6
Assessing Gurmukhi Textual Production in the Late Early Modern Period

Anne Murphy

Abstract This exploratory chapter examines the great diversity of literary production in the Gurmukhi script in the early modern period, only a subset of which has received significant scholarly attention. One domain in which Gurmukhi materials invite consideration is in what Michael Allen (2017: 291) has called the field of 'Greater Advaita Vedānta', which incorporated vernacular works, non-philosophical works, and works that integrated with diverse traditions such as bhakti, Sikhism, and yoga. This was a part of the proliferation of Advaita thought across diverse languages and scripts in North India, and its influence in Gurmukhi philosophical and literary domains has been considerable; Jvala Singh's new work on the *Sūraj Prakāś*, by Santokh Singh, provides crucial new details on this dynamic. The *Vicārmālā* attributed to Anāthadās / Anāthapurī can be put in this category of 'Greater Advaita': composed in VS 1726/1669 CE, it was published in print as early as 1876 CE in Devanāgarī with Hindi commentary – and perhaps earlier – and later into Gurmukhi; it was later translated into English, on the basis of the 1876 commentary by Lala Sreeram (Calcutta, 1886). In addition to being well represented in Gurmukhi manuscript collections, the *Vicārmālā* was thus also a popular text for replication and commentary in the burgeoning print culture of colonial North India – and in Punjab. It was therefore clearly a well-known text over an extended time in Punjab, in Gurmukhi, in both manuscript and print. This paper will consider this text in preliminary terms, as an example of the field of Greater Advaita Vedanta in the Punjab context, to suggest the diversity of texts available in Gurmukhi script that invite our attention.

Murphy, Anne: Assessing Gurmukhi Textual Production in the Late Early Modern Period, in Hiroko Nagasaki, Monika Horstmann, and Kiyokazu Okita (eds), Early Modern Literatures in North India. Current Research 2022–2024. Heidelberg: Heidelberg Asian Studies Publishing, 2025, pp. 129–154. https://doi.org/10.11588/hasp.1553.c22778

The Diversity in Gurmukhi Script[1]

There is great diversity in the textual production in the Gurmukhi script in the early modern period, only a subset of which has received significant scholarly attention. The material that has received more attention either (1) also exists in Devanagari, the script associated most prominently with Hindi and Sanskrit, or other scripts, and is examined more in those scripts, without full recognition of Gurmukhi iterations, or (2) directly relates to the historical unfolding and textual formations of the Sikh tradition. Yet, there is more to think about with the range of Gurmukhi manuscripts, as well as in print, and the goal of this exploratory essay is to think through some ways of pursuing this train of thought. This work is aligned with the recent work of Purnima Dhavan and Heidi Pauwels (2015), which has explored the emergence of *Rekhtā* (an early literary form of what later came to be known as Urdu) across different locations as well as scripts; work by Francesca Orsini (2019, 2023) on multilingual literary production in and between different kinds of urban centres; the late Allison Busch's (2011) work on Braj (what she calls 'classical Hindi', but which is best discussed not as a form of 'Hindi', but as a fully independent linguistic form that was adopted broadly for literature in the early modern period, as will be discussed below) in the Mughal court and in more peripheral court contexts; and the important work of Julie Vig (2020, 2022) that explores Braj literature in Sikh contexts and, within this, the ways in which Vaiṣṇava tropes function in Sikh Braj texts. This existing work

1 I am grateful overall to the work of Jvala Singh, which has informed so much of my own thinking on Advaita Vedānta in Sikh and Punjabi contexts, and to that of Julie Vig, which has enriched my reading of Punjabi Braj sources. Sincere thanks also to the editors of this volume, and to the anonymous reviewer of the essay, for insightful and detailed feedback. This exploratory essay was first presented as 'Philosophy and / of the city? Tracing urban religious networks in early modern and colonial South Asia through philosophical exchange', discussed in the Summer term Colloquium Series of the Max Weber Centre for Advanced Social and Cultural Studies, University of Erfurt (Germany), 7 June 2022 (funded by the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* (DFG, German Research Foundation) – FOR 2779 – in the context of the Kolleg-Forschungsgruppe 'Religion and Urbanity: Reciprocal Formations'). A later version was presented as 'Assessing Gurmukhi cultural production in the late early modern and colonial periods: the case of the *Vicārmālā* in the field of "Greater Advaita"', paper given at the 14th International Conference on Early Modern Literatures of North India (ICEMLNI), Osaka, Japan (online), 15–19 July 2022. I am grateful to my interlocutors at both locations for their input, and to Jvala Singh for his reading of this work-in-progress.

demonstrates the diversity of contexts that hosted vernacular literary production in multiple linguistic and scriptal registers, and the ability of languages and their literatures to move and take on different scriptal and other forms. This is a broad characteristic of the early modern period: in this time, as Francesca Orsini and Samira Sheikh (2014: 22) have argued: 'Script was an indicator of circulation rather than of the intrinsic nature of the text.' This insight is fitting to the case of Punjabi: Punjabi as a language is not only found in Gurmukhi, and Gurmukhi texts are linguistically diverse, as will be discussed below. The significance of this offers much to our understanding of Punjabi religious formations in the early modern period, and the diverse ways in which languages and literatures intersected with them. Indeed, as Orsini (2023: 160) has recently noted, 'the intrinsic connection between script and language', which has become normalized in the last century, has 'denied the history of multiscriptualism in northern India, a history that meant… that the same text circulated among different reading communities and that different registers could be part of the same language, accessible to the same person'. The life of texts in Gurmukhi reflects this history.

Broad comparison of some exemplary Gurmukhi manuscript collections – the Wellcome Collection (London, UK), Bhāśā[2] Vibhāg (Patiala, Punjab, India), and The British Library (London, UK) – reveals the diversity of materials in the Gurmukhi script. The contents of the 'Punjabi' (defined in a particular way, as discussed below) manuscript holdings in the Wellcome Collection are instructive in this regard, reflecting both the particular histories of collections acquired during Henry Wellcome's lifetime, as well as broader histories of manuscript production and circulation in early modern North India.[3] According to the as-of-yet unpublished guide to the Wellcome Collection's Punjabi manuscripts skillfully prepared by Dr. Peter Friedlander, which is the basis for the analysis presented here, most of the Punjabi manuscripts were collected – as were most of the South Asian manuscripts in the Collection overall – by Dr. Paira Mall, who acted as an agent of Henry Wellcome and engaged in purchases of manuscripts between 1911 and 1921. Dr. Mall was specifically charged with the purchase of medical manuscripts, but judging from the resulting collection (which is augmented by some additional purchases in India and London), it is clear that, as Dr. Friedlander puts it in his introduction to the Punjabi

2 Diacritics here follow those required for Punjabi: *bhāśā* not *bhāṣā.*

3 Sincere thanks to Adrian Plau of the Wellcome Collection for sharing the unpublished catalog of Punjabi manuscripts with me.

Collection, Dr. Mall 'interpreted his brief somewhat broadly' (Friedlander n.d.). This accounts for the striking diversity of the Wellcome Collection manuscripts, which reflect a wide range of religious, literary, and utilitarian interests.[4] It is also important to note their linguistic diversity: these manuscripts here are not grouped so much by language as by script: Gurmukhi is the main script used, and is the grounds for the definition of the manuscripts as 'Punjabi'. They are, however, linguistically diverse, and Braj is prominent among them; the 'Punjabi collection' is therefore not defined in linguistic terms, but instead by script.[5] Friedlander (n.d.) notes a striking distinction between the Wellcome Collection body of Punjabi manuscripts and those in the British Library: those in the latter are generally more elaborate and designed for public use, while those in the Wellcome Collection are smaller and less elaborate, and designed for private use. The Bhāśā Vibhāg (Language Department) collection in Patiala (Punjab, India) – one of the most extensive collections of manuscripts in the Indian Punjab – parallels the Wellcome Collection in this regard, housing a large number of smaller manuscripts; only three of the manuscripts in the Wellcome Collection are illustrated (Mss. 255, 256, 259). The earliest dated manuscript in the Wellcome Collection is 1791 CE (Mss. 257) and the remainder of the dated manuscripts hail from the nineteenth century (Friedlander n.d.). Some of the undated manuscripts may date from as early as the seventeenth century, Dr. Friedlander notes, based on orthography.

