

*Hidden in Plain View: Brajbhasha Poets at the Mughal Court**

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Abstract

Brajbhasha literature is a domain of Mughal culture seldom investigated by scholars, to the detriment of our understanding of both. While the Mughal court is famed for its lavish support of Persian writers, a surprising number of Brajbhasha poets also attracted the notice of Mughal patrons. In this paper I look at the lives and texts of important Braj writers who worked in Mughal settings, with a view to uncovering the nature of the social, political and cultural interactions that this kind of patronage represents. Why these poets have been largely lost to social and literary history is another concern, along with the challenges of trying to recover their stories.

The Other Language of the Mughal Court

This is a study of Mughal literary culture. It is not, however, about the culture of Persian literature. My focus is a more unexpected subject: a corpus of texts written in a language today known as Brajbhasha, North India's most important literary vernacular during the early modern

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period (1500–1800). Today the word ‘Brajbhasha’ is likely to evoke immediate associations with Krishna devotion; meaning ‘language of Braj’, the term proclaims Brajbhasha’s mytho-poetic associations with Krishna lore and the Vaishnava efflorescence that took Mathura and Vrindavan by storm from the sixteenth century onwards. While Braj does indeed owe some of its popularity to its cultivation by Krishna-worshipping literati, it was also a major court language, and thus a far more versatile cultural vehicle than its present-day Vaishnava connotations suggest.¹

The first claim—and it is simple but often simply ignored—is that Brajbhasha did have a presence at the Mughal court. While this claim will come as no surprise to scholars of Hindi (though the data some adduce do not always conform to the most rigorous standards of historical verifiability), Braj literary patronage is rarely discussed in studies of Mughal India, which as a rule focus on Persian poets.² Persian of course had a long history in India, but from the time of Akbar (r. 1556–1605) the Mughal court became an especially attractive destination for writers who were eager to leave Safavid Iran. In a new turn towards cosmopolitanism, North India was swept up in a dramatic process of what one might think of as re-Persianization after close to two centuries of more eclectic, locally-rooted literary behaviour on the part of Indo-Muslim courtly communities. Still, even if Persian would always occupy the position of highest prestige in the hierarchy of Mughal literary forms, an impressive list of emperors as well as members of the Mughal nobility also sponsored the production of Brajbhasha texts. One of the aims of this paper is to begin the task of understanding the extent of this patronage, and to reflect on

¹ ‘Brajbhasha’ had many names in the premodern period, including ‘Bhasha’, ‘Hindi’, and ‘Gwaliyari’ (among others). I employ the term ‘Brajbhasha’ because it is the standard designation today, while registering that the very name reinforces the dominant Vaishnava perspective that this paper seeks to nuance.

² The rise of Persian as the Mughal court language has been magisterially traced in Muzaffar Alam, ‘The Pursuit of Persian: Language in Mughal Politics’, *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (1998), pp. 317–349. He does mention a few eighteenth-century vernacular poets (see especially pp. 343–346), but does not treat those who were active in earlier periods, which is the primary concern of this investigation. Owing to scholars such as Nalini Delvoye, *dhrupad*, a type of Braj composition that was sung in Mughal music circles, is somewhat better understood than poetry more generally. A good overview is Françoise ‘Nalini’ Delvoye, ‘Les chants *dhrupad* en langue braj des poètes-musiciens de l’Inde Moghole’ in Françoise Mallison (ed.), *Littératures médiévales de l’Inde du nord* (Paris: École Française d’Extrême-Orient 1991), pp. 139–185.

the roles played by Braj poets and the works they wrote in Mughal settings.

Nationalist Mythmaking and Some Archival Disarray

I use the modest phrase ‘begin the task’ because our present state of knowledge does not permit a more ambitious goal. Despite its evident importance, the extent of Mughal participation in Braj literary culture has never been systematically traced. There are monographs in Hindi on a few individual Braj poets who are known to have commanded Mughal patronage, but no broad, historically rigorous study of imperial court sponsorship of Braj poetry exists. 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 a daunting undertaking. There are enormous holes in the archive. Some texts have simply been lost; others have never been published or, if once published, have long been out of print. Brajbhasha remained the medium of a thriving poetic community into the early twentieth century, but when partisans of the new Khari Boli (Modern Standard Hindi) ousted Brajbhasha—branded as effete by colonial and nationalist discourse during a period of profound discomfort with India’s courtly past—many earlier texts fell out of favour. The erosion of Persian literacy among Hindus in the modern period and the general neglect of Braj texts by Mughal scholars have prevented the Persian and Hindi domains of historical and cultural memory from being viewed in concert. Yet another impediment to reconstructing the history of Brajbhasha at the Mughal court is the familiar self-effacement of Indian authors: most poets are uncommunicative about matters beyond their immediate literary aims. Moreover, dates of texts and biographies of even major Braj authors are sometimes startlingly unknown. Record-keeping was not the Hindi literary tradition’s strong suit.

In addition to these practical obstacles we are confronted with ideological difficulties. If scholars of Indo-Persian are often silent, or at best reticent, on the subject of Braj literary production at the Mughal court, we need to approach the more effusive corpus of Hindi scholarship with caution. Modern Hindi literary studies came into being during the nationalist period, and the field exhibits a complicated relationship to Mughal-period texts. Forged during a time of increasingly polarized self-definitions on the part of Hindi and Urdu

users, and later exacerbated by the scars of partition-era communal conflict, Hindi literary historiography has never been able to free itself from the strictures of communalist readings of the past.³

The narratives take different shapes, and evince at times a schizophrenic quality. Some literary historians see Brajbhasha's courtly tendencies as evidence of a wrong turn that the Hindi language took on its developmental path. Ramcandra Shukla, who wrote the first self-consciously modern history of Hindi literature in 1929, made a sharp demarcation between what he thought to be an earlier 'bhakti' (devotional) and later 'rīti' (courtly) period, helping to set the stage for a consistent denigration of courtly Brajbhasha texts as late, decadent, and suspiciously engaged with worldly matters rather than spirituality.⁴ A related historiographical trope (and trap) has been the association of rīti literature with Mughal (and Muslim) decline.⁵

Another breed of literary historian, while refreshingly avoiding accusations of literary waywardness, goes to the opposite extreme and seems to find a Hindi couplet flowing from every emperor's tongue.⁶ The implication (gentler towards the Mughals but also at base a nationalist one) is that Muslims, like Hindus, have been passionately devoted to the cause of Hindi for centuries. In modern times, when Muslims and Hindus self-consciously eschew each others' languages and scripts, this type of scholar seems to find solace in highlighting features of a more linguistically pluralistic past, with Hindi-using Muslim poets and patrons revered as tolerant advocates of national unity *avant la lettre*.

I am by no means suggesting that Hindi scholars are wilfully deceiving their readers. They are often drawing upon evidence from oral tradition as well as Hindi's copious heritage of poetry anthologies. Two influential exemplars, together totalling more than two thousand printed pages, the provenance and historicity of whose contents are

³ The Hindi-Urdu struggles of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have been well studied and need no rehearsing here. A now classic account is Christopher King, *One Language, Two Scripts: the Hindi Movement in Nineteenth Century North India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994).

⁴ The canonical periodization of Hindi literature is Ramcandra Shukla, *Hindī sāhitya kā itihās* (Varanasi, 1994 [1929]). A critique of this paradigm is Allison Busch, 'Questioning the Tropes about "Bhakti" and "Rīti" in Hindi Literary Historiography' in Monika Horstmann (ed.), *Bhakti in Current Research, 2001–2003* (Delhi: Manohar, 2006), pp. 33–47.

⁵ See, for instance, Nagendra (ed.), *Hindī sāhitya kā itihās* (New Delhi: Mayur Paperbacks, 1995 [1973]), pp. 281–287.

⁶ Braj couplets have been attributed to most of the Mughal emperors in Candrabali Pandey, *Mughal bādśāhō kī hindī* (Varanasi: Nagari Pracarini Sabha, 1940).

not easy to verify, are the *Śivsimḥsaroj*⁷ (1878) and *Miśrabandhuvinod* (1913). In presenting a voluminous array of poems and literary biographies, the compilers seem to have adopted as their anthologizing strategy the literary-historical equivalent of the motto ‘everything but the kitchen sink.’ Over the preceding centuries, oral forms of literary culture circulated through sophisticated local mechanisms in tandem with written streams to generate a robust corpus of legends about Hindi literati, their *oeuvres* in some cases accruing countless *phuṭkal* (miscellaneous) verses that are not necessarily well attested in manuscript traditions.

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 celebrates the poetess Pravin Ray, courtesan of Raja Indrajit of Orchha and a student of the Braj luminary Keshavdas, for having refused Akbar’s summons to court. She is reported to have 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 the plates used by others.’⁸ Dozens of tales chronicling encounters between Braj poets and Mughal emperors have come down to us. A famous example from the *Caurāsī vaiṣṇavan kī vārtā* relates that Surdas enchanted the emperor with his *padas* and then refused to perform at the Mughal court.⁹ While we naturally suspect many such narratives are not true in a historically positivist sense, their sheer abundance suggests a larger composite truth about Brajbhasha poetry being a desired commodity at the Mughal court. (The fact that in the two instances cited here the poets do not go to 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 problem for social and literary historians is how to get at some approximation of the truth that hovers behind various tales, undated texts, ghostly authors, and presentist fallacies that stem from wishful thinking about Hindu-Muslim unity in the premodern period. To be sure, Mughal texts are not the only domain of the Hindi corpus

⁷ See ‘Glossary’ at the end of this paper for English translations.

⁸ For this and other verses attributed to the poetess Pravin Ray see Sudhakar Pandey (ed.), *Hindī Kāvya-gaṅgā* (Varanasi: Nagari Pracarini Sabha, 1990), Vol. 1, p. 201.

⁹ An analysis of this episode is John Stratton Hawley, *Three Bhakti Voices* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 182–183. 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. See his *The Round Dance of Krishna and Uddhav’s Message* (London: Luzac, 1973), p. 32, note 7.

that poses historiographical challenges. We would have to throw out many of the greats of the Hindi canon—Sur, Kabir, and Mira Bai, for starters—if we insisted on biographical precision, or authenticating every verse attributed to them. Hindi literary study would grind to a halt. 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 an epistemological regime separate from the methodologies of modern scholars, cannot be entirely ignored.¹⁰ This type of evidence is sometimes accepted readily by Indian literary scholars writing in Hindi for whom the manuscript evidence deemed critical by western scholars is less important or, perhaps, has proven inaccessible. Indeed, careful studies of manuscript traditions remain a desideratum for many Braj authors, Mughal or otherwise.

Given the limitations of the archive, then, reconstructing the story of Braj poets at the Mughal court is at the core 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 tracks the poets left in their texts. If too often the documentation is unsatisfactory, we also have more traceable, datable texts and individuals that can help to anchor this investigation, particularly when we put the more conventional Hindi sources in dialogue with Persian ones. Unexpected memories crop up in Persian texts, and bringing this additional archive into play adds new layers to our understanding of poets as actors in the early modern period, allowing a richer kind of social and literary history to emerge. In what follows I sift the available evidence concerning prominent Braj authors whose careers intersected with the world of the Mughal court. I reveal some hidden aspects of Mughal cultural life that are surprisingly easy to find if one actually knows where to look for them.

The Rise of Brajbhasha in the Early Mughal Period

A good starting point is to outline the literary conditions the Mughals would have encountered on the ground when they arrived in India. Whereas both Brajbhasha literary culture and the Mughals were new

¹⁰ Similar processes of literary memory formation in South India have been discussed in Velcheru Narayana Rao and David Shulman, *A Poem at the Right Moment* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 1–25.

in sixteenth-century India, the patronage of Hindi by Indo-Muslim elites was old. In fact—though this is a fact largely unrecognized by nationalist literary historians—most important early signs of Hindi poetic creativity are traceable to Indo-Muslim performance settings and courts. Anecdotal references to vernacular verse forms and songs are found as early as the Ghaznavid period (*circa* 977–1186),¹¹ but it was more recent activity in regional Muslim courts and Sufi *khānqāhs* that were the impetus behind the truly major textual achievements in pre-Mughal Hindi: a series of *premākhyāns* (Sufi love stories) written in the Avadhi dialect from 1379–1545, which continued to be performed and enjoyed long after they were first composed. The court of Islam Shah Sur was particularly frequented by Hindi writers, notably the Avadhi poet Manjhan (author of *Madhumālātī*) and Shah Muhammad Farmuli, whose Hindi poems are fondly remembered by the literary biographers of early modern India.¹²

During the reign of Akbar noticeable shifts occurred in North Indian language and literary preferences. The Mughal attention lavished on Persian poets is one. In vernacular literary circles, another important change should be noted: the dialect of Brajbhasha began to supersede that of Avadhi. The languages are not hugely dissimilar. They can both be classified linguistically as Hindi (which Indo-Muslims often called ‘Hindavi’), though they differ in some basic morphological features, as well as in genre preferences. Brajbhasha poets favoured short *muktak* (free-standing) poems, usually on devotional or royal themes, as well as treatises on classical Indian aesthetics known as *rīṭigranth* (poetry textbooks). The Braj dialect is not too distant from the Hindi spoken in Agra and it would in all likelihood have been readily comprehensible to the Mughals—especially when compared with Avadhi which, as its name indicates, originated further east.

