

Literary and Religious  
Practices in Medieval and  
Early Modern India

Edited by  
Raziuddin Aquil and David L. Curley



LITERARY AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICES IN  
MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN INDIA



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*Edited by*

RAZIUDDIN AQUIL

DAVID L. CURLEY

 **Routledge**  
Taylor & Francis Group  
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2017

by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge

711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

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Print edition not for sale in South Asia (India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Pakistan or Bhutan)

*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data*

Catalog record for this book has been requested

ISBN: 978-1-138-28031-1 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-315-27218-4 (ebk)

Typeset in MinionPro

by Ravi Shanker, Delhi 110 095



MANOHAR

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## *Preface*

Covering the history of medieval and early modern India, from the eighth to the eighteenth centuries, this volume is part of a new series of collections of essays publishing current research on all aspects of polity, society, economy, religion and culture. The thematically organized volumes will particularly serve as a platform for younger scholars to showcase their new research and, thus, reflect current thrusts in the study of the period. Established experts in their specialized fields are also being invited to share their work and provide perspectives. The geographical limits will be historic India, roughly corresponding to modern South Asia and the adjoining regions.

This series of essay collections will, thus, provide a forum where some of the best researches on medieval and early modern India can be published at regular intervals. Mr Ramesh Jain and his able staff at Manohar Publishers & Distributors, are bringing out these volumes. Two collections currently being planned include a volume on Sufism, bringing together contributions on Sufi sources, historiographical analysis of existing research, and fresh study of themes relating to Sufism in the Indian Subcontinent. Another volume on religion and political culture, focuses on critical connections between religion and politics, significance of the intermeshing of religious and political ideas in statecraft, religious justifications not only of political conquests, but also of governance, roles of men of religion (*ulama*, Sufis, *yogis*, *gurus*, Brahmins) as power-brokers or legitimizers of political authority as well as violent claims to authority between political and spiritual power-holders, significance of religious shrines as political



## 8 *Preface*

symbols, medieval rulers' inability to disentangle the interconnections between the affairs of the 'church' and the state, etc.

As part of this project, chapters in the current volume cover a wide variety of connected themes of crucial importance to the understanding of literary and historical traditions, religious practices and encounters as well as intermingling of religion and politics over a long period in Indian history. The contributors to the volume comprise some fine historians of the present generation working in institutions across South Asia, Europe and the United States. It is also a matter of great pleasure to have a veteran scholar of literary and religious texts, Professor David Curley, as co-editor of the volume, who besides providing valuable guidance, has also contributed a chapter on local and popular historical memories as significant material for the history of the eastern Bengal region in the eighteenth century.

RAZIUDDIN AQUIL

## *Introduction*

### *Literary and Religious Practices*

RAZIUDDIN AQUIL AND DAVID L. CURLEY

#### Some Historiographical Concerns

The essays in this volume comprise histories that use religious or literary texts. The authors explore a variety of practices that made it possible for the texts to be created, to circulate, and to shape beliefs, sentiments, and institutions. Religious and literary texts often were received as 'documents' and 'histories' in their own contexts. They preserved authoritative stories about the past, and retold them to comment on the present.

Of course, religious beliefs and texts that justify them have been central to all societies across the centuries of medieval and early modern history. In the field of medieval and early modern history of South Asia, however, to take religious and literary texts seriously represents a departure from some usual practices of history as a social science. We have in mind the preference for causal explanations over explanations that relate parts to a larger whole, the preference therefore for documents that can be thought to record objective facts, the distrust of 'subjective' and 'fictive' aspects of narrative history, and the preference especially for causal explanations based on demographic, economic, or ecological systems and relations (White 1987, compare Braudel 1980).

When academic historians discuss contentious religious issues in medieval and early modern times, the sentiments and perspectives of current issues and debates tend to frame their discussions and are imposed upon the past, so that remarkable differences of the past from the present are elided. In particular, strongly held

beliefs about the 'naturalness' of religious conflict in medieval South Asia shape what is popularly accepted now as 'true' and 'factual' history. Based on strict standards of evidence accepted by their profession, academic historians can label much in popular discourse about South Asian religion in the past as 'myth', 'legend', or 'fiction'. Should academic historians attempt to intervene politically? When they have intervened to correct popular history, however, they often have been accused of being partisan against religion. Is it possible for historians to be unbiased in their approach to history-writing about religion, even when dealing with contentious issues about which religious communities feel sensitive?