It is of course not surprising that in a large collection of Gurmukhi texts of this sort, a large number are specifically Sikh in content, given the strong association of the Gurmukhi script with Sikh tradition. A large body of the texts represented in the collection feature

4 I discuss specific texts, not manuscripts, since most of the 261 manuscripts represent compilations of numerous texts. In addition to the major categories of texts discussed here, there are five texts on prosody, and a Gurmukhi version of Bihārīlāl's *Satsaī*, nine *qissā* texts (six Sassi Punnu and two Hīr Rāñjhā) and three manuscripts with the work of Bulhe Shāh, from the nineteenth century. There are also six unidentified manuscripts, with loose folios; also fifteen miscellaneous devotional works that do not fall into the broad categories outlined here, and seventeen miscellaneous late (early twentieth century) *parachai* of miscellaneous saints. I have not yet had the opportunity to examine these texts.

5 Punjabi texts in the early modern and modern periods were commonly written in Shahmukhi (a Punjabi term for the Urdu / modified Persian script, which is commonly used in the Pakistani Punjab and among its diaspora communities today. 'Shahmukhi' as a term may be a modern term; I am not aware of evidence of its use before the modern period and Amarjit Chandan has suggested this periodization, personal communication 2014.

selections of the *Gurū granth sāhib*, the canonical scripture of Sikh tradition. There are 145 texts of this sort. Two collections of text, Manuscripts 23 and 31, comprised of a total of twenty-one texts between them, approximate the final contents of the *Dasam granth*,[6] which was fluid until the modern period, as Jeevan Deol (2001) demonstrated in an analysis of *Dasam granth* manuscripts. Otherwise there are thirty-five sections of the *Dasam granth* scattered through various manuscripts, appearing in isolation or with one other text associated with the *Dasam granth,* but not the entire corpus now generally understood to constitute that text. There are seventeen texts of what we can call 'Panthic historiography', to utilize a phrase used by Sukhwinder Gill (2020) in his study of the *Vār*s of Bhāī Gurdās. This category of texts includes the *Janamsākhī*s, which are well represented in this collection, as well as the *Gurbilās* tradition. Three copies of the *Nasīhatnāmā*, which is said to be a discourse by Guru Nanak to the King of Medina, are available; this is also available in manuscript form in single copies, each, in the Bhāśā Vibhāg collection (mss. 245) and the British Library.[7] This too is something that has been unstudied in a substantial way in the literature on the Sikh tradition. The Collection also features three manuscripts of the collected works of Bhāī Gurdās; the Bhāśā Vibhāg collection includes more, inviting further study to enhance the late Dr. Rahuldeep Singh Gill's important 2016 work on the manuscripts of the *Vār*s of Bhāī Gurdās (dated generally to the late sixteenth / early seventeenth century).

More than 100 of the works in Gurmukhi might be broadly conceived to fall within 'Hindu' devotional / religious domains, with full appreciation of the relative lack of specificity of that designation in the early modern period, when in Punjab we commonly see 'Hindu' being used in a contrastive sense as 'non-Muslim', rather than as a content-laden term that designates a specific set of religious and cultural attributes (Lorenzen 1999: 639–40; Murphy 2012: 106–7; Murphy forthcoming 2). This contrasts with the formulation developing in scholarly and Sanskrit-dominant environments where a cohesive tradition was conceptualized, although more so, according to Michael Allen (Allen 2022: 194) and Shankar Nair (2020: 14–15), in the idea of a 'Vedic', rather than 'Hindu' tradition (cf. Nicholson 2010). The diversity of these

6 The diacritics here, *Granth*, are used to indicate the use of a nasalization marker *(tippi / bindi),* which is used widely in Punjab over the use of conjunct nasalization.

7 *Janamsākhī nasīhat nāmā bābe nānak jī kā*, PanjB41, India Office Collections, British Library.

texts exceeds my ability to discuss them all in the confines of this short chapter, so I note here some of their notable features. If we speak more accurately about specific traditions and lineages, rather than largely anachronistic broader religious categories such as 'Hindu', we can see significant representation of Vaiṣṇava traditions in the Wellcome Collection: a large representation of Braj renditions of the story of Rām (such as Braj Gurmukhi versions of the *Hanumān nāṭak*), and numerous Braj versions of the *Bhagavadgītā* (as well as one in Sanskrit, in the Gurmukhi script, Mss 102). We also see works based on the *Mahābhārata*, and several Braj Gurmukhi versions of sections of the *Yogavāsiṣṭha vairāgya prakaraṇam*. Most are preliminarily dated to the nineteenth century. There is a huge number of parallel texts in the Bhāśā Vibhāg collection, with a similar range of themes and texts represented, in the Gurmukhi script.

Gurmukhi Domains of Advaita Vedānta

Seventeen Gurmukhi texts in the Wellcome Collection signal a particularly neglected area of exploration in Gurmukhi domains: Advaita Vedānta, a philosophical, intellectual, and religious tradition with deep historical roots as well as enduring relevance today. The field of Advaita Vedānta is important for two reasons that are contradictory in an important way: first, because it represented a meeting place of many different traditions in the early modern period and, second, because of its significance going forward, but in less plural terms: both of these dimensions are relevant to our discussion. Advaita Vedānta becomes a central feature of an emergent idea of Hinduism that coalesces in the late early modern, and then later the modern, period, as discussed below. The contradictory element here is that it clearly was not fully within that category earlier; it was both important in what would become Hinduism in modern terms, but also widely influential and a site for interreligious exchange and capacious breadth in the early modern period. This is not meant to suggest this acts as a syncretic domain; the concept of syncretism has been ably critiqued in recent scholarship and has largely ceased to offer much in its favour.[8] Instead, as I have argued elsewhere, we can consider such domains of activity as a meeting place for allied intellectual and personal interests

8 The definitive critique is Stewart, 2001; see also de Bruijn 2018. For wider discussion, see Stewart and Shaw 1994.

and practices, a place that need not require sameness to allow shared exchange and experience (Murphy 2020; forthcoming 2).

Brian Hatcher's (2007: 299) work on the 'the elite, textual, and spiritualized model of Hinduism that had become normative by the middle of the twentieth century' has drawn attention to the 'special interplay of nationalism, romanticism, and orientalism in the this [sic] Vedānta-based paradigm of Hinduism'. As Hatcher (2007: 302) notes, with reference to famed reformer Bengali Ram Mohan Roy (1772–1833; founder of the Brahmo Sabhā, a precursor of the Brahmo Samāj), and Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902), who was an important voice on the international stage in representing modern Hinduism, among others, '[t]hese and a host of lesser-known philosophers and swamis helped to enshrine Vedānta as the veritable essence of Hinduism'. In the hands of Ram Mohan Roy, for instance, this represented a part of a larger effort 'to promulgate a more rational and humane religion' in the broadest sense, following a 'method of *conscious* selection, a method imbued with intention and purpose' (Hatcher 1999: 32, 9). The Brahmo Samāj advocated for a rejection of Vedic ritual, belief in reincarnation, and image worship, and embraced congregational worship and monotheism; this task was later taken up by the Tattvabodhinī Sabhā, which Hatcher examines at length. Advaita Vedānta thus was mobilized in modern articulations of Hindu identity.

