Before the Divide

Hindi and Urdu Literary Culture

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Riti and Register
Lexical Variation in Courtly Braj Bhasha Texts

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With its literary spaces shared across Hindu and Muslim courtly communities in Mughal-period India, the Braj Bhasha riti tradition is an instructive site for exploring the connections between language practices and other cultural, political, and religious affiliations. On the one hand, the riti corpus is literally defined by its adherence to Sanskrit literary norms, and the largely brahmanical episteme they represent. The word *riti* means 'method', referring specifically to Sanskrit method, and one of the most prevalent genres of riti literature, the *Ritigranth* (Book of method), was designed at least in part to be a vehicle for disseminating classical literary ideas in a vernacular medium. On

the other hand, from virtually the moment of its inception the Braj Bhasha courtly style attracted both Mughal patrons and poets—to the extent that the stunning transregional success of riti literary culture from the seventeenth century would be unthinkable without factoring in Indo-Muslim communities. Whereas Sanskrit literature remained largely inaccessible except through sporadic Persian translations, riti literature was a cultural repertory in which Indo-Muslims could and did participate firsthand. Situated at a kind of intersection, then, between Sanskrit and Persianate courtly traditions, what might the writings of riti poets reveal to us moderns about the 'Hindi'[1] of its day—both as a linguistic phenomenon but also as an index of the larger social and conceptual worlds its users inhabited?

Broadly speaking, by the seventeenth century the Hindi favoured at regional courts throughout north India, and as far away as Raigarh and Golconda (in modern Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh, respectively) was Braj Bhasha. But the precise parameters of this 'Braj Bhasha' or 'Braj', as it is often affectionately called, are far from fixed. Indeed, considerable disagreement exists among scholars about such basic matters as the place and time of origin, and even the name, of early modern north India's most popular literary language. For instance, is Braj Bhasha to be considered the same as the Gvaliyari (language of Gwalior) used as early as the fifteenth century by Vishnudas (fl. 1435) of the Tomar court?[2] Or was Braj literary culture a much later development—a specific byproduct of the Vaishnava fervour that overtook the nearby Mathura region only

[1] Putting quotation words around the word 'Hindi' at every usage, or awkwardly appending it to 'Urdu' in a hyphenated compound, quickly becomes tedious. Acknowledging here the problematic nature of the word Hindi— particularly as a designation for the language(s) of pre-modern north Indian literary cultures—I will henceforth dispense with extra punctuation.

[2] R.S. McGregor's studies of Vishnudas make it clear that he considers the literary language of the Tomar court at Gwalior an early form of Braj Bhasha. See, for instance his 'A Narrative Poet's View of his Material: Viṣṇudās's Introduction to his Brajbhāṣā *Pāṇḍav-carit* (AD 1435)', in Mariola Offredi (ed), *The Banyan Tree*, 2000, vol. 2: 335–42.

in the sixteenth century?[3] And who is to be the arbiter of competing modern narratives about early modern Hindi? Unfortunately, for the most part pre-colonial authors were not concerned with delineating precisely the language they used—often they just called it *bhāṣā/bhākhā*: language. Nor do language practices themselves exhibit the kind of homogeneity that might help anchor Braj as a fixed unit of analysis. It is a commonplace in north India that vernacular writers—in strong contrast to their Sanskrit counterparts—were generally indifferent to the delimiting mechanisms of prescriptive grammar until the colonial period. All this means that we find considerable internal variation within the loosely-defined larger rubric of Braj Bhasha.

Of concern to me in this article is one particular aspect of the fluidity of early modern Braj Bhasha: variation in lexical styles. Riti texts exhibit a phenomenon now widely associated with modern Hindi-Urdu, namely a spectrum of written registers ranging from the Sanskritised (*tatsama*) or semi-Sanskritised (*ardhatatsama*), to a more basic vernacular style (*tadbhava*), to a Persianised idiom. Some writers fell predominantly into one particular camp. Others tapped into more than one of these registers depending on context. Yet others used a hybrid style as a matter of course. As modern students of pre-modern north Indian literary cultures from before the Hindi-Urdu 'divide', it seems critical to probe the earlier significations and logic(s) of such divergent usages. In what follows I present case studies of different Braj Bhasha styles, examining texts by Keshavdas (fl.1600), Chintamani Tripathi (fl.1660), Bhushan Tripathi (fl.1673), Rahim (fl. c.1600), and Raslin (fl.1740). My aim is to see what larger conclusions can be drawn about the lexical tendencies

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[3]If this is so, then it is anachronistic to speak of a Braj language or literature before the sixteenth century. In this vein, Hariharnivas Dvivedi rejects the designation Braj Bhasha and makes a case for 'Gvaliyari' or 'Madhyadeshiya' as more authoritative terms for early Hindi. See his *Madhyadeśīya Bhāṣā*, Gwalior 1955. Shivprasad Singh, for his part, proposes different stages in the development of Braj Bhasha. He posits a 'transitional Braj Bhasha' from the mid-twelfth to mid-fourteenth centuries before Braj develops into a fully-fledged language from c. 1350–1550. Shivprasad Singh, *Sūr-pūrv brajbhāṣā aur uskā sāhitya*, 1958: 71–237.

of pre-modern Hindi authors, and how they may, or may not, differ from those of today.

A few words about the unavoidable limitations of this endeavour are appropriate. The scholarly reach required to execute a thorough study of language usages across all riti-period genres—bhakti poetry, courtly poetry, martial ballads, scholarly treatises, and commentarial literature—is an expertise I do not pretend to possess. This article is intended to be suggestive rather than exhaustive. Moreover, some language usages simply do not lend themselves readily to scholarly analysis. Contemporary ethnographic studies abound that establish linkages between language and other kinds of social or political identities; interrogating past practices is not so easy. We cannot ask Keshavdas, or Bhushan, or Rahim, what informed their choice to write in a certain way in a particular poem. And normally these poets, content just to write their poetry, did not ease the scholarly burdens of posterity by deigning to comment on these issues.

In the absence of many clear and direct pointers from the past, the modern interpreter of early modern language practices must tread carefully. In the very process of seeking out frameworks for reconceptualising pre-nineteenth century Hindi, the collective enterprise in which contributors to this volume are engaged, we confront the risk of reading too much of the present into the past. Some fully naturalised modern conceptual structures—such as the notion that a singular language is a meaningful marker of a particular ethnic group or religious community—would perhaps not have made sense to early modern Indians. Or it may be that the Hindi-Urdu divide of the modern period is, improbable as the notion may initially appear, related to a range of pre-colonial phenomena. Scholarly arguments are invariably made about the colonial-period ruptures in Indian traditions, yet rarely do continuities make headlines. But tracing continuities must also be a part of the process of understanding the relationship between the Hindi-Urdu past and present. As we shall see in what follows, language practices such as Sanskritisation and Persianisation are found in pre-nineteenth century Hindi texts; it is surely the *meanings* we assign to these practices that are candidates for re-evaluation, and not the practices themselves. But what meanings are to be assigned?

OVER-INTERPRETATION AND UNDER-INTERPRETATION

The cultural semantics of riti-period lexical choice have not gone wholly unnoted, and a brief survey of common approaches to the issue is a useful backdrop for the case studies that will follow. In the *Kāvyanirṇay* (Critical perspective on literature, 1746), a rare pre-modern text that calls attention to Braj Bhasha's lexical variance, Bhikharidas mentions both Sanskritised and Persianised language:

> *Bhāṣā Brjabhāṣā rucira, kahai sumati saba koi*
> *Milai saṃsakṛta pārasyau, pai ati pragaṭa ju hoi*

> Every man of learning recognises Braj as a fascinating language. There are instances of Braj mixed with Sanskrit, and also Persian, but which still remain altogether clear.[4]

Bhikharidas treats these registers with a kind of neutral, pluralist attitude that is harder and harder to find in modern-day South Asia. It is also interesting to note that Sanskritised and Persianised registers were both considered possible without forfeiting comprehension (*pai ati pragaṭa ju hoi*).

Discussions of register also arise intermittently in more modern scholarship on riti literature, especially in response to texts marked by a prevalence of Perso-Arabic vocabulary. Some categories of analysis are not necessarily relevant to the pre-modern literary landscape, and we do well to tread cautiously in this conceptual minefield booby-trapped since the days of colonial- and nationalist-period religious rivalries. One early twentieth-century British scholar explained the phenomenon of Perso-Arabic style in the *Satsaī* of Biharilal along communal lines that were notably absent from the work of Bhikharidas:

> I have been struck with the comparatively large number of words of Persian and Arabic origin which appear with little or no change in this typical Hindi poem.... The extent to which foreign words are used in

[4]Bhikharidas, *Kāvyanirṇay*, in Vishvanath Prasad Mishra, (ed), *Bhikharidās granthāvalī*, 1957, vol. 2: v: 14.

such a poem at such a date is a striking indication of the penetrative power of the language of the Islamic conquerors.[5]

According to this model Perso-Arabic lexical forms are indexes of Islamic rule as well as essentially 'foreign' rather than integrated into riti writing—an approach to lexical variance subsequently well-attested in Hindi scholarship.[6] Other scholars (quite rightly, in my opinion) see the use of hybrid vocabulary in terms of its poetic enrichment of the language.[7] Also found is a more functionalist theorization: rather than being viewed as some 'penetration' of the body of Braj by Muslim conquerors, using Perso-Arabic words aided in communicating with Indo-Muslim elites, who were patrons of riti literature.[8] There is also a class of liberal-minded scholars who view riti-period multilinguality as a component in a larger cultural system of religious ecumenism.[9] While this is a welcome departure from the 'Islamic conquerors' interpretation, it is an explanatory mechanism that may also call for some caution. Whether language practices are traced to Hindus and Muslims fighting or getting along, the binary logic is still grounded in present-day realities of Hindu-Muslim opposition. If we rely on heavy-handed communalist correspondences between language and religious identity are we obstructing access to other conceptual structures that may have been in place in the past?[10]

Whatever may be the case, some of these modern models of language use, grounded in a Hindi-versus-Urdu logic that is unreflectively 'after the divide', seem about as delicate as a bull in a china shop when it comes to articulating basic features of riti style.