While popularly accepted 'myths' and 'legends' about medieval South Asia often have been ignored or dismissed by academic historians, the space so vacated has been enthusiastically occupied by 'popular' historians, religious leaders, and politicians. One task of academic history should be to analyse the history of changing beliefs, including both religious and those about the past, and to consider them in relation to changing contexts.

Outside of history departments, in the fields of literary studies and history of religion, many fine studies have been produced on both religious and secular literature in medieval and early modern South Asia. These studies have treated texts from classical and vernacular languages of South Asia, and they have treated texts belonging to each of the major religious traditions, as well as texts claimed by several religions at once, texts that maintained a strict independence from all accepted orthodoxies, and secular texts claimed by no religion (for an introduction to languages and texts, see Pollock 2003). Perhaps what historians can best contribute to the discussion of literary texts is rigorous criticism of the situations in which they were produced, careful comparison of texts whose contextual relations have escaped notice, and careful attention to changing rules for the production, reception, and institutionalization of genres over time.

For example, in a study that ranges from the sixteenth century to the present, Ramya Sreenivasan (2007) has written about changing traditions of the legend of Padmini. Her legend was first composed both as a Sufi allegory about love for God, and as

a heroic romance related to pre-Mughal politics in north India. Emphasizing Rajput heroism, quite different versions of the Padmini legend subsequently were produced at Jain and Rajput courts, and even in faraway Arakan. In the nineteenth-century, Rajput 'histories' in turn were synthesized by James Todd, who gave new emotional colour to the final 'tragic' act of self-immolation by Padmini and other Rajput women. For modern Hindu nationalists Padmini thus came to be both a 'real' historical woman, and 'a perfect model of ideal Indian womanhood' because she fought against an evil Muslim king.

Another very interesting approach has been to compare public spaces and 'historical memories' created by literary and oral histories, and their changing interactions. Using this approach Prachi Deshpande (2007) and Chitralekha Zutshi (2014) have written about the profound changes in history writing in Maharashtra and Kashmir respectively. Deshpande is concerned with historical traditions that have come to be used to project Hindus and Muslims as natural enemies. On the other hand, Zutshi argues that in Kashmir, local Persian histories and traditions of oral story-telling continued to tell legends of the origin of Kashmir first told in Sanskrit. Through most of the nineteenth-century alternative versions of familiar 'legends' explained the creation of Kashmir as a sacred place, and circulated it in the public which included both Muslims and Hindus. But in the twentieth-century historians redefined the Sanskrit *Rajatarangini* as a classical Hindu Indian history text, and not a Kashmiri history, while the Dogra dynasty withdrew its patronage of Persian language and literature, thus severing a centuries long bridge between Sanskrit and Persian histories, and between them and oral story-telling in Kashmiri.

Much good research on literary texts and their histories is happening in North America and Europe, but new subjects, methods, and discoveries are often ignored in Indian researches and teaching, except in the field of research on popular and vernacular histories, both precolonial and colonial (for the latter see also: Ali 1999; Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam 2003; Aquil and Chatterjee 2008; Chatterjee 2009). The problem is not merely a concern for historians of pre-colonial India. Can South Asian literature, in many different languages and genres, be brought within the ambit of

historical research in colonial and modern history? How well are scholars of colonial and modern history linguistically equipped to delimit and understand cultural transformations in the nineteenth century from the period immediately preceding it?

Popular myths about Indian history, especially on questions of religion and identity, attract harsh criticism, but professional historians also need some soul searching. Despite more than sixty years of investment in history as a discipline in independent India, the general public remains historically uneducated. One may also like to ask what exactly historians are doing that has international importance in terms of knowledge production? Where does Indian history exist in relation to global standards of historical research? Experts on medieval India need to reflect on the state of their historiography even in relation to other fields within Indian history. How often do we peddle the same old stuff and block fresh thinking by younger scholars, with the result that a civilized and rational discussion of new thinking becomes impossible? Much as the upsurge of right-wing censorship in education and in scholarly publication is justifiably lamented, censorship of the same kind unfortunately happens even within liberal academia.