But it would be wrong to see these modern forms as developing *ex nihilo*, and both the continuities as well as the disjunctures in the 'life' of Advaita Vedānta from the early modern to the modern period are important to account for (Madaio 2017). Advaita ('non-dualist') Vedānta developed in relation to a complex set of institutionalizing practices in the early modern period; at the same time, it also moved outside of them. The field of Vedānta was particularly productive across communities in the early modern period when, as Christopher Minkowski (2011: 205) notes: 'a lot was written about non-dualism, often at great length and sometimes with great intellectual and polemical force.' This led, in part, to the compilation of catalogues and surveys that explored a variety of Advaitan positions in a synthesizing mode, 'towards the generalization of regional arguments and arrangements in religious matters' (Minkowski 2011: 212, 222 for quote). Minkowski (2011: 218–19) notes that in the early modern period, Advaitan activities were concentrated in the South, largely in association with the Sṛṅgerī and Kāñcīpuram *maṭh*s (monasteries), which developed with the support of the Vijayanagara state. Later Benares, also known as Kāśī or Vārāṇasi, evolved as a major centre, one that provided for the learning and rise of Niścaldās (*c*.1791–1863), whose vernacular *Ocean*

of Inquiry (Vicār-sāgar) contributed to a 'Greater Advaita Vedānta', described by Michael Allen (2017: 291; 2022: 7–8), which incorporated vernacular works, non-philosophical works, and works that integrated with diverse traditions such as bhakti, Sikhism, and yoga. This was a part of the proliferation of Advaita thought across languages and scripts in present-day northern India / Pakistan – as Supriya Gandhi's (2020) important work on Vedānta articulations in Persian shows. Its influence in Gurmukhi domains has been considerable, if underexamined; Jvala Singh's work on the early nineteenth-century text the *Gurpratāp sūraj graṅth*, by Santokh Singh, is particularly important in this regard, detailing how this major work that focuses on Sikh history also reflects a transregional network of Advaita Vedānta thought and intellectual investigation (J. Singh 2022; 2023: 157; 2024). The Nirmala and Udāsī communities, generally Sikh-affiliated intellectual groups in Punjab and beyond – who were also active in Benares – provided one of the contexts for the emergence of the *Sūraj graṅth*; they were in general strongly influenced by Advaita thought. Jvala Singh (2024) argues cogently, however, for not limiting Advaita Vedānta to one intellectual domain in the Punjabi and Sikh context, and for recognition of the central role of Advaita-oriented texts in Sikh intellectual traditions in the early modern period. Indeed, Nirbhai Singh has argued that we can see in the compositions of Sikh Gurus the effort 'to reconcile both the personal and the impersonal views of reality without surpressing either one… [such that] (t)he non-dualistic concept of Being dealt within the Sikh scriptures, Guru-bāṇī, is in harmony with the Advaita doctrine' (Balasubramanian 2000: 603). Such a statement may not accord with some modern interpretations of Sikh thought and practice, as discussed below. Regardless of one's position on the consonance between Gurbāṇī and Advaita Vedānta, however, the historical evidence of Sikh engagement with Advaita thought in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is significant.

Before continuing with a specific textual example that attests to the life of Vedānta in Gurmukhi, it is important to note some observations about the Gurmukhi collections discussed above, and what a bird's-eye view of these collections tells us. First, we can see that Gurmukhi was a commitment of Sikh tradition, but also far beyond it. This does not adhere to the conventional narrative regarding Gurmukhi, and Punjabi, where 'Hindu texts' are associated with Devanāgarī, and Gurmukhi is seen to be a special commitment of Sikhs. Clearly that was not the case. Farina Mir's (2010) work demonstrates this for the colonial period: cultural production in the colonial period was expressed in multiple scripts by diverse authors, and Punjabi-language literary production

did not adhere to identitarian configurations. So this is not news, for the period of print. But to note it at this scale in manuscripts, before the advent of print, is significant, and deserves attention, given the tenaciousness of popular assumptions about the use of Gurmukhi. Second, the array of texts preserved in these collections gives us a sense of a reading public that was capacious, and moved not only across script and language, but also across ideas. Our exploration of the text that is at focus here allows us to see this. We also see in these collections as a whole the great diversity of work hailing from Punjab, in the Gurmukhi script, and in diverse linguistic forms: this is a diversity that speaks to the capacious cultural moorings of Punjabi religious cultures of diverse kinds, and moves across them. The importance of Gurmukhi as a regional, and not religiously marked script (contrary to its general representation today) stands out from such a vantage point, and suggests a new history of the script that remains to be written.

As the seventeen Advaita-oriented manuscripts in the Wellcome collection and the many more in the Bhāśā Vibhāg Collection demonstrate, Vedānta mattered across communities, and across scripts, in the early modern period. The use of the Gurmukhi script in this context tells us something important about circulation, and about communities of reception and production of texts and ideas in different locations. This has significance in how we conceptualize religious dynamics in this period. The ascendancy of 'Greater Advaita' in this period did not entail exclusivity or simple consolidation; nor did it entail the problematic idea of 'syncretism' – in which the supposed 'mixing' of traditions requires the reification of the traditions that are being mixed as somehow quintessentially 'unmixed', regardless of the genealogy and dynamism of these traditions themselves.[9] Instead, it indicates a diversity of engagements with Vedantic thought that spoke across traditions. Niścaldās, the author of the popular Hindavi Vedānta text the *Vicār-sāgar*, was positioned, Michael Allen (2017: 278) has argued, as a 'popularizer [who] must be understood against the backdrop of the pre-existent popularity of Advaita Vedānta', a popularity that accounts for later figures such as Vivekananda, who drew upon the vibrancy of Advaita Vedānta in the early modern and into the modern periods to argue for a particular kind of universal 'tolerance' (Harris 2022: 277–97; Madaio 2017). This speaks to Sikh intellectual work in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and its diverse moorings, as Jvala Singh (2022; 2023: 157; 2024) shows in his work on the early-nineteenth-century *Sūraj granth* by Santokh Singh. This parallels early

9 See discussion in Murphy 2020.

modern convergences that emerged between Sufi and Yogic mutual embrace of body- and mind-transforming practices, and significant interest on both sides in common concerns and techniques – a set of parallels seen across communities that build on commonalities and shared understanding and practices, not equation or mixing.

A bird's-eye view of Gurmukhi-script manuscript collections helps us to see these connections: the Bhāśā Vibhāg collection in Gurmukhi holds four versions of the works of Sundardās (1596–1689), follower of Dādū Dayāl (d. 1604), a major figure in early modern religions of what is now Rajasthan and a proponent of a Sant or *nirguṇ*, non-representational, understanding of divinity that bears strong resonances with Sikh thought (Mss. 89, 114, 172, 173; on Sundardās, see Allen 2020; Horstmann 2021; Williams 2022: 299–300, 321–2). The Dādūpanth (the community founded by Dādū) was clearly in conversation with Sikh traditions, as historical exploration of eighteenth-century Dādū textual production reveals; it also had strong and complex affinities with Vaiṣṇava religious formations, as well as Vedānta.[10] Michael Allen (2020) argues Sundardās 'should be credited for his originality': not only did he "Vedānticize" the Dādūpanth, he "Dādūized" Vedānta'. Sundardās also, it must be noted, wrote on Yoga, integrating bhakti or devotionalism with yogic practices, representing another Guru-centred tradition that resonates with the content of the *Vicārmālā* as we will see (Horstmann 2021: 177–82). In so doing, Horstmann (2021: 182) notes, Sundardās 'mediates between the wide gamut of attitudes prevailing among Dādūpanthīs of the mid-seventeenth century'.