[5]R.P. Dewhurst, 'Persian and Arabic Words in the Satsai of Bihari Lal', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Part 1, 1915: 122–23.

[6]Compare the attitudes of Ramchandra Shukla (1994: 132–33) who generally looks unfavourably upon Persianising poets of the Braj tradition (although he is somewhat lenient when it comes to Bihari).

[7]A good example of this perspective is Kishorilal 1971: 480–83.

[8]See Krishna Divakar 1969: 437.

[9]Jagdish Gupta 1961: 119–25.

[10]Shantanu Phukan has usefully cautioned against religiously over-determined approaches to old Hindi Sufi texts. See Phukan 2000: 22–26.

We are surely guilty of over-interpreting if we do not make allowances for how the use of a particular Persian, Arabic, or Sanskrit word might be attributable to some absolutely straightforward cause. Or to a cause that is aesthetic rather than religious. For instance, the Braj corpus consists of far more poetry than prose, and versification had a demonstrable impact on lexical practices. The language choices for a poet working in the *doha* metre are not the same as those of someone writing a freeform prose passage. In the former case, vocabulary choices may be determined by rhyme scheme or syllable weight more than any other factor. Take the line by Biharilal:

> *Rasa kī sī rukha sasimukhī, hāsi hāsi bolati baina*

The moon-faced girl of liquid beauty speaks her words laughingly.[11]

The Persian word '*rukh*' (*rukha* in its Braj-ified form) is cleverly paired with the modified *tatsama* '*sasimukhi*' (from the Sanskrit) to create a gentle rhyming effect. The Persianness of '*rukha*' seems completely incidental—except perhaps in that the doubling of meaning across languages (*rukh* and *mukh* both mean face) creates an added layer of poetic charm.

Similar examples of word choice being predominantly rooted in principles of poetic craftsmanship can easily be multiplied. Aesthetics more than any other principle is likely to have been at work in the occasional instances of Persian vocabulary found in King Jasvant Singh's overwhelmingly popular *Bhāṣābhūṣaṇa* (Ornament to the Vernacular, c. 1600), a work that epitomises the courtly cleverness of riti poetry. Consider the mixed language of the following doha:

> *Ati kārī bhārī ghaṭā pyārī bārī baisa*
> *Piya paradesa ādesa yaha āvata nāhi sādesa*

The dense clouds darken, a sweet girl in the bloom of youth.
With her lover abroad, she is anxious—why has he not sent any message?[12]

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[11]Biharilal, *Satsai*, in *Bihārī*, 5th ed., Vishvanath Prasad Mishra 1965: 230, v. 561.

[12]Jasvant Singh, *Bhāṣābhūṣaṇ*, in *Jasvant Siṃha granthāvalī*, Vishvanath Prasad Mishra (ed), 1972, v. 204.

In this ultra-concise rendition of a typical *viraha* theme, the two Sanskrit-derived words *paradesa* (foreign country) and *sādesa* (message) are expertly linked with a Braj-ified form of the Persian word *andesha* (anxiety) to create beautiful alliterative effects and internal rhyme. That is all. There is no religious or political implication. Although Jasvant Singh knew Persian and had close ties to the Mughal court he was not trying to enhance communication with Muslims by employing Persian words. Nor were his Sanskrit words directed at Hindus. There simply is no larger point to be made about the matter. For a riti writer with broad exposure to a range of different social milieux, courtly style and elegance were possible in both Perso-Arabic and Sanskrit registers, and there even seems to have been a certain delight in mixing them.

It is also undoubtedly the case that some Persian vocabulary was unmarked in Braj Bhasha usage. The word *kāgad* and its variant *kāgar* (from Persian *kāgaz*), for example, is commonly attested in riti literature, but this is hardly a matter for etymological deconstruction since the object in question was not available in pre-Islamic India. Thus it only makes sense that Braj writers would routinely employ a Persian loanword alongside the more Indic term *pāti* (leaf), which stems from an earlier technology of palm-leaf writing. Furthermore, many riti poets had close contact with branches of Mughal administration, and depending on the poet and the court and the time period, Persian words could be just as fully naturalised as Sanskrit ones. While recognising that the bulk of riti writers were brahmins and often well-versed in Sanskrit (who therefore could be expected to know whether a word was a Sanskrit derivative or not), who knows if they were always conscious, in the way scholars of Hindi-Urdu are today hyper-conscious, of the roots of individual words they used? Are even highly educated modern speakers of English particularly aware of when they are using Latinate versus Germanic vocabulary?

While alert to the problem of over-interpreting language practices in terms of crude modern ideologies that construct Persian lexemes as integral to Muslim language practice, enjoining Sanskritisation as the mark of '*śuddh*' Hindi and Hindus, we also need simultaneously to resist an overly-cautious tendency towards under-interpretation.

It would be unwise to swing to the opposite extreme and begin arguing that they were used in a free-form, value-free vacuum. Such an interpretation of early modern language practices is equally problematic, and demonstrably implausible.

REGISTER IN CONTEXT

In the lines by Biharilal and Jasvant Singh just quoted, no kind of consciousness with respect to choice of Persianised versus Sanskritised vocabulary seems to be in evidence, except perhaps for something that could be called poetic consciousness. But is this all there is to the story? Can other connotations to lexical choice be discovered, and theorised? One thing is certain: the use of register can vary considerably across the spectrum of riti poets, and even within the oeuvre of a single poet. Such variations do not appear to be random. In what follows I will track particular types of language use as they occur in their individual contexts, and reflect on the patterns that emerge.

1. The writings of Keshavdas

The works of Keshavdas Mishra encourage an analysis of lexical register as a set of changeable rather than fixed language practices. Keshavdas was from a family of learned brahmins, well-versed in Sanskrit literary and intellectual traditions. But this traditionalist bent was mitigated by external forces: during the poet's own lifetime his patrons' kingdom, Orchha, became a tributary state of the Mughal empire. Thus, his writings afford an exceptional opportunity to study the language practices of a classically-trained author who, through increasing contact with the Persianate world, was exposed to a new array of linguistic and cultural possibilities.

True to Keshavdas's reputation in the Hindi tradition as an *ācāryakavi* (scholar-poet), classicising tendencies are strongly evident, both stylistically and lexically, throughout much of his oeuvre. His major scholarly works (*Rasikpriyā*, 1591 and *Kavipriyā*, 1601) show

a distinct predilection for Sanskritised language. But such a style was encouraged—if not necessitated—by his intellectual task: the exposition of technical aspects of Sanskrit-derived literary categories such as heroines and heroes (*nāyikās/nāyakas*), poetic moods (*rasas*) and rhetorical devices (*alaṅkaras*), which form the basis of the Braj *rītigranth* genre. The following typical 'definition' (*lakṣaṇa*) from the *Rasikpriyā* illustrates the kind of linguistic imperatives at work:

> *Sādhāraṇa-nāyaka-lakṣaṇa*
> *Abhimānī tyāgī taruna, koka-kalāni prabīna*
> *Bhabya chamī sundara dhanī, suci-ruci sadā kulīna*
> *Ye guna 'Kesava' jāsu mā soī nāyaka jāni*
> *Anukula dacha saṭha dhṛṣṭapuni caubidhi tāhi bakhāni*

General definition of a hero
A hero is self-confident, willing to sacrifice, young, and skilled in the arts of love. He should be prosperous, forgiving, handsome, wealthy, well-groomed and always from a good family. Says Keshavdas, these are the recognisable qualities of a hero. And the category of hero is held to be four-fold: faithful, expert, deceitful, and brash.[13]

The language employed here is almost pure Sanskrit with only the thinnest veneer of vernacularisation: except for typical Braj modifications of Sanskrit phonemes such as 'cha' for 'kāa' or 'ba' for 'va', all but line 3 consists mostly of words that are virtually indistinguishable from Sanskrit.

Such a register, however, is chosen for certain contexts, and not others. Despite their scholarly focus even the ritigranth works contain other styles. It is typical of the genre to alternate between definition verses (*lakṣaṇa*) and poems that illustrate (*udāharaṇa*) the author's theoretical propositions. The latter verses tend, significantly, towards *tadbhava* style. An illustration of the manifestly faithful hero (*prakāśa anukūla nāyaka*) taken from the very same page of the *Rasikpriyā* is far less Sanskritised than the definition:

[13]Keshavdas, *Rasikapriyā, Keśavgranthāvali*, vol. 1, Vishvanath Prasad Mishra (ed) 1954: vv. 2.1–2.

'Kesava' sūdhe bilocana sūdhī bilokani kō avalokē sadāī

Sūdhiyai bāta sunē samujhē kahi āvati sūdhiyai bāta suhāī

Sūdhī sī hāsī sudhānidhi so mukha sodhi laī basudhā kī sudhāī

Sūdhe subhai sabai, sajanī, basa kaisē kiye ati ṭeṛhe Kanhāī.