It was precisely during Akbar’s period that Hindi became a naturalized idiom for the Mughal rulers. Babur (r. 1526–1530), the

¹¹ The lost *divān* of Masud Sad Salman of the Ghaznavid court and other instances of early vernacular poetry in Indo-Muslim settings are discussed in Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, ‘A Long History of Urdu Literary Culture, Part 1’ in Sheldon Pollock (ed.), *Literary Cultures in History* (Berkeley: University of California, 2003), pp. 819–825. Also see R.S. McGregor, *Hindi Literature from its Beginnings to the Nineteenth Century* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1984), pp. 8–28.

¹² On Manjhan’s work and the genre of Sufi love stories see Aditya Behl and Simon Weightman (trans.), *Madhumālātī: An Indian Sufi Romance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. xiv–xix; some details about Farmuli are in the *Ma‘āshir-al Kirām* of Ghulam Ali Azad Bilgrami (Hyderabad, Kutubkhanah-i Asifiyah, 1913), pp. 352–356.

founder of the empire, had been most at home in Chaghtai Turkish, the language he used to write *Bāburnāmah* (his memoirs). Although Humayun's lengthy exile at the Safavid court in Iran contributed to his (and his son Akbar's) Persophilia, Humayun (r. 1530–1540, 1555–1556) hosted Turkish poets at his court.¹³ Akbar, however, is known to have been conversant with spoken Hindi, as was his son Jahangir and all future Mughal rulers.¹⁴ A major political imperative in consolidating the empire was to build consensus with local Rajput kings, one expedient of which was to accept their daughters as brides. The mothers of Akbar's son Jahangir and grandson Shah Jahan were both Indian Rajputs. Thus, over the course of Akbar's reign Hindi was in some cases literally becoming the mother tongue of the Mughal princes, even if Persian remained the primary public language, and ties to Turkish were maintained.¹⁵

Additional political factors contributed to the Mughal interest in Brajhasha. Their early capital at Agra was situated close to the Hindu cultural centres of Vrindavan and Mathura, the locus of new Vaishnava religious communities that were gaining power with both Mughal and Rajput state support. Important members of Akbar's administration such as Todar Mal and Man Singh were patrons of Vaishnava institutions and, in 1580, Mathura became part of the *ṣūbah* of Agra.¹⁶ The new types of song and poetry emerging from these same places would have been a natural subject of imperial interest. While Persian literary patronage proclaimed the Mughal rulers' rootedness

¹³ Alam, 'Pursuit of Persian' (1998), p. 317.

¹⁴ 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 naïve Akbar who delights in exemplary tales and poetry, especially *dohras* [i.e. *dohās*] in the vernacular.' Apparently the only Hindavi portions of this text occur in sessions where Akbar is present and, whereas the Arabic portions were translated into Persian for the emperor's benefit, Hindavi needed no such mediation. See Derryl N. MacLean, 'Real Men and False Men at the Court of Akbar' in David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence (eds.), *Beyond Turk and Hindu* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), p. 203, and note 17.

¹⁵ According to Wheeler Thackston, Jahangir occasionally included Hindi words in his Persian memoirs. He also took pride in his Timurid ancestry: upon reading his grandfather's Turkish 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.' See Wheeler Thackston, (ed. and tr.), *Jahāngīrnāma* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. xvi, 77.

¹⁶ Alan Entwistle, *Braj: Centre of Krishna Pilgrimage* (Groningen: E Forsten, 1987), pp. 151–166.

in a cosmopolitan Islamic 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.

The beginning of Mughal engagement with Braj literary culture is difficult to pinpoint. Most of the earliest Hindi poets associated with the Mughal court are only shadowy figures; often nothing survives but their names, and occasionally fragments of poetry. Whether or not Babur should be accorded the status of a Hindi (but not, technically, Braj) poet on the basis of a single couplet found in his Turkish *dīvān*,¹⁷ he seems not to have sponsored any vernacular poets. Patronage of Brajbhasha songs, not always entirely distinguishable from poetry, has been linked to Humayun. The names of several Braj writers are also associated with his court. Better documented than others is the *oeuvre* of the poet Narhari, who appears also to have attracted the patronage of Islam Shah Sur and was later to become a court poet of Akbar. Another poet mentioned in early, and not entirely reliable, literary histories is Chem.¹⁸

With the accession of Akbar, our information becomes richer, if still somewhat vague. Akbar was tremendously fond of music, especially *dhrupad* songs composed in Brajbhasha. His celebrated court musician, Tansen, needs no introduction here. The *Ā'in-i Akbarī* of Abu'l Fazl takes special note of music, and includes a section on *Bishnupad* (Songs to Vishnu).¹⁹ Although Abu'l Fazl does not mention any of the numerous Hindi poets associated with Akbar's court, the names and compositions of some survive in poetry anthologies. A few, such as Karnesh and Manohar (among others), routinely make the rounds of literary histories, accompanied by sparse biographical musings. Todar Mal, Akbar's revenue administrator, is credited with writing Braj poetry, as is Faizi, Akbar's Persian-language poet laureate (and

¹⁷ Alam, 'Pursuit of Persian' (1998), p. 343. Babur, like Jahangir, also mentions some local Hindi words in his memoirs.

¹⁸ Shaikh Abdul Bilgrami and Shaikh Gadai Delhavi, both associated with Humayun's court, are said to have sung compositions in Hindi. See Pandey, *Mughal bādsāhō*, pp. 6–7. Humayun's patronage of Braj poets is discussed in Sarayu Prasad Agrawal, *Akbarī darbār ke hindī kavi* (Lucknow: Lucknow University, 1950), pp. 27–29, 298–304, 309–333.

¹⁹ H. Blochmann and H.S. Jarrett (ed. and tr.), *Ā'in-i Akbarī* of Abu'l Fazl (Delhi: Low Price Publications, 1994 [1927–1949]), Vol. 3, pp. 260–273. A more general discussion of music at Akbar's court (in which Tansen is mentioned) is Vol 1, pp. 680–682.

brother of Abu'l Fazl).²⁰ Akbar himself is also credited with a few compositions in Hindi. In the words of Abu'l 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.'²¹

Akbar's courtier Birbal is also known to have had a literary temperament. Birbal 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 the clever Birbal. Even if most of these are the stuff of legend, and little of his literary *oeuvre* survives today, that the famous Mughal courtier was also a Braj poet is beyond doubt. Although not providing any details about his poetry, both Badauni and Shah Nawaz Khan mention that Akbar awarded him the title *kavirāy* (king of poets). A few dozen of Birbal's Braj verses come down to us under the *chāp* (poetic signature) of 'Brahma', a name that also occurs in an authoritative list of Braj poets compiled by the eighteenth-century Braj literary critic and scholar Bhikharidas (fl. 1740).²²

Major Braj Poets Associated with Akbar and Jahangir

A major poet with clear associations to the Mughal court during Akbar's period and one widely known, if little studied by Hindi scholars, is Gang. Hundreds of poems survive with his *chāp*. It is

²⁰ Poems attributed to Karnesh and Manohar are excerpted in Pandey (ed.), *Hindī Kāvyaṅgā* (1990), pp. 184, 467. Discussions of Braj poets at Akbar's court include Agraval (1950), *Akbarī darbār*, and McGregor, *Hindī Literature* (1984), pp. 118–22. Two verses attributed to Faizi are discussed in Shailesh Zaidi, *Hindī ke katīpay musalmān kavi* (Aligarh: University Publishing House, 1977), pp. 97–110, 135–140.

²¹ ('Ṭab'-i ilhām-pazīr-i ān ḥazrat bih guftan-i naẓm-i hindī ū fārsī bih ghayāt-i muvāfiq uftādah dar daqā'iq-i takhayyulāt-i shi'rī-yi nuktaḥ-sanjī ū mū-shigāfi [i.e. shikāfi] mīfarmāyand.) My translation is modified from Henry Beveridge (trans.), *The Akbarnāma of Abul Fazl: History of the Reign of Akbar Including an Account of His Predecessors* (Delhi: Ess Ess Publications, 1977), Vol 1, p. 520; a sampling of Hindi verses attributed to Akbar is in Pandey (ed.), *Hindī Kāvyaṅgā* (1990), p. 463.

²² Birbal's title is mentioned in W.H. Lowe (ed. and tr.), *Muntakhab ut Tavārīkh of Abdul Qadir al-Badauni* (Karachi: Karimsons, 1976 [1884]), Vol 2, p. 164, and Vrajratna Das (ed. and tr.), *Ma'āṣir al-Umarā of Shah Newaz Khan* (Varanasi: Nagari Pracarini Sabha, 1984), Vol 1, p. 128. Birbal's purported Hindi compositions are anthologized in Parmeshwar Prasad Sinha, *Raja Birbal, Life and Times* (Patna: Janaki Prakashan, 1980), pp. 170–177. Birbal's inclusion in the Hindi canon of the eighteenth century is evident from Vishvanathprasad Mishra (ed.), *Kāvyanirṇay of Bhikharidas in Bhikhārīdāsgranthāvalī* (Varanasi: Nagari Pracarini Sabha, 1957), Vol 2, v. 1.17.

indicative of the state of scholarship that even the editor of the most authoritative book on Gang is in doubt about the authenticity of some of his material.²³ Still, there is no real doubt that Gang existed, that some of the poems that survive are actually his, and—given the number of *praśasti* (panegyric) verses to Mughal personages—that he was associated with the court. More than 75 poems attest to the high-level company Gang kept: there are compositions in honour of Akbar, Abdur Rahim Khan-i Khanan, the latter's sons Iraj Khan and Darab Khan, Prince Salim (the future Jahangir), Prince Daniyal (Salim's brother), Man Singh Kachhwaha, Birbal, amongst others.²⁴ A century and a half later Bhikharidas considered him one of two *sardār* (masters) among Hindi poets, the other being Tulsidas.²⁵

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 made some 80 years after those of Bhikharidas by William Price who, in a grammar book written for British military recruits in 1827, noted that Gang was one of a half-dozen of the most celebrated Hindi literary figures.²⁶ Since then Hindi scholars seem to have suffered from an astonishing case of literary amnesia. The example of Gang dramatically illustrates how charting the early career of Brajbhasha at the Mughal court can seem a laborious exercise in weaving together tiny threads of evidence. Fortunately there are also major figures about whom we know much more. It is to these people that I now turn.

One of the founding figures of the courtly Braj literary tradition is Keshavdas Mishra (c. 1555–1617). Hailing from Orchha, a small principality in Bundelkhand, Keshavdas belonged to a family of learned Sanskrit pandits but chose—and this is just one sign of the historical rupture of the age—to take up a new type of career as a vernacular writer. Other major changes were afoot, for during the poet's youth Orchha was annexed by Akbar's armies. Although Keshavdas was a poet and not a political commentator, his awareness

²³ Bate Krishna (ed.), *Gang-kabitt* (Varanasi: Nagari Pracarini Sabha, 1960), p. 8. The author compiled this collection from both printed and manuscript copies of Hindi poetry anthologies.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 88–117; also see Sarayu Prasad Agrawal (ed.), *Ganggranthāvalī* (New Delhi: Kendriya Hindi Nideshalay, 1970), pp. 234–269.

²⁵ Mishra (ed.), *Kāvyaniṛṇay* (1957), v. 1.17.

²⁶ The others were Chand Bardai, Kabir, Tulsi, Bihari, Keshavdas and Sur. See William Price, *Hindee and Hindoostanee Selections* (Calcutta: Hindoostanee Press, 1827), Vol 1, pp. viii–x.

of the new order occasionally peeps out from his work. The full extent of the poet's personal contact with the Mughal court is not clear, but there is enough evidence to permit well-informed speculation.

Several verses from his *Kavipriyā* (Handbook for poets, 1601), an early exemplar of the Braj poetry textbooks that would soon become all the rage in courtly circles, mention the Mughal aristocrat Birbal. 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.

And one day while they were in Prayag Indrajit said 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 nobody block me at court.' (*āṅgyo taba darabāra mē 'mohi na rokai koi'*).

