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## 15. Punjabi in the (Late) Vernacular Millennium

**Abstract.** This exploratory essay considers in preliminary terms some of the registers of vernacular literary production in Punjab, and to suggest what the writing of a history of Punjabi language literary production might look like with a broader view to both vernacular and cosmopolitan literary production in the region. Punjabi's emergence must be understood in dynamic relation to the presence of Sadhukarrī, Braj, and emergent Hindustani in the region, as well as the formative presence of Persian. The multiplicity of its articulation points largely outside of the conventional centres associated with vernacular literary production—the court and the formal religious institution—provide Punjabi with a distinctive location, although it simultaneously maintained enduring and important ties to such centres. It is suggested that this may account for some of the particular valences of Punjabi language use; more work is required, however, to fully characterize this, and to explicate fully the interconnection between Punjabi cultural production and that in other languages.

**Keywords.** Punjabi, Vernacular, Cosmopolitan, Punjab, Braj.

Punjabi cultural production in the early modern period sits uneasily within the understanding of the 'vernacular millennium,' described so well by Sheldon Pollock, where new language choices emerged in relation to newly defined cultural zones linked to the emergence of 'vernacular polities' in contradistinction to, but reliant upon, a prior cosmopolitan idiom that was supralocal.<sup>\*1</sup> The goal of this

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\* This essay is based on a paper first delivered at the 12th International Conference on Early Modern Literatures of North India (ICEMLNI) at the University of Lausanne, Switzerland, 15–19 July 2015; a later version was delivered at the *Congrès Asie et Pacifique* in Paris, France, 9–11 September 2015. Thanks to all at these two venues for discussion, and in particular to Julie Vig for research assistance and feedback, and Purnima Dhavan and Heidi Pauwels (both of the University of Washington) for detailed responses. Participation in these conferences was enabled by an Insight Development grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. I would like to state here why I prefer 'Punjabi' over 'Panjabi,' the latter of which appears closer to the correct transliteration of the word *pañjābī*. The word can be mispronounced by English speakers in both spellings. Since there is an English word 'pun' that is far closer to the correct pronunciation of the first syllable of the word than the English word 'pan,' I utilize 'Punjabi' when writing in English. It seems the closest to the correct pronunciation, based on the English language analogues that invariably influence pronunciation in English by non-Punjabi speakers.

exploratory essay is to consider in preliminary terms some of the registers of vernacular literary production in Punjab in relation to these ideas, and to suggest what the writing of a history of Punjabi language literary production might look like in such terms. The paper is thus broadly conceptual, laying out an approach and a trajectory that shapes ongoing research, in keeping with the spirit of this volume, and is meant as a beginning point, rather than a conclusion.

Sheldon Pollock's characterization of the emergence of the vernacular features attributes that make it less useful for understanding Punjabi cultural production in the early modern period (although I will return to and affirm some of his key insights at the close of this essay). This is true for North India in broad terms, as Francesca Orsini has noted,<sup>2</sup> where we must define 'multilingual history' with respect to a range of both cosmopolitan and vernacular languages and texts in a period when languages often 'ran into each other.'<sup>3</sup> Shantanu Phukan's groundbreaking work leads the way here; as he has argued: 'To do justice to . . . [the] complex and adamantly heteroglot literary community [of Mughal India] one must . . . redirect one's gaze at the blurred peripheries of literary canons, for it is there that we glimpse the intricate inter-dependencies and rivalries—in a word the ecology—of literary communities.'<sup>4</sup> The same is true specifically for Punjabi literary production. If we seek a 'superordinate, usually cosmopolitan, literary culture'<sup>5</sup> to influence Punjabi, we must resort to not one, but two languages: Braj (the means through which connection to Sanskritic cultural production was maintained, a 'cosmopolitan surrogate,' in Pollock's terms)<sup>6</sup> and Persian, which had a powerful

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1 Vernacularization is, as Pollock describes it, 'the historical process of choosing to create a written language, along with its complement, a political discourse, in local languages according to models supplied by a superordinate, usually cosmopolitan, literary culture' (Pollock (2006), p. 23). Vernacularization should not be subsumed within political developments; in this (as I argue below) I am in full agreement (see Pollock (1998), p. 32 and related discussion in Pollock (2006), pp. 27–34). On the vernacular polity, see Pollock (2006), pp. 28, 413–ff.

2 Orsini (2012), p. 238; Orsini and Shaikh (2014), pp. 13–ff.

3 Orsini and Shaikh (2014), p. 2; see discussion pp. 6–ff. This entails a 'comparative perspective that takes in both cosmopolitan and vernacular languages, both written archives and oral performances, and texts and genres that circulated in the same place and at the same time although they were transmitted in separate traditions.' Orsini (2012), p. 227. For Pollock's view on possible reasons that northern languages operate differently from those in the South with respect to vernacularization, see Pollock (2006), pp. 391–393.

4 Phukan (2000a), p. 7. See also Phukan (2001), p. 37. Phukan's observations concern texts that are internally multiglossic, but can be extended also to a more broadly heteroglossic environment as expressed in multiple texts; in his broader work, he also discusses 'thematic hybridity' (Phukan (2000b), ch. 4–5). Multilingual texts are taken up in Orsini and Shaikh (2014), pp. 403–436.

5 Pollock (2006), p. 23.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 400.

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influence on cultural production in Punjab through the late medieval and early modern periods. This reflects the ‘multiple diglossias’ Orsini describes as characteristic of North India, or what we may also call ‘multiglossia’ or ‘heteroglossia.’<sup>7</sup> We know something about all of this in Punjab, but there is much more to learn. Christopher Shackle has done foundational work (as cited throughout this essay) on the literary and linguistic expression of Punjab; Louis Fenech has explored the influence of Persianate idioms of power in the Sikh context in detail.<sup>8</sup> Braj emerges in deep conversation with the Sanskrit cosmopolis, as Allison Busch has detailed, but operates in Punjab as a superordinate, cosmopolitan force, reflecting its own ‘cosmopolitization’ process.<sup>9</sup>

We can see this as a second vernacular revolution, but my suggestion along these lines differs slightly from that suggested by Pollock. To review his position: in order to account for the problem of the North in his comprehensive account, Pollock argues that for ‘some parts of India,’ there were ‘two vernacular revolutions: one that was cosmopolitan in its register and divorced from religion, and another that might best be termed regional, both for its anti-Sanskritic, *desī* idiom and for its close linkages with religious communities that developed distinctively regionalized characters. The second revolution is unthinkable without the first, and might well be seen as a kind of counterrevolution.’<sup>10</sup> This allows for the setting aside of religious forces in vernacularization as secondary and parochial, and maintains the centrality of the court such that ‘the greater portion of the literature . . . created was produced not at the monastery but at the court.’<sup>11</sup> This is why religion was, according to Pollock, ‘irrelevant’ to the primary vernacular revolution ‘because vernacularization was a courtly project, and the court itself, as a functioning political institution, was largely unconcerned with religious differences.’<sup>12</sup> He calls the ‘new vernacularism,’ in contrast, ‘noncosmopolitan, regional, *desī* in outlook’ and it is perhaps in its limited nature that he understands its religiousness, as a form of a narrower regionalization.<sup>13</sup> Christian Novetzke’s recent contribution to this debate argues for a close relationship between the emergence of the vernacular (construing the vernacular, however, in broad extralinguistic terms) and the religious, reiterating an earlier representation of bhakti as a demotic and inclusive social force and therefore directly linked to linguistic vernacularization, a position which Pollock counters, and linking the vernacularization process with the effort

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7 Orsini (2012), pp. 229, 231.