Keshav says,

Her eyes are straight,

She always looks into your eyes with straightforward innocence

She is straightforward when she listens to you,

And in the way she understands.

Her charming replies are also straight-laced,

Her laughter is straight,

Her moon-face has absorbed the world's straightness.

Oh friend, her character is straight in every respect!

How did she bring into her thrall this most-crooked Krishna?[14]

Here and elsewhere throughout the corpus of Braj poetry, *tadbhava* language is chosen for recounting the escapades of Krishna and the gopis. Although Keshavdas purports to be analysing the traits of a male character in this verse, the point of view is actually that of a woman, the girlfriend of the heroine, who comments on the power Radha has over Krishna. This is Keshavdas's way of illustrating the *nāyaka's* faithful or *'anukūla'* qualities. Since the speaker is an uneducated, unsophisticated gopi, a de-Sanskritised register lends verisimilitude to the poet's impersonation of a woman. A further factor in the less formal register of *udāharaṇa* verses is that, unlike the *lakṣaṇas*, they are not normally based on Sanskrit models. These less theoretical, and more poetic, portions of the ritigranths are the riti writers' independent creations.

De-Sanskritised lexical style is found elsewhere in the Keshavdas corpus with very different poetic effect, as in the poet's first work, the *Ratnabāvanī* (Fifty-two verses about Ratna). Written in c. 1583, only a few years after Orchha capitulated to the Mughals, the *Ratnabāvanī* is a martial tale of resistance centring on the bold yet ill-fated efforts of the Orchha prince Ratnasena, who tried to protect

[14]*Rasikpriyā*: v. 2.5.

his father's kingdom from the Mughal onslaught. The subject of the work and its dominant mood of heroism (*vira rasa*) seem to demand a particular idiom. A combination of *tadbhava* words, Prakritising archaisms, heavy retroflex sounds, and a pronounced doubling of consonants create dramatic onomatopoeic effects, mimicking the cacophony of armies as they clash in battle:

Tahā amāna paṭhṭhāna ṭhāna hiya bāna su uṭhṭhiva

Jahā 'Kesava' kāsī-naresa dala-roṣa bhariṭhṭhiva

Jahā tahā para juri jora ora cahū dundubhi bajjiya

Tahā bikaṭa bhaṭa subhaṭa chuṭa ka ghoṭaka tana tajjiya

Jahā Ratanasena rana kahā caliva halliva mahi kampyo gagana

Tahā hvai dayāla Gopāla taba biprabheṣa bulliya bayana

The battlefield was filled with countless Pathans shooting arrows, hearts intent on war.

Keshav says, the Prince of Kashi (Ratnasena[15]) urged his warriors forward.

The soldiers engaged their enemies with force,

and the sounds of war drums rang loudly in all directions.

Fearsome warriors went careening from their mounts, giving up their lives.

Wherever Ratnasena led his soldiers in battle, the earth shook, and the skies trembled.

Then suddenly the merciful Vishnu came to earth, disguised as a brahmin.

He spoke to Ratnasena.[16]

Since Braj Bhasha poetry is otherwise characterised by an avoidance of conjunct consonants, the effect of the dense sound clusters here and elsewhere in the work is striking. Their choice is deliberate: the

[15]The Orchha kings traced their lineage back to a branch of the Gahadavala dynasty with a connection to Kashi. See *Kavipriyā*, *Keśavgranthāvalī*, vol. 1: vv. 7–8.

[16]Keshavdas, *Ratnabāvanī* in *Keśavgranthāvalī*, vol. 3 Vishvanath Prasad Mishra (ed),1956: v. 8.

style is characterised by what Indian literary theorists call the 'literary property of vigour' (*ojas-guṇa*), and it hearkens back to old concepts that underlie both Sanskrit martial poetry and the Hindi *rāso* with its distinct ethos of opposition.[17]

Yet another aspect of Keshavdas's style—testament to the poet's immense versatility and range—can be traced in his experiments with Braj forms of Sanskrit courtly *kāvya* (refined poetry). His *Rāmcandracandrikā* (Moonlight of the deeds of Ram, 1601), *Vīrsiṃhdevcarit* (Deeds of Bir Singh, 1607) and *Jahāngīrjascandrikā* (Moonlight of the fame of Jahangir, 1612) favour verses written in an elevated style, the fashioning of which required the deployment of an entire arsenal of Sanskrit-derived rhetorical flourishes including classical *topoi* of kingly glory, a wide range of figures of speech (*alaṅkāras*), pronounced compounding, and complex metrical forms. In most respects the poet's Sanskrit literary models seem to dictate both style and lexical content. It is noteworthy that all three of these *kāvya* works are about kings: the ideal King Rama of epic lore, but also two of Keshavdas's contemporaries: the poet's patron Bir Singh Deo (r. 1605–1627) as well as the Mughal emperor Jahangir (r. 1605–1627). Formal verses of praise (*praśasti*) and iconic descriptions of a ruler seem to demand a *kāvya*-idiom for which Sanskritised language is particularly well suited.[18] The *Vīrsiṃhdevcarit*, for instance, may be seen in part as Keshavdas's protracted literary argument about his patron's fitness to rule, and the building blocks of this argument are elaborate, Sanskritised verses about Bir Singh's kingly glory, the elegance of his court, and the wellbeing of his subjects. Here the poet also invoked Sanskrit literary models (especially Bana's *Kādambarī* and the *Vāsavadattā* of Subandhu[19]), and in the cantos leading up to the coronation, where establishing the moral authority

[17]Some aspects mentioned here of the *Ratnabāvanī*, and of other historical works by Keshavdas (discussed below), draw on my earlier article, Busch 2005: 31–54.

[18]But even Keshavdas's highly 'kavyaesque' works can exhibit a degree of internal variation. Scenes more geared toward action or reporting may be more *tadbhava* in form, and fashioned in less ornate metres.

[19]See discussion of *Vīrsiṃhdevcarit* in Renu Bhatnagar 1991: 239–63.

of Bir Singh is of paramount importance, he even goes so far as to weave purely Sanskrit verses into his tale.[20]

Keshavdas's *Jahāngīrjascandrikā*, a panegyric to the Mughal emperor written towards the end of the poet's life, may well be more Sanskritised than any of his other works, its Indo-Muslim hero notwithstanding. Several verses are almost completely *tatsama* in their construction, such as the following one comparing Jahangir to Indra, king of the gods:

> *Kavi, senāpati, kusala kalānidhi, guṇī gīrapati*
> *Sūra, ganesa, mahesa, śeṣa, bahu bibudha mahāmati*
> *Caturānana, sobhānivāsa, śrī dhara, vidyādhara*
> *Bidyādharī aneka, mañju ghoṣādi cittahara*
> *Dṛṣṭi anugraha-nigrahani juta kahĩ 'Kesava,' saba bhāti chama*
> *Imi Jahãgīra suratāna aba dekhahu adbhuta indra sama.*

See how the emperor Jahangir is as astonishing as the god Indra
In his court are poets and generals, skilled artists and discerning scholars,
Warriors, officers, stable masters, **shaikhs**, masterminds
The clever, the glamorous, the lustrous,
A range of entertainers and their companions.
There are beautiful songs, haunting to the soul.
Keshavdas says, Jahangir is a capable ruler in every respect—
He is kind to the deserving, and harsh towards those who break the law.[21]

This is almost pure Sanskrit! Sanskritised language for an Indo-Muslim ruler? Such a style defies our expectations. But these are modern expectations. The *Jahāngīrjascandrikā* is a telling example of how language practices 'before the divide' need to be approached in ways that tease out their unfamiliar rationales. Sanskrit is not a 'Hindu' language in this text: it is a lexical code chosen precisely because it speaks to moral perfection and kingly authority like no

[20]See Keshavdas, *Vīrsiṃhdevcarit*, *Keśavgranthāvalī*, vol. 3, cantos 28–32.

[21]This interpretation is based on the Hindi translation of the verse in Keshavdas, *Jahāngīrjascandrikā*, Allahabad 1993: v. 114.

other. Still, there is a twist to this verse, which can be read as an extended double entendre (*śleṣa*), in which Jahangir and the Hindu god Indra are simultaneously glorified.[22] Peeping out from behind the hyper-Sanskritised style, it turns out, is a multi-lingual pun that hinges on two possible pronunciations of the word '*śeṣa*'. Read as a Sanskrit word in relation to Indra's court, it means Sheshanaga, the serpent companion of Vishnu. But the same word, when pronounced in the Braj manner, sounds like 'Shaikh', allowing it to double as the Arabic word for spiritual master.

This brings us to a final factor that must be considered in any analysis of lexical register in Keshavdas's poetry: a new tendency towards Perso-Arabic vocabulary in select parts of his last two works. Persianised vocabulary is virtually nil in Keshavdas's writing until the *Vīrsiṃhdevcarit*, which was commissioned in 1607—at a time when Bir Singh Deo's political ascent was being backed by Jahangir. Here we begin to see an occasional Persian word entering Keshavdas's diction, particularly for Mughal contexts.[23] And this tendency becomes more of a habit by the time of the *Jahāngīrjascandrikā* written five years later, as when Bir Singh Deo Bundela is accorded a new Persianised title '*bakhata bilanda*' (high-fated, i.e. fortunate) in the following mixed-register doha:

Nakhata somaṭata nakhata so, bakhata bilanda bisekhi
Bhāga, birājata kauna yaha, kahijai nakha-sikha dekhi.

