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Culture and Circulation

Literature in Motion in Early Modern India

Edited by
Thomas de Bruijn
Allison Busch



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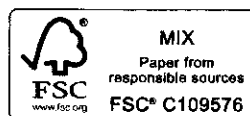
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POETRY IN MOTION: LITERARY CIRCULATION IN MUGHAL INDIA

Allison Busch

Hindi's Non-Hindu Past

Since the late nineteenth century it has become customary to view the Hindi language and its literary heritage as an arena of culture upon which Hindus have a special claim. Even a cursory glimpse at North India's pre-modern literary landscape, however, reveals a deeply hybrid past, for Muslim writers and patrons played a decisive role in the development of both of North India's classical Hindi idioms, Awadhi and Brajbhasha. Here my concern is the latter, with a focus on the courtly traditions that Hindi specialists today designate by the term *rīti* or "[high] style". Indo-Muslim elites were enthusiastic patrons, connoisseurs, and even occasional composers of *rīti* literature, which owes much of its genesis and genius to processes of political, cultural, and religious circulation during the Mughal period.

While poetry with its slim readership today may seem an improbable barometer for culture writ large, the case of premodern India is different. In a world where poetry was at the very center of everyday life, aesthetic choices were significant. Poetry was an entertainment, a means of education, even an instrument of statecraft. Babur (r. 1526–30), the first of the Mughal emperors, bequeathed to India several centuries of Timurid rule but an important part of his legacy is literary: his memoirs and a *divān* (poetry collection) in Turkish.¹ Babur's grandson Akbar (r. 1556–1605), for his part, adopted Persian as the primary idiom of empire, which had been a major cosmopolitan language in India since the eleventh century.² But this does not even begin to encompass the complexity of India's multilingual literary landscape. Sanskrit had been a staple of court life for centuries before Persian ever took root in India, and several South Indian vernaculars were well-established by the end of the first millennium CE.³ In North India,

regional rulers under the Delhi Sultanate and its successor states in the east were demonstrably active in constituting Awadhi as a major literary language in the two centuries leading up to Mughal rule. The Afghan kings who were serious rivals to the Mughals even into Akbar's reign were major patrons of the Awadhi tradition of Sufi *kāvya* (poetry) that was an important forerunner to Brajbhasha and, eventually, to modern Hindi.⁴

Thus, any historian of Mughal-period literature needs to be cognizant of the array of available languages and poetic cultures. It is against this terrain of multiplicity that particular choices can be deemed significant: When so many literary cultures were available, what made one more relevant or suitable than another in a specific context? For example, the Mughal emperors, who primarily patronized Persian writers, occasionally went out of their way to commission Brajbhasha texts. Can we retrieve their motivations? Was the patronage accorded to a vernacular literary tradition part of a mission to learn about the culture of the country that they ruled, in a language they could understand far better than Sanskrit? Perhaps the Mughals were deliberately turning away from Awadhi, the earlier Indo-Muslim literary vernacular, because it had been so assiduously cultivated at the courts of their Afghan rivals and thus was too readily associated with a competing political formation.⁵ Certainly aesthetic factors also need to be weighed. Did poets or patrons perceive a particular language to be conducive to types of literary experience unavailable in another?⁶ What did such literary choices mean for those connected to Mughal power as well as the other social groups who made them?

The rubric of circulation is an indispensable methodological tool for assessing a cultural system that was shared by multiple constituencies. The majority of *rīti* writers came from Brahmanical Hindu backgrounds but

⁴ See Behl and Weightman 2000: xi–xiv. To use the term "Hindi" prior to the nineteenth century is slightly problematic, but I use it for convenience as a blanket term that encompasses the widely intelligible lingua franca of the Mughal period and its literary dialects.

⁵ This possibility was suggested to me by Aditya Behl (personal communication). And yet while Brajbhasha does begin to eclipse Awadhi as a literary language by late in Akbar's period, Mughal elites hardly abandoned the earlier tradition. For instance, 'Abd al-Qadir Badauni mentions that Maulana Daud's *Cāndāyan* was read from the pulpit in *Muntakhab al-tavārikh* (1: 333). Shantanu Phukan (2000) has documented an enthusiastic reception for Awadhi literature among Persianized elites throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. And a few important literary works, such as Usman's *Citrāvalī* and Surdas's *Nal-daman*, continued to be written. For these and other latter-day works of the Awadhi Sufi tradition, see McGregor 1984: 150–4.

⁶ An insightful analysis of the choice of Hindi made by Persianized Mughal elites is Phukan 2001.

¹ See Thackston 2002 and Ross 1910 (respectively).

² Muzaffar Alam (1998; 2003; 2004) has written extensively on what he calls the "pursuit of Persian" in India.

³ See Pollock 2006, chapters. 8–10.

their patrons were diverse; far from being associated with a Hindu religious identity, *rīti* poetry had a distinctly non-denominational cachet among kings (whether the Mughal badshah or the regional Hindu rulers known as "Rajputs"), Indian noblemen, music aficionados, Brahman intellectuals, soldiers, and merchant groups. I begin by briefly outlining some of the key genres of the *rīti* tradition and the circulatory factors behind its inauguration in the early Mughal period. I am especially keen to understand *rīti* literature as a cultural form held in common by Rajput and Mughal royalty because this facet of its connoisseurship is poorly understood, especially in comparison to the similarly shared idioms of painting and architecture from the same courts.⁷ The greater part of the essay is devoted to trying to reconstruct to the extent possible the reception of *rīti* texts in a multicultural region like South Asia. When more than one readership participated in a literary culture was it experienced in the same way? Or can we speak of a polyvalence of genres as they traveled between different social groups? What factors in *rīti* texts themselves contributed to their broad appeal? What acts of translation were generated in this culture of circulation?

To fully account for all of the diverse strands of a major literary culture is impossible in a short essay and some hesitation about making categorical statements is warranted when it comes to theorizing what *rīti* texts meant to their varied audiences over the centuries. With rare exceptions, such as an insightful study by Shantanu Phukan (2000), the field of reception theory has barely been broached by Indian literary historians, and even basic data, let alone any adequate understanding of it, is scarce. Still, assessing the evidence, where available, enriches our knowledge of richly variegated literary and social milieus that were so central to early modern life.

Cultural Circulation and the Beginnings of Rīti Literature

The term "*rīti* literature" designates a diverse repertoire of courtly genres including elaborate praise addresses to royalty, political narratives, historical poems, lyrical styles, as well as a robust tradition of vernacular rhetoric. Although Brajhasha courtly literature has some important antecedents in Gwalior and among Vaishnava communities of Vrindavan and Mathura, the *rīti* tradition is closely tied to the consolidation of Mughal rule during the second half of the sixteenth century. In some respects it can be seen as a vernacular revival of the Sanskrit *kāvya* tradition that was being promoted by the courts of early modern India. Older literary motifs

⁷ See Beach 1992; Asher 1995; Tilotson 1999 [1987]; Aitken 2010; Rothfarb 2012.

were invested with a new cultural salience for the Mughal elite and the Rajput *manṣabdārs* (prominent officials) who were the tradition's powerful backers.

Praśasti or political poetry had been a favored mode of projecting royal authority in India since the classical period. Inscriptions as well as courtly *kāvya* were composed in a rich, highly aestheticized style, as though poets aimed to approximate the power of the king through the expressive feats of language itself. The Mughal emperors were especially drawn to Timurid and Persianate forms of political expression, but Akbar's reign witnessed an interest in local styles in both Sanskrit and Brajhasha. The Sanskrit and vernacular poets who contributed to early Mughal court culture were perhaps more comfortable with their traditional genres and thus did not always rush to adopt Persian protocols, but presumably it was also desirable for the Mughal emperors to broadcast their authority widely, in as many languages and idioms as possible. In India and elsewhere, court poetry has a long history of underwriting political authority. When even Persian-language histories on occasion traced Emperor Akbar to exalted figures like Yudhisthira from India's epic past,⁸ it makes good sense that the Mughal kings would have found *praśasti* poems in Indian languages appealing, as when Keshavdas constructed this complex poetic vision of Emperor Jahangir in his Braj panegyric *Jahāngīrjascandrikā* (Moonlight of the Fame of Jahangir, 1612):⁹

Like Brahma, he has made the royal swan his mount.	Like Brahma, he has vanquished the pride of eminent kings.
With the various deities at his side, he is as stable as Mount Meru.	With the various courtiers at his side, he is as stable as Mount Meru.
His luster radiates throughout the seven continents.	His luster radiates throughout the seven continents.
He is a second Dilip, backed by the power of [his wife] Sudakshina.	He is a second Dilip, backed by the power of his charity.
Like the magnificent ocean, he is the lord of many rivers.	Like magnificent King Sagara, he is the lord of many armies.
Or is he the spotless sun, the enemy of the night?	Or is he brilliant like the spotless sun, constantly engaged in charitable acts?
Valiant in battle, Jahangir is everywhere resplendent.	Valiant in battle, Jahangir is everywhere resplendent.
His fame, pure and bright like Ganges water, has brightened the three worlds.	His fame, pure and bright like Ganges water, has brightened the three worlds.

⁸ Ernst 2003: 183.

⁹ *Jahāngīrjascandrikā*, v. 110. Instances of *śleṣa* or secondary meanings cleverly crafted by the poet are here indicated by means of a double-columned translation. My translation draws insight from the modern Hindi rendition by Kishorilal.

