas's prize student Pravin Ray), and the subject matter of that education —*rītigranth*s being an important component of early modern education—were distinctly not in keeping with the prescriptions of nineteenth-century reformers. The sensual content of *rītigranth*s, it was feared, would corrupt rather than nurture morality. What kind of role models were all these *nāyikā*s and their oversexed lovers, especially when an inability to control their libidinous desires was considered a characteristic failing of Hindu women?[110] Harishchandra proscribed Brajbhasha poems from *Bālābodhinī*, the magazine he edited for women and children, which illustrates that not only *rīti* literature but the very Brajbhasha language itself was invested with a problematic sensuality during the Victorian period.[111]

By the time of the *Dvivedī yug*, when nationalism co-opted Indian womanhood into the service of the motherland, any continued appreciation of the female figures from Indian court literature was out of the question. The Indian nation was constructed as feminine, to be sure, but such femininity was demure and controlled, the very antithesis of the open sexuality of the type to be found in *rīti* poetry. Indian womanhood (and nationhood) was synonymous with motherhood—chaste, self-sacrificing, and worthy of the sacrifice. Men's sexuality needed to be checked as well. Men had to rally their *vīrya* (a word for heroism but also, appropriately, semen) to the cause of the Indian nation, not fritter away their energy in idle sensual pleasures. It was precisely such sensuality that had been the downfall of Muslim rulers.[112]

The findings of Ramchandra Shukla in his *Itihās* must thus be viewed as the distillation of a complex *zeitgeist* rather than the workings of a maverick literary historian. He may have invented the category of *rīti* literature, but he certainly did not invent *bhakti* literature, nor was he the first to idealize it. But he was the first to emplot *bhakti* and *rīti* on a timeline that, given historiographical assumptions of precolonial decline under Muslim rule, had the effect of setting *rīti* off from *bhakti* as later, and therefore part of a cultural turn for the worse. In

contrast to *rīti* literature, *bhakti* also contained little that was objectionable and much that resonated with contemporary needs. If Indians had failed to maintain their greatness in this world in the centuries prior to colonialism, they could feel that they reigned supreme in the spiritual arena, an area of cultural autonomy in which they could still take pride.[113] Quite aside from its connotations of wholesome Hindu spirituality, *bhakti* also spoke to contemporary political needs: one of the new coinages for patriotism, *deśbhakti*, gave an older term an expanded scope and a modern, purposeful ring.[114]

(p.234) The Legacy of Ramchandra Shukla

The *Chāyāvād* movement, a homegrown Hindi Romanticism that was already coming to prominence in Ramchandra Shukla's day, did not help the cause of *rīti* literature. *Chāyāvādī* poets exhibit a complicated relationship to both nationalism and the *rīti* past.[115] They were frustrated with the unrelieved prosaicness of *Dvivedī yug* literature and sought to move poetry away from patriotic and reformist themes, striving to reclaim beauty as a literary value. But such an orientation could appear dangerously close to the stress on art for art's sake that seemed to have characterized *rīti* literature and, in the years leading up to Indian independence, risked appearing reactionary and insufficiently engaged with political struggle. Perhaps this is why Sumitranandan Pant (1900–77), one of the movement's prominent spokesmen, took special care to distance *Chāyāvādī* aesthetics from those of *rīti* literature. This excerpt from *Pallav*, one of Pant's most popular works, sounds like he has taken a page from Dvivedi's book (or perhaps a page from a manuscript of the eighteenth-century poet Thakur):

> No matter which of these literary gardeners' pleasure gardens (*vilās bāṭikā*) you enter, you will mainly find in all of them the same banana trunks, lotus stalks, pomegranate seeds, parrots, cuckoos, wagtails, conch shells, lotuses, serpents, lions, deer, moons, lovers' gazes, sidelong glances, heaving sighs, horripilating, the sending of messengers, moaning, fainting, dreaming, setting forth for a tryst—only this, nothing else![116]

Although the high style, even classicism, of some *Chāyāvādī* poetry would be familiar to any lover of *rīti* literature, Pant, Mahadevi Varma, Nirala, Jai Shankar Prasad, and other sympathizers of the movement self-identified as Romantics. They were bringing a new personal voice to poetry that, in the case of both *rīti* and reformist literature of the *Dvivedī yug*, was in their view too mechanistic and stilted.

A couple of decades after *Chāyāvād* had run its course, *rīti* literature would briefly return to favor—not for writers but for scholars—in a flurry of Hindi research that took place in the wake of independence. India's freedom from colonial rule was attended by tragedy and disillusionment in the bloody aftermath of Partition, but the currents of nationalist optimism, which had been a defining feature of Hindi literary study for half a century, were a countervailing

buoyant force. The 1950s, ’60s, and ’70s witnessed many advances in research on the *rīti* period. New texts had been discovered and *granthāvalī*s (editions) of **(p.235)** old ones continued to be made. The field of Hindi scholarship, which had scarcely existed even fifty years earlier, was by now a thriving and substantial enterprise in Indian universities (it would take much longer to develop in the West). The career of Vishvanathprasad Mishra (1906–82) in particular illustrates how the study of *rīti* literature seemed poised for a remarkable comeback. A talented student of the Braj aficionado Lala Bhagvandin (along with Ramchandra Shukla, one of two Hindi lecturers appointed in 1921 when Hindi study was inaugurated at Banaras Hindu University[117]), Mishra singlehandedly edited the *granthāvalī*s of many *rīti* poets, including Keshavdas, Bhushan, Bhikharidas, Bodha, Jaswant Singh, and Padmakar, writing substantial introductions to each. Much of this work has yet to be superseded. Mishra also wrote a major two-volume literary history: *Hindī sāhitya kā atīt* (Hindi's literary past, first published in 1959–60).

A major historiographical overhaul was not on offer, but it was an influential work, and some of Mishra's ideas about *rīti* literature proved to have longevity. Most famously, Mishra proposed that the name *rītikāl* (*rīti* period) be changed to *śṛṅgārkāl*. He did keep the term *rīti*, however, using it to frame three subdivisions of the *śṛṅgārkāl*. The period's hallmark poetry textbooks were typed *rītibaddh*, “bound by convention” or, in other, more enticing words, “classical.” The remaining poetry could be categorized as either *rītisiddh* (informed by classicism) or *rītimukt* (free from classical influence).[118] Mishra's proposed system had the virtue of recognizing the importance of the classical *śṛṅgāra rasa* to the *rīti* enterprise, but a name change centered on eros was not likely to advance the cause of recuperating the tradition, for its defining concept was still susceptible to the same old colonial and nationalist tropes about Indian decadence. Mishra's system did, however, set the stage for a wider acceptance of *rītimukt* poets like Anandghan and Bodha, whose work has since attracted acclaim for its relative independence from courtly convention, and its personal, even Romantic, voice. While Mishra is to be credited for his immense labors on behalf of *rīti* literature—without his scholarship the present book could certainly not have been written—he remained deeply troubled by what he saw as the *vilāsitā* (hedonism, decadence) of the period.[119] One also detects here a recurrence of the cultural schizophrenia that marred early histories like the *Miśrabandhuvinod*: one of *rīti* literature's greatest advocates on some level simultaneously disparages it.

The veteran Hindi critic Nagendra, an approximate contemporary of Vishvanathprasad Mishra who presided over the Hindi department at Delhi University—one of India's best—in the decades after independence, shows similar symptoms. In his *Rītikāvya kī bhūmikā* (Backdrop to *rīti* literature), first published in 1949, Nagendra ostensibly set out to restore the tradition to **(p. 236)** the esteem it had once commanded among cultured people in Hindustan.