He is especially fortunate,
Like a star crossing the edge of the moon.

[22] A second translation of the verse from the Indra perspective:
   See how the emperor Jahangir is as astonishing as the god Indra.
   In his court all kinds of wise deities are present:
   Venus and Kartikeya, the clever moon, learned Jupiter,
   The sun, Ganesha, Shiva, Sheshanaga,
   Brahma, Kamadeva, Vishnu, the Vidyadharas and their lovers,
   And the apsaras like Manjughosha to captivate a man's heart
   And Indra is a capable ruler in every respect—
   He is kind to the deserving, and harsh towards those who break the law.
   For uses of *śleṣa* by Jayasi in his *Padmāvat*, see de Bruijn in this volume.
[23] See *Vīrsiṃhdevcarit*, cantos 5–6.

Oh Fate, who is this illustrious man?
Describe him from head to toe.[24]

In this short verse *tatsamas, tadbhavas,* and Braj-ified Persian forms interplay to produce rich alliterative resonances. These are clearly the careful choices of a masterly poet-craftsman. Nonetheless, unlike in the poems of Bihari or Jasvant Singh cited above, here hybridity in language seems to carry more than a purely poetical value. The mixed language of the verse captures perfectly the stately cosmopolitanism of Keshavdas's patron Bir Singh Deo Bundela sitting in attendance at the Mughal court, and it speaks powerfully to the new alliance between his patron and the emperor Jahangir. Similarly, given the lexical profiles of Keshavdas's earlier compositions it is difficult not to be struck by something new when Jahangir is addressed as '*Ālama panāha kulli ālama ke ādamī* ' (Shelter of the world, man of the whole world, vv. 167–168) or his son Khusrao is praised as the recipient of a '*khalaka kī khūbī ko khajāno*' (treasure house of all earthly good qualities, v. 55). These and other Persianised phrases probably did not just flow naturally from Keshavdas's pen. In the context of his corpus they are anomalous and seem carefully studied. The skilled manipulation of Perso-Arabic vocabulary can be seen as partly an aesthetic touch that was intended to produce a 'Mughalising' effect. Smidgeons of Persian evoke the Mughal courtly environment, but they also seem to be indicative of a sense of cultural rapprochement with the Mughals, which evolved in the course of Keshavdas's oeuvre no less than in the political climate of the Orchha state.

It will be clear from even this brief sketch that studying the works of the single poet Keshavdas yields a tremendous range of register profiles. And these cannot be classified neatly along lines of religious affiliation. Although Persianised vocabulary is likely to be found in a Mughal scene and not elsewhere, Sanskritised language is found in various contexts, and these cannot be construed as Hindu—particularly when such a register is considered suitable for Jahangir. *Tadbhava* language also has its identifiable literary spaces such as

[24] *Jahāngīrjascandrikā*: v. 78.

feminine speech or, when configured slightly differently, martial scenes. Are these observations confirmed, nuanced, or countered by the register profiles of other riti writers?

2. The writings of Chintamani Tripathi

Variability of lexical register is also a feature of the work of Chintamani Tripathi, who was alongside Keshavdas, one of the leading poets of the early riti tradition. Although a fully accurate evaluation of Chintamani's oeuvre awaits the publication of his complete corpus, his available works provide enough clues to allow some exploration of trends in lexical choices. In many respects the logic is similar to what we find in the writings of Keshavdas. Like Keshavdas, Chintamani was a brahmin well versed in Sanskrit traditions; he too was keenly interested in crafting vernacular renditions of the principles of Sanskrit literary theory, and most of his known works are ritigranths. His *Kavikulakalpataru* (Wish-fulfilling tree for the brotherhood of poets, c. 1670) and *Śṛṅgāramañjarī* (Bouquet of Passion, c.1666) are frequently Sanskritised in their scholarly style, especially in the *lakṣaṇa* verses.[25]

Both draw heavily on Sanskrit sources; indeed, the *Śṛṅgāramañjarī* is even a fairly direct translation of Akbar Shah's Sanskrit text of the same name.[26] A close connection to Sanskrit source material and the nature of the technical subject matter explain the tendency towards *tatsama* style.

The *Śṛṅgāramañjarī* is of particular interest to any would-be theorist of pre-modern language practices because it contains extensive prose passages. Prose is relatively rare in Braj—Keshavdas, for instance, does not use it in any of his eight works. Significantly, Chintamani's prose style, unconstrained by the exigencies of rhyme or metre, is strongly inclined to Sanskritised vocabulary. The work

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[25]The *udāharaṇa* verses, as in the ritigranths of Keshavdas, tend to be simpler in style.

[26]To complicate this profile of linguistic interactions further, the Sanskrit *Śṛṅgāramañjarī* is itself a translation (*chāyā*) of a Telugu work—as proclaimed in the text itself. See *Śṛṅgāramañjarī of Akbar Shah*, V. Raghavan (ed), Hyderabad: 1951, v. 15.

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opens with what must surely be the longest compound in all of Braj Bhasha literary history, which, in its nearly one hundred word abundance and *tatsama* lexicon, hearkens back to the most complex of Sanskrit *'gadya'* styles.[27] Whereas current linguistic patterns of Hindi language nationalism in India suggest that Sanskritised Khari Boli is a modern practice, I think R.S. McGregor is correct to draw attention to its Braj antecedents. His study of the Braj commentaries of Keshavdas's patron Indrajit (c.1600) finds 'clear evidence that a Sanskritised style of speech of high prestige existed and was well recognised' in early modern India.[28] Chintamani's *Śṛṅgāramañjarī*, like the prose writings of Indrajit, is a useful reminder that a Sanskrit-based Hindi prose was neither a colonial invention, nor an exclusionary by-product of modern Hindu-Muslim rivalries. Certain scholarly contexts seem to have encouraged or even necessitated its use hundreds of years ago.

What about Persianisation in the works of Chintamani—are there patterns to be detected in this register? After all, his translation of the *Śṛṅgāramañjarī* was commissioned in an Indo-Muslim cultural setting. The exact conditions surrounding the commission are unknown, but Chintamani's work was probably produced at the Golconda court since Akbar Shah, the text's purported author, was son of the preceptor to the Qutb Shahi ruler Abul Hasan 'Tanashah' (r.1672–1687).[29] It turns out that one looks in vain for any strong

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[27]The lengthy compound is found in *Akbarsāhkṛt Śṛṅgāramañjarī*, Bhagirath Mishra (ed), Lucknow: 1956: 5. It is a translation of a similar compound found in the Sanskrit source.

[28]See *The Language of Indrajit of Orcha: A Study of Early Braj Bhasa Prose*, Cambridge 1968: 5. In his work on the thesauruses (*kośas*) of Nanddas, McGregor adduces further evidence in support of this point. See 'The Formation of Modern Hindi as Demonstrated in Early "Hindi" Dictionaries', Gonda Lecture, published by the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, Amsterdam, 2000: 7–9. Christopher King, reporting on the perceptions of John Gilchrist at Fort William College in Calcutta, also suggests that classicising trends (whether Sanskrit, Arabic, or Persian) could be found among early munshis at Fort William College. See King 1994: 26–27.

[29]That Akbar Shah rather than a scholar at court is the actual (as opposed to attributed) author is doubted by the editors of both the Sanskrit and Braj texts. See, respectively, Raghavan 1951: 7, and Mishra 1956: 11–13.

tendency towards Perso-Arabic vocabulary in the work—even in the lengthy introduction containing verses in honour of several Indo-Muslim notables (including *praśasti* verses to Akbar Shah himself). In fact, except for two Persianised lines, the entire prelude to the poem, ninety-six lines in length, is, if anything strongly, Sanskritised.[30] Asking whether Perso-Arabic vocabulary should be used for Muslims is simply the wrong question to pose in the case of this poet. As we have seen, Persianisation was something that crept into Keshavdas's writings over time and does in his case seem truly to be a marker of contact with the Indo-Muslim world, as his patron Bir Singh Deo Bundela forged ties with Emperor Jahangir. But Chintamani's case was different. He was writing in a later epoch; he was a cosmopolitan poet patronised by a range of courts: Hindu and Muslim, Northern and Deccani. His usages are harder to classify.