8 Pollock (2006), p. 23; Fenech (2008). See also Persianization as discussed by Phukan (2000b), pp. 169–ff.

9 Busch (2011), p. 196; see discussion overall pp. 193–ff.

10 Pollock (2006), p. 432.

11 Ibid., p. 29.

12 Ibid., p. 430.

13 Ibid., p. 436.

to reach diverse audiences.<sup>14</sup> Pollock's characterization of this second vernacular revolution, however, can still apply to Novetzke's formulation of Marathi's emergence as deeply local, non-cosmopolitan, and religious.<sup>15</sup>

Pollock's account of religious vernacularization, however, goes against current understandings of the rise of Vaishnava bhakti in the early modern period as part of a broader adoption of a supralocal and less tantric/yogic form of religious life and a Vaishnava–Mughal cosmopolitan synthesis, as described in a wide range of recent work, where Vaishnavism was, as Kumkum Chatterjee describes it early in the discussion, a 'trans-regional phenomenon that developed, matured and grew stronger during the period of the later Delhi sultanate as well as the Mughal empire.'<sup>16</sup> This did not rely only on centralizing imperial formations; as Heidi Pauwels has asserted, the rise of Vaishnava bhakti (as well as discourses around Kshatriya identity) in the Braj region was tied to the interests of local warlords and 'military power brokers,' such as the Bundelās, who may have seen it as a 'socially and politically upward' option.<sup>17</sup> A religiously marked position, expressed in a vernacular idiom, thus acted as a supralocal force at the same time that it was locally articulated, towards the production of a particular kind of religious ecumene that was tied, but not identical to, a courtly one. Recognition of this suggests the need for further exploration of the interface between religious modes of expression and the rise of vernacular literary forms. The second vernacular revolution I imagine in Punjab however reflects not so much a content difference (more regional, more religious), as Pollock suggests, but represents a difference in what it is formed *in relation to*, in relation to the cosmopolitan nature of the 'vernacular' Braj, which both did and (it seems to me) did not make much room for Punjabi. (In this way the case is quite different from that which Novetzke explores, where we do see early courtly use of the vernacular and where Sanskrit is the main language of interaction that shapes the development of the vernacular, along lines sketched out by Pollock.) As we know from Pollock's formulation, the cosmopolitan and vernacular exist only in dynamic relation, and Punjabi particularly in Sikh contexts emerges in relation to Braj in just this kind of contrary embrace. Such an understanding can help us also to bring a new analytical purchase on Vaishnava elements visible in texts associat-

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14 Novetzke (2016), pp. 213, 219, and overall. Novetzke's account provides some recognition of the limitations of this demotic force and construes the debate that ensues as a form of public sphere, invoking modern formulations of the same.

15 Pollock (2006), pp. 381–382, discusses the Marathi case.

16 Chatterjee (2009), p. 151; Chatterjee finds that 'the cosmopolitanisms actively sought out by the Malla kings' that interest her 'resulted from the use of Vaishnava elements certainly, but Vaishnava elements which were conjoined to Mughal and Rajput elements as well.' See also Pinch (2006); Pauwels (2009a); Horstmann (2011); Burchett (2012), pp. 40, 318; Hawley (2015), pp. 75, 225.

17 Pauwels (2009a), pp. 199, 209, 211 for latter quote, 190 for former.

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ed with the Sikh tradition in the eighteenth century, particularly within the *Dasam Granth*.<sup>18</sup> Julie Vig's emerging doctoral work on Braj cultural production in the Sikh *Gurbilās* literature follows this line of investigation; to explore the multiple resonances of Vaishnava imagery and themes within Sikh contexts.<sup>19</sup>

### Punjabi literature vs. literature in Punjab

Many are perhaps familiar with the conventional representation of the broad sweep of Punjabi literary history: its early formations in the work of Baba Farīd and then of later Sufi poets. Generally, the compositions of the Gurus are central to this narrative (a point to which we will return). If we do look to Baba Farīd (said to have been active in the first half of the thirteenth century) as a founding voice for Punjabi literature, it is for the most part to the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* or *Ādi Granth* (AG) that we turn, since it is indeed one of the earliest reliable textual sources available for his work, although a small selection of his Punjabi verses were preserved in the *malfūzāt* of Zain ud Din Shirazi (d. 1371), showing that vernacular verses of Farīd were in circulation within a century of his death.<sup>20</sup> And of course, Amir Khusrao spoke of 'Lahouri' in 1317–1318, attesting to a clear consciousness of a linguistically distinctive language at Punjab's cultural centre.<sup>21</sup> The work of other Sufi poets was not collected and published until the nineteenth century, however; the distinctively Punjabi linguistic flavour of their compositions therefore may result from the later date of their being recorded; Punjabi forms could have been introduced and/or enhanced at a later transcription time.<sup>22</sup> The Farīd material in the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*, Shackle argues, is distinctive amongst the so-called *Bhagat Bānī* or compositions of the devotees because of the strong imprint of Punjabi forms (specifically Multani or in more current usage Siraiiki),

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18 See Rinehart (2011), pp. 4–ff, 165–ff on issues that emerge in relation to the *Dasam Granth*. Rinehart argues for a 'new Sikh conception of the role of the leader with both spiritual and worldly responsibilities' (ibid., p. 10) in this period, but this is not new and not unique to Sikh tradition; it reflects a broad range of religious formations in the period; see Murphy (2015).

19 Vig (2016).

20 We know of Farīd earlier through the memoir of a follower of Farīd's leading disciple, Nizam ud Din Auliya, whose circle also included Amir Khusrao (d. 1325) (Shackle (2015), see p. xii). See discussion of the *malfūzāt* in Singh, P. (2003), p. 47 and Shackle (2008). See also discussion in Ernst (1992), pp. 167–ff and Shackle (1993), pp. 269–ff.