The *Vicārmālā*

We can put in this category of 'Greater Advaita' the *Vicārmālā* attributed to Anāthadās or Anāthapurī, which declares itself to have been composed in VS 1726/1669 CE, in the month of Māgh.[11] This makes Anāthadās a younger contemporary of Sundardās, the great Dādūpanthī synthesizer of Vedānta discussed above, thus situating this text in the larger dialogue on Vedānta of which Sundardās was part, although

10 On Dādū–Sikh connections, see Vig 2020: 184–91, Hastings 2002 and Williams 2024.

11 The date for the text is provided by Blumhardt (1899: 51), and this corresponds with four of the five manuscripts available on the Panjab Digital library, see below; see, for example, MN-000120, p. 72; MN000296 is missing the date of the text, and overall is incomplete.

Anāthadās' work is far less elaborate and lengthy than the works that have made Sundardās prominent, such as his doctrinal work, the *Jñān-samudra*, 'Ocean of Knowledge' (Allen 2020: 52). Anāthadās' text is far humbler in length and complexity: comprised of eight sections, the text provides a broad overview of Vedantic ideas in the form of a dialogue between one seeking guidance and that seeker's Guru, with a focus on the role of the Guru as model and guide, the path required to allow the student to still the mind and ego and achieve the qualities of the enlightened, and the identity of the individual self with the ultimate. As translator Sreeram notes in his 1886 introduction to the text and commentary, it is designed for the 'beginner': 'All metaphysical disquisitions and subtle arguments which can only reach the comprehension of the more advanced student have been purposely abstained from' (1886: I).

The *Vicārmālā* is extant in manuscript form in the Wellcome Collection in the UK, and numerous copies – a total of seventeen – are also present in the Bhāśā Vibhāg ('Languages Department') Collection in Patiala, Punjab (India); five are available on the Punjab Digital Library website by Anāthapurī; another manuscript in Gurmukhi script is held in the British Library, also by Anāthapurī (according to the text itself), although the catalogue lists the author as Anāthadās, who also is understood to have authored the *Sarvasāra-upadeśa* from 1671 CE (Blumhardt 1899: 51).[12] The presence of the *Vicārmālā* in these collections – the Wellcome Collection, the Punjab Digital Library, the Bhāśā Vibhāg Collection, and the British Library – tells us that it had significant reach in the late early modern period, prior to the imposition of British rule; as Tyler Williams has helpfully noted, it is also well attested in manuscripts and manuscript collections associated with the Nirañjanī and Dādūpanthī communities, two early modern sant or *nirguṇ* religious communities in what is now Rajasthan (India), organized around a formless notion of the divine that could be experienced through mystical practice.[13] The text is also well attested in print in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The text was available in print form in 1876 with a commentary by Govind

12 British Library India Office Collection Or2763. As of 28 April 2024, eleven manuscripts are listed under the name *Vicārmālā* in the Punjabi Digital Library. Six are not this text (ID: MN-000001, MN-001854 by a Tara Singh; MN-000811; MN-000295, MN-000794, MN-000788); five are this text by Anatha Puri: MN-000120, MN-000296 (the scan begins on the twelfth verse), MN-000591, MN-000588, and MN-000157 (this copy is dated to vs 1867; other copies are undated).

13 Email communication, Tyler Williams, University of Chicago, 6 May 2022.

Dās in Devanāgarī, and, according to Blumhardt's catalog (1899: 51), in Gurmukhi by 1891.[14] The text and Govind Dās' commentary – which names the author as Anāthadās – were translated by Lala Sreeram (1886) and published from Calcutta. These were not the only printed versions of the text, and commentary on it, produced in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: the work was widely printed in the period of British rule, when the field of print became a dynamic and diverse one in the Punjab, as Farina Mir's important work has shown. Print technology was introduced in Punjab in the early nineteenth century by missionaries – a phenomenon paralleled elsewhere in South Asia – during the period of the Lahore State of the greater Punjab, ruled by Ranjit Singh. (The first press was established in Ludhiana in 1836 [Mir 2010: 32].) After annexation by the East India Company in 1849, by the 1870s 'Punjabi print culture was thriving' (Mir 2010: 12). On the one hand, this inaugurated a period of extensive publication of agonistic and reformist religious treatises, as the religious landscape of the region became politically fraught in the context of British colonial administrative practices that politicized religious identity by basing nascent representative political institutions on religious identity (Jones 1981; Mandair 2009). On the other hand, this was not the full story: Mir (2010: 19, 21 for quote) demonstrates that agonistic positions did not dominate in the Punjabi print environment, certainly not in book publishing but even to a lesser degree in periodical publishing, as they did in Hindi and Urdu, although she also allows that 'the reform organizations all employed print to promote their own movements, and print served as a particularly fertile medium for attacking other communities'. The Punjabi print environment therefore demonstrated striking diversity and broad reach, often maintaining traditional themes and genres that did not adhere to religiously divided community definitions promoted by some reformist organizations (Mir 2010; Murphy 2018).

This is the broader domain in which we can locate the Gurmukhi-script colonial-period print editions of the *Vicārmālā*. In these printed forms, the work was not only made available for a larger public, but was also engaged with by multiple commentators in the vernacular – and in both Hindi and Punjabi, in Devanagari and Gurmukhi. According to

14 Two versions of Govind Dās' version of the text, with commentary, were available for this essay, both in Devanāgarī: one through the Punjab Digital Library (PDL) (Dasa 1881; PDL ID BK006228-0024), and one through the Internet Archive (Digital Library of India Item 2015.315564), which claims a date of 1832. The PDL version is used primarily here, but is damaged, requiring reference to the Internet Archive version.

Blumbardt's catalogue of Hindi, Punjabi, and Hindustani manuscripts, it was a popular work, 'published from several native presses': mention has already been made of the Hindi language / Devanāgarī version by the Dādūpanthī Govind Dās, published from Bombay in 1876, that later became the basis for Lala Sreeram's 1886 translation; a Gurmukhi version was, according to Blumhardt (1899: 51), published from Lahore in 1891.[15] An example of a particularly Punjabi (in location) engagement with the *Vicārmālā*, in Gurmukhi, is a commentary by Bishan Singh, a scholar *(giānī)* of Khalsa College, Amritsar – an institution of higher learning founded in 1892 specifically to further the interests and educations of Sikhs in the context of British rule – which was published in 1911 by Bhai Chatar Singh & Jivan Singh of Amrtisar, a prominent publisher in that city. A later commentary was done in Gurmukhi by Svargvāsī (the late) Paṇḍit Svāmī Gur Prasād, which was accessioned by the India Office Library in 1938 (and is otherwise undated); further information about this author (such as his scholarly and religious affiliations) is unavailable.[16] These are only examples, but give a sense of the breadth of linguistic and scriptal engagements with the text.