This verse mobilizes a host of images and royal codes to cast Emperor Jahangir in the mold of an ideal Indian ruler from antiquity. The poet likens the emperor to heroic figures such as Dilip and Sagara from the Raghu clan, ancestors of King Rama, whose famously just rule was held up as the model for all subsequent Hindu kings and the occasional Muslim sultan. Keshavdas knew the Sanskrit *kāvya* tradition well, for in places he draws on imagery from Sanskrit predecessors.¹⁰ He also uses the classical technique of *śleṣa* (double entendre) to interesting effect: Some words and phrases are intended to be read in two registers simultaneously, a form of verbal play that was a specialty of Indian court poets.¹¹ The adopting of a distinctly Indian royal vocabulary, invoking esteemed classical heroes (not to mention Mount Meru from Hindu Cosmogony and the revered Ganges River) has the effect of naturalizing a Muslim ruler of Central Asian descent in the Indian setting.¹²

For the Rajput kingdoms of central and western India, whose court culture was evolving in dialogue with the Mughals, *rīti* literature was an especially potent means of articulating the power of regional rulers at a time when the inexorability of Mughal dominion made such assertions of some urgency. Although Sanskrit writers retained their status as intellectuals and court professionals for many years to come, this period witnessed the dramatic rise of vernacular *kāvya*, often at the very courts that had the closest ties to the Mughal Empire. Two of the earliest vernacular examples of the *carit* (exemplary biography) genre, for instance, can be traced to the court of Man Singh Kachhwaha of Amber, who was Emperor Akbar's leading Rajput general for more than two decades. Between 1585 and 1595 two of Man Singh's court poets, Amrit Rai and Narottam, wrote lengthy narratives about their patron, both entitled *Māncarīt*. They contain typical Sanskrit elements such as elaborate *prāśasti* verses about the king and trademark *kāvya* features like the *nagara-varṇana* (description of the city), but also distinctly topical features, in particular a concern to narrativize Mughal power.¹³ Amrit Rai and Narottam record many of the signal historical events of Man Singh's career in Akbar's service, while at the same

¹⁰ As noted by Kishorilal (*Jahāṅgīrjascandrikā*, p. 104), in this verse Keshavdas appropriates expressions like *vimānikṛta rājahamṣa* from the opening to Bana's *Kādambarī* (see p. 6).

¹¹ On the Indian *śleṣa* tradition, see Bronner 2010.

¹² Sanskrit poets had a long history of representing Muslim power, both admiringly and otherwise. See Chattopadhyaya 1998.

¹³ See Bahura 1990, and Busch 2012. There were other approaches to the Mughal presence. As discussed by Cynthia Talbot (2012), Chandrashekhara, the author of the *Surjana-*

time presenting the patron as an ideal king in keeping with ancient Sanskrit and contemporary Rajput styles of royal representation.

A similar bending of the genres of poetry and history is Keshavdas's *Virsimhdevcarit* (Deeds of Bir Singh Deo, 1607), another important early example of vernacular political *kāvya* written at the court of Bir Singh Deo Bundela (r. 1605–27) of Orchha, a late contemporary of Man Singh who made a name for himself as one of the most powerful Rajputs of Jahangir's reign. The *Virsimhdevcarit* is a breathtakingly complex and erudite work of *rīti* literature that is very much in keeping with the protocols of classical literary representation while also revealing dramatic new early modern hues. Some of the work is highly stylized and demonstrably drawing from classical authorities like Bana, but in a dozen of his opening cantos Keshavdas records—almost with a modern historian's zeal—important details about Mughal-Orchha political relations at the turn of the seventeenth century.

It seems likely that this political turn in Braj literature arose in response to a new form of circulation between Persianate and Hindi-using literati. Can it be mere coincidence that the *Akbarnāmah* (1590s), Abu al-Fazl's Persian account of Akbar's life and reign, is almost exactly contemporary with a spate of biographies of Rajput rulers? The languages and rhetorical modes of the Mughal royal biography and the Brajbhasha *carit* are of course distinct, but their broader political and historicizing missions seem too similar to just have sprung into existence without some as yet little-understood process of cultural circulation. At any rate, these bold experiments with new vernacular genres widened the repertoire of Brajbhasha and contributed to its profile as a sophisticated language of courtly life.

Whereas earlier sixteenth-century bhakti poets tended to be closely affiliated with or even founding members of religious communities, the new class of *rīti* literati operated out of a vastly different social milieu: that of the early modern court. Amrit Rai and Narottam wrote their remarkable *carits* about Man Singh and then either died or faded into obscurity.¹⁴ Keshavdas, however, had a more extensive career with truly multi-disciplinary reach. As the leading court poet of an upwardly mobile Rajput kingdom in central India that had come under Mughal dominion in the

carita, a Sanskrit *kāvya* from about the same period commissioned by Bundi patrons, seems almost to wish Mughal power away by largely excluding it from his narrative.

¹⁴ As suggested by G. N. Bahura, who edited both *Māncarits*, Amrit Rai may have died in 1585, or fallen from favor, which would explain why his text does not cover any events later than that year (Bahura 1990: 20). Narottam's work, for its part, breaks off in c. 1594.

1570s, Keshavdas wrote a total of eight major works that collectively extended Brajbhasha into new expressive realms, contributing in significant ways to the process of vernacularization that was by then well underway in northern India.

Aside from writing new types of political and historical literature that satisfied the evolving cultural needs of his contemporary milieu, Keshavdas was also an important innovator in the field of vernacular rhetoric.¹⁵ Inspired by his courtly context and considerable Sanskrit training (he was from a pandit family), while not forsaking the bhakti concerns that were also central to Brajbhasha literary culture (his Orchha patrons were recent converts to Vaishnavism), he wrote a total of three instructional manuals on traditional topics from Indian literary theory: the *Rasikpriyā* (Handbook for Poetry Connoisseurs, 1591), *Kavipriyā* (Handbook for Poets, 1601), and *Chandamālā* (Guide to Metrics, 1602). These works, known as *rīti*granthas (books of method), heralded a growing concern with classicism and formal scholarship and helped to spark a new literary trend: the production on a vast scale of vernacular handbooks on rhetoric.

The immense popularity of such handbooks—a cultural trend that would endure for centuries—must have stemmed from their ability to condense the general principles of a long and complex tradition of Sanskrit theory into an accessible vernacular medium. Here too the rubric of circulation proves relevant: Classical ideas were brought forward into the present and transmitted in a new Hindi idiom that could reach a broader community, notably (but by no means exclusively) the Mughal and Rajput elite. *Rīti* poets also updated the earlier Sanskrit treatises. For instance, most Sanskrit courtly texts were wholly unconcerned with religious themes, whereas for many Brajbhasha poets, writing in the age of bhakti fervor, to craft a treatise on aesthetics was unthinkable without featuring the venerated deity Krishna and his consort Radha. The Brajbhasha *rīti*granth also played an important role in cultural translation and community formation. These texts decanted the best of Sanskrit literary tradition into new vessels. At the same time, by dint of their generally truncated and relatively uncomplicated style the *rīti*granthas served as the perfect introduction to general Indic literary devices and images for a Hindi-knowing Persianate clientele. They fostered connoisseurship and helped to create a new reading public for Brajbhasha literature.

¹⁵ Keshavdas's forays into history are discussed in Busch 2005; an overview of his larger oeuvre is Busch 2011: 29–56.

The *rīti* poetry manuals that became popular from the late sixteenth century imparted technical knowledge about Indian literary theory, one of premodern India's most important knowledge systems, but they also contributed in general ways to producing well-rounded individuals of courtly sensibility. To be effective, kings and members of the nobility required not only political and military training but also cultural and emotional refinement. The frequent emphasis on *śṛṅgāra* (erotic love) in *rīti* poetry manuals played a role in the education of the senses. Brajbhasha poets routinely served as mentors to kings and members of the nobility. Education had a moral component; it also meant a process of self-cultivation to become a connoisseur, a person of taste. When the eighteenth-century writer Bhikharidas proclaimed, "the fine points of poetic sentiment are comparable to women because they deliver instruction in a pleasurable manner," he encapsulated a widely held belief.¹⁶

Rīti literature became an indispensable form of court culture in greater Hindustan through its multiplicity of genres and poets' and connoisseurs' diverse modes of engaging them. Several non-literary circulatory mechanisms also fostered this development. Mughal military expansion and a Timurid ruling style that favored travel more than staying put contributed to the development of a transregional court culture. Some localities that had been more isolated or resistant to the surge of imperial might were definitively incorporated as Mughal vassals. Rajput rulers became a critical part of this moving machinery of empire. Sometimes serving as kings in their own territory, they were also generals and administrators in the Mughal system, posted in various provinces of the realm. Poets and poems regularly moved between regional courts and the imperial capitals, fostering a shared Mughal and Rajput courtly ethos.

Another more general factor behind the rise of *rīti* literature was the Mughal rulers' acculturation to the Indian milieu from Akbar's period onward. All of the Mughal rulers self-affiliated with the Persianate world but, whereas Babur and Humayun spent much of their lives outside of India and gave precedence to Central Asian and Safavid cultural models, Akbar (r. 1556–1605) was keenly interested in his local environment. He commissioned Abu al-Fazl, his close friend and courtier, to write the *Āʾīn-i akbarī* (Institutes of Akbar, 1590s), which contains a census of Indian knowledge systems, including extensive sections on *sāhitya* (literature) and *saṅgīt* (music), the latter of special relevance to vernacular literary culture since

¹⁶ *Kāvyamīmāṃsā*, 1.11. Here and elsewhere all translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

Tansen, the emperor's leading court musician, composed his songs in Braj. Akbar's court also undertook translations of Indian texts from Sanskrit into Persian on an unprecedented scale. Women too would have exerted their influence from behind the scenes as Rajput brides entered the Mughal harem beginning in Akbar's day.¹⁷ Although detailed evidence can be hard to pin down, they brought with them their own Indic cultural tastes, to which the emperors would have been routinely exposed.¹⁸ Jahangir, whose mother was a Kachhwaha princess, regularly uses Hindi words in his Persian memoirs and otherwise showcases his knowledge of Hindustan.