He not only countered the misunderstandings that had come to plague this component of the Brajbhasha past but also, during his chairmanship of the department, rallied countless Ph.D. students to the task of writing on *rīti* subjects.[120] Inexplicably, but perhaps inevitably given Hindi's now firm congruence with the history of the Hindu nation, Nagendra framed *rīti* literature in terms of a series of tired arguments about Hindu *patan* (decline) under Muslim rule and the lamentable sensuality of *sāmantvādī* (feudal) cultural life. Like the Mishra brothers and Dvivedi before him, he wondered why Braj poets did not employ their pens to more useful ends. In his *Rītikāvya kī bhūmikā*, he asked the withering question, “In the end, what did Hindi poets do for two hundred years?”[121]

It is Nagendra, I suspect, who bequeathed to us the discussion of the *rīti* period's “*paristhitiyāṃ*” (conditions), which became a staple of historiography and criticism from the 1970s. The volume on *rītibaddh* literature in the massive *Hindī sāhitya kā bṛhat itihās* (Comprehensive history of Hindi literature), at fifteen volumes among the longest histories of any literature ever produced, was compiled under his editorship. Before readers encounter a single *rīti* poem they are bombarded by an arsenal of diatribes against India's lamentable medieval feudal conditions, which are then painstakingly detailed as the purportedly necessary backdrop for understanding *rīti* literature. The *śṛṅgāra* elements of Braj court poetry are presented not in terms of their congruence with classical norms but as the actually wayward practices of late Mughal society, when morality and self-control had sunk to an all-time low.[122] Dilating upon the excesses of Mughal rulers—their supposed obsession with luxury, wine, and women—and harping on the waning political fortunes of India from the time of Aurangzeb, who is predictably misrepresented as a cruel, iconoclastic, and Hindu-hating tyrant, Nagendra invites readers to view *rīti* literature as the product of a diseased, moribund culture and could have no other effect than to predispose them against it.[123]

Literary histories by the dozens have been written in the ensuing decades, yet none has attempted to correct the nationalist bias that entered the field of Hindi a century ago and—or so it often seems—is actually constitutive of it. Even self-styled “new” theorizations reproduce the old. A *Hindī sāhitya kā navīn itihās* (A new history of Hindi literature, 1998) by Lal Sahab Singh, whose title promises field-changing insights, describes the *rīti* period as follows:

> As far as the social order is concerned, this was through and through an epoch of terrible decline. It was the heyday of feudalism.… The **(p.237)** ruling classes were steeped up to their neck in decadence and luxury, the greater part of their days spent indulging in wine and women.[124]

The *paristhitiyāṃ* section remains an unshakable feature of *rīti* literary criticism.[125] The practice of framing *rīti* literature in this manner is so widespread that I have actually found myself wondering if Indian Ph.D. advisors feel compelled to tell their students that they must begin their thesis on a *rīti* topic with a discussion of Mughal-period decadence. This relentless, unquestioning normativity about the early modern Hindi past not only is historiographically questionable but also harmfully forecloses new research into fresh conceptual terrain. The study of *rīti* literature has been trapped by Hindi textbooks, trapped by historiography, trapped—and this last most cruelly—even by its admirers.

Conclusion

Nothing that happened to *rīti* literature in the modern period was a given. The logic of colonialism (India needed to be rescued from its political and cultural decline under Mughal rule) and nationalism (literature needed to be more vigorous, and to serve the Hindu motherland) constructs the story of Hindi's dramatic literary overhaul as one of necessity. Brajbhasha literary culture entered the nineteenth century as strong as it had ever been. It was never in decline, as we know from countless sources: Lallulal, Broughton, Padmakar, Gokulnath, Sardar Kavi, and many others. *Rīti* poetry in particular was very much alive to Harishchandra and the writers of his generation, attracting an avid readership during the early phase of Hindi print culture. *Rīti* poets remained active even into the twentieth century. They wrote some traditional works, but were also still experimenting with new cultural forms—a sign of literary vitality by any measure.

There is still probably much that we do not adequately understand about late *rīti* writers. For one thing, scholars tend to focus on the literary production of Indian territory that was under direct British rule, even though many of the princely states were only sporadically assimilating to colonial trends. Indigenous culture zones of this type may still have something to teach us about the period. A recent study of northwestern India shows how Punjabi literature was a largely unregulated, even subversive circulatory arena outside the control of the Urdu-language print mechanisms supported by the British.[126] *Rīti* literary culture, although not demotic in its register and intended audience in the manner of Punjabi texts, would also have operated beneath the radar of colonialism, especially in the two-fifths of India that were not under British control. Typically, **(p.238)** however, scholars frame the Hindi literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a call and response between Brajbhasha traditionalism and Khari Boli modernity. Such conceptual binaries are clearly inadequate. Although we have only been able to glance at nineteenth-century *rīti* texts here, evidence from the poetry of Thakur Jagmohan Singh suggests a far more complex mode of interaction between the colonial state and “traditionalist” culture zones than any dyadic analytic could capture.[127]

In order to disrupt the neat packaging of Hindi modernity, this chapter has also called into question cherished notions about literary historiography. In the nineteenth century, a clearly defined historical account of Hindi literature did not exist. It had to be invented, and few of the building blocks of this new construction lay to hand. A centuries-old amorphous mass of diverse texts began to be conceptualized in unprecedented ways and apportioned to new symbolic realms. When Hindi was first taken up as a suitable subject for history, the historiography was already compromised, shaped by the colonial construction of India's supposed medieval weakness under Mughal rule, a thinly veiled justification for a British takeover. Colonialist logic operates in full force in Grierson's treatment of the eighteenth century in *The Modern Vernacular Literature of Hindustan*, but the nationalist logic that informs much of the Hindi historiography that followed is no less skewed. Ramchandra Shukla's disaggregation on chronological grounds, as found first in *Hindī sāhitya kā itihās*, of what were for Brajbhasha two highly synchronous literary trends—devotional and courtly—is inflected by the high utilitarianism and reformist spirit of its age rather than by any defensible principle of literary or intellectual history.

The Hindi public sphere developed dynamically in the early decades of the twentieth century, and literary history as well as much of Khari Boli's modern literature and critical apparatus participated in the programmatic discourse of the nation. In the eyes of Hindi activists, chief among them Mahavir Prasad Dvivedi, the Brajbhasha *kavikul* had led the language astray. Aside from Brajbhasha's putative insufficiencies with respect to grammar and prose genres, the language also made at least some critics nervous for its lexical impurity. But “purity” was never a cultural value for Brajbhasha poets. Brajbhasha was congenitally and joyfully impure—hybrid and multi-registered—in an almost-direct challenge to Sanskrit with its sanctimonious claims to being an unadulterated “language of the gods.” Brajbhasha's linguistic diversity was not just a theoretical liability in the judgment of modernizing Hindi critics; it was also a practical debility at a time when Hindi and Urdu were increasingly being carved out into separate domains. Promoting the new Sanskritized Khari Boli over Brajbhasha in the early twentieth century was perceived as an act of linguistic nation-building.