There is no little irony in the fact that a verse in honor of the Hindu king Shahaji Bhonsle from the opening to Chintamani's unpublished *Bhāṣāpiṅgal*[31] (Treatise on vernacular prosody, c. 1662) is far more Persianised (in lexicon if not in imagery) than any of his *praśastis* to Indo-Muslims:

> *Kavina ko rājai-bhoja, voja ko saroja-bandhu*
> *   dīnani ko dayāsindhu, lāja-śīla ko jahāja"*
> *Koṭi kāma sundara hai, sāhibī purandara hai,*
> *   Mandaru hai vairī-bala vāridhi-mathana kāja*
> *Janga mai jālima, avalamba kuli ālama ko,*
> *   bālama dharā ko, saba sūrana ko siratāja,*
> *Vikrama apāra, sakra sujasa ko pārāvāra*
> *   bhārī bhāratha mana samattha sāhi mahārāja*

Maharaja Shahaji is a King Bhoja to his poets,
When it comes to lustre he is the sun.
To the poor he is an ocean of compassion,
He is a large ship when it comes to the extent of his good character.
He is attractive like a crore of Kamadevas,
In grandeur he is Indra himself,
He is like mount Mandara, poised to churn the ocean of enemy powers.
He is ferocious in battle, and a stronghold for the whole world.
The earth's darling, the crown of warriors,
His prowess is endless—he has attained the boundless fame of Indra.
His courage withstands even the heaviest battle.[32]

This is a startlingly mixed verse with both Sanskritic compounding (*bandhu-dīnani ko dayāsindhu...*) and strong Persianisation (*Janga mai jālima ... kuli ālama*); in which the poet takes the liberty of juxtaposing the Arabic word *sāhibī* with the *tatsama* Purandara (Indra). Rhyme is obviously a major consideration in the vocabulary choices, but the kind of Persianisation in evidence was probably not something remarkable in its day. We should not forget that Persian was part of the cultural repertory of a certain class of Hindu court poets from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries. Perhaps we can also ascribe Chintamani's language style to local conditions in the mid seventeenth-century Deccan, where Persianised style and hybridity were both regular occurrences.[33]

3. The writings of Bhushan Tripathi

We also find the traits of hybridity as well as a dense distribution of Persian vocabulary in the writings of Bhushan Tripathi, who is widely

[30]The Persianised phrases are '*dastagīra pīra pātsāha siratāja ke*' ('protector and spiritual mentor of the crown of kings', v. 5) and '*pīra dastagīra e jāhira azamati eka*' ('protector and spiritual mentor of this single manifest glory', v. 13).

[31]*Bhāṣāpiṅgal* is the most common name of the work. This particular Ms, no. 4805 of the Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute, Alwar, Rajasthan, is labeled '*Chandalatā*'. In the margin of the text the abbreviation '*pin. la.*' appears, probably short for *Piṅgal-latā*—yet another name from within the same semantic field.

[32]Perso-Arabic vocabulary is given in bold-face. Verse from Ms no. 4805, Alwar, p. 1. A brief survey of the mansucript suggests that Persianisation is not otherwise prominent in the *lakṣana* or *udāharaṇa* verses.

[33]In a recent article Sumit Guha has drawn attention to the phenomenon of polyglot literary competition at Shahaji's court. He also notes that commoners were often familiar with at least the bureaucratic registers of Persian during this period. See Guha 2004: 23–31.

thought to be Chintamani's younger brother. Bhushan is famous in the annals of Hindi literary history as the court poet of Shivaji (Shahaji Bhonsle's son), for whom he wrote his magnum opus the *Śivarājabhūṣaṇ* (Ornament to King Shivaji) in 1673. The work is ostensibly a *ritigranth*, where one might expect the use of more Sanskrit than Persian, but this work is filled with surprises. First of all, for the most part, Bhushan proves himself to be manifestly uninterested in any scholarly pursuit of poetic theory. Instead of composing his own *lakṣaṇa* verses he was content to copy those of Matiram Tripathi (like Chintamani, in all likelihood, one of Bhushan's brothers).[34] His *udāharaṇa* verses also depart dramatically from the bucolic love scenes of Krishna and Radha—the usual fare of Braj poetry—focusing instead on the clamour of Shivaji's battles and the laments of his beleaguered enemies. It is in Shivaji that Bhushan proves to be most interested, perhaps because the work was in all probability commissioned as a *praśasti* for the occasion of his patron's coronation.[35] The multi-layered resonance of the word *bhūṣaṇ* (ornament) in the title constitutes a brilliant feat of semantic acrobatics, and speaks to the complexity of the author's project. In offering up his poem as an ornament to his patron Bhushan invites us to think of it as a panegyric, but *bhūṣaṇ* is also a synonym for *alaṅkāra* or rhetorical device, the literary topic under discussion in the work. *Bhūṣaṇ* is additionally, of course, the signature (*chāp*) and title of the poet himself.[36]

[34]Compelling examples of plagiarism are exposed in Rajmal Bora, *Bhūṣaṇ aur unkā sāhitya*, Kanpur 1987: 233. According to Om Prakash, Bhushan borrowed more than one quarter of his *lakṣaṇas* from Matiram's *Lalitlalām*. See *Hindī-alaṅkāra-sāhitya*, Delhi 1956:101–102 (quoted in Nagendra (ed) 1973: 343).

[35]Shivaji's coronation had originally been planned for 1673, but ended up being postponed until the following year. For a discussion of the circumstances see Stewart Gordon, *The Marathas: 1600–1818*, 1993: 87–89.

[36]The title 'bhūṣaṇ,' which was so thoroughly to eclipse the poet's given name that the Hindi tradition came to know him only by this sobriquet, was bestowed by patron, Rudra Shah Solanki of Chitrakut. The poet mentions the incident in *Śivarājabhūṣaṇ*, in *Bhūṣaṇ Granthāvalī* [reprint of 1953 edition], Vishvanath Prasad Mishra (ed) 1994: v. 28.

The linguistic profile of the *Śivarājabhūṣaṇ* is unusual, in keeping with the work's atypical combination of objectives. It is written in a mixed style, with extreme feats of both Sanskritisation and Persianisation in evidence. The *praśasti* aspects of the text seem to invite the dense levels of figuration characteristic of Sanskritised *kavya* style and in this respect, the work bears comparison with the *Vīrsiṃhdevcarit* and *Jahāṅgīrjascandrikā*. Like Keshavdas, Bhushan—a fellow brahmin, after all—was perfectly capable of using *recherché* Sanskritic words, compounding techniques, and all manner of classical poetic devices. The Sanskritised register invokes an age-old moral vocabulary of rectitude and valour to present an idealised vision of his patron.

But Sanskritisation is only one side of Bhushan's language-coin. The flip side is the Persianised register to which we have already alluded. Much of the Persianised language consists of ordinary workaday words and is not particularly associated with Indo-Muslim characters. A heavy degree of Persianisation makes a certain amount of sense in the text because the *Śivarājabhūṣaṇ* is profoundly about seventeenth-century politics, and Persian was the language of power. Perso-Arabic and even Islamic epithets for Shivaji, such as 'gāzī' ('victor over the unbelievers'),[37] however, give rise to cognitive dissonance in the unprepared reader, in whom modern Indian cultural memory has enshrined Shivaji as the ultimate 'Hindu' rebel fighting his 'Muslim' enemies. A well-informed reader may also be aware that Marathi took a turn toward the Sanskritised during Shivaji's reign—but this was only in the final years of his life. Bhushan's work, written seven years before the death of Shivaji, shows no evidence of such de-Persianising measures.[38] His writings, like those of his brother Chintamani, serve as a powerful reminder that Persianised language was not the distinct marker of a particular religious or cultural community in the seventeenth-century Deccan. By drawing on both Sanskritised and Persianised language Bhushan had all the

[37]*Śivarājabhūṣaṇ*, vv. 60, 144, 172, 186, 194.

[38]Shivaji commissioned the *Rājavyavahārakośa* (Dictionary of administrative terminology) to formulate Sanskritic equivalents to the Persianised vocabulary that had permeated the language of the region. See Guha 2004: 27, 29.

bases covered: he invoked an old Hindu authority bolstered by hundreds of years of traditional kingly representation; he also spoke the language of the court politics of the here and now.

It has been suggested that by drawing on Persian, particularly the words that were common in the heavily Persianised Marathi of the day, Bhushan, a northerner, could make his work more intelligible to an audience that lacked fluency in Hindi.[39] There may be at least some truth to this assessment, although such a functionalist explanation is not wholly adequate. Interestingly, it was Khari Boli Hindi rather than Persian that apparently had Indo-Muslim associations for Bhushan, who occasionally seems to go out of his way to use Khari Boli verb endings instead of Braj ones for recorded Muslim speech.[40] All of this underscores the multi-valence and flexibility of Braj Bhasha. During the seventeenth century it became a language that travelled vast distances, and along the journey it encountered a range of courtly contexts and regional linguistic practices, to which poets adapted. The writings of Matiram Tripathi, who worked for small scale Hindu patrons in northern India rather than Deccani or Mughal rulers, are far less Persianised in style, and this variability of language practices among brothers underscores the point that a poet's literary language is not a given of birth or caste or community, but one of choice.

There are some additional features of Bhushan's own language choices, features we have not yet encountered in this study. While partly a celebration of the military feats of Bhushan's famous patron, the *Śivarājabhūṣaṇ* is also a strong statement of Shivaji's disillusionment with the Mughal political establishment—and even, in places, a denunciation of major figures such as emperor Aurangzeb. It can be a strongly, sometimes bitterly, satirical text, and the satirical effects in some cases stem precisely from Bhushan's deft manipulation of language in ways that could not be more different in spirit from what we observed in the poetry of Keshavdas.

If Keshavdas's experiments with mixed language style are by all indications gestures of cultural inclusiveness, Bhushan uses that same style on occasion to create a mocking, hostile mood. Consider

[39]See, V.P. Mishra 1994: 40.
[40]Ibid: 39.

his etymologically corrupt but thematically brilliant handling of Aurangzeb's name. In Persian the word Aurangzeb is a flattering title, meaning 'adorning the throne'. In Bhushan's hands the word '*Aurang*' is Braj-ified into '*Avaranga*'.[41] According to Braj phonetics this is a plausible enough pronunciation of the emperor's name, but it also invokes the combination of the Sanskrit lexemes '*ava*' and '*raṅga*', which together mean something like 'sickly pale'—a point that could hardly have been lost on a brahmin like Bhushan. This deliberate Sanskritisation of the emperor's Persian name suggests Aurangzeb's overwhelming trepidation in the face of Shivaji, transforming his noble title into a source of derision.