A great deal that was written about medieval India in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century has turned out to be inaccurate, incomplete and even downright false and misleading. We now understand that to justify British rule, colonial historians made broad and untenable generalizations about the lawless tyranny of Brahmins and Indian states over the weak, and about habits of servile submission, inveterate dishonesty, and moral and cultural decadence in 'pre-colonial' India. Is it not also possible that many current assumptions about Indian history are stereotypes relevant only to the politics of the present? Fifty years from now, in new contexts, historians may laugh at the irrationalities of our time. Opinions contrary to those now dominant may turn out to be more accurate or more insightful than our own.

Adherents of contemporary political ideologies, to say nothing of political propagandists committed to party interests, presume that only their own understanding of history is true, 'factual' history, and that their opponents' versions are imaginary 'fictions'. They try to establish their understanding of the truth through a variety

of strategies, including illogical arguments, personal attacks, and straightforward and obvious forms of academic suppression, as philosopher Akeel Bilgrami (2014) has recently delineated in his exposition on liberalism and the academy. Rather than attempting to establish an absolute truth, Chitralkha Zutshi has recently suggested that we frankly admit the existence of ‘mutually contested historical narratives with no possibility of ultimate resolution or verifiability’ (2014: 314). What happens to standards of truth in history if we allow that a variety of approaches and perspectives to history can be valid? Is it too much to expect from historians that we attempt to provide an approximate representation of the human past in all its dimensions, sources permitting, even if dominant politics of the time dictate otherwise? Academic historians can and usually do begin by insisting on careful and skeptical criticism of the provenance of our sources, before going on to the work of deciding which questions we can and should ask, and how we can generalize about them, and connect our sources to larger issues.

One problem in writing history pertains to the connection between ideology and how historians configure historical evidence. Religious and political ideologies deeply affect the questions historians ask, and how we write historical essays and narratives. Competing ideologies, such as imperialism and nationalism in the colonial period, and Marxism, secular liberalism, and religious nationalism in more recent times, have produced alternative ‘schools’ of historiography. Schools of historiography in turn seek to denigrate and thwart each other, both rhetorically and in practice. On the other hand, the rhetoric of a politically neutral and strictly empirical approach to history, representing itself as nothing beyond what the evidence suggests, often masked the dominant ideology of the colonial state. Anti-colonial historians produced in turn a counter-rhetoric that sought to unmask hidden interests served by historical empiricism, and to assert evidence for ‘emotional truths’ knowable only by historians who belong to the nation, religion, or social group about which they write (Chatterjee, in Aquil and Chatterjee 2008: 1-24). Perhaps writing history has always been a weapon in political struggles.

Some of the debates in medieval Indian history that have been shaped by ideological struggles or identity politics include the level

of rents extracted by medieval and early modern states, the incidence of violence against non-Muslims in states ruled by Muslims, the incidence and significance of desecration of temples, and other non-Muslim sites of worship and study, and the role of Sufis in conversion of non-Muslims to Islam, versus the role of Sufis in the inclusion of non-Muslims at Sufi shrines, and in making a 'pluralistic' society. Thus, the study of history is not only about what probably happened in the past, but it is also about competing claims for counter-factual alternatives: what might have happened, or what should have happened.

Political pressures and political appointments will also continue. After all, conquerors have always written histories on the bodies of those they have vanquished. The UPA/NDA governments determining and sponsoring divergent kinds of politically-motivated histories, not only at the level of school textbooks but also by controlling academic institutions, is now a matter of routine, seriously affecting the autonomy of the discipline of history.

Furthermore, more crucial and disappointing is factional politics within academia, often of a very petty kind: the use of power experienced in struggles over the topics of PhD theses, research grants and fellowships, over control of journals and publishing houses, over appointments, syllabus revisions, and reading lists, and in arbitrary decisions about course allotments and requirements for promotion. For those at the receiving end of academic power relations, there can be a long period of frustration; and once senior dons retire, the next generation takes over and repeats the same pattern.