The Vernacular Medium and Analogue Genres

While translation was one mechanism for the circulation of ideas across linguistic boundaries, Brajbhasha itself functioned as a zone of sociolinguistic contact, a medium that the Persian-using Mughals and the Sanskrit-proficient Hindu literati had in common.¹⁹ As Sunil Sharma has remarked,

in the premodern centuries of Muslim presence in South Asia very few works of belles-lettres were actually translated into Persian from Indian languages, and surprisingly, after Birūnī perhaps only a handful of Muslim scholars in the subcontinent were proficient in the Sanskrit language. But there was a fair degree of participation in the vernacular literary cultures, as well as a sense of shared ethical and aesthetic values, that gave rise to new hybrid forms in literature, especially in the provinces of the Mughal Empire.²⁰

As a vernacular, Brajbhasha had the innate ability to foster the participation of multiple groups and linkages between them. In contrast to Sanskrit and Persian, India's two cosmopolitan languages that were only accessible to those with specialized linguistic knowledge, Brajbhasha was readily intelligible to most North Indians from Gujarat to Bengal and it also gained a following in the Deccan.²¹ It was a marvellously adaptable linguistic resource because writers could manipulate registers to suit diverse literary

¹⁷ See Taft 1994; Lal 2005: 140–75.

¹⁸ As noted by Rizvi (1975: 179, drawing on the *Muntakhab al-tavārikh* of Badauni), Akbar's Hindu wives maintained their distinctive religious traditions. Rajput women's probable influence on Mughal visual culture has been mentioned in Welch 1983: 30–1.

¹⁹ Audrey Truschke (2011: 507–8) has observed that the Persian translations of Sanskrit texts commissioned by Akbar were not made directly but rather through the medium of oral explanations in Hindi.

²⁰ Sharma 2009: 92.

²¹ See Busch 2011: 188–96.

contexts and patrons. *Rīti* poets in some cases wrote in an uncomplicated, down-to-earth idiom; they could also opt for spectacularly elegant Sanskritized style. Many writers used Persian loan words when the occasion warranted it, whether composing praise addresses to Shah Jahan or crafting a scene from a Mughal *darbār*.²² There is also a tradition of writing macaronic poetry that blends Persian and Hindi.²³

Writing in the vernacular was one factor that facilitated the transmission of cultural forms between different social groups.²⁴ Another is the existence of analogue genres. As noted, the Brajbhasha *carit* and Persian chronicles like *Akbarnāmah* have more than a passing similarity in terms of both genre and political intent; they arose at the same time in two distinct but related courtly milieus that had a pressing need to articulate royal authority. Disparate communities in South Asia had long been appropriating each other's genres for communicating their messages, whether political, spiritual, or aesthetic. Hagiographers of Vaishnava and Sikh saints, for instance, had at their disposal the Sufi *taẓkira* tradition, which they reshaped to their own purposes.²⁵ Several *rīti* styles would have easily translated into genres readily accessible to a Persianate reading public. Love poetry is of course universal, but both Persian and Braj writers had a penchant for crafting scenes about lovers destined to endure anguished separation (*fīrāq* and *viraha*, respectively).

Yet other notable equivalences between Persian and vernacular genres can be traced. Structural resemblances between the musical lyrics of Braj *dhrupad* and the Persian *rubāʿī* may have contributed to the enjoyment of this genre by Mughal patrons.²⁶ Persian and Indic literatures share the genre of the "head-to-toe" description of the beloved, known as *sarāpā* in Persian and *śikh-nakh* in Brajbhasha. Additionally, Persian and Brajbhasha both have strong traditions of epigrammatic poetry. It has been suggested that the overwhelming popularity of the Braj rhyming couplet during the

²² See Busch 2010.

²³ On the *Bikaṭ kahānī* of Muhammad Afzal, see Phukan 2000: 89–101; on Rekhta or "mixed language" more generally, see Bangha 2010.

²⁴ Phillip Wagoner (2011: 105) has observed that Telugu literature was a similar zone of cultural contact in the mixed cultural sphere of the Deccan under the Qutb Shahs: "In such a complex social setting, searching for areas of congruence and commensurability between cultures would have been a vital necessity, and the production and enjoyment of Telugu *kavya* within a primarily Persianate courtly milieu would have provided one natural avenue for such exploration."

²⁵ The Sikh genre of *janam-sākhī* demonstrably drew on Sufi biographical writings, as did Sant commemorative traditions. See McLeod 1980: 82; Lawrence 1987.

²⁶ Delvoye 1991: 152.

Mughal period probably owes something to Persian literary tastes.²⁷ Certainly the verses now collected in the *Dohāvalī* (Collection of Couplets) of the Mughal *amīr* and Hindi poet 'Abd al-Rahim Khan-i Khanan (Rahim), though vernacular in form, are in keeping with Persianate court culture, in which poetry was publically declaimed as proof of one's sophistication as well as to offer up trenchant political or social commentary.

The same poet's *Nagarśobhā* (Beauty of the City) can similarly be approached as both a vehicle for Persian sensibilities and a sincere attempt to participate in local literary culture. In this work, Rahim provides a poetic account of an (unnamed) Indian city that seems in part inspired by the Persian genre of *shahrāshūb* (lament for the city).²⁸ Whereas in Persian the emphasis is on the devastating beauty of the young men who stroll the city's byways, Rahim's rendition focuses on the piquant beauty of myriad Indian women and their saucy ways.

In each case the female beloveds are portrayed in terms relevant to their caste profession. This verse, for instance, records the fascination of the onlooker with a kayasth's wife (*kaithinī*):

The kayasth's wife is unable to tell her tale of love.
Her heart itself becomes the paper on which she writes love's intimations.
Her eyelash, dipped in kajol-ink, is a pen.
She writes love's alphabet with her eyes, and gives ²⁹ it to her lover to read.³⁰

One after another, each Indian woman infatuates him with her charms. Consorting with a dyer's wife (*raṃgrejin*) unleashes waves of liquid passion. A butcher's wife (*kasāin*) is like a bloodthirsty murderess, wielding her weapons of youth, haughtiness, and exuberance. A wood-cutter's wife is hard-hearted (*ura kī kaṭhina*), intractable as the raw materials of her husband's craft.³¹

The antecedents of Rahim's *Nagarśobhā* are probably multiple. While the emphasis on cruel beloveds conjures up the world of the Persian *shahrāshūb*, descriptions of the city, known as *nagara-varṇana*, have a long pedigree in Sanskrit and Indic vernaculars.³² Elaborate descriptions of

²⁷ These and other shared features of Persian and Braj literature are discussed in Holland 1969: 104–9.

²⁸ The *Ma'āṣir-i rahīmī* contains a *shahrāshūb*, strengthening the possibility (Vivek Gupta, personal communication). On the *shahrāshūb* genre, see Pritchett 1984; Petievich 1990; Sharma 2011.

²⁹ Here reading *dei* for the editors' *deha* (the latter does not conform to the rhyme scheme but would have the racier meaning "she gives her body to her lover to read").

³⁰ *Nagarśobhā*, vv. 9–10.

³¹ *Ibid.*, vv. 19–20, 37–8, 122–3.

³² See Ramanujan 1970. Another instance from the Deccan (where Rahim lived for an extended period) is *Kṛīḍābhīrāmamu* by the Telugu poet Vinukonda Vallabharaya (trans-

Rajput capitals became prevalent in the Brajbhasha political narratives of the Mughal period.³³ Often *rīti* poets were especially concerned with portraying architectural and artistic grandeur, but beautiful women do feature as part of the ambience.³⁴ Rahim's descriptions of the female *jātis* is quasi-ethnographic, but also distinctly erotic in flair. Should the *Nagarśobhā* be viewed as an attempt by a Mughal writer to contribute to Indic literary culture on its own terms, the imposition of a Persianate worldview upon the target literature, or some kind of hybrid creation that deftly melds various traditions? When a Persianate genre is grafted into Brajbhasha, it is neither what it once was nor entirely naturalized in the new environment.

A spectacular instance of circulation between Indic and Perso-Arabic milieus that took place over centuries concerns a genre of advice literature. The *Pañcatantra*, a famous collection of animal fables from the Sanskrit *nīti* (political wisdom) tradition, was translated into Pahlavi as early as the sixth century and circulated widely throughout the Islamic world, occasioning renditions in countless languages.³⁵ The *Pañcatantra* famously entered the Arabic literary environment as *Kalīlah wa dimnah*, and it also engendered an elaborate Persian reworking as *Anwār-i suhaylī*. One reason for the popularity of this frequently illustrated text in Islamic lands was that it resonated with the mirror for princes genre that was used to impart *akhlāq* or moral instruction to would-be rulers.³⁶ Several painted versions of the text produced in the Mughal atelier of Akbar and Jahangir's reigns testify to its popularity there, and Akbar commissioned Abu al-Fazl to write a version in simplified Persian, known as *ʿIyār-i dānish*. At least one Brajbhasha version was also produced, a *Buddhisāgar* by Jan Kavi, said to have been presented to Shah Jahan.³⁷ Presumably this work would have had special appeal for a Persianized ruler who was also deeply familiar with illustrated versions of the text that had been common in India since at least the Lodi period.³⁸

lated by Velcheru Narayana Rao and David Shulman as *A Lover's Guide to Warangal*), who takes the reader on an extended tour of the city of Warangal, pruriently pausing over various low-caste beauties with their raw charms. I am grateful to Phillip Wagoner for the reference.