Examples of derisive word play in the *Śivarājabhūṣaṇ* could easily be multiplied. Some stem from precisely this peculiar feature of Braj Bhasha: the ability for particular words to be read simultaneously in both Sanskrit and Persian registers. Like Keshavdas, Bhushan also employs punning techniques from Sanskrit (in this case *yamaka*, the repetition of a single word that invokes more than one meaning), but to dramatically different effect. Note the play on the word *pīra* in these lines:

Sāhitanai sivarāja kī dhākani, chūṭi gaī dhṛti dhīranhū kī
Mīrana ke ura pīra baṛhī yau, ju bhūli gaī sudhī pīranhū kī.

Shivaji, son of Shahaji, struck such terror in the hearts of Muslim nobles
    that even the bravest lost their nerve,
Their affliction grew such that they forgot the teachings of the Sufis.

The first usage of the word *pīra* invokes the Sanskrit meaning '*pīḍā*' (affliction). But turning to the Persian lexicon the same word as it is typically written in Braj can also mean a Sufi Pir. A similar bilingual mocking of the enemy is evident in:

Dīnadayālu na to so dunī aru mleccha ke dīnahī māri miṭāvai

There is no one in the world as merciful to the oppressed as you
And you wipe out the faith of the Mlecchas.[42]

[41]See *Śivarājabhūṣaṇ*, vv. 58, 74, 113, among others.
[42]*Śivarājabhūṣaṇ*, vv. 110, 167.

Here *dina* first occurs as part of a Sanskritised compound meaning 'merciful to the poor', an appropriate kingly epithet for Shivaji. In the second half of the line, however, the same word is used in the Arabic sense of religious faith, which Shivaji is said to be wiping out. This last line seems to be a deliberate inversion of the more typical image of Muslim rulers razing Hindu temples and religious artifacts. One thing is clear: Bhushan uses both Sanskritised and Persianised vocabulary to striking effect in his work, and these practices require a far more complex analysis than a simple division along the lines of Hindu versus Muslim would allow.

In considering the cases of Keshavdas, Chintamani Tripathi, and Bhushan Tripathi we have noted the multiple rationales that seem to underlie differential patterns of register. Sanskrit is the language of technical literary jargon for a ritigranth, but also the language of kingly perfection appropriate to *praśasti*-oriented genres. Persian is a workaday language for some courts; it is the language of politics; it is sometimes but not invariably employed for Indo-Muslim contexts; multi-lingual puns are also employed with radically different intentions. A consideration of riti writings by select Indo-Muslim authors reveals additional patterns.

4. The writings of Rahim

The poetry of the Mughal administrator Abdurrahim Khan-i Khanan (1556–1627) is a particularly promising site for an investigation of Hindi register. He was voraciously multi-lingual, and this trait seems to have had a tremendous impact on his Hindi literary style. Rahim naturally knew Persian, the major imperial language of the Mughals, and was a famously generous patron of Persian poets in his day.[43] His generation still had a connection to Turki, the native language of the earliest Mughal rulers, as evinced from his *Vāqi'āt-i Bābarī*, a translation from Turki into Persian of Emperor Babur's memoirs. Rahim was also conversant with a range of Indian regional languages.

[43]On Rahim's role as a major patron of Persian poets see Chhotubhai Ranchhhodji Naik 1966: 280–462, as well as Annemarie Schimmel 1992: 202–23.

He is even said to have learned both Sanskrit and Portuguese. As far as composing poetry is concerned, he is credited with some verses in Sanskrit and Persian, but the bulk of his literary output seems to have been in Hindi.[44] Half a dozen collections of his Hindi poems have come down to us, which, if authentic, would be compelling testimony to his multilingual poetic skill. Unfortunately, however, none of the texts has been dated, and a thorough review of available Rahim manuscripts remains a desideratum. Still, one can at least venture some preliminary findings about his writing on the basis of the existing published works.[45]

Rahim's literary talents in Hindi ranged across many dialects (Avadhi, Braj and Khari Boli), and within these, various lexical registers ranging from Sanskritised to *tadbhava* to pure Persian are all attested. In analysing Rahim's Hindi style(s) the first observation to make is that the variety within the texts embodies a set of cultural practices in the outside world: the poetry through its mixed language enacts a kind of Mughal cosmopolitanism. And this seems to be precisely the point—or at least one of the points—of Rahim's poetic experiments with Hindi. Without wishing to belabour stereotypes about early Mughal ecumenism, there *was* something about Rahim's particular historical moment that brimmed with cultural newness and exploration. Mughal power was expanding and, as one of the empire's key purveyors and protectors, Rahim travelled extensively throughout the subcontinent. European outposts dotted the coasts, their ambassadors visited the Mughal court, trading in a range of cultural currencies—from Flemish painting to Christian religious precepts. It really should not surprise us, then, if the poetry of this leading Mughal notable deeply reflects its multicultural surroundings.

Rahim's register of Mughal cosmopolitanism is evident throughout his oeuvre, but perhaps nowhere more dramatically than in his

[44]An overview of Rahim's roles as both patron and poet in Persian and Hindi—and the discrepancies between his strong patronage of Persian and weak patronage of Hindi (as well as his relatively scanty Persian oeuvre when compared to its Hindi counterpart)—is found in Corinne Lefèvre-Agrati 2006.

[45]The text used here is *Rahīm granthāvalī*, Vidyanivas Mishra and Govind Rajnish (eds) 1985. The lack of basic text-critical infrastructure in Hindi continues to hamper the field.

Madanāṣṭaka (Eight verses of love).[46] The title, the metre (*mālinī*) and the *aṣṭaka* genre all proclaim the *Madanāṣṭaka's* partial location in a Sanskrit literary field. But the base language as determined by verb structures and postpositions is, incongruously, Khari Boli. Contributing to the text's pronounced upending of customary literary practices are the stark juxtapositions of *both* Sanskritised and Persianised vocabulary in configurations that vary from verse to verse. The first line begins with pure Sanskrit:

Śarada-niśi niśīthe... (at midnight on an autumn night...)

And then our poetic expectations are suddenly thwarted when the poet completes the line with the plodding long vowels typical of Khari Boli:

...cãd kī rośanāī (the light of the moon).

The verse turns out to be about Krishna leading the gopis away from their respectable family lives into the forest for love-play on a moon-lit night—a typical theme of its period. But there is nothing typical about the language. A line about Krishna reads:

Zarad basan-vala gul caman dekhtā thā

(The one with the yellow garment looked at the rose garden, v. 5).

The phrase *zarad basan* is a mixed register calque on *pitambara*, a common Sanskrit/Braj epithet for Krishna. And mixture is the name of Rahim's poetry-game. Both in lexicon and *topoi* the *Madanāṣṭaka*

[46]This work exists in several recensions—testament to the kinds of manuscript problems that plague a would-be scholar of Rahim. Although there are major differences in the order of lines and verses, the overall flavour and thematic content of the poetry are shared across the recensions. And all versions exhibit the same polyglot profile. The version used here is the Nagari Pracharini Sabha recension published in *Rahīm granthāvalī*. The Hindi Sahitya Sammelan and Asani recensions are published in *Abdurrahīm Khānkhānā*, Samar Bahadur Singh (ed) 1961.

transports us back and forth from the *kuñj* of Vrindavan to the poetic world of the Persian ghazal, surprising the reader at every turn. Krishna plays his flute on a moonlit night, enchanting the gopis in a manner familiar from centuries of Indic poetic representation; but he is also enraptured by a gopi's hair (expressed in the language of ghazals: *zulfē*), and sips from the proverbial cup (*pyāla*) of the lovelorn, getting drunk in a style reminiscent of images from Persian poetry. Rahim unites Indic and Persian language, as well as motifs, in dramatic fashion in this text.

Rahim's other collections of Hindi poetry may not be as boldly macaronic as the *Madanāṣṭaka*, but they are still generally mixed in lexical profile.[47] It is not an easy task to pinpoint why, but Rahim's default register is atypical of others in the Hindi literary tradition. Rahim and Keshavdas, for instance, were exact contemporaries—and they almost certainly knew one another[48]—but their language practices are very different, particularly in the extent and choice of Perso-Arabic vocabulary. How do we theorise this difference in degree and style of Persianisation? Along the lines of Hindu versus Muslim? Courtly context? Cultural orientation? Or can we theorise it at all? The opposition of Hindu versus Muslim seems least likely to yield any useful analysis since there is almost nothing Islamic about Rahim's Hindi texts.[49] Courtly context and cultural orientation are more promising, if not fully satisfactory. As a Mughal courtier Rahim travelled in a world that prized refined Persian speech and poetry. And when he was not speaking Persian his default vernacular probably tended towards a relatively Persianised Khari Boli.

[47]The *Kheṭakautukam*, a technical work on astrology attributed to Rahim is, however, macaronic in style. It features a Sanskrit grammatical and metrical infrastructure overlaid with significant amounts of Perso-Arabic vocabulary. A recent edition is *Khānkhānaviracitam Kheṭa-kautukam*, Narayan Das (ed.) 1997. For further discussion of Rahim's Rekhta and macaronic style, see Bangha in this volume.

[48]Keshavdas's *Jāhāngīrjascandrika* opens with panegyric verses in honour of Rahim's father Bairam Khan, Rahim himself, and his son Iraj Khan. The prominent placement of these verses at the beginning of his work suggests that the family held considerable importance for him. See vv. 3–8.

[49]McGregor 1984: 121.

