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INTRODUCTION

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LITERATURE AND WRITING

THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE MUGHALS throw into deep shadow the kingdoms and cultures that preceded them in north India. The Mughals are assumed to have changed everything: politics, literature, religion, even language. But how can we know what the Mughals changed when we know so little of what happened before?¹ What was South Asia like before the Mughals? Most of us associate the preceding period with the ‘high’ Delhi sultanate with its idiosyncratic rulers, bureaucrats, and historians. But this had come to an end soon after Timur’s bloody invasion of north India in 1398. Was the invasion the end of an era? What happened after Timur left?

The ‘long fifteenth century’ between Timur’s invasion and Humayun’s return to India in 1555, a time of remarkable change and invention in literature, culture, and politics, forms the chronological core of most

¹ On British colonialism, Sheldon Pollock makes a similar point, ‘[W]e cannot know how colonialism changed South Asia if we do not know what was there to be changed’; Sheldon Pollock (ed.), *Forms of Knowledge in Early Modern Asia: Explorations in the Intellectual History of India and Tibet, 1500–1800*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2011, p. 1.

of the essays in this volume. This is a period too often masked by the centralizing categories of the Mughal, colonial, and postcolonial bureaucracies that were to follow. A quarter century ago, historians began to reveal the eighteenth century as a time of cosmopolitan ferment and experimentation; it is now time to unveil new scholarship on another century too long regarded as backward and interstitial. The conventional periodization that blanks out the long fifteenth century from literary histories is not because nothing happened then. Quite the opposite; it is the diversity and intensity of politics and culture in this period that have rebuffed scholars searching for singular ideologies or narratives. This was a time of cultural production in languages and idioms that ran into each other, in vernaculars 'literated' for the first time, in the old classical languages modulated for new patrons. There was a certain 'democratization' of written culture: arriviste patrons could have genealogies and tales composed; performers could reinvent the epics for the new world; upwardly mobile chieftains could lay claim to languages and forms from which they were previously excluded. Spiritual yearnings were expressed in new vocabularies: some expressed the injustices of the present, others the worldly and other-worldly aspirations of the new patrons. Political turmoil meant that people travelled: in search of employment or business opportunities, for pilgrimage, war, or pleasure. Thanks to travel, a north Indian vernacular—*bhakha*—was disseminated and literized across north India while the transregional High Languages of Sanskrit, Arabic, and Persian continued to wield cultural cachet. The decentralization of power also meant that there was a demand for literary specialists as chieftains and merchants all sought poets, composers, and scribes. Many of these specialists were multilingual and travelled widely in search of patrons and opportunities. It is this hybrid, restless, multilingual ferment that nation-centred, monolingual scholarship has been unable to comprehend. How does this plethora of voices and texts relate to fifteenth-century polities? The contribution of this volume is that for the first time, it foregrounds and embraces the diversity of what we have called the long fifteenth century and investigates the links between politics and cultural production.

LITERATURE AS HISTORY

Textbooks generally start from 'hard' evidence and documents such as coins, inscriptions, and historical chronicles typically compiled in

centres of political power, to which literature and the arts are added as supplementary ornaments, usually under the rubrics of ‘patronage’ and, in the case of vernacular devotional literature, of an undefined ‘popular culture’. For a richly fluid time like the fifteenth century in north India, literary texts are often the only way we have to write social history, to write individuals and groups, their self-representation and worldview into the picture, which is otherwise a largely empty and dichotomous one of court and people, rulers and dynasties, Muslims and Hindus, men and of course, hardly any women at all. To study these voices and texts, and to study them in relation to each other and within a wider comparative framework, means attempting to write a thicker and more comprehensive history than that usually available in textbooks. For this reason we have tried to include in this book the widest possible range, not just of cultural production but also of social contexts and types of self-expression, and to connect and intersect them in all possible ways.

The long fifteenth century was not a canon-making period. As Delhi after Timur became just one of many regional power centres (although always one with great symbolic importance), it becomes necessary to adjust our lens and look not for the great bureaucratic projects, imperial histories, or central linguistic and literary experiments of the Mughals, but for other genres of recording and remembering. Simon Digby remarks in this volume that after the relative stability of the greater Delhi Sultanate, the ‘lesser’ was a time during which few histories were written and from which even fewer survive. This remark is true only if we consider political histories from Delhi—Persian court histories continued to be written in Malwa, Jaunpur (although these do not survive), Gujarat, the Deccan, and in smaller sultanates such as Kalpi²—nevertheless, once we begin to look at other literary survivals and acknowledge how profuse and diverse they are, we find that each genre marks history in its own way. One basic assumption underlying this book is that producing literature in the form

² In Malwa, Shihab Hakim wrote *Ma’āsir-i Mahmūd Shāhī* (completed 1467–8); six historical works in Persian survive from the Gujarat sultanate (see S. Sheikh, *Forging a Region: Sultans, Traders and Pilgrims in Gujarat 1200–1500*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010, pp. 11–12 for details); and for Kalpi, Muhammad Bihamad Khani’s *Tā’rikh-i-Muḥammadi* (1438–9), translated by Muhammad Zaki, Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1972, is an important record.

of heroic narratives, genealogical accounts, local or caste *puranas*, or biographies and hagiographies was a way of producing one's own history or inscribing oneself in larger histories. A large and varied body of texts in this period do exactly that—Aparna Kapadia's local Sanskrit narratives, Ramya Sreenivasan's vernacular ones, the Jain genealogies in the Apabhramsha texts of Eva de Clercq's essay, or the Persian texts by provincial Sufis in Francesca Orsini's. These are deliberate attempts by kings, merchants, and spiritual figures, through the medium of professional poets or members of their circles, to create narratives that become the history of their family or lineage and insert their protagonists or patrons into the history of a place or of a wider group. Some such histories are in book or manuscript form, while others are carved on stone inscriptions that record individual achievements and family trees on civic and religious buildings. History can also be found in other genres of texts, including in the many glossaries and dictionaries produced at this time, some that offer etymologies and lexical histories in their explanations, others that signal the linguistic needs of their commissioners and compilers. In the visual realm too, painters represented their surroundings even when they deliberately relocated 'classical' tales to local landscapes and climates, turning them into records of their own times. Many such conceptions of history are explored in this volume.

In addition, the long fifteenth century saw the emergence of the powerful voices and personalities of Ramanand (whatever his historicity), Kabir, Nanak, Raidas, Mira Bai, and Surdas, to name but a few. Although their words (*bani*) did not attempt to produce history in the same way as the ones mentioned above, they produced history all the same. Through their distinctly new forms of articulation, the rapid circulation of their words, and in a few cases, their active proselytizing, these figures prefigured the creation of widely shared discourses and new groups (called *panths*).³ If a new form of literature and its textualization is always linked to the emergence of a new power (with consequent

³ These Sants and *bhagats* (devotees) are often described in terms of a Bhakti 'movement' and a kind of 'social revolution', though usually unsupported by socio-historical dimensions and contextualization; for a recent book that seeks to address this question seriously, see Purushottam Agrawal, *Akath kabānī prem kī: Kabīr kī kavītā aur unkā samay* (Love's Unspeakable Tale: Kabir's Poetry and His Times), New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 2009.

realignments in the field of power), the emergence of these voices denotes a changed polity and the confident assertion of new historical subjects. Even though the words and songs of these charismatic figures were textualized only a century later, they marked as well as produced important socio-historical change.⁴ In the century following this textualization, their biographies and hagiographies followed in great number as their followers systematized the memorialization of both *panth* and *bani*.⁵

In the absence of massive bureaucratic history-making projects, what we get from this period are texts representing the political and cultural aspirations of many of the stakeholders in the patchwork of authority. While the three warrior tales of Sreenivasan's article or the Sanskrit compositions described by Kapadia were written in different sectarian milieux, they come out of remarkably similar social circumstances, having been composed for small-time rulers or chieftains of garrison towns, each in tense subjection to an overlord, dazzled by the promise of the city, and beset by anxiety about controlling women for marriage and men for battle. These are romances, but are histories too. Their novelty lies in the adaptation of genres, the choice of literary languages, and the range of media. With the imperial ideology of the Mughals, the entrepreneurial world of such warlords was no longer viable and their attempts to inscribe themselves retreated into the oral realm where they still survive. This is why some of the narratives bear close resemblance to the oral epics that still circulate in South Asia. The eighteenth century was another time

⁴ The earliest dated manuscript that contains song-verses by Kabir, Surdas, and the like, *Pada Sūradāsajī kā* (ed. Gopal Narayan Bahura, with an essay by Ken Bryant, Jaipur: Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum, 1984) is dated 1582, while the *Ādi Granth* compiled by Guru Arjan is the earliest systematic collection (dated 1604, though possibly earlier versions are found in the Goindwal and Harsahai manuscripts of the early 1570s); see G.S. Mann, *The Making of Sikh Scriptures*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001; see also J.S. Deol, 'Text and Lineage in Early Sikh History: Issues in the Study of the *Ādi Granth*', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 64(1), 2001: 34–58.

⁵ Biographies, lists, and dictionaries and lists of model devotees and poet-saints were composed in the seventeenth century within the Vallabha *sampraday* (e.g., *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī vārtā*), the Dadu *panth* (Raghavdas's *Bhaktamāl*), the Ramanandi *sampraday* (Nabhadas's *Bhaktamāl*), and the Sikh *panth* (*Janamsākhīs*); for an overview, see W.E. Callewaert and R. Snell (eds), *According to Tradition: Hagiographical Writing in India*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1980.

when such narratives were literized, and literary production from the period was similarly dismissed by scholars as lacking refinement.

MULTILINGUALISM AND LANGUAGE DOMAINS

While it has long been recognized that this was the period when modern languages came into being, language histories have been overshadowed by the rancour of subsequent community histories. As several scholars have documented, the history of Hindi has been wrenched from the history of Urdu in the twentieth century.⁶ Thus, Malik Muhammad Jayasi's *Padmāvat* (1540) is not seen as part of the history of Urdu because of its Indic vocabulary, while Sufi tales are seen as too 'Islamic' to form part of the history of Hindi. However, many of the surviving narrative texts from fifteenth-century north India arose from a common aspirational landscape and evolving multilingual genre-bending, regardless of sectarian orientation.

Another contention of this book is that north India, like any other part of India and most parts of the world in this period, was a multilingual society, and that cultural historians have not yet taken this basic 'conditioning condition' (Bourdieu) seriously enough.⁷ Multilingualism took different forms, particularly because literacy was often limited to particular scribal groups and educated elites, and because diglossia, or the distinction between a High Language and Low Language, meant that many forms of vernacular textual production, though documented, have come to us only as traces in the archive, and not as texts. This is the case, for example, of the sustained interest that Persianized elites, and provincial Sufis in particular, had in Hindavi songs and narratives (see Chapter 14 in this volume). We find many traces of such multilingualism—'so-and-so composed songs also in Hindavi'—but very few actual texts, since the protocols of Persian anthologies and biographical dictionaries (*tazkiras*) meant that only Persian verses

⁶ Francesca Orsini (ed.), *Before the Divide: Hindi and Urdu Literary Culture*, New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2010, Introduction.

⁷ By far the most sophisticated account of South Asian literary history, the essays in Sheldon Pollock's *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003a) each deal with one language, and multilingualism is dealt with mostly as diglossia in the relationship between Sanskrit and an Indian vernacular language.

would be quoted.⁸ In other cases, multilingualism is outside the text; the sophisticated Sufi authors of Avadhi romances probably read Persian, as their awareness of *masnavi* conventions shows, but *chose* to use almost no Arabo-Persian words in their poems. Or, again, the protocols of Persian texts meant that, with very few exceptions, dialogues that explicitly took place in Hindavi would be written down in Persian, leaving the oral vernacular world outside the text (Chapter 14). In other cases, the diglossic relation is flaunted, as in Vishnudas's supposed 'translation' of Valmiki's *Rāmāyana* into the vernacular (Bangha), though little of the style of the superimposed language/text remains.

While north India was not a homogenous region in political terms, it was a well-connected cultural and linguistic region. Its linguistic economy can be described as one of 'multiple diglossias',⁹ with several high languages—Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit—and a general spoken vernacular (what we call here Hindavi) written in the Persian, Kaithi, or Devanagari scripts. We use the term Hindavi, which was the term (together with Hindi and Hindui) used for the north Indian vernacular in Persian sources, intentionally in order to avoid the split history of Hindi and Urdu that has dominated modern scholarship and language consciousness.¹⁰ Prakrit had a limited but symbolically important status

⁸ See, for example, 'Abd al-Qadir Badauni, *Muntakhab al-tavārikh*, W.H. Lowe (ed.) and W. Haig (trans.), Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1898–1925, vol. 3, pp. 238ff.