21 Faruqi (2003), p. 819. In the same passage, he wrote (translated by Faruqi): 'Since I am an Indian, it's better/To draw breath/From one's station. In this land /In every territory, there is /A language specific, and not so/By chance either.' Ibid., p. 820. The earliest example of Khusrao's Hindavi works is 1636. (Bangha (2010), pp. 24, 33)

22 Shackle (2015), p. x. On varying interpretations of Bulhe Shah, see Rinehart (1999).

rather than the more generic ‘Sant bhāṣā’ as it is so often called, which comprised the linguistic flavour of the remainder of the Bhagat’s contributions to the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*.<sup>23</sup> As Shackle notes well, when Punjabi does emerge, it does so in two different ‘flavours’: ‘a central language based on the Lahore area, and a south-western based on the Multan area, also cultivated to the south in Sind under the name Siraiki, in parallel with Sindhi’<sup>24</sup>—but of course, as is discussed further below, distinctions among languages were generally not highlighted, so searching for a clear distinction is an anachronistic task. We can see Punjabi’s emergence in other manuscript evidence, with one colophon in the British Library’s Punjabi manuscript collection claiming a surprisingly early date equivalent to 1592 CE.<sup>25</sup> There is, as shown in Purnima Dhavan’s emerging research on that collection and beyond, evidence for the emergence of Punjabi in seventeenth century *fiqh* ‘legal’ and other texts, and its emergence overall is deeply tied to the emergence of other languages, particularly Braj and Urdu—again, not a surprise, given the lack of named differentiation among them, but useful for our now retrospective attempt to recognize Punjabi in linguistic terms.<sup>26</sup>

In the textual production associated with the Sikh tradition in particular Braj’s influence was powerful; this is where the conventional Punjabi literary historiographical narrative becomes quite problematic, since the linguistic ‘Punjabiness’ of many of the compositions in the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* is unclear. While Guru Nānak and the early Gurus composed in what Shackle called early on ‘The Sacred Language of the Sikhs,’ with some Punjabi and other flavouring (what Shackle calls ‘stylistic variety,’ particularly in works by Gurus Nānak and Arjan, and in *bhagat* or other saints such as Farīd), by the time of Guru Arjan the influence of Braj was strong and increased over time, replacing the influence of Sant *bhāṣā* as a defining feature of the compositions.<sup>27</sup> Shackle has described in detail the relationship of the ‘peripheral’ linguistic features of the *Ādi Granth* or *Gurū Granth*

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23 Shackle (2008), p. 3.

24 Shackle (1979), p. 193. This article provides a useful in-depth discussion of the differences between Siraiki and Punjabi.

25 Shackle (1977a), p. 42.

26 Dhavan (2017).

27 Shackle (1977b). On ‘stylistic variety,’ see Shackle (1978a), p. 82. In addressing Arjan’s continuation of stylistic varieties that feature in Nānak and the Bhagats, Shackle notes particularly Arjan’s ‘function to have isolated and pursued further . . . a particular line of development, out of the many radiating in such extraordinary profusion from the dense nucleus of possibilities with which early Sikhism was gifted by its founder’ (Shackle (1978b), p. 312). I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer for discussion of the parallel between Braj and Sant *bhāṣā* as perhaps competing cosmopolitan idioms for compositions represented in the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*.

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*Sāhib*<sup>28</sup> in relation to its core features as a pattern that features ‘classicizing’ elements (the pull, that is, towards Persian and ‘Sahaskriti’ or archaic ‘colouring’) and regionalizing elements such as the south-western features he has described for Farīd, in particular.<sup>29</sup> Guru Arjan demonstrated his self-consciousness of linguistic form in his designation of some compositions with the term *dakkhanī*, what Shackle calls an ‘artificial style’ designed perhaps to extend the linguistic reach of the Gurus farther south into Sind.<sup>30</sup>

The *Janamsākhī*, or narrative representations of the life of Guru Nānak, provide an important early source not just on the formations of the Sikh tradition and as an early example of hagiography, as explored in important new work by Simran Jeet Singh, but also on vernacular language production, literarization, and the production of new genres.<sup>31</sup> Building on the earlier work of Ratan Singh Jaggi, Simran Jeet Singh argues for an early date for the *Purātan Janamsākhī* (and for its relative prominence within the Sikh community, countering early claims by W. H. McLeod that asserted that the *Janamsākhī* lacked influence until the modern period).<sup>32</sup> The early date of 1588 CE, however, is attributed to a manuscript that is no longer available to us; a transcription exists, but does not feature a colophon; the other older tradition, known as the Colebrooke *Janam-sākhī* (which is available in the British Library) is also undated.<sup>33</sup> Either way, however, the text is important as an early example of prose, which appears alongside the poetic compositions of the Guru (and is therefore distinct from the other possibly early Punjabi text discussed in brief here; the work of Bhai Gurdas, which is wholly poetic in form).<sup>34</sup> Although space limitations do not allow for evaluation of the language of the *Janamsākhī* tradition in this essay—the effort here is to set out the parameters of the problem, not examine all the evidence—R. S. Jaggi’s assessment of the language of the text provides an entry point. He describes the language of the text, overall, as ‘*sādh bhāshā-numā*

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28 I generally utilize *Gurū Granth Sāhib* to indicate the final version of the canon in 1708, rather than the earlier version, from 1604, for which the term *Ādi Granth* is used. I do this in deference to conventions cited by members of the Sikh community, and for the sake of distinguishing between the two versions in chronological sequence. The general scholarly convention, however, is to use the term *Ādi Granth*.

29 See Shackle (1978b), p. 313, for a valuable diagram of linguistic features; on ‘colouring,’ see *ibid.*, p. 307.

30 Shackle (1993), p. 278.

31 Singh S. (2016). While the term for this genre is a modern one, as Singh points out, we can use it as he does, with awareness of its limitations in historical terms. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

32 Singh S. (2016), p. 112. For Ratan Singh Jaggi’s assessment of the date of the text, see Jaggi, R. (2010), ch. 3, pp. 31–39; see p. 38 for final assessment.

33 Singh S. (2016), pp. 113–114; see following for extensive discussion of the history of the dating of these manuscripts.

34 As noted by S. Singh, not all of the poetic compositions cited in the text, however, are included in the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* as Guru Nānak’s; some do not appear in the canonical text at all (Singh S. (2016), p. 152).