The *Vicārmālā* and Its Commentaries: A Brief Exploration

The *Vicārmālā* in both manuscript and print form, and its late-nineteenth-century translation, offers the opportunity to tell a wider story of the role of Advaita Vedānta in vernacular contexts in Punjab and beyond, from the early modern period into the modern, and can help us to discern the networks that brought together thinkers and practitioners of diverse traditions from the early modern period and into the colonial. The range of texts in manuscript, print, and translation allows us to see how distribution, and multiple readings, of the text reflected both converging religious and philosophical interests, as well as diverse religious affiliations. The core text itself is linguistically complex, at times with affinities to Braj, and at other times moving towards a simpler, *Sadhukkaṛī* linguistic form. It is not marked by Punjabi linguistic elements. In this way, it bridges linguistic communities active in the literary landscape of early modern present-day

15 The version available on the Punjab Digital Library is from 1881: Dās 1881.

16 For the first, see British Library, India Office Library collection PanjD210 and 14162.bb.5; for the 1938 text, see Panj D1215. At this time, I only have access to the first two sections of Panj D1215.

northern India / Pakistan. Govind Dās' and others' commentaries – and Sreeram's English late-nineteenth-century translation – can be seen as part of the broader exchange around Vedānta in the late nineteenth century that Hatcher explores, which (in the case of the translation in particular) may be indicative also of a complex late-nineteenth-century congruence between Indian and British thinkers on modes of religious engagement in the context of Theosophy, for example, as well as *bhakti*, or devotionalism (Pinch 2003). The introduction provided by the translator of the text, which is quite formal in tone, provides a cogent and thoughtful description of Vedantic thought, in concise form, in keeping with the orientation of the *Vicārmālā* itself, which the translator notes is marked by its 'simplicity' and 'cogency of arguments', although the *Vicārmālā* is far less explicit in meaning and less verbose than the translation (in keeping with poetic norms in this genre of formulaic, recited text) (Sreeram 1886: 1). In his introduction – which does not correspond to an original in the Govind Dās commentary, at least in the versions of the Hindi commentary available to the author at this time – Sreeram indicates the core orientation of the original work: 'Knowledge alone is the one and only means for the destruction of ignorance which envelopes the self and prevents cognition of his natural felicity' (1886: vi). He then provides a full translation of the text in English, with extensive commentary in English, translating both the core text and the Hindi commentary provided by Govind Dās. Here I discuss the text in preliminary terms, with reference to the versions mentioned thus far: manuscript MN-000120 from the Punjab Digital Library, which is an undated manuscript but appears stylistically to be the oldest among those available on the website, (see footnote 12); the Govind Dās printed text and commentary (Dās 1881; see footnote 14 regarding versions); the published Sree Lam translation from 1886; the Bishan Singh commentary and version of the text from 1911 (Singh 1911; British Library PanjD210); and the version by Pandit Svāmī Gur Prasād (Gur Prasād n.d.; British Library D1215), which was accessioned by the India Office Library in 1938 (and is otherwise undated). As has been noted, there are many other published versions and manuscripts of the text. Given the constraints of space in this publication, we examine only a few exemplary lines; fuller investigation is forthcoming, drawing on a greater range of texts.

The Govind Dās printed version, as well as Shree Ram's translation, opens with an invocational *dohā* that is included neither in the manuscripts available through the Panjab Digital Library and the British Library, nor in the printed Gurmukhi commentary and text by Bishan Singh (1911). The Gur Prasād (n.d.) version includes its own *doharā* (as,

the author tells us, a *maṅgalacaraṇa*) that is not the same as that given in the Govind Dās version, and the Sree Ram translation. This Gurmukhi version is strikingly different from the tenor of the Govind Dās version (and its translation), which are oriented at their opening towards reverence to Gaṇapati, and other deities. After this, the text turns to reverence to the Guru. Gur Prasād's four-line, opening commentary is from the beginning oriented towards the Guru: '*vār vār vaṅdana karūṁ. Satigur ke pad pūj. Jāsu pratāp pragaṭe. anabhai ātama sūjh* I salute, again and again, worshipping the feet of the Guru. To whom [the Guru's] glory radiates will realize the inner self without fear' (Gur Prasād n.d.: 1). The commentary also refers to Gur Prasād himself, as author. Both manuscripts (BL Or2763 and PDL MN 000120) open also with *sati gur prasādi*, a Sikh invocation, before the invocation of Ganesh.

The core text that follows the commentarial verse is parallel among the versions: it opens with the invocation of Rām: '*namo namo srī rāma jū sata cita ānaṅda rūpa* Hail, hail to Ram, whose form is truth, thought and bliss'. At the outset, it is important to recognize that the Rām referenced here is not necessarily Rām, the hero of the Rāmāyaṇa and *avatār* (incarnation) of Viṣṇu. There is of course much more to be said about this, but at this juncture it is sufficient to note that the term 'Rām' – like allied terms, such as 'Harī', which can be used as an epithet of Kṛṣṇa – has multiple, quite dramatically different valences in different traditions. The term 'Harī', for example, is very commonly utilized as a term for the divine in the *Gurū graṅth sāhib*, where divinity is not expressed in personal terms, and maintains a *nirguṇ* (literally, 'without attribute' or 'without quality'), or non-personal / immaterial, imaginary that is significant here.[17] This verse continues to describe the impact of this Guru – from knowing the Guru, ignorance and darkness, as deep as a well, are dispelled like the world waking from a dream.

The second verse of the text reveals similar vocabulary for the divine / ultimate, but with more ambiguity than is visible in the commentaries. '*Rāma mayā satigura dayā sādhusaṅga jaba hoi | tab prāṇī jānai kachhū rahio bikhai ras bhoi*'.[18] Here we see the idea of someone

17 There are discrepancies in the versions in the second half of the opening line; in Gur Prasād and Govind Dās, we have in the final part of the line: *nāsata bhrama tama kūpa*, whereas in Singh 1911, we have *nāsa prabha tama kūp*. The PDL manscripts are consistent with the printed versions (with *nāsai* instead of *nāsata*); the Singh 1911 is an outlier here.

18 *sādhusaṅga* appears in Dās (1881), but not in Singh 1911, PDL ID MN-000120, British Library Or2783, or Gur Prasād n.d. We provide Govind Dās' reading to accord with metrical requirement. Thank you to the anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.

being '*Rāma mayā*' or 'full of Ram': that person is the 'Satiguru', the compassionate *(dayā)* true Guru – this is of course a term *(satigura)* that is used extensively in Sikh tradition, but also resonates beyond it. When one is in good company *(sādhusaṅga jaba hoi),* the text tells us, then one knows the breath of life *(tab prāṇī jānai kachhū);* otherwise one remains *(rahio)* drenched *(bhoi)* in pleasure *(ras)* and worldly enjoyments *(bikhai).*[19] A wide variety of terms continue in this text – the divine is called 'Murārī', an epithet of Kṛṣṇa, in verse 3. The 1911 commentary by Bishan Singh does not, in his discussion of this line, mention any deities in the conventional sense at all, and he maintains focus on the Guru, whom he describes as being joyful. The 1886 translation of the core text and commentary notes the use of these terms, but cautions about their meaning: 'The author… pays his respects to Siva and Kṛṣṇa apparently, but in the sense of Impersonality', Sreeram's (1886: 4) rendering of Govind Dās' '*nirguṇa brahmakūṅ namaskar karke*' (Dās 1881: 6). At the same time, the translator notes the use of 'Murārī' as 'the personal aspect of Brahma' (Sreeram 1886: 4), from Govind Dās' '*saguṇa brahmanaiṅhī dhāraṇa karī hai*'. The pre-1938 commentary by Gur Prasād is less circumspect: in the discussion of line 2, with reference to 'Rām', that text refers to 'Ram Candra', a more direct reference to the personal deity known to us as Ram in the Rāmāyaṇa (Gur Prasād n.d.: 2). Still, the same commentary, in analysis of line 3, notes the primacy of '*Nirguṇa Briham vidiyā*', knowledge of the formless Brahma, in our understanding of the Guru. So, there is some consonance among the three, with some change in emphasis.