### Languages, Literatures, and Permeable Boundaries

In medieval India, some of the masterpieces of classical Hindi literature are written by Muslim writers on themes related to Islam and Muslim cultural practices. Medieval Islamic association with Arabic and Persian languages has justifiably been recognized in literary and intellectual histories, but the emergence of a vast and fascinating corpus of Indic vernacular literature and its association with Islam in medieval India has not been adequately appreciated. Of a variety of Indian languages, in which a whole range of lit-

erary compositions emerged by fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Hindvi, or Hindi, was not only understood and spoken in large parts of the subcontinent, but it was also the language used in many complex literary productions.

Though Islamic theoretical and political discussions could still be accessed in Arabic and Persian, Sufis and other Muslim holy men were being heard, already in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, speaking languages such as Punjabi and Bengali, besides what is now identified as Hindi/Urdu. Of particular significance is the composition of a huge body of Sufi poetry of love (*premakhyān*), in Awadhi dialect of medieval Hindi. Beginning with Mulla Daud's *Chandayan* as early as fourteenth century and reaching its climax with Malik Muhammad Jaisi's *Padmavat* in the sixteenth century, with a large number of other scintillating examples in-between and later, this literature could captivate Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Jaisi's voluminous text also appropriated almost the entire Awadhi *Ram-Katha* then very popular with the public.

Thirty years later, this was indeed the inspiration for Tulsidas to garner all the glories with his Awadhi text par excellence, *Ramcharitamanas*. Smarting under their own pedantry of classical Sanskrit, the *pundits* of Banaras must have scoffed at Tulsidas for what they thought was a perversion of sorts, but the latter had the satisfaction not only of seeing its wide circulation amongst a large public of *Ram-bhakts*, but also had patrons in powerful Mughal quasi-officials, or *mansabdars*. Tulsidas and his work could easily fit the cultural taste of stalwarts like Todarmal and Man Singh. The biggest patron of Awadhi and Braj corpus of Hindi, both *bhakti* (devotional) and *riti* (erotic courtly) variety, was Abdur Rahim Khan-i-Khanan, a multilingual polyglot, with considerable political clout as a foster son of Emperor Akbar.

Hindi was, indeed, the *lingua franca* of Mughal India. The Mughal court being located at the centre of Braj Mandal, the dialect of the region, Braj, came to occupy an important place as the language of the court. Modern historians of Mughal India have conventionally portrayed Persian as the language of power and dominance, but, as literary historian Allison Busch (2011) has put it, Hindi is hidden in plain view of those who are obsessed with Persian in medieval India, as they are with English in mod-



ern times. It is naïve to imagine that influential Mughal nobles and cultural personalities such as Todarmal, Birbal, Man Singh, Tansen, and Surdas transacted their private and public businesses only in Persian.

Much as a certain degree of Persianization happened in many fields over five-six centuries, it will be absurd to assume that people in the bazaars of Jaunpur, or even in Agra and Delhi, would speak Persian—the status of the language was somewhat like English today, a language of the power-elite and international discursive engagements. One doubts very much, however, whether even someone like Akbar would speak to the visiting foreign dignitaries in Persian (the official language of the empire) or in Turkish (his mother tongue). While Abul Fazl, his brother Faizi, and Abdur Rahim could engage with the visitors in their own languages, Akbar himself could be comfortable in Hindustani—whether in quiet contemplation or when emotionally overwhelmed.

Before the nineteenth-century colonial divide, it was possible for leading Muslim intellectuals and theologians in Delhi to call their language ‘Hindi’ and even translate the Holy Koran in that language. At that time, the Persianized language of poetry was called Rekhta, or mixed language, and the more deeply rooted (*theth*) language of prose was referred to as Hindi. The imposition of Sanskritized Hindi in Devanagari script for Hindus and Persianized-Arabicized Urdu in Persian script for Muslims had not come about yet. Still, when a history of Hindi literature is written, even the most prejudiced authors are unable to completely bypass the Awadhi *premakhyan* or altogether ignore the seminal Mughal contribution to the growth of Braj corpus. On the other hand, the Urdu field, now identified with Muslims alone, is still learning to come to terms with a tradition torn asunder (for more on the history of these difficulties, see Orsini 2010).