*Pañjābī* or Punjabi influenced by/appearing as or like ‘Sādh Bhāshā’ or Sadhukarī (he also notes the influence of Khaṛī Bolī and Urdu).<sup>35</sup> Imre Bangha calls the language of the text a form of ‘Gurmukhi Rekhta,’ which he defines as a language that ‘consciously mixes the vernacular Hindavi . . . and the cosmopolitan Persian,’ with a loose Khaṛī Bolī core; he distinguishes this from Sadhukarī, defined as ‘the spontaneously mixed literary language of the Sants that blends elements from various north Indian dialects and languages.’<sup>36</sup> He rightly notes, however, that Persian vocabulary is not prominent in what he calls Gurmukhi Rekhta; the language of the text is thus more of a combination of vernacular forms, the mix that Jaggi notes, although perhaps less definitively Punjabi than Jaggi suggests.<sup>37</sup> The language of the text does exhibit western Punjabi features (particularly verbal forms and characteristic post-positions); these, in Jaggi’s view, reflect specifically the Avānakārī dialect of western Punjabi.<sup>38</sup> Does this mimic the western Punjabi features present in the compositions of Nānak and Farīd, as seen in the work of Guru Arjan, which Shackle suggests was an intentional stylistic decision on Guru Arjan’s part?<sup>39</sup> It is possible. Either way, here we have elements of Punjabi emerging, although undeniably later than those that emerge in the compositions attributed to Nānak and Farīd (recognizing that Farīd’s much earlier works are attested in the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* significantly after the period of their purported composition). We see resonances of the same linguistic features in the *Hukamnāme*, letters to the *pañth*’s dispersed communities that were extant from the time of the sixth Guru, Hargobind, in the first half of the seventeenth century, where Punjabi forms are utilized alongside more broadly familiar Sadhukarī or Sant *bhāṣā* forms.<sup>40</sup> It is striking that Punjabi’s initial emergence is seen here among what might be called more ‘pragmatic,’ non-devotional works, contrary to the conventional formulation of Punjabi literature’s emergence among Sufis and the Sikh Gurus.

The *Vār* literature represents another Punjabi genre. One early example of this generally oral tradition in the work of Bhai Gurdas, an associate of the Gurus. As the work of Rahuldeep Singh shows, Bhai Gurdas is said to have written, interestingly, in both Punjabi (for his *vār*) and Brajbhāṣā (for a large number of *kavitt*).<sup>41</sup> This is of particular importance, because if the Punjabi nature of the *Vār* is authentic—Gill argues for a dating of Gurdas’ work to the early part of the seventeenth century, after the execution of the fifth Guru, but others argue that some compositions pre-date it—this would certainly be an early sustained example of Punjabi,

35 Jaggi, R. (2010), p. 101. On Khaṛī Bolī and Urdu, see *ibid.*, pp. 99, 106.

36 Bangha (2010), p. 26.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 60.

38 *Ibid.*, pp. 95–96, 102–103.

39 See above, footnote 30.

40 Singh G. (1990).

41 Gill (2014).

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or a Punjabi-influenced Rekhta or mixed language alongside the *Janamsākhī*.<sup>42</sup> The general lack of verified and strictly dated early manuscript evidence, however, means we cannot be sure of the Punjabi linguistic nature of the compositions in their original form; the compositions attributed to Gurdas may have been Punjabi-fied over time before being written down.<sup>43</sup> The acceptance of the language of the *Vār* as clearly Punjabi is also something we can debate, given the predominance of Brajbhāṣā verb forms and vocabulary alongside Punjabi features, with occasional preferences for Persian vocabulary, exhibiting some of the elements Bangha utilizes to describe Gurmukhi Rekhta. We can see these features in *Vār* 4:<sup>44</sup>

*māṇasa deha su kheha tisū vici jībhai laī nakībī*

The body of human birth is [mere] dust, but the tongue within it acts as a herald

*akhī dekhani rūpa raṅga rāga nāda kaṇna karani rakībī*

Seeing with the eyes the colour and form, and hearing the music of the raga, as a rival

*naki suvāsu nivāsu hai pañje dūta burī taratībī*

The nose is the home of the breath; the five messengers are in a terrible order

*sabha dūñ nīvai caraṇa hoi āpu gavāi nasību nasībī*

The feet are below all, and losing oneself [before them] proves one's good fortune

*haumai rogu miṭāidā satiguru pūrā karai tabībī*

The True Guru obliterates the illness of ego, the Unani doctor does the job in full

*pairī pai riharāsa kari gura sikha gurasikha manībī*

At the feet the Guru's Sikhs recite Rahiras and become Gursikh

*murdā hoi murīdu garībī*

Having become like the dead, the disciple is humbled.  
(*Vār* 4, *Pauri* 3, Jaggi, G. (2010), p. 60)<sup>45</sup>

42 Bhalla (2017).

43 Gill notes that neither of the two manuscripts he relies on for Gurdas Bhalla's compositions feature colophons; orthographic evidence supports his designation of them as 'early,' but no date is suggested. (Bhalla (2017), p. 14).

44 According to the currently traditional numbering system, which is attested in the manuscripts in the first position. *Ibid.*, p. 150.

45 This and all translations are mine.

There is typical Punjabi vocabulary here, but also parallels in verb form with Braj, as well as, in this example, a striking use of Persian words in the rhyme scheme that are generally overlooked in conventional translations.<sup>46</sup> Shackle has argued that the use of Persian loanwords in the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* is strongly associated with governance (both in terms of administration and in describing royal authority) and trade as ‘a mirror reflecting the impression made by Islamic political dominance on at least one section of non-Muslim society in sixteenth-century Panjab’; R. S. Jaggi has argued that it is used in the *Purātan Janamsākhī* to provide a kind of contextual flavour: speakers who are Muslim are represented as speaking with a more Persianized vocabulary.<sup>47</sup> In the example above, Persian vocabulary provides a striking rhyme, demonstrating that the influence of rhyme and other literary considerations thus must be accounted for alongside semantic ones, as Shackle suggests.<sup>48</sup> As Shackle argued early on, the presence of such flavouring in texts associated with the Sikh tradition does not support a general idea of ‘syncretism’ in defining Sikh religiosity: ‘the actual patterns of influence which are suggested by the analysis of the Persian loans in the AG are so very much more interesting,’ reflecting complex inflections of meaning and citations of alternative regional and religious moorings.<sup>49</sup> More intensive examination of such markings, beyond the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*, will enhance our understanding of how such citations/‘varieties’/‘flavours’ work; so will further work on the *Vār* tradition in broader terms, as Ali Usman Qasmi of Lahore University for Management Sciences is undertaking at the time of the composition of this essay.

Outside of these early examples, with the exception of the Rahit literature of the eighteenth century, Braj dominates. The description of Hawley and Mann for the *Pothi Prem Ambodh* (dated by them to 1693 CE) is instructive; that text features ‘a version of western Hindi or Brajbhasha that shows a familiarity with Punjabi idioms—[fitting] . . . comfortably within the range laid out by other early texts in the Sikh tradition.’<sup>50</sup> In addition to a rich range of non-canonical writings in Braj by figures like Harji, a competitor of accepted Guru-lineage and explored recently in an important monograph by Hardip Singh Syan, we have the *Dasam Granth*, explored in recent work by Robin Rinehart, an overwhelmingly Braj text, as will be visible in a moment.<sup>51</sup> It is into this world that we can also place the

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46 Except for the use of *nasīb*. For an exemplary translation, see <[https://searchgurbani.com/bhai\\_gurdas\\_vaaran/vaar/4/pauri/3](https://searchgurbani.com/bhai_gurdas_vaaran/vaar/4/pauri/3)>. (Accessed 4 June 2015). See also a modern Punjabi translation that takes more account of the Persian words: Jaggi, G. (2010), p. 61.