⁹ See María Angeles Gallego, 'The Languages of Medieval Iberia and Their Religious Dimension', *Medieval Encounters* 9(1), 2003: 107–39.

¹⁰ We consider Hindavi here as synonymous with *bhakha*. Though modern scholarship distinguishes between western and eastern Hindi, and between Avadhi, Braj Bhasha, Khari Boli (Hindi and Urdu), and so on, it is our contention—supported by the wide circulation of texts like the 'Avadhi' *Candāyan* in Delhi and of Kabir's poems or Gwaliyari *dhrupad* all over North India—that vernacular (or *bhakha*, 'language', as they are called in vernacular sources) literary forms travelled easily and widely at this time within a unified language domain, and that script was a function of written transmission and not intrinsic to a language, at least in this case. True, terms like 'eastern' (*purbi*) and 'of Gwalior' (*gwaliyari*) were also sometimes used in this period, but it was only at the end of sixteenth century that Braj Bhasha emerged as a separate, specific, (partly) codified literary vernacular; see Allison Busch, *Poetry of Kings: The Classical Hindi Literature of Mughal India*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011b.

for Jains, who also continued to write in Apabhramsha until the sixteenth century (Chapter 12). A simplified form of Persian seems to have been a spoken lingua franca, while individuals and groups maintained spoken languages such as ‘Turki’ or Pashtu for generations. Material traces of this multilingualism are scant yet unmistakable: Persian dictionaries compiled in India in this period are particularly multi-lingual and include Turki and Hindavi synonyms (Chapter 5); the poor command over Persian of some Pashtu-speaking Afghan *amirs* is occasionally commented upon; and a few compositions of the Sikh gurus show that simplified Persian was current as a spoken language in Punjab in the late-fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.¹¹ Persian words had, of course, entered everyday language use, particularly in the domains of administration, power, and warfare, and can be found inflected by local phonology in a number of texts. Even a text famous for its low percentage of Perso-Arabic lexical items, such as Jayasi’s romance *Padmāvat*, employs a number of such words when describing the sultan’s army, suggesting at the same time a highly heteroglot body of soldiers:

Dhani sultān jebika saṃsārū,
Sabai turuk sirtāj bakhāne,
Lākhanha mīr bahādur jangī,
Jebā, kholi, nāga sō maṛhe,
Barana barana au pāntiḥi pāntī,
Behara behara sab kai bolī,

Uhai kaṭaka asa jorai pārū.
Tabala bāja au bāndhe bāne.
Jantra kamānaine tīr khadangī.
Lejim ghālī irākinha caṛhe.[...]
Calī so senā bhāntiḥi bhāntī.
Bidhi yah khāni kahān saun kholī.¹²

Happy is the **Sultan** who owns the world, and who can assemble such an army!
 All sing praises of the **Turkish chiefs**, with **drums** and **war-attire**.
 Thousands of **Mirs** and **brave warriors**, with mechanic **bows** and *khadangī*
arrows.

¹¹ For references to Afghans’ poor command of Persian, see I.H. Siddiqui, *Waqī’at-e-Mushtaqui of Shaikh Rizq Ullah Mushtaqui: A Source of Information on the Life and Conditions in the Pre-Mughal India*, New Delhi: Indian Council of Historical Research and Northern Book Centre, 1993, p. 9; for the ‘spoken Persian’ hymns of the early Sikh Gurus, see C.S. Shackle, ‘Approaches to the Persian Loans in the *Ādi Granth*’, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 41(1), 1978: 73–96.

¹² Malik Muhammad Jayasi, *Padmāvat: Malik Muhammad Jāyāsī kṛt mahākāvya*, Vasudev Sharan Agrawal (ed.), Chirgaon: Sahitya Sadan, 1998 [1956], pp. 499, 1–4, 6–7.

Ready with **armour**, cannons, and leg-covers, with **iron-stringed bows** they
mounted Iraqi [horses]

Kind after kind, row after row, the varied army went.

All differed in speech—where did God open such a treasure?¹³

While Persian remained the language of scholarship and political theory of the Delhi sultanates and the regional sultanates, and Persian poetry, both ‘classical’ and Sufi, was taught and written in *madrasas*, Sufi centres (*khanqahs*), and courts all over north India, there are signs that parts of administration and cultural production began to encompass both Persian and what, for the reasons explained above, we have called Hindavi. Meanwhile, the knowledge of Persian began to spread among Hindu scribal groups.¹⁴ Some of the very few Sultanate documents extant are bilingual, with Persian on top and Hindavi in the scribal Kaithi script at the bottom.¹⁵ Provincial Sufis clearly wrote and listened to and thought about both Persian and Hindavi poems and songs (see Chapter 14), and the tradition of writing romances in Hindavi

¹³ Jayasi, *Padmāvat* (1998), p. 527. A vernacular tale composed for Baghela patrons from 1493 who were familiar with, as Simon Digby puts it, ‘the governmental framework of Muslim power in the Gangetic plain’ shows a comparatively high number of Perso-Arabic words related to the military: *jin/zin* (reins), *samser* (sword), *tirandāz* (archer), *taslim* (subordination), *asrarlişrar*; see Bhima Kavi’s *Ḍangvai Kathā*, S. Misra (ed.), Allahabad: Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, 1966; S. Digby, ‘Two Captains of the Jawnpur Sultanate’, in *Circumambulations in South Asian History: Essays in Honour of Dirk H.A. Kolff*, J. Gommans and O. Prakash (eds), Leiden: Brill, 2003, p. 165.

¹⁴ The first manuals for learning Persian in India were written in Sanskrit by Jains; see S.R. Sarma, ‘Sanskrit Manuals for Learning Persian’, in *Adab Shenasi*, A.D. Safavi (ed.), Aligarh: Aligarh Muslim University, 1996, pp. 1–12. According to tradition, Guru Nanak himself got some Persian (‘Torki’) education through a *maulvi* and there are a few Persian and mixed-language compositions in the *Ādi Granth*; W.H. McLeod, *Early Sikh Tradition: A Study of the Janam-sākhis*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980, and Shackle (1978), p. 82–3.

¹⁵ A land-grant from a village near the *qasba* of Sandila (now dist. Hardoi) to a local Sheikh from Sultan Ibrahim II, son of Sikandar Lodi, dated 927H (1520), records the deed in Persian *ta’liq* and in Hindi Kaithi script below, and there is a similar (though illegible in print) grant from Sher Shah’s time; M. Mohammad Shafi, ‘Three Old Documents’, in *Proceedings of the Idara-i Maarif-i Islamia*, Lahore, 1936, pp. 281–5. (See Fig. 1).

begun with Da'ud's *Candāyan* that addressed both worldly/courtly and spiritual audiences continued in this period (see Chapter 10). Sanskrit musical treatises continued to be written, but the same musical knowledge became available in Persian and, so we are told, in *bhakha* at Gwalior thanks to Raja Man Singh Tomar himself.¹⁶ Music in north India developed in widely different environments, patronized by Turk, Afghan, and Indian rulers alike.¹⁷ In contrast with the later art of the book under the Mughals, among the books illustrated under the regional sultans was a vernacular text, the *Candāyan* again (see Chapter 11), indicating that the taste for fine books included what was probably the most popular Hindavi romance of the time.

Persian itself was 'provincialized' in the fifteenth century. After the great transregional moments of Mahmud's Ghazni, Amir Khusraw's Delhi, and Timur's Herat, Persian scholarship in the fifteenth-century regional sultanates, whether concerned with lexicography, medicine, or cooking, took into account local material (Chapters 5 and 6). Large-scale patronage of Sanskrit literature and scholarship in north India was limited and was similarly 'provincialized' or adapted to the political and cultural demands of the time. A striking example is the *Sulaimaccaritra*, a Sanskrit life of King Solomon written by the poet Kalyana and commissioned by a Lodi Afghan amir, Lad Khan, in early sixteenth-century Lucknow,¹⁸ or the itinerant poet Gangadhara who tuned the tools of

¹⁶ See H.N. Dvivedi, *Mān Simh aur Mān-kutūhal*, Gwalior: Vidya Mandir Prakashan, 1956 reprint.

¹⁷ After the *Ghunyāt al-munya* (1374–5), commissioned by the governor of Gujarat Malik Shams al-Din Ibrahim Hasan Abu Khan [Rajā], the *Lahjat-i Sikandar Shāhī* was composed in our period by Hammad Yahya al-Kabuli during the reign of Sikandar Lodi (r. 1489–1517); see F.N. Delvoye, 'Les chants *Dhrupad* en langue Braj des poètes-musiciens de l'Inde Moghole', in *Littératures médiévales de l'Inde du Nord. Contributions de Charlotte Vaudeville et de ses élèves*, Françoise Mallison (ed.), Paris: Publications de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient, 1991, pp. 139–85. See also Madhu Trivedi's *The Emergence of the Hindustani Tradition: Music, Dance, and Drama in North India, 13th to 19th Centuries*, New Delhi: Three Essays Collective, 2012.

¹⁸ C. Minkowski, 'King David in Oudh: A Bible Story in Sanskrit and the Just King at an Afghan Court', Inaugural Lecture for the Boden Professorship, University of Oxford, 7 March 2006, <http://users.ox.ac.uk/~ball2185/Minkowski.Inaugural.pdf> (accessed 14 June 2014).

Sanskrit *kāvya* to the realities of his patron Gangadasa in the small local court of Champaner (Kapadia). The Sanskrit model letters and documents of the late fifteenth-century *Lekhapaddhati* include local words and even ‘Sanskritize’ some colloquialisms.¹⁹ Sanskrit poets thus turned to new patrons—local rulers or the sultans²⁰—or else turned to the vernacular, or both, as the careers of Keshavdas’s ancestors from Gwalior to the new Bundela principality of Orchha attest.²¹ Later, as Sheldon Pollock, Muzaffar Alam, and others show, both Persian and Sanskrit would make a spectacular comeback under the new imperial Mughal dispensation, finding new patrons and new social roles.

Our strategies for grasping the multilingual quality of the social and literary/cultural world in this period have been several. One has been to focus specifically on bilingual or multilingual texts (Sheikh, Orsini, Karomat), trying to gauge the conditions under which the different languages were used in the same place, the assumptions behind the use of each language and the relationship between them. For example, if one striking characteristic of Persian dictionaries in this period is that they included among other languages not just Arabic, but also Turki and Hindavi, what kinds of words were included, and were they among the lemmas or synonyms in the definition? Were they the words that the dictionary sought to explain or those the dictionary used to explain? (See Karomat, Pellò). Another strategy has been to focus on a particular place and explore the language and literature traditions that were current there, as in the literature of the Jain merchants and the Tomar court in the Gwalior of de Clercq and Bangha’s essays.²² A third strategy has

¹⁹ C.D. Dalal and G.K. Shrigondekar (eds), *Lekhapaddhati*, Baroda: Central Library, 1925, Preface, p. vii. There are several earlier precedents for such reverse Sanskritization of Apabhramsha words; see R. Salomon, ‘The *Ukti-vyakti-prakarana* as a Manual of Spoken Sanskrit’, *Indo-Iranian Journal*, 24(1), 1982: 13–25.

²⁰ For example, the Sanskrit *kāvya* on Sultan Mahmud Begada; see A. Kapadia, ‘The Last Cakravartin? The Gujarat Sultan as “Universal King” in Fifteenth Century Sanskrit Poetry’, *The Medieval History Journal*, 16(1), 2013: 63–88.

²¹ See Allison Busch, ‘Culture from the Cowherd’s Mountain: Gwalior and the Early History of Courtly Brajbhasha’, paper presented at the conference ‘After Timur Came’, SOAS, London, June 2007.

²² Another case could be Jaunpur, a courtly environment in which both romances and songs in the vernacular were patronized as well as Persian poetry and scholarship; for romances, see Behl (Chapter 10 in this volume) and his

been to look for traces or mentions of other languages and language tastes in monolingual texts; even if the protocols of transmission of a particular archive exclude verses and narratives in other languages, traces and mentions are enough to show that they were known and circulated at the time. Thus, while seeking to understand the logic internal to the formation and transmission of each archive (courtly and *madrassa* Persian, Jain, courtly *bhasha*, Bhakti, Sufi), it has been crucial for us to also question their limits and exclusions, and to place them within a larger framework. It has also been important to consider the world of orality and performance which some of these texts refer to (for example, music treatises, which famously do not include song texts) and the oral-performative aspects of the High Languages, Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic, for words and phrases and verses from the High Languages circulated orally beyond the realm of the educated, and can be found in the songs of ‘unlettered’ *bhagats*.