The author of the core text asserts that the explication *('barnana')* of this text is linked to the holding of it in the heart – which also refers to the *mālā*, garland, a reference to the title of the text – and of a kind of silence that is directly linked to knowledge (verse 3).[20] This is upheld among all the commentators. While one line of text is missing from the translation, it is present in both the 1911 and 1938 commentaries and in Dās (1881), and focuses on moving past 'me' and 'mine', ownership and differentiation, and dwelling fully within silence (verse 4). It is noted in the 1911 commentary that '*ih cup rahan dā kāran hai, bhāv cup vic hī mast rahe* The reason for this is remaining silent. Only in

19 Dās 1881 differs from Singh 1911 in this line: instead of *rahio bikhai ras bhoi*, which corresponds with PDL ID MN-000120, Dās (1881) has *rahio biṣayaras bhoya.* This can be seen as a spelling variation, but also can have semantic implications, with *bikhai* as 'poison' instead of 'subject' or, here, 'worldly enjoyment'. We take the latter meaning here.

20 Thank you to the anonymous reviewer for this observation regarding the double meaning of this line.

silence can one enjoy full experience [of this kind of non-duality]'. The text moves on, to an assertion about the primacy of the Guru above all (Singh 1911: 5). As described in the 1938 commentary: '*vaha mātā pitā bhāī piāre dost gur rājā ate āpṇe priāṇāṅ nāloṅ bhī piyāre han* That one is more beloved than even one's mother, father, brother, close friends, guru, king, and one's own life' (Gur Prasād n.d.: 3). It is not surprising that this kind of statement would resonate in Sikh contexts; *Gur Sobhā* by Sainapati (*c*.1711) makes a similar declaration, calling the Guru the mother and father of the devotee, and the Guru is held as paramount (Murphy 2007: 357).

The Guru is central to the text. Without the Guru, the text tells us, one falls into illusion, like a dog barking without discrimination, or like a lion who sees his mother and father reflected in a well, without realizing it is his own reflection (verse 8). One who faces the Guru can discern, and then achieve experience (*anbhava* Singh 1911, *anubhava* Dās 1881, Gur Prasād n.d.) that is expansive (*bisāl* [Singh 1911]; *visāl* [Dās 1881]; *viśāl* [Gur Prasād n.d.]) (verse 11). The language of 'Gurmukh' in Anāthadās' text is striking here. A Gurmukh, in Sikh tradition, is one who faces, or turns to the Guru – specifically, the Sikh Gurus – that is, who has abandoned self-willed action and has oriented the self towards the Guru. Clearly there is a strong resonance here with Sikh ideas, and the word *"sikh"* is used in association with this discernment (there is however no mention of the Sikh Gurus). And indeed, later interpretation does not render this verse in specifically Sikh terms, in the available commentaries: in all three commentaries by Dās (1881), Singh (1911), and Gur Prasād (n.d.), the focus in this line is on *darśan*, sight of the Guru, which brings knowledge (see also Sreeram 1886: 9). The terminology is, however, striking. In the next line, we see the Guru described as *dīna-dayāla*, the protector or cherisher of the poor or meek (verse 12). This is a general epithet for the Guru, and is also an epithet of God. This is the case across religious traditions: there was a broad shared vocabulary across northern India / Pakistan, across communities. Indeed, the term 'Khalsa', generally associated with the orthopraxic form of Sikh identity initiated in the very end of the seventeenth century and developed more fully in the eighteenth century, was used as a description for sadhus associated with the Dādūpanth, for example, and the term *ikk onkar* – utilized in Sikh contexts for 'the ultimate / divine' – was also utilized widely in Hindavi texts from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries (Hastings 2002: 43; Behl 2012: 40). There was much that was shared, and it is a set of ideas that were being utilized in diverse contexts among religions in early modern South Asia that we see expressed here.

Overall, the text describes the greatness of the Guru, the need for the Guru's guidance, and the consequences of lack of the Guru (which is equivalent to a state of ignorance, since the Guru is the only way to achieve knowledge). Hope or desire *(āśā),* craving *(triśnā),*[21] and worry *(ciṅtā)* are thus described as demonesses *(ḍāin)* that torment the speaker – this is life without the Guru as guide (verse 14). Sometimes there are good thoughts, and sometimes one is subservient to bad – and so one suffers, the same way the husband of two wives suffers (*kabahū sumati prakāsa cit, kabahū kumati ādhīn | bibanārī ke kaṅta jiu, rahata sadā ati dīn*, verse 15).[22]

Placing the *Vicārmālā*

The preliminary analysis of the opening lines of the *Vicārmālā* pursued here is sufficient for some initial conclusions. Resonances with Sikh tradition are in particular valuable to pursue. Arvind Mandair (2009) has developed a trenchant critique of modern interpretation of Sikh thought that is relevant here. In Mandair's argument, modern Sikhism has been constructed as a form of monotheism within the context of colonial translation, where Sikhs were compelled by the power differentials of colonial rule to make themselves knowable to the British through the religious categories available to them. As Mandair (2006: 654) puts it in an early article along these lines, Bhai Vir Singh (1872–1957), who had a formative influence on the evolution of modern Sikh thought, was in his interpretation of Sikh scripture forced to transform the 'middle ground' of Sikhism, a set of 'idioms, practices, forms, and strata of experience that are different from but also broadly continuous with those of the wider North Indian devotional traditions'. Contrary to the theologically driven understanding of Sikhism that thus emerged, Mandair (2006: 653) argues, Sikh thought embraces 'the nonduality of the Absolute' that is 'grounded in a state of existence that has realized this nonduality by relinquishing the individuality of the ego and merging itself into the Other'.[23] It is well established that there was a significant disjuncture between South Asian ways of imagining reli-

21 Here I take the spelling in the Gurmukhi versions, which do not feature a retroflex sibilant.

22 Here I follow the text from PDL MN-000120; later printed versions feature variations.

23 Nirbhai Singh's discussion of the integration within Sikhi or Sikh thought of both the personal and impersonal, referenced above, is relevant here.

gious subjectivity and identity and those common in the British (and more broadly European) context. In the religious histories specific to Europe (and, in terms of the powerful influence in India, in Britain), religious difference was understood in agonistic terms, and interstitial positions between religious identities were deemed impossible: one might identify with and consider oneself a connoisseur of both classical and baroque music, but it is generally seen as impossible to evince affinities as both a Catholic and a Protestant, for example. In this discursive environment, Mandair (2009: 236) argues, 'what changes in the colonial period is the way in which identity was conceived', so as not to allow for articulations of commonality and shared religious affinities.

It is therefore important to see the logic of Sikh interest in the *Vicārmālā* – as evidenced by Sikh commentary on it, as well as the large number of manuscript copies of the text in Gurmukhi, which as has been noted does not require a Sikh readership but suggests a diverse audience for Gurmukhi texts, and one that (given the Sikh invocation on the two manuscripts examined) likely included Sikhs. It has been noted that personalized deities are de-emphasized in the 1911 commentary by our Khalsa College commentator: congruences consistent with Sikh thought are emphasized. But there are many other such congruences: we see resonances in the emphasis on non-duality, on oneness, on the need to dispel ignorance as a core practice, and specific vocabulary that coincides with core Sikh ideas, such as the idea of 'Gurmukh', or the one turned towards the Guru.

At the same time, the *Vicārmālā* is not a text that today is generally included within the corpus of 'Sikh texts', and Sikh religious affiliations are not foregrounded in Govind Dās' commentary, or Sreeram's late-nineteenth-century translation of it. The text seems by that time to be moving out of a Sikh domain, at least for some. And yet, at the same time, the 1911 commentary on the text by a Sikh author affiliated with a Sikh-oriented institution of higher learning suggests that a movement along such lines was still incomplete at that time. Indeed, its staying power suggests that earlier scholarship that saw the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as closing down the diversity of the Sikh community, such as Harjot Oberoi's widely read *The Construction of Religious Boundaries* (1994), spoke perhaps a bit too soon. The text has continued to be published in Punjab, in the Gurmukhi script, with strong Sikh – as well as Nirmala, and other – affinities.[24] There is a longer story to this text that bears telling, just as there is a broader history to Gurmukhi textual production, across manuscripts and print, that remains to be accounted for.