47 Shackle (1978a), pp. 85–86. Jaggi, R. (2010), pp. 107–108.

48 Shackle (1978a), p. 86.

49 Ibid., p. 94.

50 Hawley and Mann (2014).

51 See Syan (2013) and Rinehart (2011), p. 24, on the language of compositions in the *Dasam Granth*.

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*Gurbilās* literature, a historiographical literature that also is written in Braj (although often claimed as a mixture of Punjabi and Braj, such works actually strongly reflect Braj, not Punjabi). In this material, here from Sainapati (complete c. 1708), we can see a relatively simple form of Braj, without elaborate Persianisms and Sanskritisms:

*anika bhānti līlā taha karī/phate shāh suni lai mani dhari/  
bahuta kopa mana māhi basāyo/pha'uja banāi judha ka 'u āyo//*  
(Sainapati (1988 [1967]), ch. 2. 9, p. 69)

He performed *līlā* in various ways/Fateh Shah heard of this and held it in his mind.

A great anger took hold in his heart/So he amassed an army and came for battle.<sup>52</sup>

Stylistically this material reveals something perhaps akin to the ‘*tadbhava* simplicity’ Busch identifies with Rahīm and Raslīn; there is more work to be done along these lines of analysis in the Punjabi case as well.<sup>53</sup> The use of *līlā* here is of interest, as it seems clearly to function outside of its conventional Vaishnava sensibilities, functioning as a description of ‘actions’ or ‘deeds’ and, indeed, a form of *tarīkh* or history; we can see a parallel in the use of the term *vilāsa* or ‘play’ for narrative descriptions of the history of the Gurus in the Sikh tradition in the genre known as *Gurbilās*. Vocabulary choices are more complex but still heavily Braj in Kuir Singh’s *Gurbilās* of the mid to late eighteenth century, as Julie Vig’s emerging doctoral work shows.<sup>54</sup> As a result it seems many of the designations of this genre as a mix of Punjabi and Braj are aspirational at best: Braj is the main linguistic form in use. The exception to this is the Rahit literature, which does not feature a ‘high’ Braj form and features a stronger Punjabi articulation; Peder Gedda’s emerging assessment of the dating of texts in this genre will inform our understanding of Punjabi’s emergence within it, however, so judgment on this point is premature.

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52 Sainapati (2014), p. 21. This translation is mine. On this dating of *Gur Sobhā*, see Dhavan (2011a), p. 182, n. 5 and 6; Mann (2008), p. 252, suggests 1701 for the initiation of the text. On the text in general, see Hans (1988), pp. 245–ff.; Grewal (2004a); and Murphy (2007).

53 Busch (2010), pp. 114, 116. Busch’s insights into how and why Sanskritization is engaged in the premodern can be applied fruitfully in the material under consideration here (*ibid.*, p. 119).

54 Vig (2016). The nature of this *interaction*, in short, is where an important part of the story of Punjabi lies, reminiscent perhaps of Jesse Knutson’s exploration of Jayadeva’s *Gītāgovinda* as ‘a consolidation of two distinct literary registers’ where the cosmopolitan and vernacular ‘strategically coincide’ (Knutson (2014), p. 74).

Punjab-located vernacular cultural production, then, is very much a part of the larger story of a cosmopolitan Braj literary world (both courtly and religious), operating within a broader Persian cosmopolis that was expressed in local terms in the *Dasam Granth* (in the *Zafarnāmāh*) as well as the court of Ranjit Singh and other courtly contexts, such as the emerging courts of other Sikh chiefs, who generally sought to narrate their own historical emergence in Persian, as Purnima Dhavan has discussed.<sup>55</sup> Recent work by Pasha Khan provides a valuable portrait of the patronage that supported (limited) Punjabi language textual production in that period; as Khan notes, however, Brajbhāṣā was ‘very much part of this story as well.’<sup>56</sup> And, of course, mainstream Sufi literature in Punjab, like courtly literature, was overwhelmingly in Persian (although this does not mean that vernacular production was absent, as Orsini notes).<sup>57</sup> Persian also strongly informed the linguistic flavour of the *qissā* or narrative story literature in Punjabi, part of a larger genre across North India and, in the case of Hīr–Ranjha, with at times striking narrative commonalities with the older genre of the Avadhi/Hindavi *premākhyān* of the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries.<sup>58</sup> We are, however, generally constrained in our ability to speak in definitive terms about specifically Punjabi linguistic production in this domain by the relatively late manuscript evidence available to us; lexical choices in the *qisse* are strongly Persianate, mixed with some Punjabi grammatical forms (as we’ll see in a mid-eighteenth-century example below).<sup>59</sup>

As Pollock points out, ‘vernacularity is not a natural state of being but a willed act of becoming’; Busch suggests that ‘courtly context and cultural orientation’ are ways of beginning to understand that will.<sup>60</sup> She notes that one figure’s virtuosity reveals in part his cosmopolitanism, but also ‘a kind of revelling in the poetic power of Braj Bhasha.’<sup>61</sup> This can perhaps help us to understand the state of play between Punjabi and Braj as well. Indeed, there is significant crossover between

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55 Dhavan (2011b).

56 Khan (2013), p. 159 for quote; see discussion and citations of limited Punjabi language textual production in the period in *ibid.*, pp. 159–ff.

57 Orsini (2014), p. 404.

58 Sufi commitments and the lover-to-yogi transformation motif visible in Hīr–Ranjha in particular finds a strong parallel with the earlier *premākhyān* tradition. On the relationship between the *qissā* narrative genre and the earlier *premākhyān*, see Behl and Doniger (2012), p. 336; on that genre overall, see Behl and Doniger (2012); De Bruijn (2012); and Shantanu Phukan’s beautiful dissertation, which is ‘only partially a thesis about *Padmavat*,’ the most famous of the Avadhi *premākhyān*, but is a valuable contribution on the genre (and more) (Phukan (2000b), p. 6). On the *qissā* genre in broad terms, see the early foundational work in English, Pritchett (1985), and the important new work of Orsini (2009) and Khan (2013).

59 According to Jeevan Deol the manuscript evidence is late for Waris’ *Heer* (1821 for the earliest MSS) and there is clear evidence of the expansion of the text at the hands of various editors and poets. Deol (2002), pp. 151–152.