Indrajit showed him kindness, considering him his guru. He washed his feet, and bestowed upon him twenty-one villages.²⁷

While his request to Indrajit was apparently honoured at once, we do not know if Keshavdas ever got his wish from Birbal—but it is the nature of the wish itself that should interest us: Keshavdas' desire to appear at court. In a cluster of verses in a later chapter, this time on the subject of *dāna* (the kingly virtue of generosity), he again mentions Birbal and Indrajit in tandem. The section concludes with *praśasti* verses to both Indrajit and Birbal, with the latter eulogized as follows:

When Birbal passed away there was great rejoicing in Poverty's court.
The pakhavaj drums of Evil began to play,
The sounds of the conch shells of Grief resounded,
The songs of Falsehood,
the tambourines of Fear—a concert of all these instruments was heard.
The house of Kaliyuga was merry with the pipes of Discord
and the streaming banners of Disgrace.²⁸

Although the precise details are now lost to us, Keshavdas evidently took pride in his association with Birbal, an important member of the Mughal political establishment.

²⁷ Vishvanathprasad Mishra (ed.), *Kavipriyā*, in *Keśavgranthāvalī* (Allahabad: Hindustani Academy, 1954–1959), Vol 1, vv. 2.18–20.

²⁸ Mishra (ed.), *Kavipriyā* (1954), vv. 6.62–76. Keshavdas also laments the death of Birbal while praising his generosity in *Vīrsimhdevcarit* (Deeds of Bir Singh Deo, 1607), v. 1.64, in Mishra (ed.), *Keśavgranthāvalī*.

Further hints about Keshavdas' associations with Mughal elites are contained in the author's last work, the *Jahāngīrjascandrikā* (Moonlight of the Fame of Jahangir, 1612), which is set at Jahangir's court in Agra. The introduction contains a series of *praśastis* to Bairam Khan, Akbar's regent, Abdur Rahim Khan-i Khanan (Bairam Khan's son) and Iraj Shah Newaz Khan (Bairam Khan's grandson), the last being singled out for special attention.²⁹ Keshavdas depicts himself in the role of mentor to the young Amir:

It was through the merit of a former life that fate bestowed upon Keshavdas the good fortune of meeting Iraj Khan. One day Iraj said,

'Respected Keshavray, you understand all of life's secrets: tell me, which is more important, fate [*bhāgya*] or human effort [*uday*]?³⁰

The work proves to have a complicated mission: to answer Iraj Khan's question with an edifying discourse on *bhāgya* and *uday* while simultaneously eulogizing the Mughal emperor—portrayed as a wise leader who can adjudicate on challenging matters.

The basic storyline of the short work is as follows: one day the personified *Bhāgya* and *Uday* are vociferously debating who is more important when suddenly an *akāsbānī* (voice from the heavens) instructs them to go to Mathura and seek the guidance of Lord Shiva. Shiva informs them that Emperor Jahangir can best decide and so the two set out for the royal court in Agra, which they describe in lively detail before petitioning for a verdict. After Jahangir offers his opinion (following a brief consultation with Man Singh) on the relative importance of fate and human effort (they are both equally important, says Jahangir, and they should both inhabit his kingdom), various courtiers express their appreciation for Jahangir's sagacity, bestowing myriad benedictions that take the form of Braj *praśasti* poems. A Qazi exhorts Jahangir to be victorious like Ram's sons Kush and Lav. A Sheikh calls on Jahangir to vanquish enemies in the manner of the fierce Hindu goddess Kali. After *Bhāgya*, *Uday*, and an assortment of ministers and poets have their say, Keshavdas inserts himself into the narrative. He expresses his desire to retire to the banks of the Ganges

²⁹ Iraj Khan, like his father, had a distinguished military career and participated in many Mughal campaigns in the Deccan. Some highlights are in the biographical notes of *Ā'in-i Akbarī*, Vol 1, pp. 550–551.

³⁰ Kishori Lal (ed.), *Jahāngīrjascandrikā* of Keshavdas (Allahabad: Sahitya Bhavan, 1994), vv. 9–10.

and pursue a life of meditation; in the final verse, Jahangir rewards him handsomely.

There is a kind of proto-magical realism in the *Jahāngīrjascandrikā*, and we are left to wonder whether any of the events ever really happened. Caution is certainly warranted in using an imaginative text like *Jahāngīrjascandrikā* to illuminate Keshavdas's lived experience or the literary practices of the Mughal court. Still, it does seem as though the poet had some personal familiarity with the environment he describes. The text includes *praśasti* verses to more than 20 known princes, rajas, and members of the nobility.³¹ When the character Uday makes remarks such as, 'Who is the handsome king to the left of Man Singh, talking to Parvez?', one wonders if Keshavdas did see with his own eyes some of what he describes. Perhaps Birbal granted his wish, after all.

Did Keshavdas actually recite poems in Jahangir's court? The *Jahāngīrnāmah*, the emperor's memoirs, does contain quite a few references to one of Keshavdas' Orchha patrons, Bir Singh Deo Bundela, but none to Keshavdas himself. Most of the literary activity is in Persian. Still, if we have good reason to treat with scepticism Keshavdas' portrayal of Qazis and Sheikhs declaiming Braj poems about Hindu deities, two significant references to Hindi poets in the *Jahāngīrnāmah* give us pause for thought. On one occasion, Raja Suraj Singh of Marwar, uncle of Prince Khurram (the future Shah Jahan), brought a Hindi poet to court. Jahangir records the pleasure he took in the Hindi poem and the elephant he bestowed as a reward.³² In another passage Jahangir becomes almost rhapsodic as he describes 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.

One such poet was Tan Sen Kalawant (a 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

³¹ See Lal (ed.), *Jahāngīrjascandrikā*, vv. 51–98. It is notable that v. 87, which is in honour of Birbal's son 'Dhiradharu', again showcases Birbal's generosity.

³² Thackston (ed.), *Jahāngīrnāma*, p. 93.

another one he likened the beloved's wink to the motion of the lotus flower when the bhaunra alights on it.³³

In referencing not just Tansen but a larger class of 'Hindi poets', Jahangir signals his awareness, and by all indications sincere appreciation, of contemporary vernacular literary trends. The *bhramargīt* (song of the bee), deriving from the *Bhāgavata Purāna* tales about Krishna's messenger Uddhava and the gopis, was a common motif in Braj poetry of the period, having been popularized by Sur and Nanddas. In the light of Jahangir's remarks in his memoirs, a phrase by Keshavdas that praises the emperor's knowledge of *nāyikābheda* (classification of heroines), one of the most important Braj courtly genres, takes on special significance.³⁴ Perhaps Brajbhasha had more currency at Jahangir's court than we currently understand.

We will probably never know for certain how exactly the *Jahāngīrjascandrikā*, Keshavdas' last work, came into being, or whether the poet presented it to the emperor in Agra. Keshavdas was never to be heard from again, strengthening the possibility that he did indeed receive an emolument from the emperor sufficient to support some kind of retirement.³⁵ If Jahangir did not commission the work himself, perhaps Bir Singh Deo Bundela, who had received many favours from Jahangir, did so as a tribute to the emperor. Bir Singh, known as a lavish builder in Bundelkhand and Mathura, also maintained a residence on the banks of the Yamuna in Agra;³⁶ thus, Keshavdas could easily have accompanied him on one or more sojourns to Agra. A final possibility, and the most likely one, given his prominence in the introduction, is that the true patron was Rahim's son, Iraj Khan. Jahangir awarded him the title Shah Newaz Khan in 1612, the same

³³ Ibid., 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...[the poets] employ.' See Françoise 'Nalini' Delvoye, 'Dhrupad Songs Attributed to Tansen, Foremost Court-Musician of the Mughal Emperor Akbar' in Alan W. Entwistle and Françoise Mallison (eds.), *Studies in South Asian Devotional Literature* (Delhi: Manohar, 1994), pp. 414–415.

³⁴ Lal (ed.), *Jahāngīrjascandrikā* (1994), v. 34. As usual, though, it is difficult to assess whether Keshavdas is describing reality or invoking a classical injunction that kings should be connoisseurs of literature. Compare the same poet's *Kavīpriyā*, v. 11.23, in which a nearly identical verse references Raja Indrajit. Vishvanathprasad Mishra (ed.), *Kavīpriyā*, in *Keśavgranthāvalī*, Vol 1.

³⁵ Keshavdas had also mentioned his desire to retire in his penultimate work, *Vijñāngītā* (Discourse on Wisdom, 1610) written for Bir Singh Deo Bundela. Vishvanathprasad Mishra (ed.), *Vijñāngītā*, in *Keśavgranthāvalī*, Vol 3, vv. 21.69–71.

³⁶ Bir Singh was a neighbour of Man Singh Kachhawa. Dirk H.A. Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput, and Sepoy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 128.

year that the *Jahāngīrjascandrikā* was composed.³⁷ Sponsoring a literary work in honour of the emperor may have been a way of showing his gratitude, and if so, it would be highly significant that his homage took the form of a Braj *kāvya* rather than a Persian *qaṣīdah*.³⁸ Iraj Khan's own father, Rahim (whom I will discuss next), is remembered as a Braj poet. Perhaps the language had a special significance in that family.

Abdur Rahim Khan-i Khanan (1556–1627) was a man of many talents, among which the composition of Braj poetry was just one. Raised at Akbar's court after his father Bairam Khan was assassinated in 1561, Rahim was employed in his early years as *aṭālīq* (tutor) to Jahangir, and would assume various roles in the Mughal political and cultural establishment, becoming renowned for his military successes as well as for his lavish patronage of the arts. Rahim was a famously generous sponsor of Persian poets, with litterateurs from as far away as Iran sending him couplets as a means of gaining entrée at his court. He mostly hosted Persian poets at his literary gatherings, but some sources also indicate the patronage of Brajhasha writers, including Gang, to whom a substantial number of *praśasti* verses in Rahim's honour are attributed.³⁹

Whereas Persian sources provide only scant information about Rahim's connection to vernacular literary life, the Hindi tradition fondly commemorates him as a major poet. This is a strange discrepancy, one that emerges in a recurring pattern. Several works in both Avadhi and Braj are attributed to him. Most are loosely organized rather than ordered into a coherent whole, and none is dated or contains a colophon, rendering pronouncements about his *oeuvre* for the time being provisional.⁴⁰ Two collections of verses in the

³⁷ Thackston (ed.), *Jahāngīrnāma*, p. 123.

³⁸ Audrey Truschke reminds us that *praśasti* poetry (in this case Sanskrit) was sometimes commissioned by the nobility as a gesture of respect to the Mughal emperor. Thus, even if a work is about the emperor, we should not always assume direct imperial patronage. See Audrey Truschke, *Sanskrit and Persian Textual Conversations at the Mughal Court*, M.A. Thesis (New York: Columbia University, 2007).

³⁹ Rahim's Braj literary patronage is discussed (if not always on the basis of reliable sources) in Chhotubhai Ranchhodji Naik, *Abdu'r-Raḥīm Khān-i-Khānān and His Literary Circle* (Ahmedabad: Gujarat University, 1966), pp. 280–462.

⁴⁰ For an analysis of the different perceptions of Rahim in the Hindi and Persian traditions see Corinne Lefèvre, 'The Court of 'Abd-ur-Raḥīm Khān-i Khānān as a Bridge between Iranian and Indian Cultural Traditions.' Revised paper originally presented at the *19th European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies* (Leiden, 2006). An overview of Rahim's Hindi compositions can be found in Allison Busch, 'Rīti

barvai (short couplet) meter are particularly striking for their affinity with major sixteenth-century literary trends in Brajbhasha. In one collection, Krishna *bhakti* themes are prominent; the other draws on the genre of *nāyikābheda*.⁴¹

While such catalogues of heroines have a venerable Sanskrit pedigree, abridged vernacular works on the subject became astoundingly popular in the courts of early modern India. Featuring the many different types of female character who inhabit the world of Indian poetry, these works served as guides to the budding writer and uninitiated reader, as well as showcases for poetry. Braj poets usually wrote about *nāyikābheda* in the *rīti* genre, providing both *lakṣaṇ* (definitions) and *udāharaṇ* (example verses) of key literary scenarios.

In Rahim's collection of *nāyikābheda* verses the definitions are absent, but he is completely conversant with the system. In traditional Indian literary theory the *nāyikā* is one of the principal underpinnings of *śṛṅgāra rasa*, considered its *ālambana vibhāva* (underlying cause). The question that concerned Sanskrit and, in the early modern period, Braj writers, is, what *bheda* (type) of woman is she, and how should she be portrayed in poetry? For instance, in the case of a *svakīyā* (one's own wife) the poet should focus on a woman's modesty, as Rahim 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.⁴²

A subcategory of *svakīyā* and a favourite of poets was the *navoṛhā nāyikā* (new bride). Such a woman refuses a lover's sexual advances 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) *nāyikā*. Part of this series is the *ajñātayauvana-nāyikā*, a still unmarried girl who is so naïve that she does not even know about puberty or lovemaking yet. She typically expresses her alarm upon first noticing her budding breasts, thinking she has contracted

and Register' in Francesca Orsini (ed.), *Hindi-Urdu before the Divide* (Delhi: Orient Longman, 2009), pp. 114–120. Also see Rupert Snell, 'Barvai' Metre in Tulsīdās and Rahīm' in Alan W. Entwistle and Françoise Mallison (eds.), *Studies in South Asian Devotional Literature* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1994), pp. 373–405.