VERNACULARIZATION

The most influential and compelling argument about the relationship between language, literature, and politics, and between a High Language (Sanskrit) and Indian vernaculars has been put forward by Sheldon Pollock.²³ Marshalling an impressive range of genres and examples, he argues that: (a) vernacular languages are first literized or written down, usually for documentary purposes, and then, often after a considerable gap, are literalized, or used for literary, imaginative, performative, and expressive purposes (what he calls ‘workly’); (b) any vernacular innovation is linked to a reconfiguration of the culture-power order, when in place

translation of *Madhumalati* (with S. Weightman), *Madhumālātī: An Indian Sufi Romance*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000; for music, see the mention in Digby (Chapter 2 in this volume) as well as Allyn Miner’s paper ‘Ragas and Raginis, Sufis and Sants: Music in North India in the Early Sixteenth Century’, forthcoming in F. Orsini and K. Schofield (eds), *Tellings and Texts: Singing, Story-telling and Performance in North India*; for Persian poetry at Jaunpur, see the *Dastūr al-shu‘arā* otherwise known as the ‘Jaunpur Anthology’, MS. Or 4110; for a short description of its contents, see C. Rieu, *Supplement to the Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts in the British Museum*, London: British Museum, 1895, pp. 232–3.

²³ Sheldon I. Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India*: University of California Press, 2006.

of cosmopolitan imperial polities more regional, vernacular polities emerge; (c) vernaculars then themselves become cosmopolitan and are used simultaneously, as had been already the case with Sanskrit, both for political and literary discourse, 'with the court functioning as engine for the stimulation of literary production of a textualized sort';²⁴ (d) in order to become literarized, the vernacular has to emulate the superimposed models of literature of the cosmopolitan language, for 'there is no parthenogenesis in culture'.²⁵ As he puts it, 'vernacular poets achieved literary expressivity by appropriating and domesticating models of literary-language use from superposed cultural formations'.²⁶ Pollock is very clear that what he means by literature is what his authors meant by literature: *kavya* and *sahitya*,²⁷ a set of genres and discourses highly regulated by the 'science of literature', *sahityashastra*. 'By contrast, the world of the "uncultured", that is, of the uncourtly and noncosmopolitan languages of Place [*deshabhasha*], was subliterate: a domain of the sung, the unwritten, the oral'.²⁸ And since his Sanskrit theorists disdained orality and literature in non-cosmopolitan languages and consigned songs to a different order of discourse (*gita*), for Pollock, too, literature that does not follow the courtly practice of *kavya* is simply not literature at all.²⁹

²⁴ Pollock (2006), p. 337.

²⁵ Pollock (2006), p. 318.

²⁶ Pollock (2006), p. 298.

²⁷ And *prashasti*, or 'workly' political discourse in inscriptions.

²⁸ Pollock (2006), p. 299.

²⁹ At the end of a very articulate and convincing plea for the importance and radical innovation of writing for literature, Pollock comes to some rather startling conclusions:

Only authors of written work are included in the canons included in ethno-historical accounts of literature; the oral poets stands entirely outside of history ... Such oral culture is not only unknowable in its historicity, it is excluded from the literary history made by committing texts to writing ... It is no redundancy to say that a literary work does not exist until it becomes literate (2006, pp. 317–8).

This seems hard to adhere to in light of the robust oral literary life of Kabir, Surdas, Mira, and so on. Elsewhere he acknowledges that 'the ongoing interaction between the oral and the literate constitutes one of the most remarkable and unique features of Indian literary culture. If oral

This model—of the emergence of vernacular literary culture with the making of vernacular polities and the literarization of the vernacular through emulation of the superimposed model of Sanskrit by (mostly Brahmin) poets at court who knew Sanskrit well and shared the conceptual framework of Sanskrit poetics but wanted to innovate—works perfectly in the case of Kannada literature at the Hoysala court, but it works less well for north India for a number of reasons. First and more obvious is the substantial presence of a new High Language of literary and political discourse, Persian, which spread over north India through the sultanate administration, *madrassa* education, and the culture of the Sufis. That Persian was not only a high cultural model but also, in a simplified form, a kind of vernacular in north India is demonstrated by the fact that when Guru Nanak, or later Guru Arjan, used it for hymns, they used a spoken, broken, and already phonologically assimilated Persian and not the Persian of literary models.³⁰ Second, while Sanskrit-educated Brahmin poets later did produce the kind of superimposed vernacular literary culture described by Pollock—notably by Keshavdas at the small Bundela principality of Orchha—they were by no means the only or principal agents of literature at this time.³¹ As we shall see, many of the authors of poems and narratives in fifteenth-century north India were Muslims, *kayasthas*, Jain *panditas*, or of low-caste, unknown or mixed background, even when later tradition strove to ascribe hidden Brahmin pedigree to them. It is then unsurprising that the literary genres they preferred and the literary models they followed were less Sanskritic than in Kannada and other similar regional literary cultures. As a matter of fact, fifteenth-century vernacular literature consists mainly of songs, *dohas* or couplets, and *kathas* or narratives; some were indeed produced at regional or even smaller courts, but others were aired in the open

compositions could be literized, literized compositions could also return to oral circulation, and the interplay between oral and literate composition and transcription could become dizzyingly complex' (2006, p. 316).

³⁰ See the examples in Shackle (1978), pp. 73–96.

³¹ This is the kind of literary culture analysed by Allison Busch in her *Poetry of Kings* (2011b); but to say that it was a 'singularly influential form of culture that occupied the entire conceptual domain of aestheticized language use' (Pollock [2006], p. 322) seems unwarranted.

'Bhakti public sphere' of towns and villages.³² Songs and singer-composers, *vaggeyakaras*, were highly prized and at the centre of courtly performances, as well as of devotional practices and temples. *Kathas*, songs, and *dohas* were genres practised by a range of different poets—Naths, Sants, Sufis, Jains, *bhakha*, and also sometimes Persian court poets—and the high degree of intertextuality in their titles, tropes, and images shows that they circulated in all these domains. Literary genres were thus a palimpsest on which every poet wrote from his particular perspective.

Instead of Pollock's model of vernacularization sketched above, then, we propose to understand literary culture in fifteenth-century north India as multilingual and multi-locational, mirroring the social forces that were active and vocal in the polities of the regional sultans and Rajput kingdoms and in the religious marketplace of the time. There were distinct trends to literary production: Persian–Hindavi bilinguality in the political and literary domains of the sultans and of Sufi religious and literary practice (Chapters 14 and 10); Apabhramsha–Hindavi/*bhakha* bilinguality in Jain circles (Chapter 12); vernacular literary production with significant gestures towards Sanskrit in certain Rajput polities (Chapters 13 and 8); and the emergence of strong vernacular voices in the 'Bhakti public sphere'.

In terms of language names, the modern regional linguistic categories of Braj Bhasha, Avadhi, Bhojpuri, and Khari Boli are not reflected in fifteenth-century sources, which instead speak of a generic *bhakha* (*bhasha*) or Hindavi/Hindui/Hindi in Persian texts as the vernacular of north India.³³ These general terms denote a certain lack of grammatical and taxonomic interest in the vernacular; for example, Da'ud's romance *Candāyan*, classed by modern writers as 'Avadhi', was recited in Delhi without any comment on the eastern flavour of the language.³⁴ It was

³² See Agrawal (2009) and C.L. Novetzke, 'Bhakti and its Public', *International Journal of Hindu Studies*, 11(3), 2007: 255.

³³ To avoid confusing this early definition of the north Indian vernacular with modern Hindi (Khari Boli), we will use Hindavi, as previously indicated.

³⁴ See in contrast the eighteenth century writer Anandram Mukhlis's comment on the 'sweetness of the *purabi* tongue' when he heard it recited by his servant; S. Phukan, "'Through Throats Where Many Rivers Meet": The Ecology of Hindi in the Persian Imagination', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 38(1), 2001: 35.

only late in the sixteenth century, thanks to its status as the language of court poetry with an *alamkarashastra* pedigree, that Braj Bhasha was recognized as a named language, a ‘cosmopolitan vernacular’ with a standard poetic language that needed to be learnt properly from teachers and through *riti-granths* or poetic manuals.³⁵ As is well known, the growing status and popularity of Braj Bhasha poetry induced poets like Tulsidas to use it for his songs and verses.³⁶

The generic terminology for the vernacular also suggests a continuum with locally produced songs and tales that could travel and be understood over the whole of north India. Oral performers and performance contexts were probably crucial in this respect, with performers able to modify inflections and replace words that were too local while keeping to the metrical scheme. Such changes would then be written down by scribes and resurface as linguistic variations in texts, thus the great differences remarked between the ‘eastern’ and ‘western’ recensions of Kabir’s songs.³⁷ Writing was in some cases intrinsic to the production of literature—as in the case of works written for patrons—but in other cases it was a function of transmission, or else subservient to performance. The ‘oral’ texts of the performer’s notebook were of a different class from the ‘literary’ texts of the *pothi* or *grantha*.³⁸

³⁵ If not grammars per se (until the Persian *Tuhfat al-Hind*, 1675). See Busch (2011b), who also takes up the suggestion that this codification (or choice of name?) was partly influenced by the adoption of Braj Bhasha by Bengali Gaudiya Vaishnavas in their mixed poetic language of Braj Buli (mixed Braj Bhasha and Bengali).

³⁶ The songs collected in his *Kṛṣṇa gītāvalī* (ca. 1590), *Gītāvalī* and the poems in the *Vinaya patrikā*, *Kavitāvalī*, and many of the verses in the *Dohāvalī*; see R.S. McGregor, *Hindi Literature: From the Beginnings to the Nineteenth Century*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1984, pp. 114–57.

³⁷ See C. Vaudeville, *Kabir*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974. For word substitution by singers, W. Callewaert and M. Lath, ‘Musicians and Scribes’, in *The Hindi Padāvalī of Nāmdev*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1989, pp. 55–117.

³⁸ Christian Novetzke’s important insight on Marathi texts and composers’ notebooks seems very relevant to the kind of manuscripts available for fifteenth-century literature. See C.L. Novetzke, ‘Note to Self: What Marathi *Kirtankars*’ Notebooks Suggest about Literacy, Performance, and the Travelling Performer in Pre-Colonial Maharashtra’, forthcoming in *Tellings and Texts: Singing, Story-telling and Performance in North India*, Orsini and Schofield (eds); see also *Religion and Public Memory: A Cultural History of Saint Nāmdev in India*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2008. For North India, see Callewaert and Lath (1989).

WRITING, SCRIPTS AND SCRIBES

After Timur's incursion that precipitated the splintering of the Delhi Sultanate, 'new public arenas emerged when state-created revenue and judicial bureaucracies extended their reach into village society' in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries (Chapter 4, p. X). In his contribution to this volume, Richard Eaton usefully compares the different options chosen by the sultans of Bengal and of Bijapur and Golkonda with respect to the language of administration, and points out the different languages that were used for stone inscriptions (on religious versus non-religious buildings, see Chapter 7), for court treatises on governance, for coins, for court literature, and, most significantly, for the administration. It was the much greater availability of paper in the fifteenth century and choice of the vernacular for revenue and judicial bureaucracy, he argues in the case of the Bahmanis of Bijapur, that brought 'Marathi-speaking peoples of all classes into closer communion with the state and with one another through the medium of written Marathi' (p. X).³⁹

It is harder to make a comparable argument for the sultanates of north India—Sharqi Jaunpur, Lodi Delhi, Khalji Malwa, Sher Shah's short-lived empire—because of the almost complete lack of reliably datable contemporary documents. A handful of surviving documents (more are said to lie in private hands) and a few references in contemporary chronicles suggest that Persian was not the only language of sultanate governance. At least at the district (*pargana*) level in Delhi,

³⁹ As regards the introduction of paper and paper manufacture in India, the information is patchy. P.K. Gode argues that paper was introduced into India from China around 1000 and was manufactured in Delhi by the mid-fourteenth century. See Gode, 'Migration of Paper from China to India—A.D. 105–1500', in *Studies in Indian Cultural History*, vol. 3, Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1969, pp. 1–12. Brac de la Perrière quotes Barani's observation that fourteenth-century booksellers took unsold books back to papermakers (*kāghaziān*), who would wash and reuse the paper. A fifteenth-century Iranian treatise mentions paper from Bengal among the kinds of papers available (though the reading might be wrong), while a contemporary *tazkira* of poets from Kashmir mentions papermaking in the region. By the fifteenth century, almost all Jain manuscripts from Gujarat are copied on paper; E. Brac de la Perrière, *L'art du livre dans l'Inde des sultanats*, Paris: PUP, 2008, pp. 96–7. See also Chapter 4 in this volume (n. 23).