³³ On Bundi, the Hada capital, and Shivaji's capital at Raigarh, see Busch 2011: 181, 191–2.

³⁴ See, for instance, the *Māncarīt* of Amrit Rai, vv. 101–6.

³⁵ See de Blois 1991; Riedel 2010.

³⁶ Grube 1991: 33, 36; Khandalavala and Desai 1991: 137–8; Olivelle 1997: xl–xlv.

³⁷ Talbot 2009: 230 n. 55 (citing Dasharatha Sharma).

³⁸ The illustrated copies of the text produced in India are discussed in Khandalavala and Desai 1991.

Toward a Reception Theory of Early Modern Indian Texts

In some cases it is clear that Mughal writers and patrons did not necessarily approach local literatures with a view to understanding the subtle points of Indian cultural logic. When Masih Panipati, a poet from Jahangir's period, composed a Persian *Rāmāyaṇa*, he called his work *Maṣnavī-yi rām wa sitā*. The work's title, genre, and overall textual approach transform it into a story focused on two lovers, changing its tenor and meaning considerably from the morally-laden emphasis on duty and righteousness that is at the core of Valmiki's version.³⁹ Elsewhere, in Jahangir's memoirs, we sense the emperor's deep familiarity with Hindi poetry, but his manner of describing it suggests that he filtered the material through Persian topoi. When the emperor expresses delight at the bee's passion for the lotus, a common motif in Brajbhasha poetry and song ("bee poetry" had recently been popularized in the "*bhramar-gīt*" genre), he does so by comparing the bee to a "nightingale in love with the rose."⁴⁰ A similar phenomenon is evident in the writings of Mirza Khan, whose *Tuhfāt al-hind* (Gift of India, c. 1675?), a Persian treatise on Indian literature and music, is thought to have been commissioned by Aurangzeb's son Azam Shah. Mirza Khan expresses his enthusiasm for Brajbhasha in terms of a central dyad of Persian poetry when he notes that it excels in the "praise of the lover and the beloved" (*wasf-i āshiq ū ma'shūq*).⁴¹ In each of these cases responses to Indian motifs appear to have been conditioned by Persian literary values, possibly because of the audience for whom Masih, Jahangir, and Mirza Khan were writing.

And yet certain ideas translated particularly well between the Persianate and Indic literary milieus because pre-existing concepts and genres allowed readers to decode (or re-code) them. We see voluminous evidence for this in religious interactions. As Tony Stewart has demonstrated, premodern Bengali Sufis sought "dynamic equivalences" between Islamic ideas and more local Hindu conceptualizations of divinity.⁴² Thus, the *Nabīvaṃśa* (Lineage of the Prophets, 1584–6) by the Muslim poet Saiyid Sultan includes Krishna in a list of prophets that culminate in Muhammad.⁴³ In a similar

³⁹ Gandhi 2007.

⁴⁰ *Jahāngīrnāma*, p. 239. Nalini Delvoye (1994: 414–5) has also called attention to the significance of this passage.

⁴¹ *A Grammar of the Braj Bhakha by Mīrzā Khān*, pp. 35, 54.

⁴² See Stewart 2001.

⁴³ Asher and Talbot 2006: 88–9. On the circulation of literary forms between Bengali, Hindi, and Persian in this period, see d'Hubert, this volume.

vein, when the Mughal-period Sufi 'Abd al-Rahman Chishti wrote his *Mīrāt al-ḥaqā'iq* (Mirror of Truths, seventeenth century), an Indo-Persian account of the *Bhagavadgītā*, he introduces various equivalences. A central framework for his treatment of the *Gītā* is that "Krishna explained to Arjuna by analogy the secrets of *tawḥīd*." (*Tawḥīd* is a profession of the oneness of God, often linked to the Sufi concept of ontological monism, *waḥdat al-wujūd*.) Hindu scriptures are glossed as *kitāb* ([holy] book), which places them in the semantic field of the *Qur'ān*. The interpolation of some Sufi verses in the middle of his rendition of theological points from the *Gītā*, again, steers the interpretation down an Islamic path.⁴⁴ Conceptualizing Indian metaphysical and philosophical ideas in Sufi terms was, in fact, very common for Mughal intellectuals. Banwalidas (d. 1677/8), whose *Gulzār-i ḥāl* is a Persian translation, probably via Brajbhasha, of the *Prabodhacandrodāya* (Moonrise of Wisdom, eleventh century), converted the Vedantic-Vaiṣṇava context of the original Sanskrit classic into a Sufi one.⁴⁵ A related case is the celebrated section of Jahangir's memoirs where, upon visiting the Hindu ascetic Jadrup, the emperor issues a dramatic statement of religious commensurability: "He is not devoid of learning and has studied well the science of the Vedānta, which is the science of Sufism." Moreover, whenever Jahangir praises Jadrup, he interlaces his discussion with fragments of Sufi poetry.⁴⁶

Here we begin to touch on the important issue, well-known to those interested in reception theory, that meaning inheres not in the text itself but in the eyes and ears of the beholder. To measure and theorize readership across a gap of centuries can of course feel methodologically fraught: How do we know for certain how particular texts were interpreted by the individual connoisseurs of Mughal India who would have brought different sensibilities and values to the experience of reading and listening? A few have left traces that can be analyzed, but often we can do little more than speculate about these hermeneutic transactions.

It is natural to presume that some principle of curiosity about other people and their cultural traditions underlies at least some types of literary encounter. This is generally presumed to be the case with the Mughal

⁴⁴ My knowledge of this text comes from Vassie 1992. Recently, Muzaffar Alam (2012) has insightfully drawn attention to how the writings of 'Abd al-Rahman Chishti, with their openness to more eclectic strains of Indian Islam, complicate the general view of this period as leaning more toward religious orthodoxy.

⁴⁵ Ernst 2003: 184.

⁴⁶ *Jahāngīrnāma*, p. 209 (Maulana Rumi and Hakim Sana'i are referenced on pages 209 and 313, respectively).

translations that have rightly attracted the attention of scholars. And yet the evidence can be ambiguous. Audrey Truschke reports the startling fact that 'Abd al-Rahim Khan-i Khanan, who patronized an expensive illustrated manuscript of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, was ill-informed about a basic element of the storyline (he thought that Shiva was Rama's father), which suggests the need for caution before glibly attributing complex patronage and textual choices to a desire for cultural rapprochement.⁴⁷ The Akbar-commissioned *Razmnāmah* (Book of War), a Persian reworking of the *Mahābhārata*, was for its part never just a straightforward translation from the Sanskrit since the expectations of a Mughal readership contributed to the text's reshaping. In the Persian version elements of 'ajā'ib (wonder) are stressed, presumably because Mughal readers—accustomed to the *dāstān* tradition—would have had an affinity for them.⁴⁸ The *Bhagavadgītā* episode, which features Krishna's powerful sermon to Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, is downplayed and loses its ethical force, most likely because it was "theologically awkward" for the Mughal interpreters.⁴⁹ The addition of hundreds of Persian poems to the epic, interpolated with clear deliberation to lend emotional weight to particular scenes, brings an unfamiliar text into conformity with Persian literary aesthetics. The Persian *Book of War* also speaks to Akbar's political concerns.⁵⁰ Carl Ernst has drawn attention to a similar case. When a *Simhāsan Battīsī* (Thirty-two Tales of the Throne), which celebrates the exemplary rule of King Vikramaditya, was presented to Akbar, it was framed as a book of kings in the manner of the Persian classic *Shāhnāmāh*. As Ernst puts it, "The evidence suggests that one of Akbar's purposes was the absorption of Indian traditions of kingship into a form that he could take advantage of."⁵¹ In short, Indian literature may undergo what Stefano Pellò has characterized as transcultural or "transaesthetic restyling" in a Persian context.⁵²

⁴⁷ See Truschke 2012: 292–94 (drawing on Seyller 1999). Nonetheless, in other respects Rahim does appear remarkably adept at absorbing and reproducing contemporary Indian literary trends, as in his two collections of Braj *barvai* verses that showcase bhakti, *viraha*, and the figure of the Indian *nāyikā*. When it comes to his visual and architectural patronage, Corinne Lefèvre (this volume) notes a similarly uneven record of engagement with local cultural forms.

⁴⁸ Truschke 2011: 509–10, 512.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 514.

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 516–9.

⁵¹ Ernst 2003: 183.

⁵² See Pellò, this volume. Alam and Subrahmanyam (2011: 239–40) discuss a similar transcultural reworking of the Nala-Damayanti story in Persian.