⁴¹ These are respectively labelled 'barvai (bhaktiparak)' and 'barvai-nāyikā-bhed' in Vidyānivas Mishra and Govind Rajnish (eds.), *Rahīmgranthāvalī* (New Delhi: Vani Prakashan, 1994), pp. 117–144.

⁴² 'Barvai-nāyikā-bhed', v. 6, in Mishra and Rajnish (eds.), *Rahīmgranthāvalī*.

some kind of disease until a girlfriend or nanny explains to her the ways of the world.⁴³ 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 towards a courtesan. Have no fear, there is a name for that, too: the *sāmānyā nāyikā* or ‘woman available to all.’ In his *nāyikābheda* collection, Rahim illustrates these and many other classical types of female characters.

The literary science of *nāyikābheda* became available outside of Sanskrit texts only in Rahim’s period. Abu’l Fazl’s discussion of *sāhitya* (literature) in the *Ā’in-i Akbarī* is principally devoted to precisely this. Perhaps Rahim learned about the subject from this Persian source, or perhaps he knew the *Rasamañjarī* (Bouquet of Sentiment) of Nanddas (fl. 1570) or Keshavdas’ *Rasikpriyā* (Handbook for Poetry Connoisseurs, 1591). A comment by Abu’l Fazl in the conclusion to his discussion of *nāyikābheda* prompts one to wonder if these Braj works were starting to make their way into 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.⁴⁴

Since Abu’l Fazl was writing in Persian for an Indo-Muslim audience not conversant with Sanskrit, his suggestion that interested readers should consult ‘works on this subject’ may well have been an invitation to read an emerging class of Braj poetry textbooks. Since all of Rahim’s works are undated, it is impossible to establish the historical relationship between his version and these others; all were produced within a few years of each other. Given the connection between Keshavdas and Rahim’s son made explicit in the *Jahāngīrjascandrikā*, it is certainly not improbable that Rahim may have known Keshavdas’ work. Whether he was reading Abu’l Fazl in Persian, or a Braj author, Rahim’s *nāyikābheda* work is an important indicator of early Mughal interest in *rīti* literary subjects—an interest that would only increase in the coming decades.

⁴³ The *navorhā* and *ajñātayauvana-nāyikā* are illustrated in *ibid.*, v. 12 and v.9, respectively.

⁴⁴ *Ā’in-i Akbarī*, Vol 3, p. 260.

The Patronage of Braj Poets under Shah Jahan

The court of Shah Jahan was bustling with musicians and poets working in Brajbhasha. Like Akbar, Shah Jahan was a keen connoisseur of music. Descendants of Tansen such as Lal Khan (son-in-law of Tansen's son, Bilas) and Lal Khan's sons, Khush-hal and Vishram, maintained the tradition of *dhrupad* at the Mughal court.⁴⁵ Shah Jahan also commissioned *Sahasras*, a remarkable compilation of more than 1,000 Braj verses attributed to Nayak Bakshu, a court musician of Raja Man Singh Tomar of Gwalior (r. 1486–1516).⁴⁶ Aside from musicians, the names of many Braj poets are also mentioned in connection with Shah Jahan. Some are obscure figures, about whom little is known except for the occasional detail provided by Mughal court chroniclers. In the *Pādshāhnāmāh*, Harinath, the son of Narhari (mentioned earlier in connection with Humayun, Islam Shah, and Akbar), is said to have enjoyed the hereditary patronage of the imperial house. Khafi Khan in the *Muntakhab al-Lubāb* reports that an unnamed Hindi poet was given an elephant and a 2,000 rupees cash reward.⁴⁷ Hindi literary historians mention Shah Jahan's encounters with Shiromani and the famed Braj poet Biharilal, but solid corroboration is lacking.⁴⁸

Several poets really stand out, however, both for the quality of their work and the quality of available information about them. One is the Brahman poet Sundar of Gwalior. Here we finally encounter a figure who can be securely located at the Mughal court at a precise time, and we can track him through both Hindi and Persian sources. The preface of the poet's major work, *Sundarśrngār* (Sundar's Love Poems, 1631), contains a short eulogy to the emperor, as well as personal

⁴⁵ The *Pādshāhnāmāh* mentions that Lal Khan was rewarded with an elephant and the title 'guna-samudra' (ocean of talent). Another musician named Darang Khan was weighed against silver and given a substantial royal gift in 1636. See K.R. Qanungo, 'Some Side-lights on the Character and Court-life of Shah Jahan' in *Journal of Indian History*, Vol. 8 (1929), pp. 45–52. I am grateful to Audrey Truschke for the reference.

⁴⁶ Delvoye, *Les Chants Dhrupad*, pp. 168–174; Premalata Sharma (ed.), *Sahasras*; nāyak bakhśū ke dhrupadoṃ kā saṅgrah (New Delhi: Sangit Natak Academy, 1972).

⁴⁷ Qanungo, 'Court-life of Shah Jahan' (1929), p. 51.

⁴⁸ On Shiromani see *Mīsrabandhuvinod* of Ganeshbihari, Shyambihari, and Shukdevbihari Mishra (Allahabad: Hindi-granth-prasarak Mandali, 1913), Vol. 2, p. 467, and Kishorilal Gupta (ed.), *Śivsiṃhsaroj* of Shivsingh Sengar (Allahabad: Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, 1970 [1878]), pp. 581–582. An almost certainly spurious Braj biography of Bihari, the '*Bihārī-vihār*', records an encounter between the poet and Shah Jahan. See Sudhakar Pandey (ed.), *Bihārīsatsaī* (Varanasi: Nagari Pracarini Sabha, 1999), pp. 32–35.

details about the author and the favour he received at court. A sense of the preface can be gleaned from the following excerpt:

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 do not fit into the palm of one's hand.
 Shah Jahan gave untold wealth to talented men (*gunin*).
 Among them he honoured 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 to the poor (*garīb-nevāj*),
 Showed him kindness.⁴⁹

A few points deserve particular attention. One is Sundar's use of the term '*gunin*' (the Braj plural of *gunī*, talented man), which occurs often in the Braj courtly works of the seventeenth century.⁵⁰ The *gunī* were an emergent class of literati who sought royal patronage, bestowing the lustre of their intellectual and creative powers upon the court. They were in turn rewarded for their services 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).

Sundarśṛṅgār is an introductory work on the subject of *nāyikābheda*. It was no doubt of interest to somebody with Shah Jahan's musical tastes, for some of the love scenes typical of *rīti* poetry with its elaborate conventions (like an innocent girl's silent anklets or hypochondria, mentioned above in the discussion of Rahim's *nāyikābheda* poems), which had a long history in the Sanskrit courtly tradition, were part of a broader cultural repertoire available to *dhrupad* singers as well. Moreover, during the seventeenth century, a classification system was evolving for *rāgas* that was based on *nāyikās*, *nāyakas*, and *sakhīs* (female companions to the *nāyikā*).⁵¹ Abu'l Fazl's comments in the

⁴⁹ *Sundarśṛṅgār*, vv. 2–3, vv. 10–12, in Ramanand Sharma (ed.), *Sundar kavirāy granth-āvalī* (Delhi: Lokvani Samsthan, 2004).

⁵⁰ Keshavdas, for instance, had praised Jahangir for 'causing the talent-trees of the talented to come to fruition' (*gunin ke guna-taru phalita karanu hai*). Lal (ed.), *Jahāṅgīrjascandrikā*, v. 33.

⁵¹ Shahab Sarmadee (ed.), *Tarjumah-i mānkutūhal va risālah-i rāgdarpan* of Faqirullah (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts and Motilal Banarsidass, 1996), p. ix.

Ā'in-i Akbarī gave us reason to speculate that Braj works on *nāyikābheda* were beginning to attract a Mughal readership, a point that seems to be corroborated by Keshavdas' praising Jahangir's knowledge of the subject. The *Sundarśṅgār*, written in the following generation, points conclusively to a Mughal interest in Indic literary culture that was mediated through vernacular manuals.

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 Love Poems*, bringing it from the language of the gods (*sura-bānī*) into the language of men (*nara-bānī*) so that the path of *rasa* could be understood by everybody.'⁵²

Accessibility must have been an important factor behind another of Sundar's works commissioned by Shah Jahan: the *Siṃhāsānbattīsī* (Thirty-two Tales of the Lion-throne). Mughal interest in this work dates to Akbar's period when a translation from Sanskrit into Persian was made at the court.⁵³ Sundar's translation shows that by Shah Jahan's time (and in all likelihood much earlier) Braj, and not just Persian, was functioning as a target language for Mughal readers.⁵⁴ His original text is now lost, but it was known to Kazim Ali Jawan and Lallulal, two 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 from 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.'⁵⁵

⁵² Sharma (ed.), *Sundarśṅgār*, vv. 373–74.

⁵³ John Seyller, *Workshop and Patron in Mughal India* (Zürich and Washington, D.C.: Artibus Asiae Publishers, 1999), p. 14. A re-translation of the same text was ordered during Jahangir's period, too. See Truschke, *Textual Conversations*.

⁵⁴ Another Braj poet of the day, Jan Kavi, reportedly presented the emperor with a Braj translation of the *Pañcatantra* known as *Buddhisāgar*. See Dasaratha Sharma, 'Kyāmkhān rāsā ke karttā kavivar jān aur unke granth' in *Kyāmkhān rāsā*, jointly edited with Agarchand Nahata and Bamvarlal Nahata, (Jodhpur: Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute, 1996), p. 9. Cited in Cynthia Talbot, 'Becoming Turk the Rajput Way: Conversion and Identity in an Indian Warrior Narrative' in *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (2009), p. 230, note 55.

⁵⁵ Meerza Kazim Ulee Juwan and Shree Lulloo Lal Kub (trans.), *Singhasun Butteese* of Sundar (Calcutta: Hindoostanee Press, 1805), p. 1. (Yih kahānī siṃhāsān battīsī kī saṃskṛt mē thī—shāh jahān bādśāh kī farmāiš se—sundar kabīśvar ne braj ki bolī mē kahī.) Garcin de Tassy, who wrote a historical account of the Hindi-Urdu tradition a few decades later, confirms their testimony concerning the text: '*ouvrage qu'il traduisit du sanscrit par ordre de l'empereur Schāh Jahān*' [a work that he translated from Sanskrit at

Over the course of the many reprintings of the Fort William version in the nineteenth century (it was chosen as a set text for the civil service exam in 1866⁵⁶), the attribution to Sundar disappeared along with all references to its original Mughal patronage context. Even if we do not have the original Braj *Siṃhāsanbattīsī* today, the very fact of its existence, especially when considered in relation to evidence from the same poet's *Sundarśrīṅgār*, suggests that Mughal patrons contributed to the vernacularizing of formal Sanskrit texts in this period.

If we turn our attention to recollections of Sundar from the Indo-Persian tradition, which prove to be surprisingly abundant, it is astonishing to discover that the Persian court historians Abdul Hamid Lahori (author of *Pādshāhnāmāh*) and Muhammad Salih Kanbo (author of *‘Amal-i Ṣāliḥ*) think of him primarily not as a Braj poet but as a diplomat. Although they call him Sundar Kab⁵⁷ Ray (i.e. Kavirāy), ‘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 for the purpose of negotiating with recalcitrant rajas. Sundar Kab Ray was an obvious choice of envoy because his relationship with his patron was a longstanding one dating from the days of Prince Khurram's successes in Mewar in 1614.⁵⁸ Language and cultural background may also have been factors. As a Hindi-speaking Hindu from nearby Gwalior, when approaching a Rajput leader Sundar presumably had a diplomatic edge over a Central Asian or Iranian Muslim member of the court.

Sundar's most important diplomatic mission was to the court of the Orchha King, Jujhar Singh Bundela (son of Keshavdas' patron Bir Singh Deo), who rebelled twice early in Shah Jahan's reign.⁵⁹ The

the order of Emperor Shah Jahan]. M. Garcin de Tassy, *Histoire de la littérature hindouie et hindoustanie* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1968 [1870]), Vol. 3, p. 178.

⁵⁶ Syed Abdoollah (ed.), *Singhāsan Battīsī* of Lalluji Lal Kabi (London: Wm. H. Allen, 1869), p. ix.

⁵⁷ There is no way to write a word final short vowel in Persian, so the word ‘kabi’ is written (and read) as ‘kab.’ The switch from ‘v’ to ‘b’ (i.e. kavi to kabi) must represent a typical seventeenth-century pronunciation of the word.

⁵⁸ Sundar (here confusingly labelled Sundar Das) is described as one of the prince's ‘chosen. . . men who stuck to him through thick and thin’. Banarsi Prasad Saksena, *History of Shahjahan of Dihli* (Allahabad: Central Book Depot, 1958), p. 17.