Earlier, led by reformers from lower sections of society, several strands of medieval Bhakti movements condemned religious rituals, criticized caste or *jati*-based hierarchies and discrimination and advocated the need to discover Ram, the formless God inside one’s heart. Some traditions of *bhakti* are also identified as Hindu religious movements, revolving around Sri Ram of Ayodhya as an epitome of virtues, and juxtaposed with forms of popular Islamic

spirituality identified as Sufism. Though saint-poets such as Kabir and Guru Nanak transcended contentious political boundaries of Islam and Hinduism, religious fields were often marred by violent formations of communities. The *gurus* were involved in a competitive spirituality of sorts and often fed off each other, in terms of appropriating ideas and attracting followers, not necessarily to organize them as sparring communities.

In many cases, however, the followers completely transformed the original teachings of their spiritual *gurus*, and communities (*panths* and *sampradays*) that formed around them often sought to use political power to demean and subdue each other. Memories of terrible struggles between Muslim and non-Muslim followers of Kabir and Nanak over their dead bodies are a case in point. These saintly figures, who challenged religious boundary-markers and hypocrisies, were to be buried or cremated depending upon which group dominated the funeral proceedings. It was in the fitness of things that the bodies disappeared, by miracle or design, so that these fine souls could not be easily trapped into the politics of religious identities (for some of the details of these contestations, see Aquil 2009).

One of the most respected scholars of Bhakti movements, David Lorenzen (2010) has recently explored the question of religious identities (Hindu, Muslim, Yogi and Sant) in the teachings of Gorakhnath and Kabir. Though much of the lives and teachings of both Gorakhnath and Kabir remain shrouded in legends, it is possible to cull out some of the essence of their teachings through compositions attributed to them since medieval times. Gorakhnath may have lived in the period between eleventh-twelfth centuries and some of his religious ideas, subsequently compiled in *Gorakhbani*, are significant in the current context of the politics of Hindutva.

As an accomplished *yogi*, Gorakhnath distinguished himself from formal and ritualistic Hindu traditions and considered himself closer to Sufi-oriented Islam. He says: he originated as a Hindu, matured as *yogi* and was a Muslim by intellect (*utpati hindu jaranam yogi akli pari musulmanin*). Paying tribute to Muslim intellect might seem a contradiction in terms in these times of all-round deterioration, but Gorakhnath lived in an age when Muslims were

still setting standards of excellence in many fields of expertise. Though Gorakhnath, like Kabir subsequently, could notice how the ignorant guardians of Islam (*mullas* and *qazis*) were unable to follow the correct path (*raah*), he recognized that through established spiritual practices and deep contemplation the Sufi *dervishes* were able to discover the door to the house of the Lord (*darwesh soi jo dar ki janain*) and, therefore, they belonged to the caste of Allah (*so darwesh alah ki jati*). Several other verses strongly reject Muslim and Hindu rituals and highlight the virtues of a separate and superior yogic tradition.

Anticipating Kabir's iconoclasm, Gorakhnath strongly proclaimed: Hindus worship in temples and Muslims go to mosques, but the *yogis* spend time in meditation in the presence of the omnipotent, where there is neither a temple nor a mosque (*hindu dhyawai dehura musalman masit, yogi dhyawai parmad jahan dehura na masit*). Further distancing himself from both Hindu and Muslim traditions which were based on particular readings of scriptures such as Vedas and Koran, Gorakhnath pointed out that the verses on the secrets of the Supreme Being are understood only by the *yogis*, whereas the rest of the world is lost in this-worldly illusions and enterprise (*te pad janan birla yogi aur duni sab dhandhe laayi*).