The *rītigraṇth* or Braj poetry manual was one widely disseminated genre that was versatile enough to serve a range of cultural needs across communities. It could be a gateway into Indian literary systems for novices who were unfamiliar with the basic ideas. Or at least Abu al-Fazl hints at such a reception when he concludes his discussion of *nāyikābheda* from *Ā'in-i akbarī* with the remarks,

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.⁵³

A central feature of the *rītigraṇth* is the interplay between *lakṣaṇs* (definitions) and *udāharaṇs* (example verses). Although connoisseurs prided themselves on their knowledge of the fine points, for those less interested in the technical matters of tropology and classifications of Indian heroines, the example verses with their frequent emphasis on *śṛṅgāra* (erotic love) would have been enjoyable in their own right. Thus, poems on the Hindu deities Radha and Krishna may have been savored in more universal terms, interpreted as simply love lyrics or as an expression of the soul's longing for god, a common motif of Sufi literature and indeed Persian textual culture more generally.⁵⁴

Vaishnava poems and songs were frequently restyled in terms of Persian or Suficate love themes. Sufi and bhakti thought worlds do naturally invite comparison, given the shared theme of ecstatic devotion to a divine lover.⁵⁵ Speculating about some of the factors that attracted Sultan Ibrahim Qutb Shah (r. 1550–80) to Telugu literature in the same period, Phillip Wagoner wonders if he "found intriguing the resonant parallels between the conventions of Persian mystical love poetry and those of the devotional poetry of the Srivaisnava tradition."⁵⁶ Richard Eaton has similarly remarked on a Sufi hermeneutics of the Krishna legend in the Deccan.⁵⁷ A dramatic illustration of a Sufi reading of bhakti from North India is the treatise *Haqā'iq-i hindī* (Truths of India, 1566) of Mir 'Abdul Wahid Bilgrami, which presented the imagery of *bishnupad* lyrics in terms of specific theological points from

⁵³ *Ā'in-i akbarī* 3: 260.

⁵⁴ In her research on Indo-Muslim connoisseurship of Indian *dhruṇpad*, Delvoye (1991: 167–68) has argued similarly for the denuding of Hindu religious content.

⁵⁵ The North Indian bhakti efflorescence of the sixteenth century has a number of largely unacknowledged Sufi antecedents. See Entwistle 1987: 42–3; de Bruijn 2005; Behl 2007.

⁵⁶ Wagoner 2011b: 95.

⁵⁷ Eaton 1996 [1978]: 151.

within the Muslim community and had nothing to do with the memorializing of Krishna's deeds that was a spiritual mainstay of their *kāfir* (infidel) contemporaries. The two interpretive communities did not so much share in a joint religious and cultural practice as experience what Francesca Orsini calls "parallel enjoyment".⁵⁸ Indeed, one explanation for the popularity of Awadhi texts among the Mughal elite is that they were a medium for intense emotional experience and thus prized for their ability to embody Sufi values like *zawq* (taste/epiphany), *ma'rifat* (spiritual insight), *jazb* (emotion), and *ḥaqīqat* (truth perception).⁵⁹ In such cases the vernacular was chosen not for its access to local cultural frameworks but paradoxically because it was perceived as more suitable than Persian for facilitating Muslim mystical experience. The implication is that Hindi texts, for all the other kinds of cultural work they did in early modern India, were at times a vehicle for Muslim religious sentiments, and Islamicate cultural tastes.

Indo-Muslim Connoisseurship

If Brajbhasha texts on occasion generated meanings that were not necessarily linked to Vaishnavism, or even specifically connected to Indian literature, there is also considerable evidence of deeply committed connoisseurs of vernacular poetry from within the Indo-Muslim community. We have noted above that the likes of Emperor Jahangir and the nobleman Mirza Khan spoke appreciatively of Hindi literature. It is true that Persian had been especially favored by the Mughal elite from Akbar's time, but Jahangir celebrates his brother Danyal's facility with local music and poetry styles⁶⁰ and even Abu al-Fazl took pains to stress the emperor's expertise in *both* Hindi and Persian, saying

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.⁶¹

⁵⁸ See Orsini, this volume; cf. Alam 1996.

⁵⁹ Phukan 2000: 79–88.

⁶⁰ *Jahāngirnāma*, p. 39.

⁶¹ (*Tab'-i ilhām pazīr-i ān ḥazrat bih guftan-i nazm-i hindī ū fārsī bih ghayāt-i muwāfiq uftādah dar daqā'iq-i takhayyulāt-i shī'rī-yi nuktaḥ-sanjī ū mū-shigāfi* [i.e., *shikāfi*] *mīfarmāyand*) *Akbarnāmah* 1:270–1. My translation modifies Beveridge (*Akbarnāmah* 1: 520). A sampling of Hindi verses attributed to Akbar is in *Hindī kāvyagāṅgā*, p. 463.

Akbar has also been credited with the patronage of several manuals on Indian rhetoric, including three *rīti*granth in Braj.⁶² That one of Rahim's *barvai* (short couplet) collections is on the theme of *nāyikābheda* (canonical types of female characters) attests to the subject's currency in elite Mughal circles of the day.⁶³ The *Sundarśrīngār* by the poet Sundar is a major monument of *rīti* literature from Shah Jahan's period that condenses a complex tradition of Indian *alāṅkāraśāstra* into an accessible vernacular form, showcasing a rich inter-disciplinary set of cultural motifs that were especially pertinent to poetry, but also to music and painting.⁶⁴ Writing mere decades after Keshavdas, whose seminal *Rasikpriyā* and *Kavipriyā* developed the *rīti*granth into a major court genre, Sundar's magnum opus took shape not at a regional outpost in Bundelkhand but at the Mughal court.⁶⁵ The commissioning of this landmark *rīti*granth is once again testament to an interest at the highest levels of Mughal society in cultivating an expertise in Indian poetics.⁶⁶

Such connoisseurship of Indian poetry and literary theory was apparently widespread. Chintamani Tripathi, one of the leading Braj rhetoricians of the mid-seventeenth century, was invited to translate the *Śrīngāramañjarī* of Akbar Shah (Bouquet of Passion, c. 1668) for the Indo-Muslim elite of Golconda during the late 1660s. Vrind, a *rīti* poet from Kishangarh, was summoned to Ajmer by Mirza Qadiri, the governor, to compose his

⁶² Shukla 1994 [1929]: 114–5. Unfortunately, no Akbar-sponsored Braj works survive but a Sanskrit work on Indian poetics that Akbar commissioned from the Jain monk Padmasundara, *Śrīngāradarpana* (Mirror of Passion, 1569), is extant.

⁶³ Rahim's own son Iraj Shahnavaz Khan is the likely patron of Keshavdas's *Jahāngīrjāscandrikā*, a collection of *praśasti* verses to Emperor Jahangir (one was cited above) that epitomizes the political and historical dimensions of the *rīti* tradition.

⁶⁴ The *nāyikābheda* system underpins many Brajbhasha musical lyrics and the *rāgas* and *rāginīs*—elements of *saṅgītaśāstra* (the science of music)—were also frequently conceived of in *nāyikābheda* terms, leading to figural representations of them in Rajput paintings.

⁶⁵ Vidyadhar Mishra (1990: 39–40) wonders whether the *Rasvilās* of Chintamani Tripathi (1630s?), another important early *rīti*granth (housed at the Anup Sanskrit Library, Bikaner, and regrettably still unpublished), may also have been his commission. It contains praise addresses to Emperor Shah Jahan, Dara Shukoh, and several Mughal elites.

⁶⁶ Evidence from the realm of music strengthens this supposition. The *dhruṇapads* of Kavindracharya Sarasvatī employ the technical terminology of *nāyikābheda*. See *Kavindrakalpalatā*, pp. 23–30 (especially *dhruṇapads* 14, 20, 31, 35–36). Also evidence of Shah Jahan's devoted connoisseurship is his ensuring the systematic preservation of Brajbhasha music lyrics from the previous century: He ordered experts to compile *Sahasras* (One Thousand Delights), a collection of song texts attributed to the great composer Nayak Bakshu. This has been considered "the first written canon of authoritative compositions in the Mughal corpus." See Schofield 2010: 499. Cf. Delvoye 1991: 168–74.

Śṛṅgārśikṣā (Instruction in Passion, 1691). He later moved to Dhaka, writing his *Nītisatsai* (Seven Hundred Verses on Ethics) for the Mughal Prince Azim al-Shan. As noted above, Azam Shah, one of Aurangzeb's sons, is remembered as the patron of Mirza Khan's *Tuḥfat al-hind*. This unique Persian compendium bears some resemblance to the Braj *rīti* *granth* with its treatment of prosody, *nāyikābheda*, music, and the ancient Indian discipline of *kāmaśāstra* (erotic science) but it covered a wider range of topics including grammar, pronunciation, and orthography. The work also contains a Hindi-Persian dictionary, another important indication of circulation between the two literary fields.⁶⁷

The Indo-Muslim engagement with Indian literary theory per se was not new. The Sufi poets of eastern India, who were the leading force behind Awadhi literature from the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, were markedly interested in classical Indian theories of *rasa* or aestheticized emotion, which they invoked insistently in the service of mystical aims.⁶⁸ Nonetheless, the Awadhi authors employed the idea of *rasa* more generically and were not concerned with classification in the manner of ancient Sanskrit writers or their early modern *rīti* successors.⁶⁹ The point was not sophisticated specialist knowledge but rather to compose a poignant, emotionally wrenching story that would aid in the apprehension of divinity. New in the Mughal period was a concern with classical Indian aesthetics as a systematic domain of knowledge.

A similar, and probably related, trend toward formalized *śāstra* can also be found in the field of Indian music, although in this case evidence of the shastric bent is even earlier. Approximately contemporary with Maulana Daud's *Cāndāyan*, the earliest known Awadhi work, is the *Ghūnyat al-munyah* (Pleasure of Desire, 1374–5), a fascinating discourse on the technical specificities of Indian music written for the Turkish nobility during Firoz Shah Tughlaq's reign. The author of this remarkable work (whose name has not come down to us) drew on Sanskrit sources while at the same

⁶⁷ A detailed description of the contents is Ziauddin 1935: 4–33; also see McGregor 2003: 942–4. According to Katherine Schofield (2010: 503), “the two most important and exhaustive chapters in the *Tuḥfat al-hind*, which was designed to be an encyclopedic systematization of all previous indigenous theory on the arts, are those on Brajbhasha and music.”