⁵⁹ 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 Ghulam Yazdani (ed.), *‘Amal-i-Ṣāliḥ* of Muhammad Salih Kanbo (Calcutta: Bibliotheca Indica, 1923–1946), Vol. 2, pp. 100–107, 83–84. Additional details (including those that derive from the *Pādshāhnāmāh* as well as unpublished court histories) are in Saksena, *History of Shahjahan*, pp. 70–96.

diplomatic missions to the Orchha court were ultimately unsuccessful, for Jujhar Singh and his son Bikramajit were executed in 1636, an incident that was grimly illustrated by Shah Jahan's court painters.⁶⁰ Regardless of the outcome, the case of Sundar 'Kab Ray' dramatically highlights three important points: Braj poets were present at the Mughal court; they served the court not just as literati but also in other capacities—in this case as a diplomat; perceptions of them can differ markedly in Persian and Hindi sources.

Another *gunī* of Shah Jahan's court—this one known mainly from Hindi and Sanskrit sources—is Kavindracharya Sarasvati, a Maharashtrian pandit whose very name ('master of poets,' a title probably bestowed by Shah Jahan⁶¹) signals his contribution to the literary life of his day. He is the author of several Sanskrit works, but here it is his Brajbhasha *oeuvre* that concerns us. His *Bhasha* works include *Yogavāsīṣṭhasāra* (also known as *Jñānasāra*), a rendering of the classic Sanskrit Vedānta text into Braj *dohās*, an unpublished *Samarasāra*, said to be on astrology, and *Kavīndrakalpalatā* (Wish-fulfilling Vine of Kavindra), a multi-tasking collection of Braj poems that includes political poetry, *dhrupads*, *bishnupads* and even some religious sermons.⁶² As a Sanskrit pandit, Kavindra does not conceal his ambivalence about writing in the vernacular. In *Kavīndrakalpalatā* he speaks of the shame he felt, insisting that he does it 'for the sake of others'.⁶³ One of those 'others' was the Mughal emperor, Shah Jahan, to whom more than half of the verses in the work are dedicated. Once again we get the distinct sense that Mughal cultural needs are a factor behind the increasing tendency of Brahman authors to write in Braj rather than in Sanskrit in this period.

⁶⁰ Milo Cleveland Beach, Ebba Koch, and Wheeler Thackston. *King of the World* (London: Azimuth, 1997), pp. 88–91.

⁶¹ V. Raghavan, 'Kavīndrācārya Sarasvatī' in *D.R. Bhandarkar Volume* (Calcutta, Indian Research Institute, 1940), pp. 160–161.

⁶² As noted by V. Raghavan, there are also passages on the science of gems and *nāyikābheda*. V. Raghavan, 'The Kavīndrakalpalatikā of Kavīndrācārya Sarasvatī' in *Indica; The Indian Historical Research Institute Silver Jubilee Commemoration Volume* (Bombay: St. Xavier's College, 1953), pp. 38–40.

⁶³ 'Bhāṣā karata āvati lāja, kīne grantha parāe kāja.' Rani Lakshmikumari Cundavat (ed.), *Kavīndrakalpalatā* of Kavindracharya Sarasvati (Jaipur: Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute, 1958), p. 1, v. 13. This was a common sentiment in the period. See Allison Busch, 'The Anxiety of Innovation: The Practice of Literary Science in the Hindi Riti Tradition' in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (2004), pp. 45–59. For an example from the Deccan see Richard Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur 1300–1700* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1996), p. 143.

Many of the *praśasti* verses in *Kavīndrakalpalatā* are standard fare, the kinds of things Sanskrit poets had been producing for centuries. However, the fact that the poet writes in Brajbhasha, and addresses the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan rather than Bhoja or some other Hindu king of old, makes these verses far from standard. One benefit of using a hybrid vernacular like Braj was that it allowed for the admixture of Perso-Arabic vocabulary in a manner forbidden to the more sanctified, and linguistically sanctimonious, realm of Sanskrit, as when Kavindra celebrates the emperor's multi-cultural competency with the following lines:

Kurāna purāna jānē, vedani ke bheda jāne,
etī rījha etī būjha aura kaho kāhi hāi
Sumera ko sauno deta, **dīna dunī** dono deta

(He knows the Quran and the Puranas, he knows the secrets of the Vedas. Say, where else can one find so much connoisseurship, so much understanding? He gives a Mount Sumeru worth of gold, he gives this world and the next.)⁶⁴

The pairing of *kurāna*, a Brajified form of 'Qur'ān,' with *purāna* deftly underscores Shah Jahan's ecumenism. The use of Braj instead of Sanskrit also allows Kavindra to tap into the Muslim thought-world by invoking the Arabic concept of *dīn* contrasted with *dunī* [i.e. *duniyā*] (that is, religion versus worldly life). In celebrating the emperor's military victories he is free to use the Arabic word *fatuh* rather than the more typical Sanskritic *vijaya*: 'Jau laū pāchilī **fatūha** ko kavitta karē, tau lagi **fatūha** aura aure kījyati hai' (No sooner have the victory poems of the last battle been composed, than more battles have already been won).⁶⁵

These sprinklings of Perso-Arabic vocabulary no doubt aided comprehension when a vernacular poet presented his work in a Persianized court, but they also allowed for playful aesthetic touches, not to mention increasing the stock of end rhymes, as when the Sanskritized words *kara vara kai* ([by removing] the tax bestowed a boon) are cleverly matched with the Brajified Persian phrase *paravara ke* (of [this] provider):

Jasa ke nidhāna bhāna pancabāna upavāna
sāhijahān sāhi hai miṭaiyā **kara vara** kai,

⁶⁴ Cundavat (ed.), *Kavīndrakalpalatā* (1958), p. 4, v. 8. The unusual phrasing is indicated in bold type here and in subsequent citations.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 6, v. 13.

rūpa rasa jasa dāna jñāna dhyāna sanamāna
kahā laū bakhāniye gariba **paravara** ke

(Repository of fame, comparable to the sun and Kamadeva, Emperor Shah Jahan bestowed a boon by removing the tax [on Hindu pilgrimage sites]. How can I possibly describe the beauty, feeling, fame, generosity, wisdom, piety and prestige of this provider for the poor?⁶⁶

Quite apart from their linguistic virtuosity, these lines allude to an important political intervention that catapulted Kavindracharya to fame amongst the Hindus of his day: he successfully lobbied Shah Jahan to rescind the hated *jizyah* (poll tax) levied on pilgrims visiting Hindu holy centres such as Prayag and Kashi. Poets from far and wide wrote verses in his honour, which have come down to us in two separate volumes: the *Kavīndracandrodaya* (Moonrise of Kavindra, in Sanskrit) and *Kavīndracandrikā* (Moonlight of Kavindra, in Braj).⁶⁷ Kavindra, himself an author of *prāsasti* poems, now became a recipient of them. Although the process by which the verses were solicited is obscure, they illustrate powerfully how intellectuals long before the modern age were effective at functioning collectively in the public domain.⁶⁸

Neither Kavindracharya's lobbying nor the fervent response of the Hindu literati was recorded in the Persian histories. 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 one discussed in an official court history.⁶⁹ Kavindracharya does, however, show up in another context: Kanbo describes how Shah Jahan took pleasure from the *dhrupad* and *taṣnīfāt-i hindī* (Hindi compositions) of one 'Kabindra Sannyasi', and the emperor's gift of a robe of honour and two thousand rupees.⁷⁰ Although further details are not given, it seems virtually certain that this reward was granted specifically for *Kavīndrakalpalatā*,

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 6, v. 14. For further discussion of the nuances of Perso-Arabic register in Brajbhasha see Busch, 'Rīti and Register'.

⁶⁷ Some information about both poetry collections is in Krishna Divakar, *Kavīndracandrikā*, Pune, 1966, pp. 40–48.

⁶⁸ This point is made forcefully in C.A. Bayly, *Empire and Information* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 180–211. Also see Christian Lee Novetzke, 'Bhakti and its Public' in *International Journal of Hindu Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (2007), pp. 255–272.

⁶⁹ Cundavat 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 W.E. Begley and Z.A. Desai (eds.), *The Shah Jahan Nama of Inayat Khan* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. xv–xxiii.

⁷⁰ Yazdani (ed.), *Amal-i Šālih* (1923), Vol 3, p. 122.

which fits Kanbo's description perfectly since it contains both *dhruṣpad* verses and 'Hindi compositions'. That *dhruṣpad* was in this case collected in a single work alongside *praśasti* and other types of Braj poetry is another reminder of the importance of the language's specifically musical component in Mughal circles. It is also worth remarking that the Hindi tradition seems unaware of Kavindra's musical talents. Once again we are reminded that a richer social and intellectual history becomes possible if we do not restrict the inquiry to the archive of a single language; we also need to be more alert to the multiple spheres in which a poet-intellectual could operate.

In the case of Kavindracharya, the list of spheres could be expanded further: he also served his Mughal patrons in the capacity of mentor. Several verses from the Sanskrit *Kavīndracandrodaya* allude to the pandit's instructing the emperor, Prince Dara Shikoh, and the wider court, in matters of Hindu philosophy.⁷¹ This detail from a contemporary Sanskrit text furnishes the context for a more than sixty-verse excursus into *tattvajñān* (metaphysics) in Kavindracharya's own Braj poetry collection. It is a bit of a whirlwind tour through Indian philosophy, briefly making stopovers in the thought-worlds of Samkhya, Yoga, Pancaratra and Jainism (to name only a few), with a decided preference for Vedanta. One wonders if in a multi-confessional environment a special resonance accrued to statements like, 'Know there to be doctrines of many types, [but] they say that God is one.'⁷² More puzzling, considering the Muslim audience for the work, is the capping of a verse with the rather pointed query, 'Why do the Turks [bother to] pray and fast?'⁷³ Perhaps the point was to question all external manifestations of religiosity—Hindu or otherwise. When the Hindu pandit Kavindracharya sought to educate Shah Jahan in religious matters, did the emperor enjoy the lecture?

Another Braj writer from Shah Jahan's period with a presumed connection to the Mughal court is Cintamani Tripathi (fl. 1650), considered alongside Keshavdas to be one of the leading figures of the early *rīti* tradition. He is thought to have attracted the patronage of Shah Jahan early in his career with his *Rasvilās* (Play of Rasa), an important but still unpublished *rīti*granth. Any definitive assessment of the *Rasvilās* and Cintamani's connection to the court awaits a more

⁷¹ Raghavan, 'Kavīndrācārya Sarasvatī' (1940), p. 161.

⁷² 'Mata nānā vidha taise jānāū, eka bhānti ko alakhu bakhāno', Cundavat (ed.), *Kavīndrakalpalatā*, p. 37, v. 5.

⁷³ 'Kāhe ko nimāja rojā turuka karata hai', *ibid.*, v. 24.

detailed study of the manuscript than has been possible for scholars to date, but a few points are beyond dispute.⁷⁴ The main focus of the work is *rasa* theory (with a section on *nāyikābheda*) and, as with the *Sundarśringār*, it is reasonable to conjecture that such a handbook had a role to play in educating the Mughal elite about Indian poetics. Unlike Sundar's handbook, this one contains an abundance of political poetry, including an elaborate *virudāvalī* (panegyric) to Emperor Shah Jahan. This suggests but does not guarantee that the work was commissioned by the emperor. A few praise poems address other contemporary Mughal notables including Dara Shikoh; the emperor's grandson Zainuddin Muhammad (son of Shah Shuja); Hriday Shah (r. 1634–1678), the raja of a principality in southern Bundelkhand; Jafar Khan, a Mughal *manṣabdār*. In theory, any of these figures could have sponsored the work.

What is beyond doubt is that Cintamani was highly regarded by the Indo-Muslim elite—both contemporaries and later redactors—for his expertise in Braj poetry. The *Ma'āṣir-al Kirām*, an eighteenth-century Persian *tazkirah* compiled by Mir Ghulam Ali Azad, a leading intellectual of Bilgram, records several incidents that concern Cintamani's association with Sayyid Rahmatullah, governor of Jajmau (near Kanpur) and an admirer of the poet's now-lost work *Kavitt-vicār* (Reflections on Poetry). In one episode a disciple of Cintamani presents a *dohā* in the governor's *mahfil* with the aim of illustrating the *ananvaya alaṅkāra* (trope of incomparability).⁷⁵ The student makes a slight error, which Sayyid Rahmatullah, fully conversant with Cintamani's writing and thus Indic poetic theory, is not shy in pointing out. Cintamani is later asked to correct his student's verse. In another episode Cintamani stays for a period with the governor, who, we learn from Azad, has himself authored a collection of Hindi poetry called *Pūran ras* (Aesthetic Plenitude). In the end Sayyid Rahmatullah rewards the learned Cintamani with gold coins and a robe of honour.