But how do we account for Rahim's use of Sanskritised style and even, on occasion, pure Sanskrit?[50] Partly it is his cosmopolitanism at work, but Rahim's hyper-variegated lexical practices may also be seen as a kind of revelling in the poetic power of Braj Bhasha. Rahim's work serves as a powerful reminder that there is nothing natural about writing poetry. It is a highly conscious act, necessitating the careful selection of words for particular effects. Perhaps here more than anywhere we must be careful about over-interpretation. For it is precisely its quirky mixes and hybridization that give Rahim's Hindi poetry so much of its charm, and an overly-reductionist deconstruction of *what it all means* not only risks spoiling the beauty of the enterprise, it isn't even adequate to the task.

More than any of the poets discussed so far, Rahim seems to mix vocabulary as a gesture of poetic playfulness. The playful effects are intensified by his modifying words in a highly idiosyncratic manner. Take, for instance, his strange Avadhi-fication of both Persian and Sanskrit words in his *Barvai nāyikābheda*.[51] The addition of the suffix '*va*', sometimes accompanied by a shortening of the preceding vowel, produces a diminutive effect in Eastern Hindi dialects like Avadhi. But Rahim plays with this '*va*' suffix obsessively—even ludicrously—throughout the work. Particularly incongruous is its repeated application to Sanskritic compounds:

Madhyā vipralabdhā nāyikā
Dekhi na keli-bhavanavā, nandakumāra
Lai lai ūca usasavā, bhai bikarāra.

The middling type of frustrated heroine
She did not see Nanda's son in the pleasure-house
Sighing long and hard, she became restless.[52]

[50]For the Sanskrit verses attributed to Rahim see Mishra and Rajnish (eds) 1985: 169–74.
[51]An informative discussion of the *barvai* form is Rupert Snell 1994: 373–405.
[52]*Barvai Nāyikābheda*: v. 63. Compare '*kopabhavanavā*' (anger-house) in v. 49. The eastern/diminutive forms of *tatsamas* have also been remarked by McGregor 1984: 122, and Snell 1994: 382.

Forming a diminutive from a *tatsama* word like '*kelibhavana*' (pleasure-house) was just not done—not in the real world, at any rate. But this is the world of poetry. Nor are Persian words spared, as in the treatment of '*gumān*,' (pride/haughtiness) in this verse:

Adhama nāyikā
Berihi bera gumanavā, jani karu nāri
Mānika au gajamukutā, jau lagi bāri.

The lowest kind of woman
Oh woman, don't get in a huff time after time,
Otherwise I'll have to buy rubies and pearls.[53]

These idiosyncratic modifications of words to generate the impression of eastern language are poetic effects, stemming perhaps partly from a concern to generate the right metrical weight in each part of the tightly-controlled and ultra-concise *barvai* line; they are also, surely, a delightful exploration of new literary possibilities in a vernacular language that was eminently suited to experimentation. The Hindi of this period could be manipulated in ways that were possible in neither Sanskrit nor Persian. The grammar was not fixed, so words could be bent and shaped creatively.

The literary manoeuvres of Rahim, although in a manner very different from those of Keshavdas, also seem to speak of a cultural rapprochement between the Mughals and their local Hindu subjects—but this time the flow moves in the other direction. As Keshavdas occasionally used Persian words in his later works for Mughal courtly scenes, Rahim embraced not only Indic lexical styles but also themes, and if anything, Rahim's gestures are far more striking than those of his Hindu contemporary. There is no evidence in his entire corpus that Keshavdas knew anything meaningful about the Indo-Muslim world, its religion or larger cultural and intellectual

[53]*Barvai Nāyikābheda* v. 5. The nayaka has presumably been with another woman. To appease her he will now have to lavish jewellery upon her. A similar instance of word play is the treatment of '*gulabavā*' (rose) in v. 18.

practices.[54] Rahim, however, seems to have been conversant with many aspects of Indian culture: a whole range of languages, Vaishnava bhakti, Indian mythology, as well as diverse technical details about Sanskrit and Hindi literary systems.

Rahim's other collection of *barvai* is partly an experiment with the Indic barahmasa form; it also shows mastery of Krishnaite poetic conventions from the Braj tradition.[55] These are poignant poems spoken in the voice of a gopi, who expresses her chagrin that Krishna has not returned in time for the monsoon. Rahim's manipulation of register here shows both great sensitivity and skill. The text's predominantly *tadbhava* style could not be more appropriate to the expression of feminine pain and longing.[56] Sanskritised vocabulary is used sparingly, only for the opening invocations to Hindu deities.[57] Persianised vocabulary, when it does occur in a handful of verses, is understated and seems largely instrumental to the task of creating end-rhyme.[58] There are, however, four verses (not in the gopi's voice) composed entirely in Persian, which express the absent Krishna's love-sickness but in a more formal, masculine, and urbane register.[59] These are a message delivered from Uddhava—didactic bore and perennial killjoy of Braj lore—and the Persian register seems perfectly calculated to heighten the poignancy of Krishna's new preoccupation with city life in Mathura and his increasing distance from the lovelorn gopis.[60] But it is overall the *tadbhava* simplicity that dominates in the poems, conjuring up a delicate blend of rusticity and pathos that bear testimony to Rahim's sensitive handling of bhakti literary sensibilities. Rahim stretched himself culturally more than most, and this is evident everywhere in the poet's multi-register virtuosity.

[54]Keshavdas's seeming ignorance of basic details about Islamic heritage is discussed in Allison Busch 2003: 232–34.

[55]For the tradition of Urdu barahmasas see Orsini in this volume.

[56]On Hindi as a vehicle for feminine expression in the Persianate literary imaginary see Christina Oesterheld in this volume, and Phukan 2000: 100–39.

[57]Rahim, *Barvai (Bhaktiparak)*, in *Rahīm granthāvalī*: vv. 1–5.

[58]See for instance *Barvai (Bhaktiparak)*: vv. 42, 68.

[59]*Barvai (Bhaktiparak)*: vv. 86, 94–96.

[60]On Persian as a masculine domain (contrasted with feminised vernacular literary registers) see Phukan 2000: 56–64.

5. The writings of Raslin

The language profile of the writings of Sayyad Ghulam Nabi 'Raslin' Bilgrami (1699–1750) is less varied than that of Rahim, but his facility with the linguistic and literary heritage of non-Islamicate India is no less striking. As suggested by his full name, Raslin hailed from Bilgram in what is now Uttar Pradesh, a famous centre of Indo-Muslim intellectual life.[61] Like Rahim, Raslin was active in the Mughal army, but he is today mostly remembered for how he wielded his pen rather than his sword. Raslin wrote only in Braj Bhasha. Given the educational setting of Bilgram it seems certain that this poet was trained in Arabic and Persian, so becoming a Braj Bhasha poet seems to have been a conscious choice. His principal works are the short *Nakh-śikh Aṅgdarpan* (Mirror of the body, 1737) and a substantial rītigranth entitled *Rasprabodh* (Understanding of sentiment, 1742); several dozen miscellaneous (*mutafarriq* or *phuṭkal*) verses are also attributed to him.

Many aspects of Raslin's poetry suggest that he carefully cultivated an Indianised aesthetic. His preferred *takhallus* 'Raslīn' ('absorbed in sentiment') as well as much of his imagery and style declare his orientation toward riti subjects.[62] Even the distinctly Islamic opening to the *Rasprabodh*, with its verses in praise of Allah and Muhammad, is infused with Indic rather than Persianised terminology, as when Allah is hailed as '*alakha anādi ananta nita pāvana prabhu karatāra*' (invisible, without beginning or end, eternal, purifying, lord and creator); or Muhammad is said to have bound mankind with a '*satya dharma kī ḍorī*' (cord of the true moral code); or when the prophet's goodness is said to be inexpressible by even the 1000 tongues of Sheshanaga.[63] Raslin's writings are the expressions of a pious Muslim, but one who was completely conversant with Indian literary motifs.

[61]The vibrantly multilingual educational and literary practices of Bilgram are outlined in *Raslīn granthāvalī*, Sudhakar Pandey (ed) Varanasi 1987: 49–60. See also Mushirul Hasan 2004.

[62]Raslin also uses, though rarely, parts of his given name as a *takhallus*: either 'Nabi' (prophet) or 'Gulam Nabi' (slave of the prophet). Raslin has also been credited with a now-lost *nāyikābheda* work in Rekhta. Pandey, *Raslīn granthāvalī*, 1987, editor's introduction, p. 6.

[63]*Rasprabodh*, in *Raslīn granthāvalī* v. 2, v. 9, v. 10.