24 See the 1998 edition of the text, Singh "Nirmala" 1998.

Concluding Thoughts

The use of both Devanagari and Gurmukhi gives us some sense about the range of publics that collected and consumed texts like *Vicārmālā*, but do not allow us to define these publics in specific religious terms. The printed versions tell us a bit more: we see Calcutta – the location of the publication of the translation, which is part of a larger history of Bengal-based theological development that embraced Vedānta, such as we see in the figure of Vivekananda. We see Amritsar, the location of Khalsa College and of one of the presses that published a commentary on the text, together with the core text. (The location of the author of the 1938 commentary is not indicated in the version available.) The location of the publication of this (and similar) texts in the urban centres of colonial Punjab (and beyond) forms one part of our understanding of the communities of both production and reception of the text. This is where both collections of manuscripts and producers of printed texts come in contact. We've heard mention of the city of Benaras as an early modern centre for Vedānta thought. This has concrete connections to the later production of literature in Braj, and the emergence of both Hindi and Punjabi in modern forms, at the end of the nineteenth, beginning of the twentieth centuries, when printed versions of the *Vicārmālā* proliferated.[25] In a brilliant essay, Valerie Ritter (2010) has highlighted the complexity of the communities of association that brought together people in support of Hindi language production in the nineteenth century, in Benares and beyond. She describes the social positions of many such individuals: 'small zamindars, teachers, *qanungos* (registrars of landed property in a subdivision of a district), Brahmans, and Agarwal merchants' (Ritter 2010: 250) as 'Braj Bhasha poetry came to inhabit a mixed oral and print culture with metamorphosing definitions of the literary public' (Ritter 2010: 251) where 'poets of Braj Bhasha considered it a unifying poetic mode across other inexorably widening divisions' (Ritter 2010: 253) as religious identity came to be politicized in colonial India. Key to this was the city of Benaras, where intellectuals received training, shared work, and then carried their ideas to smaller urban centres across the region (present-day North India / Pakistan); this had been a locus for Sikh intellectual traditions, as well as others. Francesca Orsini (2019) has detailed the complexity of connections among urban centres in this period, moving across diverse languages (Braj, Hindi,

25 As Orsini (2019: 73) notes, Benares also became a 'node, if not a center' of Persian cultural production in the eighteenth century, under Company rule.

Urdu, Persian), and moving across the region of Awadh and its capital of Lucknow and many small *qasba* or small garrison towns; Benares; and Calcutta (the East India Company centre, in the early nineteenth century). Punjabi centres can be added to the latticework of 'local courts' that proliferated in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to produce a range of small, local centres of power, that patronized literature of different kinds, and often in the vernacular.

Ritter's (2010) work presents the figure of Sumer Singh Sahibzade (1847–1903), who published widely across subjects both Sikh (such as a commentary on the initial composition of the Sikh scriptural text the *Gurū graṅth sāhib*, entitled *Japjī sāhib*) and non-Sikh (such as on poetic ornament and commentaries on non-Sikh literary works). Sumer Singh, Ritter (2010: 260) argues, 'moved fluidly between and within regions' – and multiple urban centres, such as Patna, Varanasi, and Nizamabad – 'and in varying social circles, ranging from the wealthy city merchant class of Varanasi, Brahmans in the districts, and English sahibs'. Across these complex urban and social contexts, 'Sikh / nirguṇ 'progressive' ideas dovetailed with both elite Vedantic movements and liberal ideological agendas inherent in British colonialism' (Ritter 2010: 261). Within a few decades, she shows us, the religiously plural positions that were allowed to exist within and travel among these urban spaces, however, began to disappear, to be replaced in the twentieth century by more religiously divided positions (and institutions) that were no less urban, but far less plural. At the same time, they remained marked by the need to distinguish and to confront, so in a sense they too are marked by religious contact and diversity, albeit in conflict.

Works like the *Vicārmālā* – read and reproduced in conversation and in contact, across religions – have much to do with how we can understand human networks that coalesce in locations of dense inhabitation, sharing, and knowledge production and reproduction. These texts may emerge within intellectual, literary networks among urban centres, particularly smaller ones within a larger, often imperial, map – reflecting perhaps what Faisal Devji (2012: 19) has usefully called 'an empire of distinctions', where diversity was the norm. In this case, we have neither a dominant discourse, nor a fully sub-altern one, but rather a discourse that persists perhaps because of its in-between-ness, and its connection to multiple places and traditions. Its movement in the twentieth century, away from this multi-locatedness and plurality, reflects its coming under a more centralizing drive that sought to homogenize and clarify the intellectual maps that had once joined places and people in a more haphazard, disorganized, and less-regulated – and thus more capacious, open, and shared – exchange.

ORCID®
Anne Murphy https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0171-6003

References

Non-English Works, Manuscripts

JanamSakhi Nasihat Nama Babe Nanak Ji Ka, Microform IOL 1249; PanjB41, India Office Collections, British Library.

Vicārmālā Manuscripts

British Library India Office Collection Or2763.
Punjab Digital Library (PDL) Manuscripts: MN-000120, MN-000296, MN-000591, MN-000588, and MN-000157.

Non-English Works, Printed

Print: Govind Dās Text and Commentaries

Dās 1881: Punjab Digital Library (PDL): PDL ID BK006228-0024.
Dās Samvat 1967, 1832 [as written on the cover; sic]. Internet Archive: Digital Library of India Item 2015.315564. https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.315564, accessed 11 May 2024.

Print: Other Editions

Gur Prasād. n.d. (Accessioned 1938). British Library India Office Collection British Library D1215.
Singh, Bishan. 1911. Published by Bhai Chatar Singh & Jivan Singh of Amrtisar. British Library India Office Collection PanjD210 and 14162.bb.5.

English Language Works

Allen, Michael. 2017. 'Greater Advaita Vedānta: The Case of Niścaldās', *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 21: 275–97.
——— 2020. 'Greater Advaita Vedānta: The Case of Sundardās', *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 48: 49–78,
——— 2022. *Ocean of Inquiry: Niścaldās and the Premodern Origins of Modern Hinduism.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Balasubramanian, R. 2000. *Advaita Vedanta: History of Science, Philosophy, and Culture Indian Civilization*, vol. II, part 2. New Delhi: Project of History of Indian Science, Philosophy, and Culture.

Behl, Aditya. 2012. *Love's Subtle Magic: An Indian Islamic Literary Tradition, 1379–1545.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Blumhardt, J. F. 1899. *Catalogue of the Hindi, Panjabi, and Hindustani Manuscripts in the Library of the British Museum.* London: The British Museum.

Busch, Allison. 2011. *Poetry of Kings: The Classical Hindi Literature of Mughal India.* New York: Oxford University Press.

de Bruijn, Thomas. 2018. 'A Discourse of Difference: "Syncretism" as a Category in Indian Literary History', in Hans Harder (ed.), *Literature and Nationalist Ideology: Writing Histories of Modern Indian Languages*, pp. 282–304. London: Routledge.

Deol, Jeevan. 2001. 'Eighteenth-Century Khalsa Identity: Discourse, Praxis and Narrative', in Arvind-Pal S. Mandair, Christopher Shackle, Gurharpal Singh (eds), *Sikh Religion, Culture and Ethnicity*, pp. 25–46. London: Routledge.

Devji, Faisal. 2012. *The Impossible Indian: Gandhi and the Temptation of Violence.* London: Hurst & Co.