⁷⁴ The manuscript (no. 274) is housed at the Anup Sanskrit Library, Bikaner. The royal family has been unwilling to allow scholars to photograph the text; thus, my assessment is based on what I could glean from a short visit to the library in December 2005. Vidyadhar Mishra, who has also viewed the manuscript, has suggested that Cintamani attended Shah Jahan's court early in his career. Vidyadhar Mishra, *Cintāmaṇi: kavī aur ācārya* (Allahabad: Vidya Sahitya Samsthan, 1990), pp. 39–40.

⁷⁵ I have corrected the Persian from '*ananya*' to '*ananvaya*', a well-attested Indic trope in which the *upameya* (subject of the comparison) and *upamāna* (standard of comparison) are identical.

These incidents from the *Ma'āšir-al Kirām* underscore how Indo-Muslim literati were one of the crucial audiences for both Braj poetry and literary theory, and how, on occasion, they even became Braj poets.⁷⁶

Cintamani was much in demand, and he travelled extensively. The poet himself, his poetry, and his fame circulated as far as the Deccan, where he was commissioned to translate a Sanskrit aesthetics treatise into Brajbhasha: Akbar Shah's *Śṛṅgāramañjarī* (Bouquet of Passion, c. 1668). The Sanskrit version of the text contains important evidence that members of the Golconda court were reading Braj authors from the North, two of whom we have already discussed: Keshavdas and Sundar.⁷⁷ The circumstances behind Cintamani's detour to the Golconda are not known, but it seems he journeyed there after he wrote his *Bhāṣāpiṅgal*, (Treatise on Vernacular Prosody, c. 1662) for Shahji Bhonsle, the father of Shivaji. Evidently word was spreading about Braj poets, since their services as *gunī* were now being sought at many courts.

Braj Poets during Aurangzeb's Reign and Beyond

Robust conditions of patronage for Braj poets remained the norm for many years. Though a thorough assessment of the patronage climate during Aurangzeb's long reign (1658–1707) cannot be attempted here, even a brisk review of the evidence suggests that it was a lively and encouraging one, in this case fostered more by the princes and nobility of the day than by the emperor himself. Observing the reception conditions of the work of Cintamani Tripathi reminds us that the purview of court culture extends far beyond just the imperial court to include the *mahfils* of governors and various ranks of nobility, who emulated (and indeed actively contributed to) Mughal style. Whereas our default position may be to think of a court as a rooted phenomenon located in a particular city and centred on the individual personality of the ruler, such a model obscures the fluidity and multi-pronged nature of the institution. Far more than just the

⁷⁶ *Ma'āšir-al Kirām* (1913), pp. 364–366.

⁷⁷ Keshavdas' *Rasikprīyā* and Sundar's *Sundarśṛṅgār* are mentioned in V. Raghavan (ed.), *Śṛṅgāramañjarī* of Shah Akbar (Hyderabad: Hyderabad Archaeological Department, 1951), p. 2. The Braj translation is Bhagirath Mishra (ed.), *Śṛṅgāramañjarī* of Cintamani, (Lucknow: Lucknow University, 1956).

entourage of a particular emperor, courts are constituted by an array of military, administrative, and cultural personnel that operate from diverse locales.

The extent of Aurangzeb's own patronage of Braj poets is unclear. The stereotype that he was antagonistic towards Hindus, which in the nationalist imagination means he was antagonistic towards Hindi, is a misconception. Recent work by Katherine Brown has shown how his supposed ban on music has been grossly exaggerated, which suggests the need for caution regarding the received wisdom about poetry because, as we have observed repeatedly, Braj poetry was often closely associated with musical traditions at the Mughal court. For all the tropes in Mughal historiography about Aurangzeb's tyrannical orthodoxy, his love of music, particularly in the early days of his reign, is well-attested and it was in fact only in this period that major treatises on music, such as the *Tarjumah-i mān kutūhal va risālah-i rāgdarpan* of Faqirullah, who served as governor of Kashmir under Aurangzeb, began to appear in Persian after a hiatus of a century and a half.⁷⁸ The emperor has also been known to cite Hindi verse, and some scholars have gone so far as to attribute Hindi compositions to Aurangzeb. At the very least we can say that several Braj poets were in his ambit, and that he probably sponsored some.⁷⁹

In an episode reminiscent of the Sundar Kab Ray mission described above, at least one poet was also employed for some non-literary activities during the war of succession between Aurangzeb and his brothers. Khafi Khan, the author of *Muntakhab al-Lubāb*, reports on an envoy sent to Jaswant Singh, Maharaja of Jodhpur, who was both a high-level *manṣabdār* and a major Braj poet of his day:

Aurangzeb sent a Brahman, named Kab, who was reputed for his Hindi poetry and eloquence, to the Maharaja, with the message:

⁷⁸ Katherine Butler Brown, 'Did Aurangzeb Ban Music? Questions for the Historiography of his Reign' in *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (2007), pp. 77–120; Shahab Sarmadee (ed.), *Tarjumah-i mān kutūhal va risālah-i rāgdarpan* (1996), pp. xii and xl–xli.

⁷⁹ S.K. Chatterji notes that in the *Ma'āshir-i 'Alamgīrī* Aurangzeb quotes a Hindi verse by Guru Nanak, suggesting his familiarity with vernacular poetry. S.K. Chatterji, 'A Verse by Guru Nanak in the *Ādi-granth* Quoted by Emperor Aurangzib Alamgir' in *Select Papers* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1979), Vol. 2, pp. 185–193. Shailesh 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. Poems attributed to 'Alamgir' and 'Shah Aurangzeb' are found in the nineteenth-century anthology *Saṅgīt Rāg Kalpadrum*. See Zaidi, *Musalmān kavi* (1977), p. 180, note 1.

The object of our movements is to pay our respects and offer our services to His Majesty [i.e. Shah Jahan], our patron and the master and the *qibla* 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 *watn* [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 as his reason for not accepting Aurangzeb's offer and gave an impertinent reply. The next day, the two sides prepared for battle.⁸⁰

If we think of diplomats as people with not just political but also cultural skills, it made good sense to send a Hindi poet as a representative to this particular Rajput court. The episode is another telling instance of how poets served the Mughal court in multiple capacities; we are also reminded that Persian writers know things that Hindi writers don't know (and vice versa) about the history of the period.

One of the most accomplished Hindi poets who served in Aurangzeb's administration is Mirza Raushan Zamir 'Nehi'. 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, *Saṅgīta pārijāta[ka]* into Persian. While 'Zamir' was his Persian *takhalluṣ*, when he wrote Braj poetry he used the penname 'Nehi' (the lover). According to Khafī 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'.⁸¹ Shailesh Zaidi has published 85 of Nehi's poems based on manuscripts from Aligarh, which attest to the poet's remarkable command of Braj literary style. Nehi was conversant with the Indic genre *śikh-nakh* (it had an analogue in the Persian *sarāpā*) and the sampling also includes typical topics from *nāyikābheda* texts like a woman's *māna* (jealous anger). The introduction of the work strongly suggests some kind of patronage from Aurangzeb with its *praśasti* poems on *Śāha Ālamgīra ko dāna barnana* and *pratāpa barnana* (Descriptions of Emperor Alamgir's generosity and valour, respectively).⁸² While it is mostly in Persian

⁸⁰ Translation slightly modified from Syed, *Aurangzeb in Muntakhab-al Lubab* (Bombay: Somaiya, 1977), p. 85.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 114; for further details see Zaidi, *Musalmān kavi* (who draws on the work of Persian biographers Sher Khan Lodi and Ghulam Ali Azad Bilgrami) (1977), pp. 143–45.

⁸² Zaidi, *Musalmān kavi* (1977), pp. 152–153, vv. 3–5.

sources that we find information about Raushan Zamir 'Nehi', Baldev Mishra in his *Satkavīgīrāvīlās* (Play of the Words of True Poets, c. 1750), a Braj compilation of poems by 35 authors, included verses by Nehi alongside those of luminaries like Keshavdas, Cintamani and Sundar. Nehi was also one of the poets praised by Sudan, an approximate contemporary of Mishra's who hailed from Bharatpur showing that the work of this now forgotten Mughal poet was part of the Hindi canon in the eighteenth century.⁸³

Other Braj poets are known to have been patronized by Aurangzeb's family members. According to Bindran Das, compiler of the eighteenth-century biographical dictionary *Safīnah-i khūshgū*, Aurangzeb's son Azam Shah 'possessed a perfect command of many genres of Hindavi poetry, and he was above all famed for his excellent musical compositions'.⁸⁴ Azam Shah maintained what can now unhesitatingly be called a tradition of Mughal interest in Indian literary theory. Some Hindi scholars consider him to have been the first patron of Mahakavi Dev, whose poetry is among the most admired in Brajbhasha, but the evidence is uncertain.⁸⁵ We can say with more certainty that he commissioned the *Tuhfat al-Hind* (Gift from India, c. 1675) from Mirza Khan, a unique Persian treatise on Brajbhasha, which included discussions of grammar, metrics, and *nāyikābheda*, as well as a significant section on music.⁸⁶ Like the *rīti-granths* by Sundar and Cintamani discussed above, the *Tuhfat* was designed to acquaint an Indo-Muslim readership with the major principles of Braj literary culture. Aurangzeb's grandsons were also enthusiasts of Braj. Rafi us-Shan (son of Azam Shah's elder brother Muazzam Shah) developed

⁸³ Shivgopal Mishra (ed.), *Satkavīgīrāvīlās* of Baldev Mishra (Allahabad: Hindustani Academy, 2001), p. 84 (v. 310 corresponds to v. 26 in Zaidi's edition). R. Das (ed.), *Sujān-caritra* of Sudan, (Allahabad: Indian Press, 1902), v. 5. Sudan also praised the now obscure poet Narhari (mentioned above as active during the reigns of Humayun and Akbar), as well as Shiromani, who is thought to have been at Shah Jahan's court.

⁸⁴ Quoted in Brown, 'Did Aurangzeb Ban Music' (2007), p. 105.

⁸⁵ The colophons of the manuscripts of *Bhāvvīlās* (Play of Emotion, 1689), a *rīti-granth* based on the Sanskrit *Rasatarāṅgiṇī* of Bhanudatta, differ in attributing patronage to Azam Shah. The older of the two manuscripts I consulted (*Bhāvvīlās*, Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute, Alwar, accession number 4771, 1796, p. 165) does mention that Azam Shah listened to and appreciated the work, but this statement is absent from at least one later version (*Bhāvvīlās*, Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute, Bharatpur, accession number 212, 1837, p. 74). The verse in question is mentioned by (but not printed by) the text's recent editor. See Dindayal Dev *aur unkā bhāvvīlās* (Delhi: Navlok, 2004), p. 11.

⁸⁶ A detailed outline of the contents is M. Ziauddin, *A Grammar of the Braj Bhakha by Mīrā Khān* (Calcutta: Visva-Bharati Bookshop, 1935), pp. 10–33.

a Braj compositional habit, and some of his poetry survives under the *takhalluṣ* ‘Nyāyī’ (the just).⁸⁷ His brother Azim us-Shan was a patron of the poet Vrind (1643–1723). Vrind hailed from the Rajput kingdom of Kishangarh but he moved to Delhi in 1673 when he was hired, probably as a tutor, to attend Azim us-Shan.⁸⁸ When Azim us-Shan later became governor of Bengal, Vrind moved with him to Dhaka. It was here that he composed his most celebrated work, *Nītisatsāī*, a collection of 700 aphorisms, completed in 1704.

Vrind, like many Braj poets of the day, had multiple patrons. He mostly served royalty of the Mughal and Kishangarh courts, but one of his works, the *Śṛṅgārśikṣā* (Instruction in Passion, 1691), was written for a prominent Muslim family in Ajmer (near Kishangarh)—further evidence that Braj poets helped to transmit royal styles into wider social circles beyond the imperial court. The *Śṛṅgārśikṣā* is in the vein of a *rīti* *granth* on *nāyikābheda*, but it also has some unusual features. The introduction marks a subtle departure from typical Hindu practice. Most Braj works of the genre begin with a short *maṅgalācaraṇ* (invocation), usually to the deity Ganeś, with an additional verse or two in honour of Sarasvatī or Kṛṣṇa. 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.

parama jyoti saba maī pragaṭa, paramānanda prakāsa,
tā prabhu kaū bandana karaū, mana krama bacana bilāsa.
The supreme light manifest in all, emanation of effulgent joy,
To this god I pay obeisance in thought, word and deed.

Although again expressed in a highly Sanskritic register, the emphasis on light imagery in phrases like ‘*parama jyoti*’ and ‘*paramānanda prakāsa*’ arguably nods toward the *Qurʾān*,⁸⁹ especially given that the second verse is dedicated to Muinuddin Chisti, the revered saint whose tomb is the major landmark in Ajmer. The text proceeds from spiritual to worldly authority with verses in honour first of the reigning Emperor

⁸⁷ Alam, ‘Pursuit of Persian’ (1998), p. 343.