some amount of bilingualism and bi-scriptualism was in place, with two *karkuns* (writers)—one to write in Hindavi and another to write in Persian — appointed for every pargana. In the north, records were transcribed in two languages and scripts—Persian in *ta'liq* and Hindavi in *kaitbi*. In Malwa and Gujarat, though, the Nagari script was used (see Figure 1).⁴⁰ We also hear that in the time of Sikandar Lodi (r. 1489–1517), Hindus ‘learned to read and write the Persian script, which had not been common among them until then’.⁴¹

Muslim officials are known to have used the vernacular for public announcements or decrees. A tax remission decree from 1513 under the reign of *mahārājādhirāja rājaśrī Sulitāna Mahamūda Sāhi bina Nāsira Sāhi [rājye]* (Mahmud Khalji II, r. 1511–31) of Mandu shows Malu[k] Khan, the *muqta* ‘(rights-holder) and local officials using the vernacular in the Nagari script to communicate a benevolent decision to the local population:

Siddhiḥ samvat 1570 satarā varshe māgha vadi 13 So-
ma dine mahārājādhirāja rājaśrī *Sulitāna* Mahamū-
da Sāhi *bina* Nāsira Sāhi rājye asau Damauva
nagare śrī mahāshāṇa Ājama Malū Shām (Khan) biṇa Ma-
lū Shām (Khan) *mukte* varttate tat-samayai dāmabijāi va
maḍavā va dāi va *darajī* ai *rakamau* ju dama[d]ā
lāgate mukte mijī va vahadārāṇa hara berisa
sālīnā le to *mumāphuki* ai chhoḍe ju ko-
i isa barisa va isa desa thī inha maha [le]-

⁴⁰ Reference is usually made to ‘Abbas Sarwani, who says that Sher Shah appointed for every pargana one *shiqdar* (governor), one *‘amil* (revenue collector), one *‘fotahdar* (treasurer), and two *karkuns* (writers), one for Hindavi and the other for Persian; see ‘Abbas Khan Sarwani, *The Tārīkh-i Sher Shāhī*, vol. 1, ed., S.M. Imamuddin, Dacca: University of Dacca, 1964, p. 210. See also K.R. Qanungo, *Sher Shah*, Calcutta: Kar, Majumdar, 1921, p. 351. The document reproduced in Figure 1 shows that this bi-scriptual practice was in use under the Lodis as well; see Shafi (1936), pp. 281–5. See also M. Momin, *The Chancellery and Persian Epistolography under the Mughals, from Bābūr to Shāh Jahān, 1526–1658*, Calcutta: Iran Society, 1971, p. 28.

⁴¹ ‘*Kāfirān bakhwāndan o-neveshtan-i khaṭ-i fārsī ki tā ān zamān dar miyān-i īshān ma’mūl nabud, pardākhtand*, in Nizam al-Din Ahmad’s *ṭabaqat-i Akbarshāhī*, quoted in ‘Sikandar Lodhī aur uske ‘ahad ke ba’z fārsī muṣannifin’, *Oriental College Magazine*, 32, 1932: 29.

hi damaḍā pai[kā] mā[m]gai lēi su apaṇa *dī-*
na thī be[j]āḍha hoī. Musalamānu hoī da-
 maḍā lēi tisahi suvara kī saumhā Hindu ho-
 ī lēi tisahi gāi kī saumha. *Pravāni-*

gī Malika Seshāna (Shaykh) Hasāna Shām (Khān) [Nirabadāchha Mau] ko-
 ṭhavālu Sonīpahaju Gopāla Sha(Kha)lachi-[pura-vare śubham bha]vatu.

Success! In the Samvat year 1570, on Monday, the 13th day of the dark (fortnight) of Magha, during the reign of the great king, the illustrious *Sultan* Mahmud Shah, son of Nasir Shah, in the town of Damauva (Damoh), while the *muqta* grant of the great Khan Ajam Maluk Khan, son of Maluk Khan, exists, the mukta grantee [and home farmers?] who take every year the annual *fees* levied on account of seed-loan, marriage booth, midwife and *tailor* should remit them *according to* this. Whoever demands these fees from this year and this country is to become an outcaste from his *religion*. If he be a Muslim and take the fees, to him be the curse of a pig. If he be a Hindu and take (the fees), to him (be) the imprecation/curse of (killing) a cow. *By permission* of malik Sheikh Hasan Khan [of Nirabadachha Mau?], and kotwal Sonipahaju Gopala of Khalachi-pura. Let (success) attend.⁴²

We may note the presence of Arabic and Persian nouns and expressions related to administration (*muqta*, *mumaphik* for *mu'āfik*, *parvāngī*, and of course, *sulṭān*), but also to common life (*daraji* for *darzī*, *dīn* for religious community).

In nearby Gujarat, the Sanskrit model letters and documents from the 1470s in the *Lekha-paddhati* suggest that some form of Sanskrit chancellery was still practised, or at least learnt.⁴³ The currency of Sanskrit, for inscriptions, texts, and letter-writing seems linked to the revival of courtly practices by small chiefs. Competence in Sanskrit was prized; in

⁴² Text, transcription, and translation (slightly modified) in R.B. Hiralal, 'Damoh Hindi Inscription of Mahmud Shah II of Malwa: (Vikrama) Samvat 1570', *Epigraphia Indica* VII (1920), pp. 291–3. Similar inscriptions from Gujarat are discussed in Chapter 7 in this volume.

⁴³ P. Prasad, *Lekhpadhati: Documents of State and Everyday Life from Ancient and Early Medieval Gujarat*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2007: Two of the manuscripts are dated 1475/6 and 1464, and the significant variation between the successive manuscripts (including the insertion of new mode letters, e.g., Nos. 35, p. 116; 46, p. 135; 73, p. 187; 78, p. 192) suggests that the copyists made changes according to current usage. For letters dated 1475, see pp. 70, 75, 87, 110, 111, 114, 116.

addition to the travelling poet Gangadhara discussed by Kapadia, there were other Sanskrit poets active in Gujarat including Udayaraja, the author of a long poem dedicated to Sultan Mahmud Begada, and the authors of numerous Sanskrit *prashastis* including the long Dohad inscription described by Sheikh. Sanskrit inscriptions were commissioned in other sultanates too; among the names of commissioners and scribes, we encounter Hindus, Muslims, and Jains.⁴⁴

This multi-lingualism and multi-scriptualism is reflected in manuscripts from this period. Although very few manuscripts from the fifteenth century have survived, Eloïse Brac de la Perrière has noted the great diversity of scripts used for Arabic and Persian books in this period, from the *bihari* used largely for Qur'ans (see her contribution) to the varieties of Naskh, including what Losty has called '*naskhi-diwani*', an intermediary form between *riqa'* and *ta'liq* that was probably used by the Tughluq chancellery, and *nasta'liq*, of which we see the first examples in the early fifteenth century.⁴⁵ The similarity in iconography between certain Jain illustrated manuscripts and illustrated Persian codexes from this period is another instance of the more intense cultural connections within the sultanates' polities and cities, and of the beginning of a layered but inter-connected taste for 'the art of the book' that was to develop much more widely in the Mughal period.⁴⁶

Equally striking is the fact that in this period some of the Sufi Hindavi romances (*Candāyan*, *Mirigāvatī*) were occasionally produced

⁴⁴ At least in Delhi, Malwa, and Gujarat, Jains functioned as ministers or senior bureaucrats. As Eva de Clercq's contribution shows, the biographies of Jain patrons in Apabhramsha texts reveal a network of families and associates between Delhi (Yoginipura) and Gwalior as well. The persistence of Sanskrit can also be traced to the much understudied presence and agency of Jain merchants, some of whom commissioned texts and biographies in 'Jain' Sanskrit.

⁴⁵ Reference in Brac de la Perrière (2008), pp. 127ff., especially pp. 140, 143–4.

⁴⁶ See, for example, B.N. Goswamy, *A Jainesque Sultanate Shahnama and the Context of Pre-Mughal Painting in India*, Zürich: Museum Rietberg, 1988. For evidence of Jain illustrated (and non-illustrated) manuscripts copied in Delhi (Yoginipura) from the fourteenth to the early sixteenth centuries, see B.N. Goswamy, 'In the Sultan's Shadow: Pre-Mughal painting in and around Delhi', in *Delhi through the Ages*, R.E. Frykenberg (ed.), Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 137–9. The colophon of one *Ādipurāṇa* dated 1404 (VS 1461) says: 'Here, today, in prosperous Yoginipur, where many resplendent feudal chiefs preside.

as illustrated codexes, that is, as precious objects, *in the same form* as Persian illustrated books—sure evidence of the bilingual culture of sultanate north India.⁴⁷ In fact, the multiple scripts and formats in which these texts circulated are the only evidence we have for their circulation in different contexts, given the absence of colophons in many manuscript copies. They were produced in unadorned *nasta'liq* for use in the Sufi *khanqah*, illustrated in *naskhi-diwani* for local Persianate elites, unadorned in *kaithi* probably for the use of storytellers or of lesser patrons, and illustrated in *kaithi* for local Rajput/merchant elites.⁴⁸

Evidence about scribes and scribal groups in the fifteenth century would have to be collated from the colophons of individual manuscripts and inscriptions, a task that so far has been undertaken only for Jain manuscripts.⁴⁹ As the designation for professional scribes and scribal groups, *Kayasthas* (thus *kaithi*) appears often. Direct evidence about Brahmins and their occupations in north India in this period is strikingly scarce when we consider the evidence that *Kayasthas*, *Khatri*s, and Brahmins formed the majority of Persian scribes and administrators in the Mughal period. However, this very fact suggests that they were

During the reign of Sultan Sri Muhammadd Shah [Nasir al-Din Muhammad Tughluq?]. Other Jain texts in Apabhramsha composed in Delhi include a *Pāsñ āh cariu*, by Sridhar Ayarval (Agrawal), a *Śāntināth cariu* by one Mahindu in 1530; see H.V. Kochhar, *Apabhramśa-sāhitya*, Delhi: Hindi Anusandhan Parishad, 1959, pp. 210–45.

⁴⁷ See Brac de la Perrière (2008).

⁴⁸ See, for example, the illustrated copy of the *Mirigāvati* in *kaithi* script now in the Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras (accession number 7742–91), which, in absence of a colophon, Karl Khandalavala dates on iconographic grounds to 1525–70; K. Khandalavala, 'The *Mṛgāvat* of Bharat Kala Bhavan: As a Social Document and its Date and Provenance', in *Chhavi: Golden Jubilee Volume*, A. Krishna (ed.), Banaras: Bharat Kala Bhavan, 1971, pp. 30–2. If we hypothesize that *kaithi* manuscripts of these texts were copied for local Rajput or merchant elites, then this would be a very early evidence of investment in an illustrated codex, given that the illustrated *Bhagavata purāṇa* folios dated to the early sixteenth century 'from the Delhi-Agra region' are in Sanskrit, and that illustrated copies of Keshavdas's poems are significantly later.

⁴⁹ See P.J. Shastri (ed.), *Jain granth prasasti sangrah*, Delhi: Vidya Sewa Mandir, 1954–63.

probably among those Hindus who learnt Persian from Sikandar Lodi's time, as noted above.⁵⁰

What lessons can we draw for literary history from the persistent biscriptualism and multilingualism of the long fifteenth century?⁵¹ First, as we have already noted above, while traditionally for Hindi and Urdu literary histories the script of a text has been a primary indicator of where and to whom the text 'belongs', we have seen that the choice of script for Hindavi texts like the Sufi romances depended on the scribe and the person commissioning the copy. Script was an indicator of circulation rather than of the intrinsic nature of the text. At the same time in a context where so many texts (poems, songs, tales) were routinely read out and recited, the script in which a text or genre was transcribed and copied cannot be taken as an indicator of the *limits* of its audience, especially in the case of vernacular texts. Furthermore, only a comparative, multilingual approach can help us recognize the dynamics of individuals and genres within the religious public sphere and arrest the hallowed tradition of placing and explaining texts and authors on the basis of their putative religious identity.⁵² For north India in this period, it is vital to decouple language from script.