(p.239) There were holdouts, to be sure. Defenders of Brajbhasha as a linguistic medium and those who had a more capacious vision of Hindi's literary heritage lent their voice to the tumultuous debates of the day. But whatever resistance, or ambivalence, was in the air, the new vision for standardized, modernized Hindi won out. The explosive popularity of Premchand's Khari Boli novels on themes of social uplift and the nation, the continued growth of the Hindi public sphere, and the rising tide of *svadeśī* (patriotic) populism under Gandhi meant that by 1930 there was no turning back.[128] Hindi, fully reformed and donning a new nationalist armor, hardly resembled the language it had been

even a generation earlier. Some aspects of Brajbhasha textual culture were now completely suspect. When Hindi became a metonym for the nation, literary energies, like political ones, were harnessed to the cause of Indian progress, and *bhakti* literature seemed on all counts a more relevant and salvageable corpus. For nationalist thinkers, the ethos of rebelliousness that is prominent in, say, some *nirguṇ sant* poetry could be reconfigured in light of more modern struggles against the British, and made to subserve new democratic political aspirations. The love of god could be potently redirected toward the motherland. *Rīti* texts, however, were constructed as tired relics from the feudal past and the very sign of the "medieval" Hindi literary heritage, laden with the shame and regret of a colonized people.

Although nothing can change the fact that Brajbhasha went from being a living language to a historical relic in the 1920s, the battle for the language's history can still be fought. The dominance of Khari Boli did not have to entail the cultural erasure of large swathes of Brajbhasha literature, which is precisely what we face at present. Many Indians became alienated from their own regional literary traditions during the colonial period, but the process of reeducation was nowhere more sweeping than in Hindi circles. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the classical tradition of Brajbhasha, in a manner virtually unique in world literary history, was supplanted by an entirely different dialect and rendered antiquated within a generation. This "catastrophic success" in the domain of linguistic and poetic reform meant that the older language would become increasingly unintelligible to speakers of Khari Boli Hindi as the decades passed.[129] Meanwhile, postcolonial criticism—otherwise such a dynamic field in Indian studies—has almost completely bypassed the historiography of precolonial Hindi literature.[130] There can be no serious postcolonialism without a committed engagement with precolonialism. More than sixty years after decolonization, the study of the classical Hindi past remains enmeshed in a paradigm of Indian failure so tired, untrue, and dispiriting that postcolonialists, nationalists, and lovers of India everywhere should surely be dismayed.

Notes:

(1.) Chandra 1992; Lelyveld 1993; Dalmia 1999; Rai 2001; Blackburn and Dalmia 2004; Stark 2007; Orsini 2009.

(2.) See introduction, n. 21.

(3.) For a dramatic account of the political complexities of the day, see Pinch 2006: 1–5.

(4.) Some scholars, notably R. S. McGregor, find a pattern of diminishing literary vigor: "Although changes and new developments took place, court poetry during this long period leaves the impression of a literary culture increasingly static,

not stimulated by new religious developments, its poets engaged to a large extent in studying and following models laid down by their predecessors and finding progressively less scope for innovation" (1984: 172). For a contrasting view, see the discussion below of early Hindi literary historians Shiv Singh Sengar and the Mishra brothers.

(5.) On Vrindavandas, see McGregor 1984: 162 and Bangha 2007: 319. The works of Somnath are collected in *Somnāthgranthāvalī*.

(6.) See the essays collected in Breckenridge and van der Veer 1993; Cohn 1996.

(7.) See Vedalankar 1969: 28–76.

(8.) McGregor 1974: 68. This discussion of the oeuvre of Lallulal draws predominantly on the findings of McGregor (1974: 66–68).

(9.) According to McGregor, this work, which was written in a Khari Boli that preserves some Braj linguistic features, was popular not just among Indians but also among British civil servants, for whom it served as a Hindi textbook. On the superseding of earlier *Braj Bhāgavata* texts by Lallulal's highly successful printed version, see McGregor 1984: 156.

(10.) Further details about Sundar Kaviray are in chapter 4.

(11.) Broughton 2000: 37–39.

(12.) Other styles that he notes, but does not anthologize, include the "Atunk, or Bheer" (*ātaṅk/bīr*), the "Jugt burnun" (*jagat-varṇan*), and the "Bishnupud," a popular Vaishnava song genre. Ibid., 42–43.

(13.) The Brahmans among his troops "not seldom have attained the degree of Pundit, when they enlist as soldiers in the Company's army, he declares. Ibid., p. 38.

(14.) Ibid., p. 44. *Kavitt* is both a generic term for poetry and a particular style of Braj quatrain. A helpful analysis of the contours of the collection is Bangha 2000.

(15.) McGregor, for instance, states, "The educationist Śivprasād Siṃh … is the first important individual figure in the history of Hindi after the opening years of the century" (1974: 71). Cf. Stark 2007: 25 n. 30.

(16.) Stark 2007: 49, 59–65. This paragraph and indeed much of my information about nineteenth-century Hindi printing draws on this valuable book.

(17.) Lakshmisagar Varshney (1963: 73–76) and Bhagvansahay Pachauri (1973: 62–72) have excavated compelling indicators of a large volume of *rīti* literature

(including original works and prose commentaries) produced in the first half of the nineteenth century.

(18.) McGregor strangely excluded *rīti* poetry from his book on nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Hindi (1974), including even very late British-period court poets in the volume on premodern Hindi (1984). On the supposedly retrenched medievalism of most nineteenth-century court poets, see Pachauri 1973: 13–14, 77 (although here the statement is contradicted by the author's own evidence on the following page); Varshney 1963: 20–22 (again, some excerpted poems seem to gainsay the argument).

(19.) Late *rīti* poets are briefly discussed in McGregor 1984: 183–84, 198–203; Asnani 1997.

(20.) See Pinch 2006, especially pp. 108–47.

(21.) *Asibara aṃgarejaiṃ ghali ghali tejaiṃ arigana bhejaiṃ surapura koṃ* (stabbed repeatedly by the finest English sword, the enemy army was dispatched to heaven), v. 200.

(22.) Further details about Padmakar's career are in Mishra 1959b: 5–79.

(23.) This is one of Padmakar's *prakīrṇak* (occasional) verses that is neither part of a *prabandha* nor a set anthology. *Padmākargranthāvalī*, p. 311 (*prakīrṇak* v. 27, quoted in Pachauri 1973: 77). For another of Padmakar's poems that uses English words with a military resonance, such as “major” and “captain,” see Telang 1972: 7.

(24.) The issue has been debated, but *Ānandraghunandan* is considered by some scholars to be the first modern Hindi drama. See Chhabra 1976; McGregor 1984: 170–71; Stasik 2007. Vishvanath Singh's son Raghuraj Singh (1833–79) was also a Hindi poet.

(25.) Pachauri 1973: 80; Vidyarthi 1983: 351–63.

(26.) See Varshney 1963: 156–57.

(27.) Continuities between premodern and print-inflected literary tastes can be traced throughout South Asia. For the Tamil case, see Blackburn 2004. Orsini (2004a: 435–36) usefully distinguishes between “genres reproduced” and “genres introduced” in early Indian print culture.

(28.) These details about literary patronage at the Banaras court are derived from McGregor 1984: 198, 202. Also see Dalmia 1999: 69–71.

(29.) Sardar's commentary on the *Kavipriyā* was published at least twice, by the Banaras Raja's own press in 1865 and by Naval Kishore in 1886. See McGregor

1984: 202 n. 374. On the general popularity of Keshavdas's work in nineteenth-century print culture, see Stark 2004: 262.

(30.) Some publication details are available in Mishra 1959b: 20–22.

(31.) See Stasik 2007: 363. Maharaja Vishvanath Singh's *ṭīkā* on Kabir's *Bijak* also made it into print in 1883. Stark 2004: 262.

(32.) Stark 2007: 320–21.

(33.) Presses were also purchased by Serfoji II (1805), raja of Tanjore, the nizam of Hyderabad (1810), and Ghaziuddin Haider of Lucknow (1817). Ibid., 42,

(34.) Stark 2004: 259–63. Cf. Orsini 2004b: 119–20.