⁸⁸ Janardan Rao Celer, *Vṛnd aur unkā sāhitya* (Agra: Vinod Pustak Mandir, 1973), pp. 45–46.

⁸⁹ Note the similarity to ‘Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth’ in *Qurʾān* 24:3. I thank Muzaffar Alam for the reference.

Aurangzeb and then the local governor of Ajmer Muhammad Salih, the father of the principal patron of the work, Mirza Qadiri.⁹⁰

The verses dedicated to Mirza Qadiri are strikingly different in tone. While Aurangzeb is given royal traits (powerful, compassionate, praiseworthy⁹¹) 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 in every respect clever and responsive—
He is handsome, steadfast, valiant, and skilled with a bow.
Generous, knowledgeable, an enjoyer, extremely generous in spirit,
Mirza Qadiri is the jewel of his family,
Clever with emotion, experiencing delight.
A connoisseur, he understands matters of sentiment,
And pursues love wholeheartedly.
He longs night and day for music and pleasure.⁹²

The Mirza is further praised because he recognizes men of talent (*deta gunī-lokana kaū māna*), a self-serving argument on the part of the poet, no doubt, but one that speaks to expectations of gentlemanly behaviour amongst the nobility of the day.⁹³ There is much that one can find in other *nāyikābheda* texts, but the *Śṛṅgārsīkṣā* contains additional lively details such as how to furnish a *raṅg-maḥal* (pleasure suite) and stipulates the need for being a connoisseur of refinements like *pān* and music.

The omissions are almost as interesting as the additions. *Śṛṅgārsīkṣā* takes up only the category of the *svakīyā nāyikā* (one's own wife), leaving out the two other major categories of *parakīyā* and *sāmānyā* (other man's wife and courtesan, respectively) that are typical of the genre. It has been suggested that Mirza Qadiri commissioned the work for the education of a marriageable daughter, a proposition strengthened by the text's excursus into *byāh bidhi* (wedding procedures).⁹⁴ Some of

⁹⁰ *Śṛṅgārsīkṣā* of Vrind, vv. 1–6, in Janardan Rao Celer (ed.), *Vṛndgranthāvalī* (Agra: Vinod Pustak Mandir, 1971). The introduction seems to follow—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.

⁹¹ These traits are expressed with a combination of Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic epithets: *mahābālī*, *mehrbān*, *ṣubihān*. Ibid., v. 4.

⁹² Ibid., vv. 7–9.

⁹³ Ibid., v. 10 (and a sentiment repeated in v. 11).

⁹⁴ Celer, *Vṛnd aur unkā sāhitya* (1973), pp. 82–83. The discussion of 'byāh bidhi' is in *Śṛṅgārsīkṣā*, vv. 18–32.

the discussion of *solah śṛṅgār* (a woman's ornamentation) also seems framed in didactic ways:

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 consumer of 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, the mouth-watering tastes of betel nut and cardamom, and its relishing of 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? The stress on love and connoisseurship here is not only fitting for a work that proclaims itself to be an instruction manual on *śṛṅgār*, it also provides yet another clue about the reception of Braj texts among the Mughal nobility. Poets like Vrind were not just teaching the dry details of Indian poetics: they were inculcating the very building blocks of emotional life and civilized comportment. It is tempting to put Vrind's text in dialogue with contemporary Persian genres on gentlemanly conduct known as *mīrẓānāmah* to suggest that compositions in Braj with their sensory celebrations 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 to theorize these matters for India (in contrast with early-modern Europe), but perhaps we can view Braj courtly texts as functioning within a larger repertoire deriving from both the Indian and Persian traditions that served to educate the senses.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ On the *mīrẓānāmah* texts see Rosalind O'Hanlon, 'Manliness and Imperial Service in Mughal North India' in *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (1999), pp. 47–93; Shantanu Phukan takes up related matters for this period in "'Through Throats Where Many Rivers Meet': the Ecology of Hindi in the World of Persian' in *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (2001), pp. 33–58); for the medieval period see Daud Ali, *Courtly Culture and Political Life in Early Medieval India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 69–96, 183–206. In formulating this argument about the education of the senses among Indo-Muslim elites I also benefited from conversations with Aditya Behl.

Conclusion

Although my focus here has been on the long seventeenth century, it would be possible, given space enough and time, to document a pattern of virtually uninterrupted patronage for Braj poets in Mughal contexts well into the colonial period. The succession struggles that ensued after the death of Aurangzeb in 1707 captured the imagination of Braj authors and engendered a historicizing impulse. Vrind, who had by this time returned home to Kishangarh, wrote his *Satya Sarūp Rūpak*, chronicling Maharaja Rajsingh's support for Muazzam Shah's (successful) bid for the Mughal throne. Upon the death of Muazzam Shah (Emperor Bahadur Shah I, r. 1707–1712), there were yet more struggles. And these too were recorded—this time in the *Jangnāmā*, which, despite its Persian-sounding name, is a Braj text by the Brahman poet Shridhar, who concludes his work with *praśasti* verses to the victor Farrukh Siyar (r. 1713–1719).⁹⁶ Abdur Rahman 'Premi', a *manṣabdār* of Farrukh Siyar, is the author of an extensive *nakhśikh* poem in Braj.⁹⁷ Muhammad Shah (r. 1719–1748) was a patron (and some say, writer) of Braj poetry. And so were his friends. Closely associated with Muhammad Shah was the Braj poet and king Savant Singh 'Nagridas' of Kishangarh (possibly a student of Vrind), who experimented with writing *rekhtā* poetry, which was then in vogue.⁹⁸ Emperor Shah Alam II (r. 1759–1806) wrote Braj poetry, as did Bahadur Shah 'Zafar' (r. 1837–1857), and it may be safely presumed that this was a literary fashion among many poets connected with their courts.⁹⁹ These are all stories waiting to be told.

Why has literary history been mostly blind to the phenomenon of Braj poets at the Mughal court? Part of the blame lies with the erosion of the North Indian composite culture that gave rise to this literature

⁹⁶ Omkardan Caran and Raghur Singh (eds.), *Jangnāmā* (Varanasi: Nagari Pracarini Sabha, 1989).

⁹⁷ Alam, 'Pursuit of Persian' (1998), 345; Iqbal Ahmad (ed.), *Nakh-sikh* of Mirza Abdurrahman 'Premi' (Bombay: Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Research Centre, 1972).

⁹⁸ A Braj poet and literary theorist associated with Muhammad Shah is Surati Mishra. Yogendrapratap Singh (ed.), *Jorāvarprakās* of Surati Mishra (Allahabad: Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, 1992), pp. 7–8. On Nagridas see Heidi Pauwels, 'Culture in Circulation in Eighteenth-century North India: Urdu Poetry by a Rajput Krishna Devotee'. Revised paper originally presented at the *19th European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies* (Leiden, 2006).

⁹⁹ Frances Pritchett, *Nets of Awareness* (Berkeley: University of California, 1994), pp. 4–5. Examples of Shah Alam's Braj poetry are in *Nādirāt-i Shāhī* (Rampur: Rampur Raza Library, 2006 [1944]).

in the first place. The conceptual terrain has changed utterly, and it has become nearly impossible to envision a past that looks nothing like the present: one in which Hindus and Muslims cherished a common literary language. 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.'¹⁰⁰

It is right to associate Mughal rule with the Persian language, and it is not my intention to suggest that Braj outstripped Persian in importance for the Mughals. It did not, either in quantity of textual production or in status.¹⁰¹ Nor was every Brajbhasha poet lining up outside the Mughal court, seeking imperial patronage. Many Braj poets worked in Vaishnava communities. Others served Rajput or merchant patrons. Some circulated and served diverse clientele in the course of their careers. Because the story of Brajbhasha as a language of Hindu *bhakti* is well known, here I have deliberately stressed the language's more courtly heritage, with a particular interest in how it was part of the cultural repertoire of Mughal elites. A largely unexamined claim about Brajbhasha (albeit one put forward by some of the tradition's own adherents), is that since it is a vernacular language it must somehow be simple, folksy, and popular in character. It can be that, but it was also a language cultivated by urbane, cosmopolitan people: it was a language of kings. It was even apparently recognized as such from within the Persian political ecumene. Taju'ddin, author of *Mirat-ul-muluk*, an eighteenth-century manual for princes, mentions on two occasions that knowledge of Hindi poetry is necessary for Mughal kings.¹⁰²

Why Braj texts so appealed to their Mughal audiences, and a corollary question—what kind of cultural work Braj texts may have done that Persian texts could not—are important questions prompted by this study, if not satisfactorily answered here. My primary purpose

¹⁰⁰ Phukan, 'Ecology of Hindi' (2001), p. 36.

¹⁰¹ The hierarchy between Persian and Hindi composition at Akbar's court, for instance, has been made clear in Alam, 'Pursuit of Persian' (1998), p. 323. Still, in the same article variation across reigns is noted: Farrukh Siyar had a Braj poet laureate but not a Persian one (p. 346).

¹⁰² Syed Hasan Askari, 'Mirat-ul-Muluk: a Contemporary Work Containing Reflections on Later Mughal Administration' in *Indica; the Indian Historical Research Institute Silver Jubilee Commemoration Volume*, (Bombay: St. Xavier's College, pp. 29–31), cited in Bayly, *Empire and Information* (1997), p. 194.

has been a more basic one: to illustrate the astonishing degree to which Brajbhasha literature was indeed part of the Mughal cultural sphere. Still, it is possible to make a few preliminary points. First of all, Indo-Muslim elites sponsored Braj poets and read their works because they found the poetry beautiful and it appealed to their literary tastes. Braj was also evidently perceived as more suitable than Persian for particular types of aesthetic experience. Phukan, working predominantly with the Mughal reception of Sufi Avadhi texts, has shown how Hindi literary culture afforded access to emotive and in some cases feminine registers of expression not as readily available in Persian.¹⁰³ Vrind's *Śṛṅgārśikṣā*, a lively celebration of passion, which is demonstrably linked to cultivating emotional sensibility, would be a case in point. But there are other issues to consider as well. Brajbhasha texts linked the court to local forms of culture. They served as a medium for the circulation of traditional Indic literary ideas into Indo-Muslim contexts. While some Sanskrit literature was available to the Mughals through Persian translations, Braj poetry was available in unmediated form. Braj was a branch of Hindi, a language native to North Indians, whatever their aspirations to the more refined domain of Persian letters. Its patronage and cultivation among Mughal elites also signalled their gentlemanly comportment.

We also need to think about the varying roles Braj poets played in Mughal circles, and what each party stood to gain from these cultural transactions. We expect court poets to glorify the king, and Braj poets with their numerous *praśasti* verses do not disappoint. The poets were rewarded with wealth, titles and prestige. One of the reasons they could be thought of as *gunī* was precisely that they gained the recognition of elite patrons. But this relationship cut both ways. Members of the *gunī* class redounded to the glory of the court. Political poetry gave rhetorical shape to imperial power and should not be glibly reduced, as it too often is, to a mere act of legitimation.¹⁰⁴ When Braj poets aestheticized—in a way, enacted—imperial power, they chose to do so not in Sanskrit, as their predecessors had, but in a hybrid, vernacular language, one that preserved a strong Sanskritic heritage but could now include Perso-Arabic words and meet the needs of a changing clientele in early modern North India. For all its importance

¹⁰³ Phukan, 'Ecology of Hindi' (2001), pp. 43FF.

¹⁰⁴ This point is made forcefully in Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India* (Berkeley: University of California, 2006), pp. 511–524.

to *bhakti* communities, Brajbhasha, in a manner that bears comparison to the literary Dakhini that evolved at the court of Ibrahim Adil Shah II (r. 1580–1627) of Bijapur in approximately the same period,¹⁰⁵ was also a vehicle of composite culture: it was more suited to a Mughal politics of pluralism than either Sanskrit or Persian with their more limited constituencies.