60 Pollock (2006), p. 24; Busch (2010), p. 111.

61 Busch (2010), p. 112.

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Braj and early Punjabi, so drawing a clear line between these two is difficult. Busch has described the broader difficulties of defining the boundaries of Braj, so this is not an issue that is exclusive to Braj's relationship with Punjabi; in her words, Braj 'often appears to be congenitally impure, that is to say, hybrid and multiregistered';<sup>62</sup> as she has also noted, the designation of difference is almost always politicized.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, as Heidi Pauwels has noted so well, 'rather than regarding these as watertight categories' among New Indo-Aryan languages in the period of their emergence and literarization (to borrow again from Pollock), 'we could here too speak of a North Indian continuum of literary expression' where 'linguistic boundaries between these various idioms were often fluid.'<sup>64</sup> Sources of the period that Francesca Orsini examines, for instance, do not distinguish between Avadhi, Braj, and other forms of what we call Hindavi; the term *bhāṣā* or *bhākhā* is used for all, although the notion of a separate idiom associated with the region of Lahore was contemporary to its use, as has been noted, so it is not that distinctive linguistic forms were not recognized; it is crucial to note therefore that this does *not mean* that all forms of 'Hindavi' are in fact 'Hindi'; there is some slippage, at times, between Hindavi and 'early Hindi,' when these must be two different things. Only a history of Khari Boli, as Bangha rightly notes, can truly be said to excavate the contours of 'early Hindi.'<sup>65</sup>

Multilinguality, Orsini thus argues, is 'a set of historically located practices tied to material conditions of speech and writing, rather than as a kind of natural heterogeneity' or, further, a sense of absolute difference.<sup>66</sup> Varying lexical features can be identified in emergent Punjabi literary expression: strongly Persian vocabulary choices in the *qisse*, and ties to Braj and, given the larger resonances of Braj's literary domain, Vaishnava vocabulary and imagery in Sikh contexts. As Shackle notes in an important exploration of the historical evolution of modern standard Punjabi, the language 'is quite as close to the Khari dialect, which underlies both Urdu and Hindi, as Surdas's Braj, and is indeed far closer to it than the eastern Avadhi of the *Ramcharitmanas*.'<sup>67</sup> We are faced with a sense of illusiveness, therefore, for a history of Punjabi, unless instead we replace such a quest with the ability to see Punjabi and Braj (as well as Punjabi and Persian, and Punjabi and

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62 For quote *ibid.*, p. 116; on the difficulty of drawing its boundaries, see pp. 85–86. As Busch notes, 'during the seventeenth century it became a language that travelled vast distances, and along the journey it encountered a range of courtly contexts and regional linguistic practices, to which the poets adapted' (*ibid.*, p. 106).

63 Busch (2010), pp. 88–89. On parallel discussion of the issue of Hindi vs. Urdu, see Phukan (2000a), pp. 18–19.

64 Pauwels (2009b). See also Orsini and Shaikh (2014), p. 15.

65 Bangha (2010), pp. 22–23.

66 Orsini (2012), p. 228.

67 Shackle (1988), p. 105.

other early modern linguistic formations) as a kind of *interface*, not a competition, while still recognizing the distinctions among them (and not subsuming all things written in Gurmukhi as automatically ‘Punjabi,’ willfully forgetting Punjabi’s rich life in the Perso-Arabic script and Gurmukhi’s appearance in multiple linguistic forms, and also not assuming all things written in Devanagari to be ‘Hindi,’ as has been for too long the temptation).<sup>68</sup>

## Region

But are there other ways to tell the story of the vernacular that is Punjabi, in this terrain? The vernacularization process is accompanied by, as Pollock describes it, ‘new conceptions of communities and places,’<sup>69</sup> although language choice does not simply map to the political and religious. Punjab is no exception, as Julie Vig’s research on the late eighteenth-century *Gurbilās* literature shows. The *idea* and experience of region thus can emerge in multiple languages, and at points of interaction among them, as Kumkum Chatterjee’s work on Bengal confirms. We know that Punjab as a place was imagined in powerful ways by its residents—Sikh, Muslim, Hindu, and others—in the time since Khusrav called attention to it in linguistic and cultural terms. While some have argued for Punjabi regional consciousness as a modern invention, there is a wealth of evidence to counter such a claim.<sup>70</sup> As I have argued elsewhere, the representation of the past was a particular concern for the Sikh community in the eighteenth century: the imagination of the physical landscape of the community formed a part of such representations, although they were never strictly coterminous with Punjab and the landscape of the Gurus was far larger.<sup>71</sup>

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68 See discussion of these issues, and script difference, in Murphy (2018a).

69 Pollock (2006), p. 6. As Pollock puts it: ‘To participate in Sanskrit literary culture was to participate in a vast world; to produce a regional alternative to it was to effect a profound break—one the agents themselves understood to be a break—in cultural communication and self-understanding.’ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

70 Harjot Oberoi argued in 1987 that ‘it was only in the 1940s, when the demand for Pakistan was articulated by the Muslim League, and when the cold truth dawned that the Punjab might after all be divided that the Sikhs with a tragic desperation began to visualize the Punjab as their homeland.’ As such, he argued, the ‘affective attachment with the Punjab among the Sikhs is fairly recent, and it does not date back to the early annals of the Sikh community’ (Oberoi (1987), p. 27). It is undeniable that the notion of Punjab in *national territorial* terms is entirely new; the idea of the nation state itself is entirely modern. But there is a long history to the affective attachment to Punjab among Sikhs, as well as other Punjabis. See Murphy (2012).

71 Murphy (2012).

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We see an emergent notion of the region in the Braj seventeenth-century text, the *Bachitar Nāṭak*, attributed to the tenth Guru and contained within the *Dasam Granth*, where ‘*madara desh*’ seems to refer directly to Punjab, and it is linked to the founding of the Sodhi and Bedi clans, the lineages associated with the Gurus:

*paṭhe kāgadaṁ madra rājā sudhāraṁ, āpo āpa mo baira bhāvaṁ bisāraṁ/  
nripaṁ mukaliyaṁ dūta so kāśī āyaṁ, sabai bediyaṁ bheda bhākke su-  
nayaṁ/  
sabai beda pāṭhī cale madra desaṁ, praṇāmaṁ kīyo ān kai kai naresaṁ//  
(Bachitar Nāṭak, ch. 4)*

The Sodhi king of Madara sent letters to them, entreating them to forget past enmities/

The messengers sent by the king came to Kashi and gave the message to all the Bedis/

All the reciters of the Vedas came to Madra Desha and made obeisance to the King.

