
The Punjabi language in the Vernacular Millennium

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Abstract (in French and English)

Punjabi cultural production sits uneasily within the understanding of the "vernacular millennium" recently described by Sheldon Pollock, where new language choices emerged within "vernacular polities" that adhered to newly defined cultural zones, in contradistinction to but reliant upon a prior cosmopolitan, supralocal idiom. This paper will place Punjabi within this broad characterization of vernacularization, and particularly the complex ways in which religious and cultural expression persisted in the crucial period of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when political changes in the region brought more localized political control that did not translate into direct courtly commitment to Punjabi language. The paper will refer to specifically Sikh forms of textual representation, such as a historiographical genre called the *gurbilās*, as well as *qissā* or story literature and *sufi* poetry composed in Punjabi and reflecting a broad oral tradition. The paper represents an effort to construct a broader history of Punjabi literary production in the sweep of vernacularization, with special attention to the repercussions of Punjabi language literary production for our understanding of the heterogeneous cultural worlds of Punjab in the early modern and modern periods.

Keywords: Punjab, Punjabi, South Asia, vernacular, language

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