Gorakhnath's compositions clearly bring out three distinct religious positions — the dominating and formal Islamic and Hindu traditions as well as the mystical world of the *yogis*, which was confident enough to recognize the value of the mystic path of the Sufis. Preaching in the latter half of the fifteenth and early decades of the sixteenth century, Kabir went a step further. Locating himself right at the centre of the marketplace (*Kabira Khara Bazaar Mein*), the latter sharply criticized not only Hindu and Muslim religious leaders, but also found faults with self-styled Sufis and *yogis*. Kabir criticized the ritual of animal sacrifice among Hindus, but he reserved his choicest language for condemnation of slaughter of animals by Muslims (*bakri murgi kinh phurmaya kiske kahe tum chhuri chalaya . . . din ko roja rahat hai raat hanat hai gai*). For *yogis*, Kabir's advice was that spiritual practices like *pranayama* and other forms of meditations are of no use until the heart of the person concerned is cleansed and Ram is discovered within

(all the statements attributed above to Gorakhnath and Kabir are derived from Lorenzen, 2010).

### Fresh Insights

The essays in this volume deal with the composition and reception of symbolic representations, and with social practices in literature and religion. In them we have many opportunities to think about writing practices and literary genres in relation to religious boundaries and identities, whether multiple, dual or exclusive (see also Leiberman, 2013). Some of the genres that will be explored are letters, hagiographies, translations or transcreations of sacred texts, and ballads. All of them depended on an archive of other texts and memories, and all tried to maintain and reshape public memories. All of them used configurative devices—symbols and dreams, story, plot and character, parables, and affective and memorable verses, for example—to construct ideas and sentiments that defined religious identities and supported action in their defence.

We also will have many occasions to think particularly about genres of vernacular and academic history in relation to religion. Domains of religion and literature frequently overlapped in the practice of writing vernacular histories of South Asia. Vernacular genres of history perhaps can be placed on a scale that ranges from the factual to the artfully configured, as Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam have suggested (2001: 1-23). However, prosaic genres of history also employ the literary devices of scene, character, and plot, together with more or less ‘factuality’, to imitate human actions and their consequences in time, while they also depend upon and reinforce an archive of public memories attached to local sites and prominent people of a shared past. Public memories were shared in oral performances as well as in written literature. Religious as well as secular purposes shaped the formation of archives of memory and the choice of vernacular genres, and secular histories as well as religious ones used literary devices to configure narratives and to shape affective responses in their audiences.

Scott Kugle’s chapter attempts to explore Sufi attitudes toward homosexuality, by means of Sufi literature about the propriety and spiritual value of the homoerotic devotional practice of ‘playing

the witness', gazing at a good-looking young boy as a way of seeking union with God, the ultimate beloved. The texts examined are records of discussions between a Chishti shaykh and his disciples, discussions that in turn drew upon a variety of stories and parables, and one public letter of instruction to Sufis at large, a letter that used personal experience, logic, and the authoritative warnings of other Sufis. Kugle finds that these Chishti texts did not employ the many technical legal terms aimed to control social behaviour and define sexual acts as licit or illicit in Islamic jurisprudence. Instead they appear to be more concerned with questions of inner disposition: intention, the presence or absence of lust, and the spiritual condition of the practitioner. These texts exist alongside and in obvious contrast to others that do use the legal terms that define specific acts as lawful or not.

Engagement with love poetry and music in some Sufi hospices relied on an underlying current of eroticism that in the social context of Sufi hospices can be considered homoerotic. Both texts and practices are related to homoerotic sociability and to sexuality in general in pre-modern Sufi hospices, and in South Asian society more broadly. Conflicting texts reveal attitudes and beliefs about both homoerotic sociability and sexuality, especially in relation to Sufi spiritual disciplines. Kugle concludes that homoerotic feelings apparently were accepted as normal by many Chishti saints. Discourse about sexuality was flexible with regard to homosexuality, homoeroticism was accepted, and homosexual acts were not seen as a matter to refer to forensic investigation and legal adjudication. Most Chishti discourse about homoerotic devotional practices was not legalistic or condemnatory, but discourse that supports 'playing the witness' was reticent (or discrete) about homosexual acts. Although homoerotic feelings and relations were not condemned in this relatively sympathetic discourse, they are placed in a moral and spiritual hierarchy that valued sublimation and discipline of sexuality as part of the path to God. Chishti Sufis valued love, but condemned the attitudes of selfishness, possession and domination that were part of a socially constructed experience of sexuality in their society.