REGIONAL POLITIES

What was the political context of fifteenth-century north India? Since standard histories, as we have seen, view this period as the 'twilight'

⁵⁰ Rajeev Kinra notes that Chandra Bhan's father Dharam Das, a Punjabi Brahmin from Lahore, had 'mastered Persian well before any of Akbar and Todar Mal's revised administrative and educational politics took effect'; R. Kinra, 'Secretary-poets in Mughal India and the Ethos of Persian: The Case of Chandar Bhān Brahman', PhD thesis, University of Chicago, 2008, vol. 1, p. 21; for Hindus as scribes in the Mughal administration, see M. Alam, 'The Culture and Politics of Persian in Precolonial Hindustan', in Pollock (2003a); and M. Alam and S. Subrahmanyam, 'The Making of a Munshi', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 24(2), 2004: 61–72.

⁵¹ Sumit Guha has argued that it had its roots in the professional specialization of scribes. Sumit Guha, 'Mārgī, Deśī and Yāvanī: High Language and Ethnic Speech in Maharashtra', in *Mārga: Ways of Liberation, Empowerment, and Social Change in Maharashtra*, M. Naito, I. Shima, H. Kotani (eds), New Delhi: Manohar, 2008, p. 133.

⁵² For a powerful critique of this tendency, see Agrawal (2009).

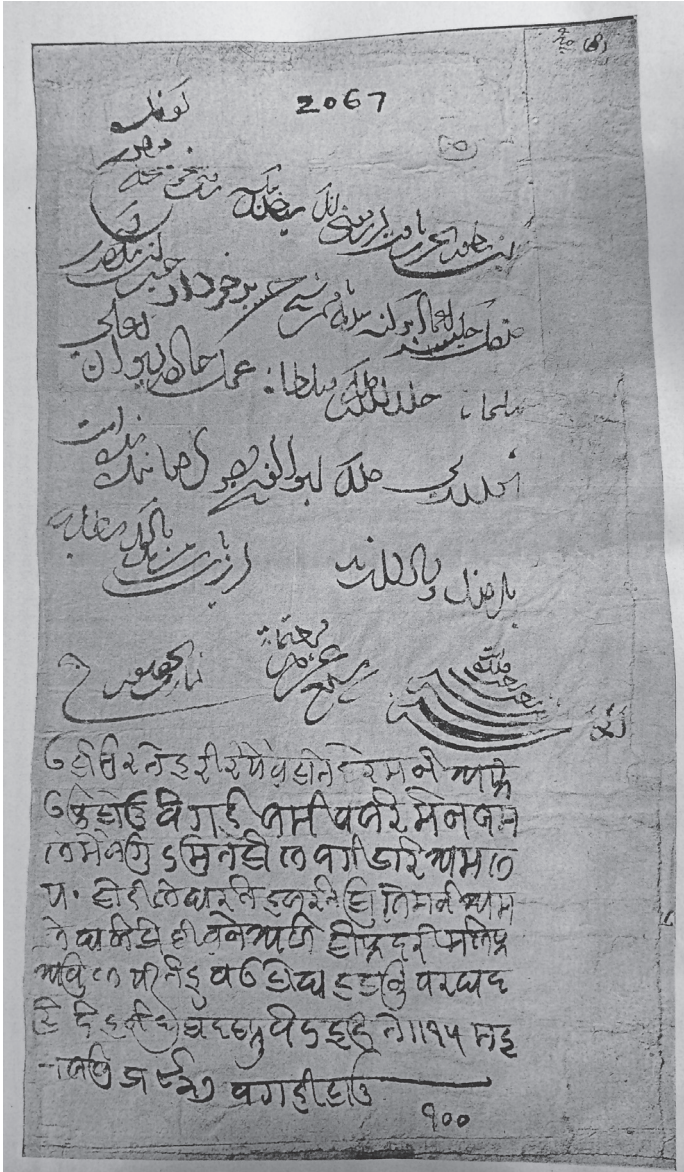


Fig 1 Biculturual (Persian *ta'liq* and Kaithi) document from the Lodi period, early 16th century. Reproduced from M. Mohammad Shafi, 'Three Old Documents', *Proceedings of the Idara-i Maarif-i Islamia*, Lahore, 1936, 281–5.

of the Sultanate and as a period of fissiparous tendencies and decline, a historical re-appraisal seems timely.⁵³ As we have seen, the Delhi sultanate was devastated by Timur's invasion in 1398 and reduced to a small regional kingdom. The invasion was only a catalyst, however, since the real authority of the sultans had declined in late years. As regional governors became wealthier and more autonomous in the latter half of the fourteenth century, Delhi's central resources of men, horses, elephants, weaponry, and gold, shrank. Since the time of Firuz Shah Tughluq (d. 1388), agricultural revenues and the size of the army had steadily dwindled—Mahmud Shah met Timur's forces with 10,000 horsemen, 20,000 footsoldiers, and 120 elephants—a quarter of imperial armies in previous decades.⁵⁴ The invasion was followed by a decade of conflict between members of the Tughluq ruling family and prominent courtiers, each of whom canvassed the powerful regional governors for support. But Timur strengthened the hands of certain factions: as Simon Digby points out, Khizr Khan, the former governor of Multan who became the first 'Sayyid' ruler in 1414, had submitted to Timur and benefited from the contacts and deals he made in Timur's entourage. Khizr Khan and his successors may have continued to pay submission to Timur's son Shah Rukh in Herat until the middle of the fifteenth century.⁵⁵ But the rulers of Delhi for the next half century exerted only limited authority over a small region contiguous with the capital city, provoking the famous remark that the sultan's sway extended only from Delhi to the suburb of Palam.⁵⁶

Khizr Khan and his successors relied on the support of the Afghan families then powerful in Punjab and Multan, including the Lodi chieftains who became prominent in the 1440s. By 1451, Bahlul Lodi had taken over Delhi. Bahlul and his successors invited more Afghan

⁵³ See K.S. Lal, *Twilight of the Sultanate: A Political, Social and Cultural History of the Sultanate of Delhi from the Invasion of Timur to the Conquest of Babur 1398–1526*, Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1980, which remains the most comprehensive history of the period.

⁵⁴ Peter Jackson, *The Delhi Sultanate: A Political and Military History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. 314, 316–17.

⁵⁵ Jackson (1999), p. 322.

⁵⁶ This is cited by Lal (1980), p. 124, n. 64, citing Ahmad Yadgar about the last Sayyid ruler 'Ala' al-Din 'Alam Shah. The remark reappeared in the eighteenth century when it was applied to the Mughal Shah 'Alam II (r. 1759–1806).

chiefs to help shore up their rule against the increasingly influential sultans of Jaunpur, but the immigration into the Doab of these powerful families meant that the Lodis had to share sovereignty with them, including the sultan's monopoly of the most vital symbol of military might, the elephant.⁵⁷ The Afghan clans could only forge an uneasy alliance, fraught with struggles for primacy, and eventually another prince of the Timurid lineage was invited to invade north India in 1526. As every South Asian school-child knows, Babur defeated Ibrahim Lodi at Panipat in a triumph for artillery over the foot soldiers and elephants of the Lodi army. But the Afghan families had now put down roots over large parts of north-eastern India, and the Mughal advance was by no means a foregone conclusion. Babur and his son Humayun had to repeatedly battle Afghan interests before Humayun's decisive return to India in 1555.

Decades before Timur, in the middle of the fourteenth century, the Tughluq conquests had reached their limits and the sultans had to face the challenges of scale. Muhammad b. Tughluq died chasing a rebel through the Kachchh desert, and his cousin Firuz was obliged to be constantly vigilant to suppress revolt. Tughluq provinces were ruled by the sultan's nominees; unlike the Khaljis who relied on relations, military slaves or Iranian/Central Asian courtiers, the Tughluq nominees were often from recently converted peasant or warrior families. As Kumar describes in this volume, the *déraciné* courtiers and slaves of former times, tied by relations of slavery or service to great lords or recently uprooted from their natal contexts, were gradually developing networks through marriage or alliance and becoming ever more prominent and threatening to the sultans. The regional governorships were greatly prized: the governorship of the wealthy trading region of Gujarat was even put up for auction in the 1370s.⁵⁸ The sultans attempted to prevent their governors from setting down local roots and getting too comfortable with the locals, but all too often they were powerless to prevent

⁵⁷ Jackson (1999), p. 324.

⁵⁸ Shams al-Din Damaghani offered a higher bid for the governorship of Gujarat than the incumbent could offer. In addition to the normal tribute, he promised an additional payment of 100 elephants, 200 Arab horses, and 400 Hindu and Abyssinian slaves. S.C. Misra, *Rise of Muslim Power in Gujarat*, London: Asia Publishing House, 1982 [1963], p. 130.

the rise of local bases of power. The principality of Khandesh became virtually independent as early as 1382, when Firuz Shah was still alive.⁵⁹ In Gujarat, too, the last-but-one governor Farhat al-Mulk was deposed for his closeness to the Hindus and was replaced by the loyalist Zafar Khan, the son of a peasant convert in the retinue of Firuz Tughluq.⁶⁰

In the years following Timur's invasion, these regional governors hedged their bets, deciding whom to support in Delhi before striking out on their own. Khwaja Jahan of Jaunpur remained loyal to the Tughluq princes Muhammad Shah and Mahmud Shah; it was only after his death that his son took royal titles. Similarly, Dilawar Khan Ghuri of Malwa may never have officially become sultan. In Gujarat, Zafar Khan supported another prince, Nusrat Shah, and took royal titles only in 1407. The political ambiguity of the first decade of the fifteenth century gave way to assertive regional polities as the erstwhile Tughluq governors became regional rulers in alliance with local chieftains.

The Tughluq empire had facilitated the movement of men, resources, and animals over its extent. While the imperial reach of the fourteenth century was long gone, entrepreneurs were able to travel widely and make long-distance deals. Many of the routes, towns, and agrarian and trade zones that we associate with the Mughals should be linked to fifteenth- or early sixteenth-century innovations. One consequence of the ascendancy of the Afghans meant that the whole of the northwest was restored as an area for the circulation of men and resources from the plains and became a place for military recruitment and *naukari*.⁶¹ With the rise of the regional polities, rival rulers had to struggle for access to war resources such as elephants and horses. Hushang Shah of Malwa travelled disguised as a horse trader to Orissa, offering horses in exchange for valuable elephants (Chapter 2). The Gujarat sultans went to great pains to protect horse merchants; in 1487 the Raja of Sirohi faced the threat of swift retribution after 'seizing' a company of merchants bringing 400 Iraqi and Turki horses from Khurasan

⁵⁹ P. Hardy, 'Fārūkhids', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel and W.P. Heinrichs (eds), Leiden: E.J. Brill, second edition.

⁶⁰ Misra (1982), pp. 143–4.

⁶¹ See Dirk Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput, Sepoy: The Ethnohistory of the Military Labour Market in Hindustan, 1450–1850*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

and Iraq.⁶² Mahmud Begada, the Sultan of Gujarat, reimbursed the merchants from his own treasury and sent a stern order to the raja to return the confiscated property. The raja complied immediately. Each regional kingdom forged close links with groups who could bring them valuable goods or connect them to long-distance trade. In Gujarat, new towns were built with merchant colonies for Hindus and Jains at their heart, surrounded securely by concentric circles of other inhabitants and fort walls.⁶³ The Jains, with their networks of credit and monetary skill, were particularly sought after, and many fifteenth-century kingdoms protected Jains and invited them to settle (Chapter 12). Jains had already held bureaucratic positions in sultanate administrations: Thakkura Pheru worked in the mint of the Khaljis in the early fourteenth century, and Jinaprabha Suri is said to have been invited to meet Muhammad b. Tughluq.⁶⁴ In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Jain names come up frequently as *mantris*—courtiers or bureaucrats—in sultanate administrations. Other non-Muslim *naukars* appear as accountants, secretaries, and administrators.

As none of these regional kingdoms had unfettered access to war resources, nor did they have the vast resources of the fourteenth-century Delhi sultanate, each was obliged to cultivate fighting men for their armies. Although the post-fifteenth-century culture of *naukari*—military employment—has traditionally been seen as distinct from the *bandagi*—military slavery—that had formerly dominated the Delhi army, Sunil Kumar argues in this volume for a longer-term view that does not radically distinguish these two forms of service (Chapter 3). Peasant groups and formerly mobile pastoralists were increasingly drawn into politics. For part of the year they were needed to fight; for the rest, they were required to clear forested and marginal lands, and to increase agricultural productivity. Much of the literature of this period arises from the experience

⁶² Sikandar b. Muhammad Manjhu, *The Mirat-i-Sikandari*, S.C. Misra (ed.), Baroda: M.S. University, 1961, p. 144.

⁶³ V.S. Pramar, 'The Effects of Trade and Urbanization on the Architecture of Gujarat', in *Studies in Trade and Urbanization in Western India*, V.K. Chavda (ed.), Baroda: M.S. University, 1985, p. 86.