Dhavan, Purnima. and Heidi Pauwels. 2015. 'Controversies Surrounding the Reception of Valī "Dakhanī" (1665?–1707?) in Early Taʾzkirahs of Urdu Poets'. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 25.4: 625–46.

Friedlander, Peter. n.d. *A Descriptive Catalog of the Panjabi Manuscripts in the Library of the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine.* Unpublished manuscript. London: Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine.

Gandhi, Supriya. 2020. 'The Persian Writings on Vedānta Attributed to Banwālīdās Walī', *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 48: 79–99. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10781-019-09415-z.

Gill, Rahuldeep Singh. 2016. *Drinking from Love's Cup: Surrender and Sacrifice in the Vārs of Bhai Gurdas Bhalla.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Gill, Sukhwinder. 2020. 'The Connectedness of Bhai Gurdas: Intertextuality in the Exegeses of Bhai Gurdas' Vārāṅ'. University of British Columbia. https://open.library.ubc.ca/collections/ubctheses/24/items/1.0390922, accessed 9 February 2025.

Harris, Ruth. 2022. *Guru to the World: The Life and Legacy of Vivekananda.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Hastings, James Michael. 2002. 'Poets, Saints and Warriors: The Dadu Panth, Religious Change, and Identity Formation in Jaipur State Circa 1562–1860 CE'. PhD dissertation, University of Wisconsin at Madison.

Hatcher, Brian. 1999. *Eclecticism and Modern Hindu Discourse.* New York: Oxford University Press.

——— 2007. 'Bourgeois Vedānta: The Colonial Roots of Middle-Class Hinduism', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 75.2: 298–323.

Horstmann, Monika. 2021. *Bhakti and Yoga: A Discourse in Seventeenth-Century Codices*. Delhi: Primus Books.

Jones, Kenneth W. 1981. 'Religious Identity and the Indian Census', in N. Gerald Barrier (ed.), *The Census in British India: New Perspectives*, pp. 73–101. New Delhi: Manohar.

Lorenzen, David N. 1991. *Kabir Legends and Anantadas's Kabir Parichai.* Albany: State University of New York.

——— 1999. 'Who Invented Hinduism?' *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41.4: 630–59.

Madaio, James. 2017. 'Rethinking Neo-Vedānta: Swami Vivekananda and the Selective Historiography of Advaita Vedānta', *Religions* 8.101: 1–12. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel8060101.

Mandair, Arvind. 2006. 'The Politics of Nonduality: Reassessing the Work of Transcendance in Modern Sikh Theology', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 74.3: 646-673.

——— 2009. *Religion and the Spectre of the West: Sikhism, India, Postcoloniality, and the Politics of Translation.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Minkowski, Christopher. 2011. 'Advaita Vedānta in Early Modern History', *South Asian History and Culture* 2.2: 205–31.

Mir, Farina. 2010. *The Social Space of Language: Vernacular Culture in British Colonial Punjab.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Murphy, Anne. 2007. 'History in the Sikh Past', *History and Theory* 46: 345–65.

——— 2012. 'The *gurbilas* Literature and the Idea of 'Religion', in Anshu Malhotra and Farina Mir (eds), *Punjab Reconsidered: History, Culture, and Practice*, pp. 93–115. New York and New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

——— 2018. 'Writing Punjabi across Borders', *South Asian History and Culture* 9.1: 68–91.

——— 2020. 'Sufis, Jogis, and the Question of Religious Difference: Individualization in Early Modern Punjab through Waris Sha's *Hīr*', in Martin Fuchs, Antje Linkenbach, Martin Mulsow, Bernd-Christian Otto, Rahul Parson, and Jörg Rüpke (eds), *Religious Individualisations: Historical and Comparative Perspectives*, pp. 289–314. Berlin: de Gruyter. Open Access. https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/9783110580853-013/html (https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110580853-013).

——— Forthcoming. 'The Reimagination of Religion, 1700–1860', in David Gilmartin, Prasannan Parthasarathi, and Mrinalini Sinha (eds), *The Cambridge History of the Modern Indian Subcontinent*.

——— Forthcoming 2. 'On Commonality: The Ambivalence of Religious Belonging', *History of Religions*.

Nair, Shankar. 2020. *Translating Wisdom: Hindu-Muslim Intellectual Interactions in Early Modern South Asia.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Nicholson, Andrew. 2010. *Unifying Hinduism: Philosophy and Identity in Indian Intellectual History.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Oberoi, Harjot. 1994. *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity, and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Orsini, Francesca. 2019. 'Between *Qasbas* and Cities: Language Shifts and Literary Continuities in North India in the Long Eighteenth Century', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 39.1: 68–81.

——— 2023. *East of Delhi: Multilingual Literary Culture and World Literature.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Orsini, Francesca, and Samira Sheikh. 2014. 'Introduction', in F. Orsini and S. Shaikh (eds), *After Timur Left: Culture and Circulation in Fifteenth-Century North India*, pp. 1–44. New York: Oxford University Press.

Pauwels, Heidi. 2015. *Cultural Exchange in Eighteenth-Century India: Poetry and Paintings from Kishangarh.* Studies in Asian Art and Culture 4. Berlin: E. B. Verlag.

Pinch, William. 2003. 'Bhakti and the British Empire', *Past & Present* 179: 159–96.

Ritter, Valerie. 2010. 'Networks, Patrons, and Genres for Late Braj Bhasha Poets: Ratnakar and Hariaudh', in Francesca Orsini (ed.), *Before the Divide: Hindi and Urdu Literary Culture*, pp. 249–276. Hyderabad: Orient Black Swan.

Singh, Jvala. 2022. 'Advaita and the *Gurpratāp Sūraj Graṅth*', paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, Denver, Colorado, November 2022.

——— 2023. 'Vir Singh's Publication of the *Gurpratāp Sūraj Graṅth*', in Anshu Malhotra and Anne Murphy (eds), *Bhai Vir Singh (1872–1957): Religious and Literary Modernities in Colonial and Post-Colonial Indian Punjab*, pp. 150–65. New York: Routledge.

——— 2024 'At the Meeting of Many Paths: The *Gurpratāp Sūraj Graṅth* and Sikh Intellectual Tradition in the Early Nineteenth Century'. PhD dissertation, University of British Columbia.

Singh "Nirmala", Giani Harbans. 1998. *Vicār bhaṅḍār, arthāt saṁpradāī vicār mālā sṭīk.* Amritsar: Mahant Giani Surjit Singh Seva Panthi / Bhai Jawahar Singh Kripal Singh and Company.

Sreeram, Lala. 1886. *The Vicharmala.* Calcutta: Vedanta Press / Heeralal Dhole. Available online at: https://archive.org/details/vichar-mala-english, accessed 11 May 2024.

Stewart, Charles, and Rosalind Shaw. 1994. *Syncretism / Anti-Syncretism: The Politics of Religious Synthesis.* London / New York: Routledge.

Stewart, Tony K. 2001. 'In Search of Equivalence: Conceiving Muslim-Hindu Encounter through Translation Theory', *History of Religions* 10.3: 260–87.

Vig, Julie. 2020. 'Participating in Other Worlds: Locating Gurbilās Literature in the Wider World of Brajbhasha Traditions'. PhD dissertation, University of British Columbia. https://doi.org/10.14288/1.0388227.

——— 2022. ‘The Use of Brajbhasha in Sikh Contexts’, *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East*, 42.2: 362–9.

Williams, Tyler. 2022. ‘Literary and Religious History from the Middle: Merchants and Bhakti in Early Modern North India’, *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 59.3: 299–334.

——— 2024. *If All the World Were Paper: A History of Writing in Hindi*. New York: Columbia University Press.