⁶⁸ See, for instance, Manjhan's use of *rasa* discourse in *Madhumālātī*, vv. 39–40; 43 and his paean to *pema* (“love”), a vernacular analogue of *śṛṅgāra rasa*, in vv. 27–30. On the Sufi poetics of love, see Behl 2012: 63–76.

⁶⁹ As Thomas de Bruijn (2012: 166–69) points out, Sufi authors such as Jayasi did indeed use technical terms like *rasa* but Sanskrit poetics was only one of many traditions that inspired them.

time providing invaluable information about contemporary musical assemblies.⁷⁰ The very existence of the *Ghūnyat al-munyah* intimates something important about the avid participation of the Indo-Muslim community in local performance traditions during the Sultanate period, but under Mughal rule the evidence becomes more extensive and compelling. As noted, Abu al-Fazl took cognizance of Indian *saṅgīt* in his *Ā'in-i akbarī* and his treatment of the subject later became canonical for a whole class of seventeenth-century Indo-Persian writers. Among them was Faqirullah, whose *Rāgdarpan* (1666) is a learned account of Indian music theory. Mirza Raushan Zamir's *Tarjoma-yi pārijātak* of the same year was a much-acclaimed translation of a Sanskrit text.⁷¹ The latter also contains examples of Hindi *dohrās* (i.e., *dohās*) and *kavitts*, two of the signature verse forms of *rīti* poetry. By this period, an important element of *mīrzāī*, the quality of being a gentleman, was sophisticated technical knowledge of Indian musical traditions and the ability to exhibit connoisseurship in elite gatherings.⁷² As the popularity of the *rīti* *granth* genre in this milieu illustrates, the same also holds true for Hindi poetry.

Although the number of formal treatises on music and poetry produced in elite Muslim circles is substantial, in the latter case we could wish for more data about readership. Good information is lacking about even basic questions such as, for instance, how many Hindi manuscripts can be traced in the Indian libraries of Indo-Muslim heritage. Another vexing issue is that of script. By the twentieth century, the Nastaliq script came to be almost exclusively associated with Muslim readership, but the relationship between script and literary community for the early modern period is not as clear.⁷³ Is determining whether a given old Hindi text is found in Nastaliq a meaningful indicator of Muslim readership? Some “Muslim” textual traditions, like the earliest manuscripts of Awadhi Sufi classics, show a predilection for Nastaliq.⁷⁴ And yet “Hindu” classics such as Tulsidas's *Rāmcaritmānas*, the *Sūrsāgar*, and *Prabodhacandrodaya* are occasionally

⁷⁰ See Sarmadee 2003.

⁷¹ Brown 2003: 45–50.

⁷² Schofield 2010: 495–503.

⁷³ Sudhakar Pandey (1987:2) exposed the problem of teleological interpretations of earlier script usages based on modern premises. I am also grateful to Francesca Orsini for her suggestion to investigate this matter.

⁷⁴ All but one of the manuscripts of Daud's *Cāndāyan* are in Nastaliq. See Hines 2009: 32. Mataprasad Gupta (1967: 52–57), however, did not rule out a Nagari predecessor to the dominant Nastaliq transmission. De Bruijn (2012: 71–89) notes that the oldest layer of *Padmāvat* manuscripts is in Nastaliq, and yet the text was constantly being adapted to different readerships and performance settings.

found in Nastaliq. Although a comprehensive census has never been attempted, *rīti* manuscripts do seem mostly to have been collected in Nagari script even if a few important texts, notably Raslin's *Rasprabodh* (see below), Keshavdas's *Rasikapriyā*, the *Sundarśnigār*, and the *Bihārīsatsaī*, are attested in Nastaliq as well.⁷⁵ Although a preference for Nastaliq may point toward a Persianized readership, it does not necessarily reveal a religious leaning since Persianized Hindus were an important literary constituency during Mughal times.⁷⁶ And, in any case, is the written form of texts the most meaningful indicator of reception when poems were often performed?

Still, written indicators are the ones that survive and thus are most readily measured. It is, for instance, possible to learn more about the premodern reception of *rīti* texts by studying Braj commentaries and *tazkiras*, a Persian genre of biographical compendia. Rajput kings were especially frequent patrons of commentaries on the *rīti* classics, but we can also find such evidence of Braj connoisseurship among highly-placed Muslim officials. The poet-intellectual Surati Mishra, for instance, wrote two commentaries on Keshavdas's *Rasikapriyā* (both, incidentally, attested in Nagari script). One, *Jorāvarprakāś* (Light of Joravar), was requested by a Rajput patron, Maharaja Joravar Singh (r. 1735–46) of Bikaner.⁷⁷ The other, his *Rasgāhacandrikā* (Moonlight of the Apprehender of Aesthetic Delight), was commissioned by Nasirullah Khan, governor of Jahanabad and a friend of Emperor Muhammad Shah (r. 1719–48).⁷⁸

The opening to the *Rasgāhacandrikā* contains several revealing details about the relationship between the poet and his patron. Surati Mishra was Nasirullah Khan's teacher.⁷⁹ Khan admired his guru so much that on one

⁷⁵ On Tulsidas, see Lutgendorf 1994: 75; on Raslin, Pandey 1987: 3–4; on Nanddas, McGregor 1971 and 2001: 9. Nastaliq manuscripts of Sundar and Keshavdas are available in the Asia, Pacific, and African Collection of the British Library. See, for instance, shelfmarks (classified under Oriental Manuscripts) Mss.Hin.B.56 and Mss.Hin.B.66.

⁷⁶ See Pellò, this volume. Only recently Lakshmidhar Malviya has argued that the *Bihārīsatsaī*, arguably the most acclaimed of all seventeenth-century *rīti* texts, was first transmitted in Nastaliq. He proposes that the only explanation for the types of variants in short vowels that are found in the transmission of Bihari's work by early commentators is that they were all from a Nastaliq prototype. See Malviya 2008: ix, 11, 25.

⁷⁷ Some information is available in Singh 1992: 23–6.

⁷⁸ According to Surati Mishra, Muhammad Shah gave Nasirullah Khan the title "Nawaz Muhammad Khan" (*pātisāha diya nāma navāja mahammada khāna jaga jānem, Rasgāhacandrikā*, v.5, folio 2a [although the opening folios are not bound in the correct order]).

⁷⁹ "He [Nasirullah Khan], a man of discrimination, read many texts with Surati Mishra. He made him his guru and honored him—this was his wish." (*tini kavi sūrata misra som*

occasion (during Holi in the year 1733) he arranged to introduce him to the Emperor Muhammad Shah himself, for whom Surati Mishra recited his poetry.⁸⁰ The more immediate context for the commentary, written the following year in 1734, is also discussed. One day the pandit and his pupil were sitting together and the latter said,

Wise one, the works of Keshavdas are very tough.
And among them the *Rasikapriyā* is particularly deep.
Please write a commentary in the "question and answer" format.
Connoisseurs will read it and take pleasure from it.

pothi keśavadāsa kī, sabai kaṭhina matidhīra
tina meṃ yaha rasikapriyā, mahā artha gambhīra
yāki ṭikā kijiyaī, praśna uttara niradhari
jāhi parhata jaga rasika jana laheṃ moda niradhārī⁸¹

Nasirullah Khan's preference for the *praśnottarī* (question and answer) style of commentary suggests a literary culture in which learned discussion of the intricacies of poetry was the norm. Of course, the very title of the commentary, which foregrounds *Rasgāhak*, the chosen *takhalluṣ* or pen name of Nasirullah Khan, signals not only that members of the Muslim nobility placed a high value on mastering this local knowledge system but is also a reminder that some of them were Braj poets in their own right.⁸² (We already noticed this in the case of Emperor Akbar, his son Prince Danyal, Rahim, and Mirza Raushan Zamir.)

There are also commentaries on the *Bihārīsatsaī* written for or by Indo-Muslims.⁸³ Shubhkarandas, author of the *Anvarcandrikā* (Moonlight of Anvar Khan, 1714), remarks upon the interest of his patron, Anvar Khan, in the finer points of *rīti* poetry:

Anvar Khan affectionately instructed his poets to explain the poetic concepts (*kavita rīti*) in the *Satsaī*. I composed *Anvarcandrikā* in the delightful month of *Sāvan* in VS 1771 (1714 CE). Herein I reveal the various poetic concepts of

pothūṃ parhūṃ aneka, vidyāguru kari pūjiyau, abhilāṣa saviveka, Rasgāhacandrikā, v.6).

⁸⁰ See Surati Mishra's preamble in *Rasgāhacandrikā*, vv. 12ff. Muhammad Shah was evidently fond of Brajbhasha poetry. On Śavānt Singh, another Braj poet (who used the *takhalluṣ* "Nāgrīdās") and friend of the emperor, see Pauwels, this volume.

⁸¹ *Rasgāhacandrikā*, vv. 26–7.

⁸² Of his patron Surati Mishra says, "He signs his poems with the pen name 'Rasgāhak' (apprehender of aesthetic delight)" (*rasagāhaka yaha nāma āpanom kavittāi me ānem, Rasgāhacandrikā*, folio 2a, v.5).