⁶⁴ See S.R. Sarma, *Thakkura Phuru's Rayanaparikkhā: A Medieval Prakrit Text on Gemmology*, Aligarh: Viveka, 1984.

of the newly politicized rural groups of north India as they entered new alliances and relations of servitude.

An important point that Simon Digby makes is that power in this period was multi-locational. He cites the Afghans who maintained bases in various non-contiguous locations in north India while keeping links with their homeland in the Gomal valley. Of the Baghela chieftains too, Digby reads their boasts of having conquered Kashi and other places as ways of declaring their interests or bases in different locations. Even with the more settled sultanates of the period such as those of Malwa, Jaunpur, or Gujarat, kings were obliged to be constantly mobile, and the apparatus of power moved with them from campaign to campaign. Secondly, rulers rarely exerted direct sovereign power over either men or revenues in the manner of the Mughals. Standing armies were rare; fighting men had to be mobilized repeatedly for campaigns. The armed peasants of the countryside that Dirk Kolff has written about were often accessible to rulers or political claimants only through their leaders—whether small landlords or chieftains, or religious ascetic collectives such as the Naths—and thus power was a matter of constantly making deals with those who could supply manpower and resources. The Gujarat sultans were able to partially stabilize the manpower situation by the mid-fifteenth century by offering heritable *jagirs* and regular cash payments to soldiers, but most other claimants to power had to continually remake agreements. While the Lodi sultans may have been the nominal sovereigns of late fifteenth-century Delhi, their authority rested on remarkably tenuous deals with various Afghan families, peasant warlords, merchants, horse suppliers, and so on. It was only with Sher Shah Sur, who managed to secure valuable alliances both martial and marital, significant wealth, and who regularized the payment of men and branding of horses, that a more stable military enterprise came into being. Until then the successful military entrepreneur was the one who understood the art of deal-making.

With constantly evolving chains of authority, people learnt to signal their status and ambitions on fresh terrain. While political boundaries were defined and redefined, they were not always negotiated on religious grounds. In other words, while sectarian and ethnic affiliations did matter in alliance, employment, and promotion, they were not the only or even the most important considerations. As Digby remarks, the Baghelas supplied men to both the Jaunpur sultanate and the Afghans; conversely,

they took Afghans into their service, as did Rana Sanga of Mewar.⁶⁵ The Jaunpur sultans, cut off from renewable supplies of horses, were obliged to turn to non-Muslim sources of military manpower. A Vaishnava landholder in north Gujarat boasted of his ships and his respectable Puranic ancestry while noting the Muslim names of his sons in sultanate service.⁶⁶ Marriage was a way of making alliances and again, some were across ethnic or religious boundaries. The Afghan Sher Shah Sur is believed to have married 'Guhar Gusain' and Lad Malika, the widow of a Turki warlord—both marriages brought him the support and military manpower of non-Afghan families.⁶⁷ The Muslim Kayamkhani family of Fatehpur claimed to have taken brides from Hindu Rathor clans.⁶⁸ Intriguingly, Hushang Shah, the sultan of Malwa, had a Jain wife and a practising Jain son who left a long inscription asserting his parentage and his religious piety.⁶⁹

While pragmatism generally prevailed over dogma in making alliances and deals, we would not like to suggest that ascriptive identities were irrelevant or 'fluid' in this period. In fact, belonging and exclusion were carefully calibrated, although ethnic, religious, and status markers did not always carry the social meanings we assign to them today. For example, instances of 'religious conversion' are recounted not as ideological or faith transitions but usually as pragmatic shifts of allegiance helped along by prominent Sufis. Such narratives are especially connected with Firuz Shah in the late fourteenth century. One such is the story of the

⁶⁵ Kolff (1990), p. 57; S. Digby, 'Dreams and Reminiscences of Dattu Sarvani a Sixteenth Century Indo-Afghan Soldier (Part 1)', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 2(1), 1964: 64; Ni'mat Allah, *History of the Afghans*, London: Oriental Translation Committee, 1829–36, p. 164n.

⁶⁶ See Chapter 7 in this volume.

⁶⁷ Kolff (1990), p. 56, citing Qanungo, *Sher Shah*, 66–75.

⁶⁸ C. Talbot, 'Becoming Turk the Rajput Way: Conversion and Identity in an Indian Warrior Narrative', *Modern Asian Studies*, 43(1), 2009: 225–6, citing the *Kyamkhān rāsa*. The alliance between the Kayamkhani and Rathors persisted into the seventeenth century: when the Mughal emperor Jahangir ordered the Kayamkhani chief to proceed against a Rathor, Dalpat, the latter invoked their long alliance and succeeded in getting the Kayamkhani to ignore the imperial order; Talbot (2009): 241.

⁶⁹ Pushpa Prasad, *Sanskrit Inscriptions of Delhi Sultanate, 1191–1526*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990, pp. 183–4.

'conversion' of Karamchand, the ancestor of the Kayamkhani clan of Rajasthan. According to the *Kyamkhān rāsa*, a seventeenth-century community history in Braj Bhasha, Firuz Shah and his companion Sayyid Nasir came upon Karamchand asleep in the forest. They decided that the boy had miraculous powers and that he would eventually become a 'Turk', a Muslim. The boy, renamed Kayam Khan, joined the sultan's entourage. He prepared to enter Islam under the supervision of Sayyid Nasir but worried that his family would lose their social standing and ability to make good marriage alliances. He was only convinced when Sayyid Nasir assured him that future kings would marry their daughters into his family.⁷⁰ After becoming a Muslim, he received land and goods from the sultan, thus establishing his place in the landed hierarchy of Rajasthan. Another version of the Kayamkhani story makes no mention of conversion. Here, the young Chauhan boy was brought up by Sayyid Nasir and later employed by the sultan Bahlul Lodi.⁷¹ Similarly, the ancestors of the Gujarat sultans were modest militarized peasants who converted to Islam after joining Firuz's retinue, this time at the behest of the Sufi Jalal al-Din Bukhari, also known as Makhдум-i Jahangasht.⁷²

The sixteenth-century chieftain Silhadi became a Muslim under intense pressure. In Sikandar's seventeenth-century telling of the tale, Bahadur Shah, the sultan of Gujarat, declared, 'This wretch keeps Muslim women in his house ... I will never let him go alive unless he becomes a Musalman'.⁷³ After Silhadi was cornered by Bahadur's forces at Raisen, he finally agreed to 'enter Islam'. We hear also that the young son of the deposed Chauhan ruler of Champaner, eventually defeated by Mahmud Begada, was brought up as a Muslim, eventually rising to a high position as Qiwan al-Mulk Sarang.⁷⁴ There is little evidence of large-scale conversion to Islam in this period or for 'forced' or incentivized conversion. The very fact that the instances recounted above are discrete narratives in the sources suggests that they were remarkable occasions.

⁷⁰ Talbot (2009), p. 4.

⁷¹ Talbot (2009), pp. 5, 6.

⁷² Sikandar, *Mirat-i-Sikandari*, S.C. Misra (ed.), Baroda: M.S. University, 1961, p. 3.

⁷³ Sikandar (1961), p. 284. See Chapter 9 in this volume.

⁷⁴ Sikandar (1961), p. 253.

We might even consider the possibility, with Dirk Kolff, that ‘Afghan’ and ‘Rajput’ were not exclusive birth-identity markers in this period. Beyond the basic fact of confessional identification, there was considerable scope for interpretation. The Kayamkhanis of Talbot’s account continued to be very much part of the Rajput world even after their ‘conversion’, and their Cauhan ‘got’, *gotra* or lineage continued to be vital to their dealings and status. On the other hand, Kolff suggests that just as low-status Bhils and Minas were adopted into the evolving Rajput hierarchy as junior clans,⁷⁵ militarized peasants who ‘entered’ Islam often became known as Pathan, or Afghan.⁷⁶ Thus, ‘Rajput’ or ‘Pathan’ could at this time be military identities rather than ‘ethnic or genealogical denotations’; those who secured employment within one military tradition or another would adopt the vocabulary of upward mobility and allegiance that being ‘Rajput’ or ‘Afghan’ connoted. Accordingly, what might appear to us as religious conversion or ethnic confusion was ‘often a device to register either recruitment or professional success whether military or otherwise’.⁷⁷

In many texts there is considerable anxiety around the control of women. A key part of Silhadi’s transgression was the fact that he had Muslim women in his harem. In this deal-making society, women wielded considerable clout by virtue of their natal links, and there are several examples of women who did not convert to the dominant religious or cultural ethos of their husbands’ families. Hushang Shah’s Jain wife is one such instance. Another classic case is that of Mira, the devotee of Krishna who refused to abandon her devotion and accept her marital family’s Shakta orientation. Women were often the instigators of religious change; many of the Sants counted women as their primary devotees, who then took the new message to their husbands and families. Sants and religious practitioners who promised fertility were also popular with women.

In the clan-based peasant and military families of north India, women had considerable agency, partly due to the importance of their natal families in marriage/military alliances. This was true of Afghans too: Bibi

⁷⁵ B.D. Chattopadhyaya, ‘Origin of the Rajputs: The Political, Economic and Social Processes in Early Medieval Rajasthan’, in *The Making of Early Medieval India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993, pp. 57–88.

⁷⁶ Kolff (1990), p. 57.

⁷⁷ Kolff (1990), p. 58.

Fath Malika and Lad Malika were both successful leaders in Sher Shah's times. While the 'unstable and segmented warrior polity' of the long fifteenth century afforded opportunities for women (including the camp-following women of the early Mughals⁷⁸), the rise of later genealogy- and honour-based polities relegated them to seclusion in harems. Beyond the warrior world, too, women had considerable buying power. The donations of pious women—Muslim, Hindu, and Jain—to build or refurbish religious structures are regularly found on inscriptions. There are even inscriptions in which no male figure is mentioned.⁷⁹

In this era of entrepreneurship, exalted ancestry was not a guarantor of success, but for most it was important to acknowledge family and lineage, even when those were modest or made up. *Got* or *gotra*, lineage, or *kula*, clan, were invoked often, considerably more than *varna* or *jati*. In Holi's Sanskrit inscription of 1424, Sahi Alambhaka (Alp Khan alias Hushang Shah) is said to belong to the Gauri (Ghuri) *kula*.⁸⁰ When Bibi Ayisha, a daughter of Bahlul Lodi, and Bibi Muradi Khatun, her sister-in-law, had a well built and commissioned a bilingual Persian–Sanskrit inscription in 1517, their family names appear as *gotras* in the Sanskrit part: Ayisha of the Serati (Sherani) *gotra* and Muradi of the Sarvani.⁸¹ Raidhu's *prashastis* also record the 'caste' and *gotra* of his Jain merchant patrons (Chapter 12). There are also frequent mentions of occupational mobility which would be precluded by a *varna*-based notion of caste. Thus, Bhima Kavi says that his father was a *kayastha* or scribe who was also a *kubera* or merchant.⁸² In the Mansa inscription from sixteenth-century north Gujarat, a merchant claims inheritance in a Rajput lineage while signalling his role as sultanate bureaucrat.⁸³ The Afghans who came to India 'became merchants', accruing considerable wealth through the sale of horses and other goods. The honour codes of the Afghans, the ethos of *naukari* and overlordship, the developing lineage hierarchy of the Rajputs, and the evolving refigurings of classical warrior

⁷⁸ Ruby Lal, *Domesticity and Power in the Early Mughal World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, Chapter 2.

⁷⁹ See Chapter 2 in this volume.

⁸⁰ Prasad (1990), pp. 183–99.

⁸¹ Prasad (1990), pp. 37–40.

⁸² Bhima Kavi (1966)

⁸³ See Chapter 7 in this volume.

mythology—these were potent codes of prestige and upward mobility available to transitioning groups in north India. For the emerging elites of the time, rootedness was the exception rather than the rule; the reality of displacement and the possibilities of reinvention are features of much of the literature of the time.