Pluralism, in this case a multi-layered social complexity, is an attribute that applies equally to the lives of many poets, as well. Sundar was sent on diplomatic missions. Keshavdas presented himself as a learned elder to Rahim's son Iraj Shah Newaz Khan, and had some sort of personal relationship with Birbal, perhaps even with Jahangir. Rahim crossed the boundary between patron and poet by composing Hindi verses. He was a tutor to Prince Salim but also a general, a governor, and a major patron of the arts. Kavindracharya Sarasvati is arguably the most complex of all the figures considered here. He served the cause of Hindus in general as a political activist, and he was respected as a religious authority by both Shah Jahan and the Sanskrit scholars of Banaras. He was an author of books in both Braj and Sanskrit, reaching diverse audiences. The Mughals remember him especially for his musical compositions, for which (along with his Braj poetry) he was rewarded handsomely. Cintamani, for his part, is remembered as a poet, teacher, translator, and literary theorist. Vrind, like Keshavdas, seems to have been a poet with a more pedagogical mission, but he was also a historian. Clearly we miss many nuances when we think of the vocation of Brajbhasha poet as exclusively literary. These writers contributed to the knowledge economy of the court, helping to ground kings and Muslim gentry in local practices and structures of cultural and political authority.¹⁰⁶

Much of this social complexity emerges only if both the Hindi and the Persian archives are consulted, since each on its own paints an incomplete picture, and in some cases the roles of poets are represented in dramatically different ways. Of course, the default position has always been to see Persian chronicles as more trustworthy than the literary evidence available in Braj and Sanskrit poems, but historical chronicles too have their own biases and blind spots. These blind spots are in themselves interesting, and merit further theorization. While Sundar is called 'Kab Ray' in the Shah Jahani court histories, his poetic *oeuvre* is never referenced. Perhaps this is

¹⁰⁵ Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur* (1996), pp. 89–106.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Bayly, *Empire and Information* (1997), pp. 10–14.

because of the frequently militaristic and political focus of this type of royal *tārīkh*. Or perhaps Abdul Hamid Lahori, Muhammad Salih Kanbo, and other Persian historians of the time were just not aware of Hindi literary trends. This would then mean that only some—not all—Mughal elites were culturally competent in Braj, and it will be important in future studies to investigate not just where literary cultures intersect, but also where they fail to do so, and the gate-keeping mechanisms that regulated these relationships. Composite culture had its limits. Indeed, one reason that Persian writers may have silenced the voices of Braj poets is sheer snobbery. In an episode from the *Afsānah-i Shāhān*, Mirza Kamran, the brother of Humayun, is reported to have told Muhammad Shah Farmuli, a sixteenth-century nobleman and Hindi poet associated with Islam Shah, that if only he had written in Persian his literary legacy would have been considerable.¹⁰⁷ Abdul Baqi Nahawandi, author of *Ma'āṣir-i Raḥīmī*, the major 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.¹⁰⁸ Whether it should be explained in terms of the expressive boundaries of particular genres, a lack of familiarity with Braj on the part of Persian writers (who were in some cases Iranian, rather than Indian), cultural snobbery, or some other reason, the Persian tradition often fails to provide any adequate representation of Braj literary life. The *Ā'in-i Akbarī* is silent about Braj poetry (although it is voluble about music); 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 historiography is silent on the subject of Shah Jahan's rescinding of the *jizyah* at the request of Kavindracharya and yet this event is recorded in Braj and Sanskrit poetry of the period. Archival monolingualism clearly cannot capture the complexities of a multi-lingual, multi-literary realm like Mughal India. While Persian texts have always played the lead role in reconstructing Mughal history, we need to be attuned to other voices.

¹⁰⁷ Cited in Syed Hasan Askari and Qeyamuddin Ahmad, *Comprehensive History of Bihar Vol. II, Part II* (Patna: Kashi Prasad Jayaswal Research Institute, 1987), pp. 59–60.

¹⁰⁸ Lefèvre, 'The court of 'Abd-ur-Raḥīm Khān-i Khānān', (2006). For further analysis of such literary hierarchies perceived by some Persian writers see Phukan, *Through a Persian Prism: Hindi and Padmavat in the Mughal Imagination* (University of Chicago Ph.D. Dissertation, 2000), pp. 56–69.

In paying greater attention to the Indo-Muslim contributions to Brajbhasha, both in terms of patronage and authorship, I have tried to capture instances of circulation between Hindi and Persian, as well as regional and imperial cultural realms, and to redirect the historiography of Hindi literary culture from its Hindu-centric moorings in the hope of rediscovering some of the complex dynamics of the early modern period effaced by modern nationalist history. Many gaps and questions remain, but this is a domain of research that requires attention. Honesty about the history of Hindi literature, and Mughal cultural history, depends on it.

Glossary

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| <i>Afsānah-i Shāhān</i> | <i>The Story of Kings</i> , Indo-Persian history, sixteenth century |
| <i>Ā'in-i Akbarī</i> | <i>The Institutes of Akbar</i> by Abu'l Fazl, 1590s |
| Ajñātayauvana-nāyikā | innocent girl ignorant of puberty and lovemaking |
| Akāsbānī | voice from the heavens (Braj pronunciation of Sanskrit ākāśavāṇī) |
| Ālambana vibhāva | underlying cause of rasa (literary emotion) |
| ' <i>Amal-i Šālih</i> | History of Shah Jahan's reign by Muhammad Salih Kanbo |
| Ananvaya alaṅkāra | trope of incomparability |
| Aṣṭachāp | 'eight seals,' the canonical Braj poets of the Vallabh sampradāy |
| Aṭṭālīq | tutor |
| Avadhi | Eastern Hindi, a literary dialect of Old Hindi |
| <i>Bāburnāmah</i> | Babur's memoirs |
| Barvai | short couplet form in Old Hindi |
| <i>Bhāgavata Purāṇa</i> | a major Vaishnava scripture in Sanskrit (tenth century) |
| Bhāgya | fate |
| Bhakti | devotion |
| <i>Bhāṣāpiṅgal</i> | <i>Treatise on Vernacular Prosody</i> by Cintamani Tripathi, circa 1662 |
| Bhaunra (bhramar) | bee |
| Bheda | type |
| Bhramargīt | song of the bee, a Braj genre |
| Bishnupad | songs to Vishnu |
| Braj/Brajbhasha | literary dialect of Old Hindi |
| Byāh bidhi | wedding procedures |
| Chāp | 'seal' or poetic signature, a mark of authorship in Old Hindi |
| <i>Caurāsī vaiṣṇavan kī vārtā</i> | <i>Tales of Eighty-Four Followers of Vishnu</i> , seventeenth century |

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| Dāna | generosity |
| Darbār | court |
| Dhrupad | type of Braj song |
| Divān | collected poems |
| Dohā | couplet, the most common Old Hindi meter |
| Garīb-nevāj | one who is merciful to the poor |
| Guna-samudra | ocean of talent (title) |
| Gunī/gunin | talented man/men |
| <i>Jahāngīrjascandrikā</i> | <i>Moonlight of the Fame of Jahangir</i> by Keshavdas, 1612 |
| <i>Jahāngīrnāmāh</i> | Jahangir's memoirs |
| <i>Jangnāmā</i> | <i>Book of War</i> , Braj text by Shridhar |
| Jizyah | poll tax on non-Muslims |
| Kalawant | musician |
| <i>Kavīndracandrikā</i> | <i>Moonlight of Kavindra</i> , Braj anthology (mid-seventeenth century) |
| <i>Kavīndracandrodāya</i> | <i>Moonrise of Kavindra</i> , Sanskrit anthology (mid-seventeenth century) |
| <i>Kavīndrakalpalatā</i> | <i>Wish-fulfilling Vine of Kavindra</i> by Kavindracharya Sarasvati, circa 1650 |
| <i>Kavipriyā</i> | <i>Handbook for Poets</i> by Keshavdas, 1601 |
| Kavirāy | king of poets (title) |
| <i>Kavittvicār</i> | <i>Reflections on Poetry</i> , lost work by Cintamani |
| Kāvya | formal poetry |
| Khānqāh | Sufi residence |
| Khari Boli | Modern Standard Hindi |
| Lakṣaṇ | definition |
| <i>Ma'āṣir al-Kirām</i> | Persian tazkirah by Mir Ghulam Ali Azad, |
| <i>Ma'āṣir al-Rahīmī</i> | Persian biography of Rahim by Abdul Baqi Nahawandi, 1616 |
| <i>Madhumālātī</i> | Sufi poem in Avadhi by Manjhan, 1545 |
| Mahfil | gathering |
| Mahākavirāy | emperor of poets (title) |
| Māna | jealous anger |
| Maṅgalācaraṇ | invocation that occurs at the opening of an Indic text |
| Maṅṣabdār | Mughal official |
| Maṣnavī | Persian narrative poem |
| <i>Mīrat-ul-muluk</i> | a manual for princes by Tajjuddin, eighteenth century |
| <i>Mīrabandhuvinod</i> | Delight of the Mishra Brothers, a Hindi literary history from 1913 |
| Mugdhā | innocent woman |
| Muktak | free-standing poem |
| <i>Muntakhab al-Lubāb</i> | a history of Aurangzeb's reign by Khafi Khan, eighteenth century |
| Mīrzānāmāh | Persian handbook on gentlemanly conduct |
| Nakh-śikh | See Śikh-nakh |
| Nāyaka | hero |
| Nāyikā | heroine |
| Nāyikābheda | classification of heroines |
| Nara-bānī | language of men (vernacular) |
| Navorhā nāyikā | new bride |
| Navratna | nine jewels |

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| Nekī | moral probity |
| <i>Nītisatsai</i> | collection of 700 aphorisms by Vrind, 1704 |
| Pañcarātra | a Vaishnava denomination |
| Parakīyā | wife of another man |
| Pada | devotional poem set to music |
| <i>Pādshāhnāmah</i> | History of Shah Jahan's reign by Abdul Hamid Lahori |
| Pān | Indian delicacy made of betel nut |
| Phuṭkal | miscellaneous |
| Prabhu | lord |
| Praśasti | panegyric (Indic) |
| Premākhyān | Sufi love story, an Avadhi genre |
| <i>Pūran ras</i> | <i>Aesthetic Plenitude</i> by Sayyid Rahmatullah, seventeenth century |
| Qaṣīdah | panegyric (Persian) |
| Qāzī | judge |
| Qibla | direction (facing Mecca) to which Muslims turn when they pray |
| Rāga | codified melodic structure in classical Indian music |
| Raṅg-maḥal | pleasure suite |
| Rasa | literary emotion |
| <i>Rasamañjarī</i> | <i>Bouquet of Sentiment</i> by Nanddas (fl. 1570) |
| <i>Rasikprijā</i> | <i>Handbook for Poetry Connoisseurs</i> by Keshavdas, 1591 |
| <i>Rasvilās</i> | <i>Play of Rasa</i> by Cintamani, 1630s? |
| Rekhtā | macaronic or Persianized vernacular poetry |
| Rīti | the courtly style of Old Hindi literature |
| Rītigranth | poetry textbooks |
| <i>Safīnah-i khūshgū</i> | biographical dictionary by Bindrabān Das, eighteenth century |
| <i>Sahasras</i> | <i>A Thousand Emotions, dhruṭpad</i> of Nayak Bakshu, compiled mid-seventeenth century |
| Sāhitya | literature |
| Sakhī | female companion to the heroine |
| Sāmānyā nāyikā | courtesan |
| <i>Samarasāra</i> | Brajbhasha text on astrology by Kavindracharya Sarasvati |
| Sāṃkhya | one of the canonical six schools of Indian philosophy |
| <i>Saṅgīta Pārijāta[ka]</i> | Ahobala's Sanskrit text on music, translated into Persian, seventeenth century |
| Sarāpā | head-to-toe description of a woman (Persian) |
| Sardār | master |
| <i>Satkaviḡirāvilās</i> | <i>Play of the Words of True Poets</i> by Baldev Mishra, circa 1750 |
| <i>Satya Sarūp Rūpak</i> | Historical work by Vrind, eighteenth century |
| Śikh-nakh | head-to-toe description of a woman (Indic) |
| <i>Śimhāsambattīś</i> | <i>Thirty-two Tales of the Lion-throne</i> , seventeenth century |
| <i>Śivśimhāroḡ</i> | early account of Hindi literary history, first published in 1878 |
| Solāh śṛṅgār | 16 elements of a woman's makeup and ornamentation |
| Śṛṅgāramañjarī | <i>Bouquet of Passion</i> by Akbar Shah, circa 1668 |
| Śṛṅgāra rasa | the erotic literary emotion |

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| <i>Śṛṅgārsikṣā</i> | <i>Instruction in Passion</i> by Vrind, 1691 |
| Ṣūbah | Mughal administrative unit |
| <i>Sundarśṛṅgār</i> | <i>Sundar's Love Poems</i> by Sundar, 1631 |
| Sura-bānī | language of the gods (Sanskrit) |
| Svakīyā | one's own wife |
| Takhalluṣ | Persian penname |
| Tārikh | Persian chronicle/court history |
| <i>Tarjumah-i mānkutūhal va risālah-i rāḡdarpan</i> | Persian treatise on music compiled by Faqirullah, 1666 |
| Taṣnīfāt-i hindī | Hindi compositions |
| Tattvajñān | metaphysics |
| Tazkirah | literary biography |
| <i>Tuḥfat al-Hind</i> | <i>Gift from India</i> by Mirza Khan, circa 1675 |
| Udāharaṇ | example verse |
| Uday | human effort |
| Upamāna | standard of comparison |
| Upameya | subject of comparison |
| Vedānta | one of the canonical six schools of Indian philosophy |
| Virudāvalī | panegyric (recitation of royal titles in Sanskrit or Braj) |
| Watn | home territory |
| <i>Yogavāsīṣṭhasāra</i> | A Braj translation of the Sanskrit <i>Yogavāsīṣṭha</i> by Kavindracharya |