(35.) Mir 2006: 420.

(36.) On Bengali literary cosmopolitanism in the modern period, see Kaviraj 2003: 553–54; on the currency of Braj poetry in Bengal during early modern times, see Chatterjee 2009: 227–28.

(37.) See Kaviraj 1995 and Seely 2004, respectively.

(38.) On the respect accorded to Sanskrit classics by Mahavir Prasad Dvivedi and other Hindi modernists, see Ramvilas Sharma 1977: 274–77.

(39.) Tharu 1994: 168. A classic illustration of this for Urdu literature is Naim 1984.

(40.) Pritchett 1994: 36.

(41.) Stark 2007: 101.

(42.) Sengupta 1992; Dalmia 1999. Also see Chandra 1992.

(43.) McGregor 1974: 80–82; Sengupta 1992: 1–38.

(44.) Giridhardas, like Vishvanath Singh of Rewa, is another candidate for the designation “first modern Hindi dramatist,” a title that evidently has multiple claimants. On Giridhardas, see McGregor 1984: 202. The discussion of Harishchandra's oeuvre in this paragraph draws mainly on McGregor 1974: 75–83.

(45.) Of Khari Boli, Grierson (1889: 107) noted, “it has never been successfully used for poetry. The greatest geniuses have tried, and it has been found wanting at their hands.”

(46.) *Bhāratendu ke nibandh*, p. 63.

(47.) In a prosodic system based on syllable weight, Khari Boli is hindered from the start by verb forms that end in long vowels (for instance, Khari Boli *kartā* instead of Braj *karata*). Brajbhasha, in contrast, favors short vowels and breaking up consonant clusters with an epenthetic short “a,” as in *parabīna* for *prabīna*.

(48.) The information in this and the following paragraph is based on the work of Robert van de Walle 2006.

(49.) On *anubhav-siddh* as a new literary criterion for Harishchandra, see Dalmia 1999: 280.

(50.) The standard study of this contentious intellectual-historical terrain is King 1999. Cf. Rai 2001.

(51.) The Bhikharidas verse is excerpted below. Sudan's method can be gleaned from *Sujāncaritra*, 1.4–9.

(52.) See, respectively, Divakar 1966 and Callewaert 1993.

(53.) The *aṣṭachāp* poets were Surdas, Krishnadas, Parmananddas, Kumbhandas, Nanddas, Chaturbhujdas, Chhitsvami, and Govindsvami. See McGregor 1984: 83–88.

(54.) On the *Bhaktamāl* of Nabhadas, see Hare 2011.

(55.) This point has been made by scholars of other Indian literary traditions. For the Tamil and Telugu cases, see Rao and Shulman 1999: 9. Frances Pritchett notes that the *tazkirah*s memorializing Urdu poets were arranged chronologically, but this was just one of many organizational strategies (2003: 865–66).

(56.) Shamsur Rahman Faruqi (1995) has pointed out some of the travesties that attended Urdu writers’ assimilation of the literary-historical model under colonial conditions.

(57.) On de Tassy's sources (mostly Urdu *tazkirah*s), see *Histoire de la littérature hindouie et hindoustanie*, 1:40–51. Sengar drew on Hindi's voluminous heritage of anthologies, including the recently published *Bhāṣākāvya saṅgrah* (1875). *Śivsiṃhsaroj*, pp. 2–3; cf. Lutgendorf 1994: 66.

(58.) Garcin de Tassy, for his part, wanted to adopt the new literary-historical method, but he claimed it would be difficult given the lack of attention to chronology in his sources. *Histoire de la littérature hindouie et hindoustanie*, 1:52.

(59.) (*Saṃvat 1700 meṃ … kaviyoṃ ne bhāṣā kāvya ke baṛe-baṛe adbhut granth banāe. Saṃvat 1800 meṃ jaise acche kavi hue aise kisī saikarā ke bhītar nahiṃ hue the. Śivsiṃhsaroj*, pp. 8–9.) These two centuries are more or less coextensive with the *rīti* period as defined by Ramchandra Shukla.

(60.) Note in particular Grierson's impassioned tribute to vernacular language and literature in the opening to *Modern Vernacular Literature of Hindustan*. See Grierson 1889: x–xi.

(61.) Ibid., pp. 128, 145.

(62.) Ibid., p. xxii.

(63.) Ibid., p. xxii.

(64.) Quoted in Trivedi 2003: 988.

(65.) Noted in Pauwels 2001: 460. For some examples of the kinds of linguistic standards that Dvivedi imposed, see *Mahāvīrprasāddvivedīracnāvalī*, 1:452–83. During the same period, other now-canonical Hindi writers, such as Premchand and Ashk, were transitioning from Urdu in Nastaliq script to the new Khari Boli written in Devanagari. See Orsini 2004c: x; Rockwell 2004: 20–22.

(66.) "*Yamunā ke kināre-kināre keli-kautuhal kā adbhut-adbhut varṇan bahut ho cukā.*" *Mahāvīrprasāddvivedīracnāvalī*, 2:49. Many choice quotes from Dvivedi, who had a particular animus against *nāyikābheda*, are compiled in Sharma 1977: 270–304.

(67.) *Mahāvīrprasāddvivedīracnāvalī*, 2:47. Dvivedi was not, of course, the first to express this criticism. See, for instance, the remarks of the English publisher Frederic Pincott in 1889, discussed in Ritter 2010: 251–52.

(68.) On the existence of precolonial prose traditions in Hindi, see McGregor 1968 and 1974: 64; Dalmia 1999: 159–60. On the prose traditions of the *rītikāl*, see Gautam 1972.

(69.) Gupta 2000: 105.

(70.) Orsini 2002b: 82 (citing Harivamshray Bachchan).

(71.) As noted by Francesca Orsini, Mahavir Prasad Dvivedi (alongside other stalwart Hindi leader like, Shyamsundar Das and Ramchandra Shukla) was strongly influenced by English utilitarian thinkers (2002b: 145).

(72.) On the fraught intersection of politics, gender, and language choice in this period, see Pauwels 2001: 455–59, 465; King 1999: 33–37.

(73.) King 1999: 36 (cited in Pauwels 2001: 455).

(74.) *Mahāvīrprasāddvivedīracnāvalī*, 1:125–34.

(75.) Orsini 2002b: 43–48.

(76.) Ibid., 55–57.

(77.) On the endurance of Brajbhasha in this period, see McGregor 1974: 98–111.

(78.) Ritter 2010: 269–70.

(79.) Ritter 2004: 417. Cf. Schomer 1998: 10.

(80.) For more details about their contributions to the Hindi public sphere and their complex social location in both princely India and the colonial civil service, see Gaeffke 1978: 20; Orsini 2002b: 408–9; Busch 2010c.

(81.) *Miśrabandhuvinod*, 1:30–31.

(82.) *Miśrabandhuvinod*, 1:162–63.

(83.) *Hindī navratna*, p. 32.

(84.) Schomer 1998: 57 n. 75 (cited in Orsini 2002b: 144).

(85.) *Miśrabandhuvinod*, 2:679.

(86.) Cf. Chandra 1992: 17–70.

(87.) Faruqi 1995: 90.

(88.) Orsini 2002b: 40–44, 101–11. Orsini also exposes the discrepancy between officially approved, "serious" Hindi and what people actually read and enjoyed (e.g., 2002b: 6, 7, 12).

(89.) A historiographical objection to sneaking Apabhramsha in under the rubric of Hindi is raised in Busch 2011.