In harmony with the themes of Raslin's compositions is a distinct lexical style. In the two riti works the poet chose a simple *tadbhava* register, with only the occasional foray into *tatsamas* for either invocations to god (*mangalācaraṇ*) or technical vocabulary from Sanskrit literary theory. It is precisely this quality of purity in Raslin's writing—it is about as close to unmarked either through Sanskritisation or Persianisation as one could get—that is so arresting. And it was a Muslim—not a Hindu—who wrote in this manner. Of course, if we have learned anything in our discussion of register thus far, purity is decidedly not a characteristic of Braj, which often appears to be congenitally impure, that is to say, hybrid and multiregistered. When compared to all the riti authors thus far discussed, Raslin's vocabulary is by far the least Persianised, except perhaps for that of Keshavdas early in his career. For an eighteenth-century Mughal soldier with Raslin's background, this complete lack of Persianisation must have been deliberate. It is as though his work is not so much un-Persianised as de-Persianised, that is, *actively avoiding* Persian-derived forms. It is not clear what factors would have prompted Raslin to write his particular style of Braj Bhasha. Braj was not the Hindi dialect spoken in his region of Bilgram, so it was definitely a learned language for him—a language, which, alongside its literary tradition, he obviously took great care to master. Although he wrote in Braj rather than Avadhi, Raslin's chosen style bears comparison with that of *premākhyān* authors like Manjhan and Jayasi (fl. 1540s)—similarly de-Persianised in lexicon.[64] Perhaps he was inspired by the practices of these earlier Indo-Muslim authors, who had Indianised their Sufi materials in both lexical and thematic presentation.[65]

That Raslin did not avoid Persianised language in all his poems underscores the deliberation behind *Rasprabodh* and *Aṅgdarpan*. His

[64]A glossary to the *Madhumālatī* prepared by Mataprasad Gupta contains only 7 words of Perso-Arabic derivation. See *Mañjhankṛt Madhumālatī*, 1961: 489–504. The much lengthier *Padmāvat*, for its part, is said to contain only about 130 words of Perso-Arabic origin. Ramesh Mathur 1974: xxi.

[65]Perhaps the Urdu poet Insha's *Rānī Ketakī kī kahānī*, a later undertaking in de-Persianised style—this time in Khari Boli—needs to be seen not as a colonial-period innovation but as part of a longer tradition of Indo-Muslims experimenting with a *tadbhava* register.

mutafarriq verses show that he did mix his Braj with Perso-Arabic words on some occasions, as in the following hymn of praise to the twelve Imams:

> *Ādi dai Alī puni Hasana kō jasa suni,*
> *Jāhira Husaina guni jāne khās o āma ke,*
> *Puna Jain ābadīna Bākara mahāprabīna,*
> *Jāfara se haī amīna Kājima kalāma ke,*
> *Alī Rajā ke samāna Takī Alī Nakī jāna,*
> *Akasarī tē bakhāna Mēhadī tamāma ke*
> *Dūra kai sakala kāma dhyāna dhari āṭhō jāma,*
> *Japata haū sadā nāma dvādasa imāma ke*

First place is given to Ali, then hear of the fame of Hasan,
And all people humble and noble know Hussein is clearly to be counted.
Then there are Zainul Abedin, and Baqir—the greatly clever.
The words of Jafar are trustworthy like those of Kazim,
And know Taqi Ali and Naqi to be the equal of Ali Raza.
They say that (the son of) Askari is the last: Mehdi.
Putting aside all other matters and meditating day and night
I constantly repeat the names of the twelve imams.[66]

The key point is that like Rahim, Raslin had the competence to write in both Persianised and non-Persianised registers, and when he wrote in the latter it was his choice to do so. It should also be stressed that this poet's keen interest in the subtleties of Braj Bhasha poetry was part of a larger literary trend. From the sixteenth century well into the eighteenth Braj Bhasha was a popular literary language that was cultivated by a range of cultural groups both Muslim and Hindu: from brahmin pandits to kings and courtiers (whether Mughal, Rajput or Dakkani). Only a couple generations before Raslin, the Mughal court intellectual Mirza Khan had written his *Tuhfatu'l Hind* (Gift from India, c. 1675), a Braj grammar and glossary in which the language was ardently praised, and its literary principles expounded for precisely the type of Indo-Muslim poet and connoisseur embodied

[66]*Mutafarriq* v. 11 in *Raslīn granthāvalī* (Perso-Arabic vocabulary highlighted in bold type).

in the later figure of Raslin.[67] Writers like Raslin and the corpus of riti literature more broadly are emblematic of an age when the cultural field of Hindi was far more fluid than it has become today. For whatever the factors to which we attribute the Hindi-Urdu divide, whether it was the Persianised style popularised in Delhi by the Dakkani poet Vali from the early eighteenth century, or later trends at Fort William College in Calcutta, or an evolving colonial and nationalist discourse about language and religious identities, or all of the above, in the case of even a relatively late riti poet like Raslin this divide was not on the horizon yet.

CONCLUSION

No monolithic understanding of language practices—particularly not one based on language as a marker of religious identity—can account for the rich and varied semantic terrain we find in a broad cross-section of riti textuality. The five case studies presented here provide a basis for identifying and theorising a range of lexical practices from a world not yet burdened with strict community-based divisions along the lines of modern Hindi versus Urdu. The use of Sanskrit and/or Perso-Arabic words in Braj Bhasha seems to have conjured up various context-sensitive meanings. To be sure, not all practices can be explained with any strict coherence of logic. But this is probably for the best. Modern language ideologies, the product of a very specific world that has been deeply penetrated by colonialism and the cultural politics of nationalism, suffer from being too coherent, and perhaps we would do well to be suspicious of altogether clear-cut explanatory models. These case studies prompt observations of a different order.

We do not see strict correspondences between language styles and religious communities, but a close study of the texts yields suggestions, if not always bold directives, of how else we might

[67]A recent discussion of this intriguing work, probably written at the court of Azam Shah (son of Aurangzeb), is R.S. McGregor 2002: 924–44.

interpret apparent trends. Some practices are familiar from the modern period, others not. Probing the less familiar ones is particularly necessary because it is outside our conceptual comfort zones—beyond our naturalised ways of thinking—that we stand the greatest chance of apprehending critical features of language practices in Indian pre-modernity.

Sanskritised language was one major register available to riti poets, but it is not particularly 'Hindu' in its orientation. In the riti world a Sanskritised register was often chosen for scholarly writing, where it added a necessary complexity of expression that it would not have been easy to obtain using simpler *tadbhava* style. Highlighting the existence—and even prominence when it comes to scholarly genres—of Sanskritised language in riti texts serves as a useful corrective to the commonly held notion that Sanskritisation originates in the nineteenth century and is driven by divisive imperatives. Another place where preference for Sanskritised over Persianised language is seen is in the panegyric form, which tended to be written in a high *kāvya* style. What is interesting here, given modern language dichotomies, is that Indo-Muslim rulers and notables (Jahangir, Akbar Shah) could be portrayed according to a Sanskritising aesthetic in precisely the same manner as Hindu ones (Bir Singh Deo Bundela, Shivaji). Even as late as the seventeenth century, Sanskrit *kāvya* style maintained a hold over certain discourses of moral and political authority, regardless of the religion or cultural orientation of the ruler.

Incorporating Perso-Arabic vocabulary into Braj poetry also needs to be seen in terms of a range of interpretive possibilities. At times there may not have been any special meaning to such usages, which is to say that Persianised language was chosen either for aesthetic or largely functional reasons. Regarding the former, the choice to use Perso-Arabic alongside Sanskrit and *tadbhava* registers was an attempt to fashion the most beautiful poem possible with the best ingredients from any language available. Riti poets had an extensive lexical palette to choose from and a poet—perhaps like a painter selecting his colours—could range between languages and dialects—according to what best suited the context, or produced

the most interesting literary effects. One of these literary effects was rhyme, which was largely unknown in the riti poets' (predominantly) Sanskrit models.

Mixed language is yet another.profile, with many different permutations. Poets may switch from one register to another as they move between scenes or genres. Some patterns of mixing register and language may be seen as part of an aesthetics of rapprochement; but the same technique may also engender an aesthetics of reproach. Keshavdas's use of Persianised language in his later works suggests a new spirit of cooperation between the Mughals and his regional kingdom of Orchha. Similarly, the hybridity and macaronic style we find in his contemporary Rahim illustrate a particular moment of cultural openness and experimentation. Hindi with its flexibility in registers and dialect forms was particularly suited to such experimentation. But hybridity may have harsher overtones, too: Bhushan's hostility towards the Indo-Muslim political establishment finds expression in a trenchant multi-lingual style.

Raslin's is the least hybrid of the registers examined here. His *tadbhava* style is, ironically, somehow cultivated in its simplicity and the lack of Persianised language is an intentional silence in this writer's voice. For Raslin's register is not just *tadbhava*: in his riti works he actively eschews Persian-derived forms—a reminder that conscious experiments with de-Persianisation and de-Sanskritisation long predate the modern period. In some sense Raslin's style makes him—a Muslim—the ultimate Hindi poet.

In sum, there is every indication that language register was manipulated with great sensitivity and in a range of contexts by the Hindi poets of early modern India. It may now be difficult for modern readers to retrieve the multiple nuances of such a diversity of language practices, but it is instructive to try to do so. The lexical orientations of particular authors were not concomitant to being a member of a given community, but a matter of careful choice. The choices were not the same as today's choices, but they are choices that we would do well to pay attention to in any reconstruction of the Hindi linguistic and literary past.

4

Dialogism in a Medieval Genre
The Case of the Avadhi Epics

Thomas de Bruijn

DIVISIONS AND DIALOGUES

The notion of a profound and unbridgeable division between Hindus and Muslims in modern Indian culture that surfaced at the beginning of the twentieth century imposes an antagonism between cultural traditions that may not have been there in the same form in earlier periods. This imposition calls for a careful re-examination of pre-modern cultural forms and the divisions that created them but have been obscured by projecting modern political divisions on the medieval situation.

The present essay will investigate some general characteristics of pre-modern cultural categories and divisions before focusing on the composite genre of medieval Avadhi epics. This literary genre presents us with an example of a cultural form that was developed by Indian Sufi poets, but in which a Bhakti poet like Tulsidas (ca. 1532–1623) found himself very much at home when writing his