Here we do seem to see a sense of new kinds of culture boundaries’ (in Pollock’s words) that may or may not rely upon the formal designation of the Lahore province in the Mughal administration to describe the region of the Indus and its tributaries mentioned in earlier literature, but these boundaries also seem to exceed it; they do not here map to the emergence of a regional polity at that time.<sup>72</sup> We also see the region’s emergence in Waris Shah’s mid-eighteenth-century rendition of the story of the star-crossed lovers, Heer and Ranjha, perhaps the most quintessentially (ethnically?) Punjabi text one might identify (the text that the revolutionary Udham Singh, alias Muhammad Singh Azād, wanted to take his oath on when at trial); it is central, as Jeevan Deol has noted, to the ‘Punjabi episteme.’<sup>73</sup> Waris Shah opens his classic version of the story, *Heer*, in praise of the Lord, and the Prophet, and the Sufi saints who were so important to the cultural landscape of Punjab, creating Punjab as an Islamic landscape (with variations between the Shahmukhi or Perso-Arabic and Gurmukhi printed versions of the text):

*ma’udūda dā lāḍalā pīra cishaṭī shakkara gaṅja māsa’ūda bharapūra hai jī  
bātān kutabān de vicca hai pīra kāmala jaīndī ājazī zuhāda manazūra hai jī  
khānadāna vicca cishata de kāmalāta shahira fakkara dā paṭaṇa  
mashahūra/ ma’ mūra jī*

72 Pollock (2006), pp. 382–383. ‘Punjab’ as a term was in use in the period of Akbar, and it was in his reign that the province of Lahore was reorganized to encompass the five doabs. The first history of ‘the Punjab’ was written by Ganesh Das at the beginning of the colonial period, the *Char Bagh-i-Punjab*. Grewal (2004b), p. 9.

73 On Udham Singh and the text, see *Rabba Hun Kee Kariye (Thus Departed Our Neighbours)* by Ajay Bhardwaj. On the ‘Punjabi episteme’ and Waris Shah’s *Heer*, see Deol (2002), p. 142.

*shakkara ganja ne āni makāna/mukām kītā dukkh darada pañjāba dā dūra  
hai jī<sup>74</sup>* (Shah (1986), pp. 2–3; Padam (1998 [1977]), p. 61)

The beloved of Moinuddin (of Ajmer), the Chishti Pir, he is full as a treasury  
of pure sweetness,  
He is the perfect saint among the 22 poles (*kutabān*) [that guide the world],  
whose renunciation and humility is accepted by all,  
He is the perfection of the Chisht lineage, whose city has become civilized  
(*ma'mūr*)/famous (*mashhūr*) as a town of mendicants.  
Shakar-Ganj has come and made this his home (*makāna/mukām*), dispelling  
the sadness and pain of Punjab.

In Waris Shah, the territory or *vilāyat* of the saint is described, locating Punjab as a distinctive region and simultaneously making it a part of a far broader Islamic imaginary.<sup>75</sup> Farina Mir has highlighted how regional imaginaries prevailed within the *qissā* or story of Heer and Ranjha in the colonial period to define a territoriality that ‘emphasizes the affective attachments people established with the local, and particularly their natal places,’ where Punjab ‘emerges . . . as an imagined ensemble of natal places within a particular topography (rivers, riverbanks, forests and mountains) and religious geography (Sufi shrines and Hindu monasteries).’<sup>76</sup> This is a mapping of Punjab: Jhang, Takhat Hazara, Tilla Jogian, Rangpur; the places that are enlivened by the always repeated story of Heer–Ranjha, fixed in time and place in this region, alongside the histories and stories associated with the Sikh Gurus and other figures with diverse religious affiliations. We can see in Waris Shah’s version of the text that this mapping pre-dates the British arrival. We thus see that Punjab as a place and a cultural sensibility mattered, percolating through texts that were diverse in their linguistic and religious formations—and occasionally reflective of a Punjabi vernacular linguistic form.

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74 The second and third lines are transposed in the Shahmukhi text; I give the order of the Gurmukhi version here. These published versions are well regarded, but there are substantial variants in published editions; compare with Ghumman (2007), p. 1. Waris Shah’s text has not been formed into a critical edition; Mohan Singh published a manuscript-based form of the text in 1947 that radically shortened the text based on manuscript evidence (and was widely rejected as a result). See Deol (2002), p. 152.

75 There are many similar articulations of the region in Shah’s text; see also verses 56, 141, 311, 364 et al. in Shah (1986).

76 Mir (2010), p. 123 for first quote, p. 134 for second.

## Concluding reflections

Christopher Shackle has argued that the beginnings of Punjabi literature are found in ‘two genres of religious poetry’ in ‘two distinct traditions.’<sup>77</sup> But we also must face that Punjabi itself as a language is illusive at best even within this formulation,<sup>78</sup> and that the narrative of Sikh and Sufi origins must be complicated. At the same time, and in diverse textual contexts, religious communitarian formations, organized in both local and supralocal forms, did somehow matter in the construction of a Punjabi literary imaginary, strongest in Sufi contexts (as we have seen, with strong Punjabi flavouring in Farīd and Waris Shah) but perhaps strongest in extra-canonical works associated with religious contexts. Early Punjabi instances are found within texts associated with the Sikh tradition particularly in Farīd, the *Janamsākhī*, and Gurdas (with questions of dating complicating our understanding); otherwise, Sadhukkarī, at first, and Braj, later, dominate. In the Sikh context it is *loyalty to Gurmukhi* as a script that stands out over the Punjabi language, which is why Braj and Persian are both so easily integrated into Gurmukhi eighteenth-century collections associated with the *Dasam Granth* (although there is significant variation in the texts included in that compilation in its early versions); the lack of recognition of the difference between Punjabi as a language and Gurmukhi as a script has effaced this important distinction.<sup>79</sup> Of a region, however, we do see something emerge, but must be careful not to assume a strictly linguistic association with it.

Francesca Orsini has argued for an understanding of North India as a ‘multilingual and multi-locational literary culture,’<sup>80</sup> defined by maps that are multiple and sometimes overlapping. Punjab emerges in multiple linguistic registers and with a particularly complex relationship with Braj, marked by religious valences that *do not* map to the centralizing Braj vernacular forces (both courtly and religious) that we see at work elsewhere in the early modern period.<sup>81</sup> A broader history of Punjabi literary production must address political changes in Punjab that brought

77 Shackle (2015), p. x.

78 The ways that *languages* function in this context, I would argue, mirrors the way religious domains also function: overlapping, and yet defined in particular contexts and for particular purposes.

79 On the *Dasam Granth* and its contents, with an overview of printed editions and research on manuscript traditions, see Rinehart (2011), ch. 1, and Deol (2001). On script and the Persian language text, the *Zafarnāmah*, see Fenech (2013), p. 23.

80 Orsini (2012), p. 238. This is a vision that ‘mirrors the balance of social forces that were active and vocal in the polities of the regional Sultans and local Rajput chiefdoms and in the religious marketplace . . . of the time: rulers and chieftains, merchants and artisans, religious leaders and groups of various kinds.’ (ibid., p. 239).