(90.) An interested reader might look to discussions by Ramvilas Sharma (1973); Krishna Dhavan (1980); Mahendrapal Sharma (1986); Bachchan Singh (1989); Milind Wakankar (2002).

(91.) Shukla 1994: 1.

(92.) Their periodization is as follows: "the Dawn of Hindi" (650–1286), "the Second Stage" (1286–1387), "Early Mediaeval Hindi" (1387–1503), "Advanced Mediaeval Hindi" (1503–1623), "Early Adorned Hindi" (1623–1733), "Advanced Adorned Hindi" (1733–1832)—these last two approximately designating *rīti*

literature—followed by “The Transition” (1832–1868) and “Modern Hindi” (from 1868). *Miśrabandhuvinod*, 1:v.

(93.) Shukla 1994: 114–19. For further discussion of Shukla's preposterous handling of Keshavdas, see Pachauri 2002: 143–47.

(94.) Shukla 1994: 133. Vishvanathprasad Mishra's account of Brajbhasha's linguistic and grammatical variation, considered perfectly reasonable in a transregional language, is far more balanced. See Mishra 1965a: 152–63.

(95.) In an uncharacteristically generous spirit, at one juncture he says, “*aise saras aur manohar udāharaṇ saṃskṛt ke sāre lakṣaṇoṃ se cunkar ikaṭhṭha kareṃ to bhī unkī itnī adhik saṃkhyā na hogī*” (Even if one could choose from all of the Sanskrit [verses on these] literary topics the number of charming, beautiful examples would not exceed those to be found in Hindi). Shukla 1994: 131.

(96.) He also dignified the classical turn in Hindi literature with the title “Augustan age.” Grierson 1889: xxi, 58.

(97.) Cf. the remarks of Mahendrapal Sharma (1986: 109–10).

(98.) Shukla 1994: 129–31.

(99.) Tulsi's poetry had already been much acclaimed in Orientalist circles for its religious message. See Lutgendorf 1991: 29. Mahavir Prasad Dvivedi had exalted Sur and Tulsi above court poets in a review of the Mishra brothers’ *Hindī navratna* published in his journal *Sarasvatī* in 1912 (Sharma 1977: 275–76). For an unflattering depiction of Keshavdas in light of his *bhakti* contemporaries, see *Mahāvīrprasāddvivedīracnāvalī*, 2:151.

(100.) These citations are in chapters 1, 4, and 3, respectively.

(101.) This verse is modified from the translation excerpted and elucidated in Bangha 2005: 20–24 (note especially his caution about anachronistic interpretations based on modern stigmatizations of *rīti* literature).

(102.) See *Kāvyanirṇay*, 1.8 and McGregor 2003: 941–42.

(103.) *Kāvyanirṇay*, 1.16–17.

(104.) Thus, the eighteenth-century poet Anandghan, who since Shukla's time would have to be considered a *rīti* poet on the basis of his date, moved from court to temple in the course of his literary career, engendering two separate *rīti* and *bhakti* literary personas. See Bangha 2001: 180–89. Keshavdas's *Rasikpriyā*, as noted in chapter 1, is simultaneously a *rīti* and a *bhakti* work. On the *bhakti* and *rīti* registers of Bihari's poetry, which operate in tandem, see Snell 1994b.

(105.) The Mishra brothers, writing in 1913, contested the idea of Indian decline, suggesting the notion was common in their day. See the epigraph to this chapter, excerpted from *Miśrabandhuvinod*, pp. 28, 31 (the full passage is translated in Busch 2010c). Other attestations could be given, such as the infamous remarks by Lord Minto recorded in this chapter's other epigraph (cited in Majumdar 1941: 223). An account of Hindi's literary past by Frank Keay, a British missionary writing in 1920 who was evidently much influenced by Grierson, introduces his chapter ten on "the modern period (from 1800)" with remarks such as, "The eighteenth century had been largely a time of literary dearth, but a renascence now began…. The peace and security which the British rule brought to India, after the long period of internecine strife and disorder through which the country had been passing, also gave the genius of Hindi literature the opportunity of reasserting itself, and of recovering from the decay into which it had fallen in the eighteenth century." Keay 1920: 87.

(106.) Chatterjee 1993a: 92–106.

(107.) On Hindi writers' increasing engagement with historical subjects during this period, see Orsini 2002b: 175–224.

(108.) Orsini notes that Maithilisharan Gupta traced Indian decadence all the way back to the *Mahābhārata* war. Ibid., 185–86. Bankimchandra, for his part, blamed Mughals but not Pathans, a nuance illustrating that as late as the 1880s the Muslim other was not a monolithic construction. See Chatterjee 1993a: 113–15.

(109.) Gupta 2000; cf. Stark 2007: 90–100.

(110.) On the debates about educating women colonial India, see Chatterjee 1993a: 116–34; Sangari 2002: 96–163. Cf. Pachauri 2001: 184–90.

(111.) See Dalmia 1999: 247.

(112.) See Gupta 2000: 95–105. But, as she remarks in the conclusion (pp. 117–18), while Brahmanical patriarchy won out in official discourse, "dirty" literature and erotic manuals continued to be wildly popular throughout the Dvivedi period.

(113.) Chatterjee 1993a: 119–21.

(114.) As noted by Harish Trivedi, the nationalist poet Maithilisharan Gupta exhibited a striking blend of patriotism and *bhakti* in his famous poem *Sāket* (2003: 990). Hariaudh's *Priyāpravās* was mentioned above as an instance of retooling *bhakti* themes in the service of nationalism. Patriotism was also a theme of some of Harischandra's *bhakti* poems. See Chandra 1992: 25.

(115.) See Schomer 1998: 1–123; for a more recent study of the *Chāyāvād* movement, see Green 2008.

(116.) Pant 1963: 21–22 (translation slightly modified from the citation in Bangha 2005: 25).

(117.) Orsini 2002b: 106–7.

(118.) The argument for a *śṛṅgārkāl* is detailed in Mishra 1966: 374–400. The debates on both the naming practices and periodization of Hindi literary historians are helpfully discussed in Mahendrakumar 1995: 277–80; Bangha 2005: 16–19.

(119.) Pachauri 2002: 139.

(120.) Pachauri 2001: 183.

(121.) "*Ākhir pūre do sau varṣ tak hindī ke kaviyoṃ ne kiyā hī kyā*?" (cited in ibid., p. 184).

(122.) Shamsur Rahman Faruqi (1999: 16) has noted a similarly absurd misreading of poetic motif as biography in the case of a love poem written by the Urdu poet Mir when he was nearly 88 years old.

(123.) Nagendra 1973: 3–23. Some of the more damaging subtitles of the section include "*rājnītik aur sāmājik durvyavasthā*" (political and social upheaval) and "*vilāspradhān jīvandarśan tathā patanonmukh yugdharm*" (decadent lifestyles and an epoch characterized by decline morality). The specific passage was written by Savitri Sinha but it was presumably Nagendra's choice to begin the volume in this fashion, since a shorter digest of Indian literary history produced under his co-editorship the same year has a similar section (this one credited to one Mahendrakumar). See Nagendra and Gupta 1995: 281–87.

(124.) Singh 1998: 98.

(125.) Representative are Cheler 1973: 1–20; Singh 1999: 21–27. Even a very recent study of the Mughal poet Sundar, while a welcome contribution to scholarship in many respects, regrets the *vilāsitāpūrṇ vātāvaraṇ* (environment overly given to hedonism) of the Mughal courts, which is held up as a reason for the erotic focus and even, improbably, the occasional intellectual lapses of the writer. See Yadav 2008: 7.