Indeed, it seems to be difficult to try to answer questions about 'homosexuality' in pre-modern Islamic societies, as homosexu-

ality is conceived in current discourses. In particular the current discourse about equal rights has been tied closely to a 'natural' homosexual orientation, formed at, or soon after birth as a component of homosexual identity. Pre-modern discourses seem to recognize homoerotic attractions, both as normal in general and as more strongly present in some men than others, especially in the early stages of their spiritual path. Still, homosexual orientation as a fact of birth or as a deep personality trait was not discussed in these pre-modern texts, and it is difficult to see how to retrieve its discussion from them.

Exploring Dashanami ascetics, and especially their military *naga* associates, Matthew Clark's chapter interrogates processes of religious change that involved borrowing from a 'common pool' of practices, a pool to which Sufis and especially their militant and antinomian *qalandar* lineages had contributed. At the same time, change was disguised by projecting borrowed practices back in time to Shankara as the founder of the Dashanami order, and by projecting his authority forward in time to include all new groups who traced a *guru*-disciple relationship back to him. Clark raises questions about the elasticity of religious identities and the permeability of religious boundaries, by examining who defines and what constitutes borrowing from the outside ('syncretism' in the author's terminology), versus what constitutes 'internal' change. Perhaps more important historically is the process of boundary maintenance that allowed for dramatic expansions of Dashanamis to include the roving bands of warrior ascetics. With regard to the contemporary historiography, Clark's essay raises difficult questions about what constitutes adequate evidence for demonstrating influence in historical change. Even though we may not have specific acknowledgements of borrowing by those who made the change, how smaller group identities were subsumed into a larger religious order remains an important issue.

Mridula Jha focuses on a single author, Dara Shikuh, and not on the reception of texts he authored. In his writing career, Dara attempted to preserve the authority of Muslim saints who taught the concept and meditative practices of *wahdat-ul-wujud* (unity of being), and to defend them against their critics. By tracing his rhetoric, Jha explores religious identity in the context of intense

controversy concerning the concept of *wahdat-ul-wujud*, and the Sufi practices of meditation related to it. Jha refers to an 'outpouring' in Dara's writing of a 'deluge of sentiments' for his teachers and their lineage. Their characters had all the virtues in balance: they were 'compassionate, magnanimous, independent, learned, perfect and erudite, and yet at the same time practical, humble, polite and heroic'. Sentiments of love, honour and loyalty attached to the lineage, its great men, and their virtues, and sentiments of self-respect and courage in one's own role in maintaining the lineage in the face of opposition probably were some of the supports for the religious identity of those who belonged to the lineage, though more discussion of such sentiments in hagiographies would help. At the end of his life Dara Shikuh also attempted to include among authoritative scriptures, Hindu sacred texts that he thought taught the same concept and practices of *wahdat-ul-wujud*. He translated the principle Upanishads, believing that they also were expressions of 'unity of being' and would help illuminate the esoteric messages in the Koran. And finally he attempted to produce a comparative lexicon of Muslim and Hindu terms based on the idea that all religions teach the same fundamental truths. In Dara's case, as in general, religious identities and boundaries were contested by gaining access to political power, against others who also had access to political power, and Dara eventually lost his life as a result.

Sandhya Sharma's study of the 'Hinduization' of *ketab* (sacred 'books' revealed to prophets) in the Prannath Sampraday is made possible by a two-step statement of equivalence: that *avatar* equals true *guru*, and that *avatar/guru* equals true Prophet. Prannath also taught two, related soteriological ideas, that true *gurus* are reborn, and that the Mahdi, Jesus and the Prophet reborn, will come again before the Day of Judgement to provide salvation to the faithful. In time Prannath claimed to be the Mahdi. We see a context of writing, as Prannath travelled from Gujarat to Sindh, to the Persian Gulf, and on to Iraq, and frequent written communications passed between him and his foremost disciples. Prannath finally returned to Delhi and Rajasthan. There we also see a social gulf that separated him and his followers from the Mughal court, in language, dress, and diet, and in the very idea