⁸³ An overview of commentaries on Bihari, including one by Isvi Khan written in 1752, is Mishra 1965: 174–86. Also see Malviya 1993.

the *Bihārisatsai*. Whoever reads the *Anvarcandrikā* with attention will find that it removes the darkness of ignorance with respect to literary theory.⁸⁴

This commentary clarifies the poetry not simply with a pedestrian gloss or translation—presumably Anvar Khan needed no such aid in comprehending Bihari's classic work—but by highlighting the deeper points of subtle knowledge that enrich a reader's experience. True connoisseurship of *rīti* literature, which was deeply conditioned by classical Sanskrit traditions, was predicated on knowing the science of *nāyikābheda* and the various conventionalized scenarios of lovers: their passion and their pique, the typical signs of *viraha* (anguished separation from the beloved), and the distinctive types of *alaṅkāras* (figures of speech) that imparted sophistication to Indian poetry.

Rīti poets especially favored *muktakas*, a freestanding verse style whose brevity often poses an interpretive challenge, particularly in the *dohā* or couplet form preferred by Bihari. In this verse the poet takes up the popular theme of *viraha*:

I couldn't seem to write it on paper, I hesitate to send a message.
Let your own heart tell you what it is mine is trying to say.⁸⁵

kāgada para likhata na banaim, kahata sandesa lajāta
kahihai saba terau hiyau, mere hiya kī bāta

A poem such as this is perfectly intelligible without a commentary. We have a solitary lover pining for the beloved and struggling for the right words to convey such a powerful emotion. And yet other subtle possibilities can be entertained, as Shubhkarandas punctiliously points out:

If these are the words of the heroine then they have been transmitted as a message through a friend or a go-between. In this case, the heroine is of the type "She whose husband has gone abroad". But if the hero is speaking then it is a case of a man's love in separation. The figure of speech in question is hyperbole.

Jau nāyakā kī ukti hoy tau sakhi kai dūti saun sandes saun hoi to proṣitapatikā.
Jau nāyak kī ukti hoi tau puruṣ viyog. Atīśayokti alaṅkāra.⁸⁶

The commentator then proceeds to define "hyperbole" for his readers. This work and indeed much of the Braj commentarial tradition is concerned with teasing out precise shifts in the meaning and figure of speech depend-

⁸⁴ *Anvarcandrikā*, vv. 10–13 (cited in Malviya 1993: 7).

⁸⁵ *Anvarcandrikā*, v. 255.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

ing on whether the heroine, the girlfriend, the go-between, or the hero is speaking. Clearly the intended readers were not neophytes but connoisseurs with a deep grounding in and appreciation for Indian *alaṅkāraśāstra*.

Other eighteenth-century Persian writers shed further light on the reception conditions for Braj poetry and the reach of poetic theory as a knowledge system among Indo-Muslim communities. The *Ma'āsir al-kirām* of Mir Ghulam 'Ali Azad Bilgrami (1704–86), which treats Persian and Braj litterateurs in the same work, contains several passages that foreground Hindi literary connoisseurship and reinforce the importance of *alaṅkāraśāstra* for the reception of formal styles of Indic poetry.⁸⁷

An entry on Sayyid Ghulam Nabi Bilgrami "Raslin" (1699–1750), one of the most gifted Muslim writers of the *rīti* tradition, stresses his mastery of Indian literary tropes such as the *śikh-nakh* (head-to-toe description), *rasa* theory, and the *nāyikābheda* system. Like Nasirullah Khan "Rasgahak", Ghulam Nabi Bilgrami adopted a Braj pen name that trumpeted his expertise in the fine points of Indian *śāstra*, choosing the persona of "Raslin", which means "absorbed in sentiment".⁸⁸ In all likelihood one function of Azad Bilgrami's *tazkira* was to translate Indic concepts for a Persianate audience that was evidently not expected to be entirely familiar with Indian literary theory since Azad needed to spell out the very meaning of the word "*rasa*" and elaborate on the basic tenets with brief descriptions.⁸⁹

Among the products of Raslin's imagination is a *śikh-nakh* in 177 *dohās*, which has the name *Āṅgdarpan* (mirror of her body). And another is a description of female characters (*nāyikā barnan*), which he wrote in 1154 Hijri—a *dohā* appended at the end of the book corresponds to this year.⁹⁰ And he called it *Rasprabodh*, which indicates that solace comes from this book as the mind of the reader apprehends the revelation of *rasa*.

May it not remain hidden that the Indians conceive of the change in condition that a person experiences upon seeing or hearing something and,

⁸⁷ All of the entries deal with Muslim writers. The Muslim community of Bilgram made many notable contributions to Hindi literature, which have prompted a separate study. See Zaidi 1969. According to Carl Ernst (2013: 44, citing evidence from C. A. Storey's survey of Persian literature), it was not unusual for the *tazkiras* of this period to deal with both Hindi and Persian writers.

⁸⁸ Raslin also occasionally used the *takhalluṣ* "Nabi", and "Ghulam Nabi", invoking the name of the Prophet. See Pandey 1987: 1, 54.

⁸⁹ Also see the entry on Sayyid Rahmatullah (*Ma'āsir al-kirām*, pp. 364–6), in which Azad situates the *ananvaya alaṅkāra* (trope of incomparability) from Indian poetic theory in terms that would have been familiar to those more conversant with Arabic and Persian literature; this passage is briefly discussed in Busch 2011: 154–6.

⁹⁰ That is, there is a chronogram.

becoming totally immersed in it, as "*rasa*". And it has nine states. The book *Nauras*, to which Mulla Zuhuri⁹¹ wrote the introduction, has this same meaning. "*Nau*", in India, means nine, hence [the title means] nine states:

The first is "*śṛṅgāra rasa*", which is a poetic expression of the state of the perfection of love that is manifest in a man upon seeing a woman or hearing about her features. In the same way, it is a state that also affects a woman upon seeing a man or hearing about his features.

The second is "*hāsyā rasa*", which is a poetic expression of the state of the perfection of laughter.

The third is "*karuṇa rasa*", which is a poetic expression of the state of the perfection of sorrow.

The fourth is "*raudra rasa*", which is a poetic expression of the state of the perfection of rashness.

The fifth is "*vīra rasa*", which is a poetic expression of the state of the perfection of bravery, liberalness, and so forth.

The sixth is "*bhayānaka rasa*", which is a poetic expression of the state of the perfection of fear.

The seventh is "*bībhatsā rasa*", which is a poetic expression of the state of the perfection of revulsion.

The eighth is "*adbhuta rasa*", which is a poetic expression of the state of the perfection of wonder.

The ninth is "*śānta rasa*", which is a poetic expression of a state in which all desires are eliminated and all good and bad become alike. And the true root of this state is renunciation and solitude.

In this book Mir laid out with complete delicacy and precision most of the states, which few people among earlier writers have investigated....

Aside from these two books, he has another book full of many delicate *mazmūns* (poetic themes). And his pen name is "Raslin". "Lin" means absorbed, so the expression means a person who is absorbed in *rasa*.⁹²

It was typical of the *tazkira* genre to praise the author whose biography was being recorded. In this example, the grounds for Raslin's literary expertise are presented almost entirely in terms of his mastery of Indian poetic theory.

Raslin was rightly hailed as a master of *alaṅkāraśāstra*. He was well versed in Sanskrit classics such as Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra* and the

⁹¹ Zuhuri was a famous Mughal-period Persian poet who was active in the Deccan.

⁹² *Ma'āṣir al-kirām*, pp. 372–3.

Rasamañjarī of Bhanudatta; he had read Keshavdas.⁹³ He synthesized earlier thinking with erudition and care. His *Rasprabodh* is a distillation of the major components of classical literary discourse, reasoned in its exposition, and it proves true to the claims of its author, who in the prologue states, "I have proposed new ideas according to my own conception."⁹⁴ Raslin's innovations in the field of *alaṅkāraśāstra* were already recognized by Azad Bilgrami during the poet's own lifetime since he praises his subtle intellect for being able to distinguish between closely-related *nāyikās*, such as *dhīrā* (self-possessed in the display of anger) and *khaṇḍitā* (angry over a lover's infidelity).⁹⁵ As with Surati Mishra's student Nasirullah Khan and Shubhkarandas's patron Anvar Khan, to know the Indian literary systems precisely was a desirable cultural attainment. Certainly the Mughal aristocracy identified with Persianate culture, but Persian was not the only language and literature that mattered in the cultivation of poetry, learning, or the gentlemanly behaviour known as *mirzā'i*.

In addition to penning a fascinating *tazkira* that attests to Hindi poetics being a domain of sincere scholarly and aesthetic interest for his Persianate contemporaries, Azad Bilgrami was himself a master of the subject.⁹⁶ His Arabic *Subḥat al-marjān fi āthār Hindustān* (Coral Rosary of the Monuments of India, collated in 1763–64) is an extended disquisition on Indian literary concepts. In the words of Sunil Sharma, "Āzād Bilgrāmī combined a purely theoretical and scholarly interest in comparative poetics with a practising poet's insight into the aesthetic sensibilities and linguistic nuances of the multiple traditions that were now inextricably linked in this region."⁹⁷

If one aim of the *Subḥat al-marjān* was to establish fruitful grounds for comparison between Arabic and Indian literary theory, another—which was shared by the analogue genre of the Braj *ritigranth*—was to outline for non-specialists the basic principles of classical poetics. Azad had special regard for the topic of *nāyikābheda*, which by the time he was writing had been a subject of formal Indo-Muslim reflections on literature for nearly two hundred years. Azad transliterates rather than translates some of the typical Hindi and Sanskrit *bhedas* in the Persian version, suggesting that

⁹³ Pandey 1987: 56, 111–14.