(126.) Mir 2006.

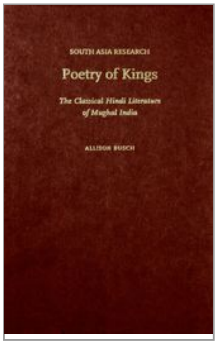
(127.) Also consider how Harishchandra still had access to precolonial practices and responded dynamically to colonial ones, simultaneously laying the grounds

for what Vasudha Dalmia sees as a “third idiom of Indian nationalist modernity (1999: 13–20). Cf. Chandra 1992.

(128.) Insightful discussions of the Hindi public sphere and Premchand's oeuvre are Orsini 2002b and 2004c, respectively.

(129.) Geoffrey Lewis (1999) uses the term “catastrophic success” for the somewhat comparable case of Turkish language reform in the same period, which saw the expunging of Ottoman in favor of barely comprehensible neologisms, not to mention the almost-immediate alienation of modern readers from a rich textual heritage developed over centuries.

(130.) Notable exceptions include recent studies by Charu Gupta (2000), Sudhish Pachauri (2001, 2002), and Purushottam Agrawal (2009a).



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Conclusion

Remembering Things Past

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Abstract and Keywords

This chapter briefly sums up some of the central findings of the book, while also making a larger argument about the value—indeed the necessity—of studying and reflecting on the Hindi literary past. Modern nationalism has been such a defining force in the field of Hindi literature that divergent narratives, such as the story of Hindi's Mughal and Muslim past foregrounded here, have been almost completely foreclosed. The revisionist history outlined in this book suggests that fresh, postcolonial perspectives on the premodern Hindi archive are not only possible but essential for the health of literary studies and also have the potential to define new areas of Indian intellectual and social history. It is also advocated that precolonialism be a part of postcolonialism.

Keywords: nationalism, Hindi literature, historiography, intellectual history, social history, postcolonialism

Reckoning Gains and Losses: Presentism in Hindi Studies

Various filters cloud our vision when we look back at the Hindi literature of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century North India, the period designated since Ramchandra Shukla's day by the term *rīti*. Monumental ruptures have severed many links with India's premodern literary past and changed fundamentally the way it is viewed. The very category "Hindi literature" was born in the modern period, under the peculiarly entwined forces of colonialism and nationalism. Simultaneously engendered was an account of what Hindi literature was and

how it came to be, a process that gave narrative shape to something much larger. At the turn of the twentieth century—in many places in the world—speaking of a literature was a synecdochic enterprise. Speaking of Hindi literature in particular meant speaking of the trajectory of the Indian people: their past, their present, and—perhaps most crucially for a country of colonized subjects—their future, a time when they could imagine themselves free from the supposed weaknesses that had allowed the country to be taken over by a foreign power in the first place.

In this book, I have tried to assay the sufficiency of this narrative with specific reference to the late precolonial past. Hindi literature as a field of academic study was created under conditions that were especially fraught, and many powerful ideas that have come to dominate it are not absolute but highly contingent truths with a **(p.241)** peculiar sociohistorical provenance. Hindi literary history came into being in a fight against both the colonizers and Muslim advocates of Urdu. Is it Hindi's destiny to be forever hobbled by its nationalist origins? Although much newness has entered the contemporary literary field in recent decades, surprisingly little has changed in the core approaches to precolonial literature.

According to the logic of colonialism and nationalism, the story of Hindi should be framed as the story of Indian progress. Replacing the weak, depleted Brajbhasha, Hindi was finally able to attain a vigorous embodiment and forward-looking demeanor. Reformist poets of the *Dvivedī yug* were conscripted into the ideological army that would carry out its great leap forward. Hindi gained; the nation gained. It is not my point here to dispute the achievements of the twentieth and now twenty-first centuries. They are many; indeed, there is much that any citizen of any nation in the world could envy about the dynamism and creativity of modern Hindi literary life. Hindi literature continued to be cross-pollinated with genres from the West, and not just those of the colonial masters, long after the initial reformist moment: great works of European literature were translated into Hindi and the writings of modernists such as Nirmal Verma were conscious, hybridizing engagements with the West, not imitations. As this study has suggested throughout, literary imitation is always a dynamic process.[1] It is right to frame all of this as a gain for Hindi. Hindi writers have been progressivists, Romantics, experimentalists. In the aftermath of Partition, some became high modernists, when the deep cynicism and alienation of *nayī kahānī* writers captured perfectly the anxieties and contradictions of deracinated urban existence. In the six decades since, Hindi writers have shown themselves to be admirably agile at inhabiting both the *deśī* (local) and the *mārga* (cosmopolitan) worlds, whether cultivating *āṃcalik* (regional) styles, encompassing new voices through Dalit or feminist literature, or engaging the modes of global English (the new *mārga*).

When we speak of Hindi modernity, we always speak of gain, and there are many reasons why we should. I want, nonetheless, to speak of loss. The Hindi literary community of today has lost access to much of its past, which is either inadequately studied or alarmingly misrepresented (the two problems are related). It is not a sign of intellectual health to consign one's classical past to oblivion or to allow colonial error to reign long after independence. Nowadays, for many students and researchers the story of Hindi starts in the middle of the nineteenth century and is inextricably linked to India's rebellion against its colonial masters. It is the story of Khari Boli and the Hindi sphere's encounter with the West, followed by the struggle for Indian nationhood. Hindi literature did not begin in the nineteenth century. It is hard to say when it did—in part because we can always dispute what precisely we mean by "Hindi," or indeed **(p.242)** by "literature" or "beginning"—but for much responsible historiography, the beautiful Avadhi tradition of *kāvya* cultivated by Sufi writers, which started by the fourteenth century, has been a sensible place to put this inauguration; another kind of Hindi, the tradition of courtly Brajbhasha, began some two centuries later. But the story of Hindi is decidedly *not* the triumphalist story of the nation, of the struggles of its Hindu citizens acting purposefully to revive their traditions after a Muslim (and British) interregnum despoiled them.

When we tell the story of Hindi as the gainful trek to nationhood and modernity —emphasizing the crucial literary, moral, developmental, and civilizational components that Brajbhasha lacked, which were restored through a vigorous colonial and nationalist regimen—we lose any and all nuance about its past.[2] Brajbhasha is not just a foil for the narrative of Hindi uplift, no more than *rīti* should be a foil for *bhakti*. These are sheer caricatures, which efface the historical and aesthetic complexity of literary premodernity. We cannot change the fact that during the Dvivedi period Brajbhasha was definitively superseded by Khari Boli Hindi, or that *rīti* literature was repudiated as a medieval, decadent tradition. We can, however, be cognizant of the colonial and nationalist conditions that governed the process. More important, we can choose to remember, and not to forget, the centuries of literary activity that preceded British colonialism—*all* of them, not just the parts of the Hindi heritage that resonate most readily with modern concerns.[3] The texts from this period have a rich and deeply layered story to tell.

Hindi's lost pasts

The Hindi pasts are of course many. The most conspicuous loss is Hindi's early modern past. Not all of it, to be sure—the *bhakti* past did have many heroes who could be recuperated during the Hindi renaissance—poet-*bhakta*s like Tulsi and Sur; the "good Muslims" Kabir and Raskhan; the beleaguered but brave Mira, honored feminist *avant la lettre*.[4] What we do not have so readily available is Hindi's courtly past, its Mughal past, and—dare I say it?—its Muslim past. These have always been a poor archive for the strategists of nationalist mythmaking.