GEOGRAPHIES IN LITERATURE

In addition to the mutability of occupation and identity and the low importance of certified lineage, the frequency of travel and dislocation should form the backdrop to our understanding of the literary genres of the time. In the *Visaladeva rāsa*, written likely in late fifteenth-century Marwar by the poet Nalha, the king, stung by his wife's taunts, leaves his country to take up service as a courtier (*uḷagāṇau*), handing the kingdom over to his nephews.⁸⁴ Opportunities for service—or what Dirk Kolff has called *naukari*—were abundant at the time, and many men took the decision to relinquish the autonomy of a peasant or pastoralist life and travel forth in search of employment, leaving behind their women and households. *Viraha*—separation or yearning—is the dominant sentiment of much of the literature of the time. Visaladeva's wife Rajmati angrily spurns an elderly woman's suggestion that she should take a 'friend' in her husband's absence (vv. 77–8), but the verse brings out an underlying theme in many of the *kathas*, anxiety about retaining the fidelity of women. A similar anxiety is expressed in accounts of *jauhar*—the self-immolation by Rajput women when defeat is certain or when kinsmen are too far away to help.⁸⁵

Merchants, too, travelled in search of opportunity. De Clercq's study of colophons reveals how Jain merchants in Gwalior had close family and business connections with other Digambara families in Delhi, Hisar, Kurukshetra, 'Lahadapura', and Mandu, crossing political boundaries with seeming ease. Marriages were arranged over long distances and both ascetic and lay religious leaders travelled widely to reach their followers.

Spiritual geographies did not always overlap with the political. When the Afghan soldier Dattu Sarvani travelled around north India in the

⁸⁴ Narapati Nalha, *The Visaladevarasa*, J.D. Smith (trans.), Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976, v. 36.

⁸⁵ See Sreenivasan's account of *jauhar* in Raisen in 1532.

1530s in the service of different armies, his *pir*, the Sufi master Shaykh ‘Abd al-Quddus Gangohi, appeared regularly in his dreams to offer him counsel, thus creating a powerful realm—*wilaya*—within which Dattu felt protected. The dream-*pir* appeared to warn Dattu about local Sufis such as Shaykh Ahmad of Mandu, guided him to seek the help of the *pirs* of Gujarat (anecdote 97), and even kept him safe from a *sanyasi* offering to help the Afghan cause. In the latter dream, Dattu was attracted by the *sanyasi* who ‘talked well about God being one’, but his *pir* was at hand to enforce religious boundaries (anecdote 93). He appeared in a dream instructing Dattu to stay away and even driving the *sanyasi* away with his slipper.⁸⁶ While Dattu criss-crossed political boundaries and allegiances, his faith in his *pir* remained constant, whether he met him in person, as at Agra, or experienced his protection while asleep. He travelled not just through political territories but through the domains of powerful religious figures, brother-Sufis to his own master, that were as real to him as kingdoms.

In other texts, epic-pannic geographies combine with terrestrial, local ones. In Bhima Kavi’s *Daṅḡvai kathā* (1493), the magical mare describes a classical but very familiar geography of north India in her wanderings through *Jambudvīpa des*: she roams the forests of Dandakal and Kedali, the mountains of Binjha/Vindhya and Vindhyaḍhar, Kannauj *des*, the country of the Kurus, Kamani, Banga and the mountains of Tilangi, Kashmir, Jalandhar, Chaupar and Naipar/Nepal, before stopping at a ‘forest near Kashi’.⁸⁷ When Visaladeva marries the princess of Malwa, his inlaws gift him the kingdom of Sapadalaksa, Nagaracala, the lake of Sambhar, Toda, Tonk, Kudala, Bundi, Mandor, and in addition, Saurashtra and Gujarat, with the sea.⁸⁸ This almost believable dowry of contiguous places indicates what a small Marwari chieftain and his poet might have considered a sufficiently grand empire. For the Sanskrit poets of mid-century Junagadh and Champaner, their skill lies in their ‘intricate interaction between local and cosmopolitan geography, between real and Puranic topography and between local and transregional geopolitics’ (Chapter 8, p. XX), as they trace fabulous places of

⁸⁶ Digby (1964), pp. 65, 71–2.

⁸⁷ Bhima Kavi (1966); see F. Orsini, ‘Travelling Tales’, in F. Orsini and K. Schofield (eds), *Tellings and Texts*, forthcoming.

⁸⁸ Nalha, *Viśaladevarāsa*, vv. 20, 21.

worship alongside detailed route directions, news of disorder in other kingdoms compared to peace at home, and the virtues and drawbacks of princesses from all over the subcontinent. Patrons wanted to show off their influence and investments, how they had brought prosperity and opportunity to their territories, and how they were aware of their world beyond. Poets, similarly, wanted to show off their mastery of classical tropes while customizing their compositions to best please their patrons and display their grasp of specific political realities. Now that the little kingdoms were the loci of the celestial courts, myth had to descend to the *qasba*, the fort, and the countryside. Representations of landscape and terrain in the texts and paintings of the time cleave closely to the familiar and the believable while stretching the imagination towards fabulous realms.

Where were these compositions produced, recited, and enacted? The fifteenth century saw power moving to a new set of cities and fort-towns such as Gwalior, Chanderi, Mandu, Ahmedabad, Champaner, Jaunpur, Kalpi, Gaur, Pandua, and Hampi.⁸⁹ With the spotlight away from Delhi, writers, entrepreneurs, artisans, and religious specialists populated the newly popular towns. The warlords who were their customers were not always city-dwellers and often did not have the resources to build great cities. This is perhaps why the city occupies a place of anxiety and desire in many narratives; the patrons 'may not have had the resources to build such royal cities, but they could do the next best thing, perhaps: patronise poets who could describe such splendour and the political status that it implied' (Chapter 9, p. XX). The increased opportunities for scribes and writers in these towns suggest that much of the writing, especially by the bureaucrats, *prashasti* writers and scribes, was done there. But many members of the new elite lived in mud forts, or on the hoof with temporary or shifting 'courts'; for the locales of many performances of our texts we should envisage modest surroundings.

⁸⁹ Ahmedabad and Champaner were purpose-built in the fifteenth century while several others were of thirteenth- or fourteenth-century origin, considerably expanded or fortified in the fifteenth century. On Chanderi, see Gérard Fussman and K.L. Sharma, *Naissance et déclin d'une qasba: Chanderi du Xe et XVIIIe siècle*, Paris: Publications de l'Institut de Civilisation Indienne du Collège de France, 2003.

THE RELIGIOUS PUBLIC SPHERE

How Islamic were the Sultanates? Conventionally, in histories of medieval India the chapter on religion begins with the rulers' supposed religious policy, gleaned either from their statements or from the evaluation of contemporary historians, along two axes, one that sees the ruler pulled in different directions by the (strict, conservative, elite) 'ulama and the (liberal and popular) Sufis, and the other that pitches the Muslim ruler and his Muslim support base against the Hindu populace and their religious sentiments and practices. How inappropriate, simplistic, and misleading such top-down approach is is thrown into stronger relief in the fifteenth century, when suddenly a much larger number and varied cast of non-Muslim voices and characters appear on the north Indian stage, apparently insensible of living under 'Muslim rule'. No case is more striking in this respect than that of Braj. After noting Sikandar Lodi's *policy* of having mosques built opposite the ghats at Mathura and prohibiting Hindus from bathing in the Yamuna (whether he destroyed any temple there is unsure), Alan Entwistle noted, 'Ironically, it was during the reign of Sikandar Lodi, a staunch oppressor of Hinduism, that propagators of the emotional variety of devotion to Krishna came in search of the sacred places of Braj'—Nimbarka, Vallabha, and Chaitanya.⁹⁰

Nor are the archives of religious groups—so important and informative for this period—to be completely relied upon, given the striking selective silences about groups that must have inhabited the same social space. The approach of this book is bottom-up—we begin with the texts and the voices of Jains, Sants, Sufis, and devotees and we try to work out the context in which they co-existed, interacted with the local and regional power holders, and developed their own spaces.

Already Nizam al-Din Awliya had encouraged his disciples, many of whom came to his *khanqah* in Delhi from all over the country, to go and establish their presence in other regions.⁹¹ By the fifteenth century, networks of Chishti, Qadiri, Suhrawardi, and Kubrawi shaykhs and

⁹⁰ A.W. Entwistle, *Braj: Centre of Krishna Pilgrimage*, Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1987, pp. 135–6.

⁹¹ On Chishti dispersal in the fifteenth century, see Carl W. Ernst and Bruce B. Lawrence, *Sufi Martyrs of Love: The Chishti Order in South Asia and Beyond*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, Chapter 5.

their disciples, as well as *qalandars* and *majzubs*, criss-crossed north India from Uchh-Multan to Bengal to the Deccan.⁹² Sufi presence was particularly dense in the eastern regions, as recorded by 'Abd al-Haqq Dihlawi in his comprehensive *tazkira Akhbār al-Akhyār* (1642). Thus, beside Delhi, Thanesar and Panipat in north-western India, Sufi centres dotted Bengal (Pandua, Lakhnauti, and Sonargaon), Bihar (Maner, Purnea), the kingdom of Jaunpur, to which Ibrahim Shah Sharqi invited formidable scholars and Sufis like Qazi 'Abd al-Muqtadir and Qazi Shihab al-Din from Delhi,⁹³ and Avadh (Manikpur, Kara, Rudauli, Kichaucha, Khairabad, Makanpur, Kannauj). Even the small and short-lived kingdom of Kalpi and the nearby 'Iraj fort sought to attract Sufis, as did the Khaljis of Malwa. We can call this a network since biographical notes show that most Sufis travelled back and forth, either in their close environs or across these regions, typically when they were looking for a spiritual guide or when looking for patronage, and their successors often moved and established themselves in nearby towns.⁹⁴ Only very few Indian Sufis in this period travelled further afield in other parts of the Islamic world,⁹⁵ while a few Sufis continued to come to India from central Asia, like Shah 'Abd Allah, who in the early fifteenth century introduced the Shattari path to India. His imposing royal appearance and cortege, and his challenge to local Sufis to either teach him or be taught by him, led to confrontations in Manikpur, Jaunpur, and Bengal, until the Khalji sultan invited him

⁹² See S.A.A. Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1978, vol.1 for a comprehensive list; Ashraf Jahangir Simnani alone established a network of centres.

⁹³ Among them, Shaykh Abul Fath, Shaykh Ahmad 'Isa, Shaykh Baha' al-Din and his son Shaykh Adhan Jaunpuri; Rizvi (1978), pp. 262–4.

⁹⁴ For example, Shaykh Qutb-i Alam's disciple Shaykh Hussain Dhukhaposh moved from Pandua to Purnea, where he established his own *khanqah*; Rizvi (1978), p. 260.

⁹⁵ One exception is Shaykh Jamali of Delhi who embarked on a long journey in the reign of Bahlul Lodi; after the Hajj he travelled to the Maghreb, Yemen, Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Khurasan, and visited Sri Lanka on his way back to Delhi. As Rizvi notes, 'He was keenly interested in collecting stories about Indian Sufis who had lived or travelled in various parts of the Islamic world'; Rizvi (1978), pp. 286–7.

to settle in Mandu where he died in 1485. His disciples established Shattari centres in Bengal, Jaunpur, Gujarat, and of course Gwalior (the seat of Muhammad Ghaus).⁹⁶

Timur's invasion of Delhi prompted a further movement of Sufis and scholars southwards and eastwards. Simon Digby recalls Khwaja Bandanawaz Gisu Daraz's quick decision to leave Delhi with his entourage, and his subsequent peregrinations to Gwalior, Gujarat, and finally the Bahmani kingdom. Others who left Delhi at the time were Shaykh Abu'l Fath, who went to Jaunpur, Mawlana Khwajagi, who left for Kalpi already before the invasion, and the young Ahmad 'Abd al-Haqq (see Chapter 14).⁹⁷

Sufis settled in cities and garrison towns along trade and military routes, or in village outposts in less inhabited areas. In his evocation of Mathura, Malik Muhammad Jayasi gives us a sense of how such towns were settled, including his own *qasba* of Jais, where a *dargah* of Ashraf Jahangir Simnani is still standing. The fort is built first, surrounded by a moat. Inside it, the ruler builds his palace with several courtyards and ranis from several countries to enhance his fame. Outside it, tall houses, walled gardens and pavilions are built to accommodate the growing population. Chieftains from neighbouring areas also come to pay their respects, while traders come attracted by good roads, water supplies, and the wealth of chiefs and soldiers. Once healthy trade is established, religious mendicants also start flocking in, and various types of wandering performers and religious specialists ply their trades. They sing and tell stories to pass the time and entertain the people in the fort, who in turn give handsome rewards.⁹⁸

It is interesting that Jayasi should mention trade in precious objects, for according to the biographical information we have, many Sufis came from merchant families or had merchants among their local disciples, and Jaunpur was indeed a centre for the trade in precious stones.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Rizvi (1978), pp. 152–6.

⁹⁷ Rizvi (1978), pp. 247, 262, 273–4.

⁹⁸ Malik Muhammad Jayasi, *Kanhāvat* [1540], S.S. Pathak (ed.), Allahabad: Sahitya Bhavan, 1981, stanzas 11–12, pp. 10–11.