⁹⁴ "Apāne mana kī ukti so racī racī juktī navīna," *Rasprabodh*, v. 23. On the early modern scholarly practice of updating literary theory "according to one's own understanding," see Busch 2004: 50–53.

⁹⁵ *Ma'āṣir al-kirām*, pp. 373; *Rasprabodh*, vv. 171–83.

⁹⁶ In fact, he was a remarkable polymath with considerable literary attainments. He is credited with an extensive poetic oeuvre, including Arabic *qaṣīdahs* on the Prophet; he also wrote commentaries on classical Arabic poetry, *ḥadīṣ*, and history. See Sharma 2009: 95.

⁹⁷ Sharma 2009: 95.

this particular audience was conversant with Indian languages. He introduces some unexpected elements, however, as when he renders *nāyikābheda* by the term *asrār al nisvān* (the secrets of women), misinterpreting or possibly intentionally modifying the meaning of the Indic word *bheda*, which in this context conventionally means “type”, but is here taken to mean “secret”.⁹⁸ Alterations such as this are a reminder of the semantic fluidities of translation. Elsewhere Azad demonstrates his uncontested expertise in Indian poetics by inventing some of his own categories, presenting thirty-six figures of speech of his own devising.⁹⁹ He also creatively transposes the Indian concept of a *mugdha ajñātayauvanā nāyikā* (young girl too innocent to understand her changing adolescent body) into a Perso-Arabic poetic milieu, typing this poem by the seventeenth-century writer Shawkat Bukhari as an example of the *ghāfilah* (ignorant) subtype of *ṣaghīrah* (innocent) beloved:

The saucy one who stole my heart
from my hand,
in his childishness
his eyes are not yet traps
and his tresses not yet lassos.¹⁰⁰ [trans. Sharma]

Here the beloved is male in accordance with Persian sensibilities, but on the whole the argument of Azad’s text is that Perso-Arabic and Sanskrit-Hindi literary conventions are commensurable.

Circulation and its Limits

These vignettes of readership, connoisseurship, and scholarship highlight the multilingual competencies of Indo-Muslim literati in the early modern period and signal some of the complex ways in which *rīti* texts were shared between Muslim and Hindu readers. Still, these textual communities were hardly congruent, nor were literary meanings stable as they traveled. Moreover, the very fact that many writers, whether Jahangir in the seventeenth century or Azad in the eighteenth, had to explain some of their categories to their Persian and Arabic readers means that Hindi connoisseurship and cultural competence in Indian poetics were far from universal.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Ibid., 97–8. I have benefited from the insights of Vivek Gupta on this matter.

⁹⁹ Toorawa 2007: 11. For specific examples, see Sharma 2009: 100; Ernst 2013.

¹⁰⁰ This and other analogies are discussed in Sharma 2009: 98–100.

¹⁰¹ It is often strangely difficult to gauge even a basic fact like the level of imperial patronage for Brajbhasha poets because Mughal chronicles so rarely mention anything other than Persian literary life. See Busch 2011, chapter 4.

Certainly Brajbhasha poetry enabled a degree of cultural synthesis and exchange between social groups, and yet only a few *rīti* genres are truly widespread across constituencies. Several were in fact restricted in their social appeal. In general, a much wider range of *rīti* genres were in use in Rajput courts than in their Mughal counterparts. During the early modern period, *alankāraśāstra* became the most important vernacular science for Brahman literati, many of whom were sponsored by Rajput courts, but there is also a substantial extant corpus of Braj works on other formal knowledge systems, including Vedānta, astrology, equestrian science, and other subjects that had long been cultivated in pandit communities. These scientific treatises tended not to be commissioned by Mughal patrons, for whom Persian and Arabic were the languages of learning.¹⁰² Brajbhasha was thus in some cases a scholarly niche for non-Persianized Brahman intellectuals whose interests had nothing to do with cultural translation and interaction with Muslims but instead centered on traditional Indian knowledge systems.

While there are many instances of panegyric to both the Rajput and Indo-Muslim elite, another element of Braj textual culture largely unattested in Mughal settings is historiography. This use of Brajbhasha had salience for Rajput courts but the Mughals had no need for it since their histories were written in Persian. It is possible that *rīti* poets’ concern with historiography may stem in part from an awareness of the parallel domain of Mughal court chronicles in Persian since, as noted, works with similar missions like the *Akbarnāmah* and the *Māncarī* emerge at the same time. Still, despite this synchronicity, little blending of culture is evident in the structure and style of the texts themselves, which are in keeping with the mandate of their respective Persian and Indic genres.

Another noteworthy distinction is that for Mughal connoisseurs, Brajbhasha was something to be cultivated *in addition to* Persian and always primarily as a literary medium. To demonstrate mastery of Indian poetics—by composing verses, commissioning a commentary, or in rarer cases writing a scholarly treatise, was to add a feather in one’s cap as a *mīrzā* or *rasika* but it supplemented, not supplanted, Persian literary knowledge. Musical lyrics, instructional manuals on poetics, and aphoristic verse were all popular with Mughal audiences, but most of all it was Brajbhasha love poetry that captivated these readers and patrons. Indian literary theorists had developed a delightful way of conceptualizing the

¹⁰² There is virtually no scholarship on early modern knowledge systems in Brajbhasha. Brief preliminary discussions are Busch 2003: 162–6; Pollock 2011: 26–29.

various scenarios of lovers through *nāyikābheda* terminology that resonated strongly with Indo-Persian literati.¹⁰³ Whereas in Rajput and other Hindu communities the *rīti* texts with their frequently reverential poems glorifying Radha and Krishna were a vehicle for bhakti sentiment, in an Indo-Muslim reception context Brajbhasha poetry could generate meanings that were not linked to Vaishnavism, or even specifically connected to Indian literature. Some Indic works underwent a Persian or Sufistic recalibration at the point of reception.

Conclusion

India has always been a multi-lingual, and multi-literary, place. Languages and literatures cross-pollinated for centuries, and, as the various authors represented in this volume suggest, literary historians need to be more attuned to cultural systems at points of intersection.¹⁰⁴ The interface between Persian and Hindi literary spheres is especially important to track not least because it can seem so unfamiliar according to the cultural logic of today's South Asia. In the modern period, the Hindi language came to be constructed as a predominantly Hindu cultural sphere, but the early modern record tells a different story. Despite its modern name, Brajbhasha ("language of the Braj region") was never geographically restricted to any one place or confessional group. A common misconception about Braj has been that it is centrally a Vaishnava language. Although often steeped in the topoi of the Krishna legend, Braj literature had an extremely wide following, and the central concerns of its poets extend far beyond any kind of sectarian or religious orientation. It may be one of the great ironies of the history of Hindi, which is too often understood from a Hindu nationalist perspective that became current only a century ago, that so many factors behind its cultivation and literary success—arguably even its very existence as a poetic medium—stem from Indo-Muslim contact. Awadhi and Braj are today celebrated as the two great literary precursors of modern standard Hindi and yet much of this heritage can scarcely be understood without recognizing the defining input of Indo-Muslim communities. To argue for a non-Hindu history of Hindi literature is not, of course, to deny the key contributions of Hindu royal and religious groups, both of which were

¹⁰³ Sunil Sharma (2009: 88–9, 101–2) notes that love poetry has frequently been a site of cultural exchange and accommodation.

¹⁰⁴ See Orsini 2012 for some important methodological reflections.

demonstrably important. It is merely to urge greater recognition of the role of Indo-Muslim writers and connoisseurs.

The Mughal period witnessed various circulatory factors conducive to the rise of this transregional literary culture that we now call *rīti* poetry. From the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, diverse imperial spheres of activity in tandem with networks of Vaishnavized Rajput courts comprised a larger Mughal system of culture and power characterized by interactions on many levels.¹⁰⁵ Whereas Sanskrit texts remained largely inaccessible except through sporadic Persian translations such as those famously commissioned by Akbar, Braj was a cultural repertory in which Indo-Muslims could participate first-hand and a multifaceted cultural resource that could be tailored to different audiences. As a vernacular, it was inherently comprehensible to most people, irrespective of community.

I have demonstrated the basic fact of the Mughal interest in Brajbhasha texts but also tried to take some snapshots of readership with the hope of uncovering more about how the tradition was experienced and understanding the mechanisms that enabled shared literary cultures. We noted instances of analogue genres and motifs that could readily travel across cultural boundaries. Love is a popular theme of poets the world over, but both the Persian and Indian classical traditions had honed love poetry to a fine art. Thus, when Persianate connoisseurs encountered a literary system in which *śṛṅgāra rasa* was predominant, learning to appreciate its fine points was an easy cultural adjustment to make.¹⁰⁶ And yet texts were never static entities: New meanings constantly accrued to them, a transformation made possible by the sensibilities of different readerships.

Persianized Urdu eventually took over some of the cultural space inhabited by Braj¹⁰⁷ from the early Mughal period and during the nineteenth century became not just Islamicate but Islamic no less than Hindi became Hindu.¹⁰⁸ But there was a cultural moment, one that lasted for hundreds of years, when language politics were not so divisive and Hindi functioned as a major conduit for circulation in a multicultural literary field.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Chatterjee 2009.

¹⁰⁶ Phillip Wagoner (1999) has discussed a related notion of "fortuitous convergences" that eased transculturation in Deccani architectural settings.

¹⁰⁷ On the creative early experiments with Urdu by Śāvant Singh (also known as Nāgrīdās), a Braj poet and Rajput king, see Pauwels, this volume.

¹⁰⁸ A now-classic account of the Hindi-Urdu divide is King 1999 [1994].

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