When I began this book, shockingly little was available to me beyond a few stale stereotypes about Hindi court literature produced in the period from 1560 to 1860. There were annotated editions of *rīti* literature and detailed studies of Hindi *alaṅkāraśāstra*,[5] but scholars have generally not posed the kinds of questions that could so profitably be asked, questions that bear critically on poetry **(p.243)** and aesthetic concerns but also on social, intellectual, and political history. In loss, then, there is the potential for gain.

I have tried to demonstrate what we gain from studying the Hindi past of the Mughal period, and its corollary, what we lose by failing to understand it. Some scholars of postcolonialism (who tend not to read precolonial sources in Indian languages) might hold that the precolonial past is forever unknowable because of the epistemic ruptures that attended India's colonization. Some postcolonial theory also tends to be suspicious of textual forms of knowledge because colonial-period Orientalists privileged texts over practices (especially oral literary practices). Indians were of course great textualizers for two millennia before the colonizers came—both the Sanskrit and *rīti* literary cultures are ample testimony to this—and it can hardly be sound intellectual-historical method not to weigh the precolonial evidence. Moreover, what could be more effective in countering India's cultural denigration under colonialism or in coming to terms with its devastating epistemological shifts than a rich, historically nuanced account of India's textual cultures before the colonizers arrived? To be sure, such nuance is not easily acquired because the Hindi literary archive challenges would-be researchers in everything from intelligibility to sheer accessibility. But knowledge, I would say, is always better than ignorance, remembering is better than forgetting, and trying to piece together a literary past is better than walking away from it. Or at least these are some of the premises that animated me in my mission to write this book.

As long as entire centuries of literary creation continue to be rejected as an *andhkār yug* (benighted time), there is only so much a reconstructive effort like this one can hope to achieve. We need substantial philological and manuscript work; new texts need to be published and older ones reprinted;[6] we need translations—almost none of any of this literature is available in any European- or Indian-language translation. The Indian textbooks and curricula that represent *rīti* literature in such a demeaning light should be overhauled. But even without a major outlay of resources and infrastructural shifts in the literary field, we can understand a satisfying amount about Hindi poets in the centuries before colonialism if we simply rake away some of the dead undergrowth of colonial and nationalist thought. If we stop conceiving of Mughal and Rajput courts as sites of shame and decadence with only rare moments of absolution—let us call them instances of Akbarian (or indeed Rana Pratapian) exceptionalism—then the presuppositions about Indian deficiency that have plagued most of the historiography of the period fall away. If we take away the end point of

colonialism, a rather vast expanse opens up before us. Let me propose how we might begin to repopulate this cultural and historiographical landscape.

(p.244) Toward a New Literary, Intellectual, and Social History of Hindi Court Culture

Unsurprisingly, the premodern history of India's *rāṣṭrabhāṣā* (national language) looks completely different if we do not overdetermine the narrative as a story of failure. And the data presented in this book do not support such a narrative. When we set out to understand the texts and actions of *rīti* poets on their own terms instead of retrofitting modern, anachronistic ones, we find many stories of astonishing and enduring success.

Take the life and work of the poet Keshavdas. He was not the derivative, cold-hearted character that modern scholars too often say he was. What a devastating misunderstanding, and a grave injustice to Hindi's preeminent classical poet. Keshavdas, heir to a long tradition of Sanskrit learning, guided Brajbhasha, the literary language of his day, down a new, classicizing path. And it is in part because he did so that Brajbhasha—and by extension Hindi—came to have the extraordinary career that it did. He took a language predominantly cultivated by Vaishnava hymnists, enriched it with the treasures of Sanskrit *kāvya* style, and presented his innovative works to his Orchha (and eventually, it seems, Mughal) patrons. Brajbhasha literature decisively entered the domain of kings. And within a few decades, kings could not be kings without it.

These new social uses of the language—the linking of Braj aesthetics with the politics and court culture of Mughal India—should not be seen as some kind of wrong turn in Hindi's developmental path, and they will continue to be seen as such unless we relinquish naïve, economist constructions of literary life. We observe instead a language and literary culture being spectacularly enriched upon coming into contact with varied groups of connoisseurs and patrons. Earlier scholars have rightly stressed that Brajbhasha literary culture was an important spiritual domain of the early modern period; it was also an aesthetic and political resource. This was the case in both Mughal and Rajput court settings.

Because the career of Keshavdas commenced at the moment that Mughal power in Bundelkhand commenced, it is difficult to determine whether he had any role in transmitting *rīti* literary styles to the Mughal court. It is equally, if not more plausible that the refined culture of the Mughals played a decisive role in spurring local courts like that of Orchha toward new modes of literary elegance. Keshavdas may or may not have visited Agra, but in his last work, the *Jahāngīrjascandrikā* of 1612, he tells us that he performed for the Mughal emperor. He also experimented with new types of quasi Persianized Braj, creatively adapting exogenous words into a Hindi milieu.

(p.245) There is no good reason to doubt that Keshavdas visited Jahangir's court but, as is the case with so much of the premodern Hindi past, we know too little for a fact. However, this past still has much to teach us. To study the works of Keshavdas and his successors is to observe new aesthetic worlds in the making. We perceive a lively engagement of court intellectuals with the spirituality of *bhakti*; we also see them trying to make sense of *this* world. The oeuvre of Keshavdas, like *rīti* literature more generally, offers a chance to study cultures at the point where they intersect. We see Brajbhasha interacting with Sanskrit, but also with Persian, as poets and their patrons encountered new realms of sociolinguistic difference and entered new zones of political and cultural contact. Tracking the development of Brajbhasha as a court language opens up access to an unfamiliar prenationalist world in which Hindus and Muslims, not to mention Jains and Sikhs (and many others), shared a literary language and aesthetic for some of their most important cultural needs.

These zones of epistemic difference, though no less difficult to access than the frequently elusive lives of many of the poets themselves, are one of the most precious gifts that India's precolonial literary record can offer. Hindi students of today might ask themselves, “What do I have to learn from hundreds of centuries-old treatises on literary theory or the social history of writers in Mughal-period courts?” I would venture that not to study premodern literature with thought and care is to miss a chance to learn something important about past humanity. To be richly human is to experience many layers of history, not to remain content with the familiar patterns one already knows. The great works of the past—the well-known classical traditions of Greek, Latin, and Sanskrit, but also, I would venture, the Braj classics—can and should still animate readers today. These texts are not just repositories of the arcana of past history, but are an extraordinary opportunity to converse with those who lived and thought before us. Quite aside from everything we stand to gain from a study of *rīti* literature—the joys of reading beautiful poetry, learning about the richly multicultural patronage contexts or the mechanisms of poetic performance and manuscript circulation in a preprint society—we gain access to past thought-worlds and unfamiliar modes of political life and sociality, including aesthetic processes of political incorporation and the importance of connoisseurship to community formation. The reason that present-day constructions of *rīti* literature's *madhyakālīntā* (medievalism) are so disabling is that they operate from within the predictable logic of modernity discourse, where there is no conceptual room for the unpredictable, un-pregiven facets of past forms of cultural expression and belonging.