81 I address some aspects of the distinctive vision of Punjabi texts in Braj in Murphy (2018b).

late localized political control that, when it did arrive, translated into peripheral courtly commitment to Punjabi language, such as during the rule of Ranjit Singh. Neither was there sustained institutionalized religious commitment to the language for writing, since the *dominant* literatures in both Sufi and Sikh contexts were in either Persian or Braj. Punjabi emerges at the periphery. We can see this in the court records of Ranjit Singh's kingdom, which are in Persian (regardless of whether or not Punjabi was used as a spoken language). Very rarely, Gurmukhi Punjabi marginalia occur alongside the core text and marginalia/comments, all in Persian, usually as an attestation of the authenticity of the document in question.<sup>82</sup> The court therefore was not the major agent of linguistic innovation for Punjabi, and religious interventions also appeared outside of institutional centres. This is in keeping with Orsini's findings that 'rather than a model of literary culture centred around either religious sites or around royal courts,' we must look to 'the interrelated efforts of singers, poets, patrons and audiences at courtly darbars and sabhas, in the open spaces of chaupals in towns and villages, in temples and khanqahs.'<sup>83</sup> This is where we therefore must locate Punjabi: *as an alternative to* institutional powers (articulated in cosmopolitan languages like Persian and Braj),<sup>84</sup> connected to a generalized sense of regionality expressed not only in that language, important perhaps particularly *because* it did not map to state or religious institution. Instead, it was linked to a kind of aesthetic practice, as Pollock has argued, embodying an affective domain available within and across religious boundaries.<sup>85</sup> It is that *affective* domain and *aesthetic* practice at the periphery that we must attend to in the effort to make space for Punjabi and its illusive multilingual (and multireligious) history (with striking parallels with the current situation).<sup>86</sup> This might explain, for instance, why when Ranjit Singh consolidated his reign at the end of the eighteenth century, he engaged a Punjabi-influenced *Persian* to do so.<sup>87</sup> Was the

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82 See, for example, in the Khalsa Darbar Records, Dharamarth Section, Bundle 5, X Pt. 2, 429 and 471. Punjabi State Archives Collection, Chandigarh.

83 Orsini (2012), p. 243. Hawley concurs in his recent work (Hawley (2015), p. 311), citing an unpublished paper by Christian Novetzke. Shackle (1993), p. 288, conversely, argues that Siraiki emerges as a distinct literary language precisely because of court patronage.

84 This has continued to a degree into the modern period, perhaps in keeping with Tariq Rahman's description of Punjabi's association 'with pleasure [that] is connected with a certain kind of Punjabi identity' (Rahman (2002), p. 395). See Murphy (2018a) for discussion.

85 Pollock (2006), p. 18. These non-state formations interacted with the court, to be sure, but were not limited to polity. As we know, Sufi shrines, Nāthyogī centres, and the Sikh Gurus too made their claims on the political sphere, and the issue of 'sovereignty' was not equivalent to that imagined in the formulation of the modern nation state. I cannot address this broader issue here, but discuss the problem of reading 'sovereignty' in Sikh contexts in Murphy (2015).

86 Murphy (2018a).

87 Based on reading of the *dharamarth* records of the Lahore state (see Murphy (2012), pp. 165–ff) For similar observations on 'easy' Persian and the influence of the vernacular, see Orsini (2014), pp. 406–407.

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vernacular already, perhaps, marked by a non-statist imaginary, as Ishwar Gaur's recent study of Waris Shah's *Heer* suggests, in a context where a vernacular *polity* had had no space to emerge and Braj and Persian functioned as institutionalized idioms of power, both religious and courtly?<sup>88</sup> This puts it on par with the ethical dimensions of Marathi as a vernacular that Christian Novetzke's work engages with, and his discussion of non-state locations for Marathi literary emergence, although the Punjabi case is in fact far more clear in terms of its extra-institutional moorings and individualistic orientation.<sup>89</sup> It is also in keeping with Shantanu Phukan's and Allison Busch's respective insights into the emergence of early Hindavi in relation to Persian and Sanskrit, where we see the emergence of Hindavi alongside Persian as allowing for a particular kind of emotional expression that, in Phukan's words, acted 'not as an instrument of conversion, nor yet as a concession to the simple sensibilities of rural folk, but as an effective vehicle for the expression of such emotional states and modalities of knowledge as can better be captured by it'; it was also as such particularly associated with the feminine voice.<sup>90</sup> Busch has shown that courtly *rīṭī* literature in Braj 'developed an extraordinary capacity to speak across cultural barriers to a wide variety of people in a way that neither Persian or Sanskrit could ever do.'<sup>91</sup> All of these resonances were of course radically reconfigured with the new politics of language in the nineteenth century, but in the early modern period, we can see Punjabi enacting its own set of affective connotations within a larger diverse linguistic landscape otherwise dominated by Persian and Braj.

The emergence of Punjabi similarly meant something particular in the complex linguistic and literary expressive worlds of early modern Punjab. The role I suggest here can be said to prefigure the position of Punjabi that Farina Mir describes in the colonial period, positioning Punjabi as simultaneously 'outside' (of state and other forms of power) and yet vividly present and resilient perhaps *because*

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88 Gaur (2009).

89 The state was certainly an agent of vernacular literalization in the inscriptional evidence for Marathi Novetzke discusses; he admits that 'vernacularization occurred at the intersection of state and public culture,' acknowledging a state role (Novetzke (2016), pp. 168, 194.) His observation of the Yadava neglect of Marathi as an opening to literary innovation bears striking similarity to the earlier argument of Farina Mir regarding the florescence of Punjabi in the colonial period, outside of colonial influence (Novetzke (2016), p. 75; Mir 2010). See Murphy (forthcoming 2019?) on expressions of individualization in early modern Punjabi cultural forms.

90 Phukan (2000b), p. 87 (for quote); see overall discussion pp. 72–ff; see also Phukan (2000a), pp. 15–ff. As Phukan well notes, such an interplay of languages does not just allow for the expression of different semantic registers but *extends* the range of each language so utilized (Phukan (2000a), p. 15).

91 Busch (2011), p. 100. This is an argument also visible in Bangha (2010), p. 83.

of such a position.<sup>92</sup> This, of course, also explains why it is so difficult to find. Overall, we need an explanatory mechanism for the dynamics of vernacularization in Punjab that embraces the range of material before us, religious and not, courtly and not, both when distinctive features of Punjabi as a language do emerge (to differentiate it from other forms or ‘flavours’ of Hindavi) and when they do not.<sup>93</sup> This essay represents preliminary thinking along such lines.

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92 Mir (2010).

93 Pollock indeed noted in passing that ‘the cultures of Place (or *deśa*) were intended to at once replicate and replace the global order of Sanskrit (although this was not true in all cases; Sufi poets, for example, had other agendas)’ (Pollock (2006), p. 397).

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