⁹⁹ For example, Shaykh Jamali belonged to the Kanbo Sunni merchants who, according to Rizvi, rose to considerable prominence during the reign of the Lodis; Rizvi (1978), p. 286. Several traders crop up in the stories relating to

Irfan Habib also notes that the new technology of distillation was employed by this time for both liquor and perfume.¹⁰⁰ A seventeenth-century history of a local Chishti lineage recalls that one ancestor, called Pir Buddhan and said to be the spiritual guide of Sultan Husayn Sharqi (r. 1458–79), shared with the Sultan a love of music but also of precious perfumes and scented wood, which he would send to the Sultan from his large estate in Rapri (near Chunar).¹⁰¹

All the rulers of this time—the Sharqis of Jaunpur, the Lodis, the Khaljis of Malwa, and the Ilyas Shahis and Husayn Shahis of Bengal, the Sher Shahis—seem to have had close personal relations with Sufi shaykhs and *qalandars*, and anecdotes of predictions, dreams, supernatural interventions or refusals to do so dot both histories and Sufi *tazkiras*.¹⁰² Such close alliances could and did create enmities when new rulers came into power, as was the case with Babur's predilection for Naqshbandis over Chishtis, for example, or with Sher Shah's reprisal against Muhammad Ghaus.¹⁰³

Several Sufi poets in particular occupied a position that was courtly and spiritual at the same time. Shaykh Jamali, for example, became close to Sultan Sikandar Lodi (r. 1489–1517) at the suggestion of his pir, Shaykh Sama' al-Din, who had been close to both Bahlul and Sikandar Lodi. He was consequently pushed aside by Sultan Ibrahim Lodi (and in fact wrote an elegy for Miyan Bhuwa, another courtier executed by the Sultan), and welcomed Babur's arrival with a *qasida* and followed Humayun on his campaign to Gujarat, where he died. Of his two sons, one became a poet at the court of Sher Shah and Islam Shah, while

the biography of Shaykh Ahmad 'Abd al-Haqq of Rudauli, whose most trusted disciple, Shaykh Bakhtiyar, had been the servant of a jewel merchant in Jaunpur; 'Abd al-Quddus Gangohi, *Anwār al-'uyūn* [1484], with Urdu tr., Lucknow: Matba-i Mujtaba'i, 1909, pp. 74 ff.

¹⁰⁰ I. Habib, *Medieval India: A Study in Civilization*, New Delhi: National Book Trust, 2007, p. 67.

¹⁰¹ See Hafiz Mahmud Sherani's summary and translation into Urdu of Shaykh 'Ala' al-Din Barnawi's *Chishtiya Bibishtiya* (1655); 'Makhdūm Shaikh Bahā' al-Dīn Barnāwī', *Oriental College Magazine*, 1, August 1927: 41–58.

¹⁰² For an account and discussion of such dreams and predictions, see Digby (1964).

¹⁰³ See Rizvi (1978), p. 157.

the other, Shaykh Gada'i, remained loyal to the Mughals and removed himself from Delhi for the duration of Sher Shah's rule. He later became the powerful *Sadr-i Sudur*, the controller of land grants and stipends for religious purposes, under Akbar, while at the same time continuing to hold *sama'* sessions and writing spiritual poetry.¹⁰⁴ This dual courtly and spiritual character is at the heart of the striking verse love stories by Avadhi Sufi poets (see Chapter 10). In Behl's words, this was 'a powerful Indo-Islamic literary tradition that circulated in courts, bazaars, shrines, and private salons throughout the Sultanate period and in subsequent centuries' (p. X). In his essay in this volume, Aditya Behl unravels the multiple layers of signification (*bhav*) in the story that a listener could draw from the elements, episodes, and characters of the story, guided by an expert storyteller or a spiritual guide.

Barring a few cosmopolitan Sufis such as Ashraf Jahangir Simnani and Shah 'Abd Allah who established the Shattari *silsila* in India, this was a world of provincial Sufis in the sense that Stefano Pellò gives to the term. Although they mostly wrote in Persian and in the classical genres of Sufi religious discourse, they drew upon an earlier canon of Persian spiritual poetry (Rumi, Attar, Nizami) rather than on current trends of the Turko-Persian Timurid world.¹⁰⁵ Also, despite their adherence to the protocol of writing in Persian, they also show unmistakable traces of vernacular use, both in their everyday practices and in their poetic and musical tastes (see Orsini in this volume). So while Sufi sources only mention yogis and not Sants or *bhagats*, the striking commonalities in their vernacular compositions in this period suggest that they shared a common language and some common spiritual vocabulary, even if they inflected the language and vocabulary differently—how far they shared audiences in north Indian towns remains a matter of speculation. Conversely, Nanak's early journey and encounters as presented in the *Puratan janam-sakhi* closely map those of Sufi biographies, suggesting a common patterning of spiritual life.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Apparently, he revoked the grants previously given to a number of 'ulama and shaykhs who had supported the Afghans; Rizvi (1978), p. 288.

¹⁰⁵ Barring Shaykh Jamali, who proudly recalled his conversations with Jami in Herat; Rizvi (1978), p. 287.

¹⁰⁶ See W.H. McLeod, *Gurū Nānak and the Sikh Religion*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986. The double succession of kin (to the *gaddi*) and

With the establishment of Sufi centres and their increasing imbrication in local economies in this period, the era of the *ghazi* or warrior pir can be said to have come to an end. The last of the *ghazis* in Gujarat was Latif Khan Dawar al-Mulk, remembered as victorious over the Rajputs of north Gujarat (whose descendants are now devotees of his shrine, as with Ghazi Miyan of Bahraich).¹⁰⁷ While the narratives associated with the silsila-based pirs were of settled life, established *wilaya*, and increasing influence in their neighbourhoods, the sagas of non-affiliated pirs also speak of settlement, cultivation, curing cows, and fertility.¹⁰⁸ In the context of Gujarat, Samira Sheikh has argued that the fifteenth century saw ‘the making of a stable polity based on the settling of pastoralist clans and their participation in sultanate politics, [and] the rise of religious activity as a lucrative economic sphere’ (p. 172). To some extent, this was the case throughout north India. As we have seen, each of the sultanates depended for their survival on local resources of manpower and weaponry. Each was thus the location for political experiments in recruitment. In Gujarat, Mahmud Begada and his son Muzaffar were able to win the support of the major religious figures of the region: these included Shaykh Ahmad Khattu, the Bukhari lineage of Ahmadabad, and the Ismaili pir Imam Shah. While in the case of north India polities were less stable, the undeniable activity of religious figures and the emergence of new religious sects points to a similar ‘religious marketplace’, with Vaishnava shrines in Braj, Bhakti gatherings of songs, preaching, and storytelling (*satsang*), Sufi shrines, and festivals. Religious groupings had now become lucrative for practitioners—witness Kabir’s

spiritual disciple, at least for the first gurus, also reproduces Sufi succession, while the practices around the holy book in the gurudwara (the *chadar*, the flywhisk, the chanting) are strongly reminiscent of practices at a Sufi *dargah*. For an analysis of the Sikh Gurus’ use of Persian vocabulary, see Shackle (1978).

¹⁰⁷ Sheikh (2010), p. 156. On Ghazi Miyan, see Shahid Amin, ‘On Retelling the Muslim Conquest’, in *History and the Present*, P. Chatterjee and A. Ghosh (eds), Delhi: Permanent Black, 2002, pp. 19–32.

¹⁰⁸ Such as some of the narratives of Satya Pir in Bengal. See Tony K. Stewart, ‘Alternate Structures of Authority: Satya Pir on the Frontiers of Bengal’, in *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia*, David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence (eds), New Delhi: India Research Press, 2002, pp. 21–54.

railing against the corruption of priests—and were equally the source of military and ideological support for rulers.

The new *sampradayas* of this period—the Nanak- and Dadu-*panth*, Ramanandis, Gaudiya and Pushti *marg*, and silsilas—have been seen as developments with no connection to politics. Yet the rise of Vaishnavism is deeply connected with the workings of the north Indian sultanates. As Heidi Pauwels has pointed out, it cannot be coincidence that the ‘recovery’ of Braj as a site for pilgrimage and as the locus of new Vaishnava activity occurred during times of intense political upheaval in the early sixteenth century.¹⁰⁹ At one level, pilgrimage was facilitated by the increased security of roads under the Lodi and Sur administrations. Later, during Akbar’s reign, rulers such as Madhukar Shah began to employ the vocabulary of Vaishnava *bhakti* as a signifier of upward mobility for the status-hungry mobile peasants they were trying to recruit. But even in the late fifteenth century, the groups newly enriched or energized by sultanate polities were reformulating devotional expression, group identity, and networks of pilgrimage.

Since the thirteenth century, royal temples had become associated with Hindu kingship and were no longer being built in sultanate territories. Jain sites continued, by and large, to be maintained, refurbished, and patronized by merchants or those in sultanate employment. For other non-Muslim groups, Vaishnavism offered a devotional vocabulary that did not pose the political threat of royal Shaivism or goddess worship. The ‘rediscovery’ of Braj by followers of Vallabha and Caitanya, among others, connected most of north India into increasingly dense networks of trade and pilgrimage.¹¹⁰ The new Vaishnavisms—with their reliance on the *Bhāgavata purāna*, avatara theory, and aggressive proselytizing—offered a mutable vocabulary to which many groups responded. The *vartas* of the Pushtimarg tradition record scores of tales of conversion by agricultural, mercantile, Rajput, and even Muslim groups. The Gaudiya tradition incorporated a similar range too. Even Rajput groups

¹⁰⁹ Heidi Pauwels, ‘The Saint, the Warlord, and the Emperor: Discourses of Braj Bhakti and Bundela Loyalty’, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 52(2), 2009: 187–228.

¹¹⁰ C. Vaudeville, ‘Braj Lost and Found’, in *Myths, Saints and Legends of Medieval India*, Vasudha Dalmia (ed.), Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 47–71.

formerly associated with goddess or Shiva worship began to link up their genealogies with Krishna (see, for example, Kanhadade, the fifteenth-century ruler of Jalor, whose name is equivalent to Krishna).¹¹¹

Vaishnavism offered a relatively open vocabulary for sectarian interpretation and investment. The Krishna narratives of the *Bhāgavata purāṇa* were one set that was creatively interpreted in the *sampradaya* traditions. For Rajputs and Rajputizing groups, the epic versions of Krishna were more relevant for their evolving genealogical ideologies. Thus Rajputs and Ahirs elaborated versions of the Krishna story, especially parts that recall the exploits of the Pandavas from the *Mahābhārata*.¹¹² Occupational castes such as the Bairagis also took to Vaishnava narratives of this kind. Vaishnavism was even incorporated within the narratives of mythological pirs, such as Satya Pir, who appears in Vaishnava guise as Satyanarayana.¹¹³ The cultural and political inroads of Vaishnavism did not go unresisted: one of the most famous narratives is that of the Krishnaite poet Mira, who faced the anger of her Shakta inlaws for her devotion to Krishna, but persisted nevertheless.

In rehabilitating the long fifteenth century, this volume has its limitations. It is concerned primarily with the literatures and cultures of north and central India. While there are two chapters on Gujarat, there are none on Jaunpur or Bengal. Both were the seat of important regional sultanates, both saw the flowering of Sufi silsilas and the new Vaishnavism, and both were part of the evolving, linked, literary culture of what we have called Hindavi. Sindh, Kashmir, and Punjab receive hardly any attention either. Richard M. Eaton's paper on bureaucracy and language is on the Deccan, but there are no other papers on the south. Here, the justification has been the linguistic distinctiveness of southern literary cultures. The Naths and other ascetic groupings that appear often in our period. The Sants, similarly, vital to the articulation and dissemination of literature in this period, are only in the background of some of the papers here.

¹¹¹ Padmanabha, *Kanhadade prabandha*, K.B. Vyas (ed.), Jaipur: Rājasthān Purātattva Mandir, 1953.

¹¹² See Stuart Blackburn, Peter J. Claus, Joyce B. Flueckiger, and Susan S. Wadley, *Oral Epics in India*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989; Alf Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking India's Oral and Classical Epics: Draupadi among Rajputs, Muslims and Dalits*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.

¹¹³ See Stewart (2002).

In spite of these constraints, we believe that a literary and multi-lingual approach like that of this volume can help bring together what are now separate strands and provide a more connected linguistic, social, and political history of the period, and we hope this volume will act as a spur to further investigations of the period and to more comparative studies.

STATES, SUBJECTS, AND NETWORKS