(p.246) As much as I have intended to showcase the ways of thinking and being of the past, to an extent the questions I have posed of the Brajbhasha literary tradition remain those of a modern interlocutor. When I have sought to intervene in Hindi literary historiography or to complicate the supposedly airtight relationship between premodern literary and religious life (showcasing

instead Brajbhasha's rich aesthetic and political life), or wondered why *rīti* literature has rarely been viewed positively for a classicism that parallels cultural developments considered highpoints in early modern European literary history, the questions I have brought to the Braj corpus were brought along in advance, and they were indubitably questions that demanded to be asked. But equally interesting to me at the conclusion of this research project is to reflect on the answers that Brajbhasha literature gave to questions I never intended to ask in the first place.[7]

The most startling discoveries for me were made when the literary-historical record spoke of its own accord. For example, I had never conceived of making an argument for the independence of Brajbhasha literary theory from its Sanskrit source material—which turned out to be a central tenet of chapter 3. Shukla's stance on this subject, as dominant in the historiography of the period as it is damaging to it, could not have given me access to that research question. And yet a very large chorus of authors spoke from across the centuries, proclaiming that they had written their works "*apanī mati anusāra*"—according to their own understanding. The shape this understanding took does not mesh very well with modern concepts of originality, and is one reason *rīti* writers have been consistently denigrated as mere imitators of classical authority. It therefore became important to me as a scholar to counter that anachronistic construction, driven by modernist presuppositions, by not only tapping into but also actually privileging a premodern Indian perspective on how scholarly creativity works. From this perspective, the writings of *rīti* intellectuals are a realm of almost-complete alterity. For them change was something that needed to be managed. Not all cultural systems work according to a progressivist logic: some are considered just fine as they are. The point to cultural creation, then, is not to effect change but to enhance stability.[8] Work that proceeds according to the logic of managing change is not the work of inferior minds; it simply operates differently. The ability to appreciate and theorize profound cultural and conceptual difference is just one of many lessons to be learned from listening to *rīti* poets.

In fact, many of the arguments of this book have come to me through listening. By listening to *rīti* writers I understood the importance of the *kavikul*, the broad-based literary community that was critical to their identity as writers and to the flourishing of a Hindi poetry of kings in the early modern period. **(p.247)** I also learned all kinds of unexpected things about the literary life of Brajbhasha at the Mughal court. At least as judged from its name, Brajbhasha was supposed to be a Hindu language—I never set out to prove that it had a major, perhaps decisive, Mughal component. Nor did I expect to find Persian to be any kind of a resource for learning about Brajbhasha literary creativity. I had no idea that Braj was so intimately tied to the political and aesthetic programs of regional kings, so much so that it demands to be seen in a new light as a critical domain of Rajput literature. The evidence itself pointed in many unexpected directions. Learning

things you did not set out to learn is exciting for any researcher, no doubt, but there is something particularly thrilling about performing an archaeology of culture—accessing the social, intellectual, and literary lives of people from the past.

There are many more questions of *rīti* literary culture churned up in the course of my research that I was never able to satisfactorily address. We have a long way to go toward understanding the different conceptual and political spaces of Brajbhasha and the complex premodern literary values that underwrote this dynamic tradition. We have much yet to learn about the social history of these poets. Some things will forever remain obscure about people who were in many cases constitutionally averse to self-celebration, but some of their story can perhaps be still reconstructed by putting Persian and Hindi sources in dialogue. Persian was once widely known to educated Hindus, but that has not been the case for a century or so, which means that Hindi scholars working today (who tend to use only Hindi sources) are missing essential components of the archive. I have also not been able to treat in any serious way the countless Brajbhasha texts that circulated to Punjab, or Gujarat, or Bengal, as Sikhs, Jain merchants, and all those who aspired to courtliness partook of its literary cachet. The world of Brajbhasha is thus even more transregional, multicultural, and multi-confessional than could adequately be captured in a single book, in this case one primarily focused on courtly communities during the height of Mughal rule.

Nor could I do full justice to the staggering multidisciplinarity of Brajbhasha, a signal characteristic of the tradition that has been denied for more than one hundred years. Aside from serving as a vehicle for spiritual discourse, politics, history, and literary theory, Brajbhasha was also widely used for treatises on astrology, medicine, equestrian science, and—even *pākaśāstra* (the science of cooking). We know almost nothing about any of this material and there is a considerable volume of it. It may be that there is no great intellectual revolution to be discovered in this archive (at least no revolution as defined by us moderns), no seventeenth-century Indian renaissance that preceded the so-called colonial one in the nineteenth century. But we should recognize that until **(p.248)** scholars read and publish the vast quantities of early modern Hindi texts that lie in Indian archives, we really do not know what we have and do not have. Some of this material will almost certainly change the way we think about the Mughal-period Hindi past. At the very least we could reconstruct more of India's intellectual and social history. When we frame Brajbhasha textual culture as primarily either Vaishnava or belletristic, as the categories of *bhakti* and *rīti* proposed by Shukla constrain it to be, we are failing to hear many of the voices —of scientists or intellectuals or historians—of the Hindi past.[9] Other important voices are those of late *rīti* writers. If the antecedent period is anything to go by, the courtly texts produced in the early days of colonialism—a corpus that has not been adequately studied—will yield insights we have not even begun to imagine.

But it is for the questions I do not even know yet to ask that I will continue to listen to, and learn from, the Hindi past.

Notes:

(1.) On the creative engagements of Indian writers with Western genres, see Mukherjee 1985; Trivedi 1994.

(2.) The essays collected in Orsini, ed. 2010 are an attempt to map out some of the Hindi-Urdu traditions obscured by modern nationalist perspectives.

(3.) I know that I also speak for some Hindi scholars working in India. See the poignant *cri de coeur* about the erosion of skills in classical Hindi of Kishorilal (1991: 11–12), whose kind mentorship and tireless editing of *rīti* texts have certainly been conditions of possibility for this book. Ramanand Sharma and several of his students have also been actively working to prevent the loss of knowledge about the literary past. In his words, "*madhyakālīn kāvya vilupt hone se bac jāye*" (may medieval literature be saved from extinction). Sharma 2008: 2. Cf. Tandon 2002.

(4.) The biographical details of most of these *bhakti* figures have been heavily mythologized, their historical lives forever now unknowable, but their poetry is nonetheless still acclaimed.

(5.) See chapter 3 n. 6.

(6.) It is impossible, for instance, to reconcile the colossal importance of a seventeenth-century author such as Chintamani Tripathi, a figure frequently referenced in this book, with the abysmal publishing record of his oeuvre. Neither his *Rasvilās*, which may have been written for Shah Jahan, nor his *Bhāṣāpiṅgal*, written for Shahji Bhonsle, Shivaji's father, has ever been published. The only text of his ever to be formally published, his *Śṛṅgārmañjarī*, eluded my search in both Indian and Western libraries for years before I was able to obtain a photocopy from the Hindī Sāhitya Sammelan of Allahabad. The sole work of this author that is available outside India—and that only in microfilm—is a lithograph printed in 1875 of the *Kavikulkalptaru*.

(7.) The Romanist Erich Auerbach reminds us that the goal is not so much for us to speak for the premodern texts that we study but to allow the texts to speak for themselves: "The starting point should not be a category which we ourselves impose on the material, to which the material must be fitted, but a characteristic found in the subject itself, essential to its history, which, when stressed and developed, clarifies the subject matter in its particularity and other topics in relation to it" (1965: 19).

(8.) This is consistent with the arguments of Bronner and Tubb (2008), who have studied the works of early modern Sanskrit *ālaṅkārika*s and find that "[t]he role of the new poetician is not to ruffle the body of analysis but to redeem it; to turn back to the history of his tradition and rescue from it what is already there"; many intellectuals of the past saw "no need for an overall theoretical revolution but rather for a kind of renovation" (630, 631).

(9.) Sudhakar Pandey (1972: 79–81), rare among Braj scholars in treating an astrology text by the Bharatpur court writer Somnath, long ago pointed out that Braj textual culture is far more encompassing than the realms of devotional and literary texts. Also see chap. 3, n. 74.