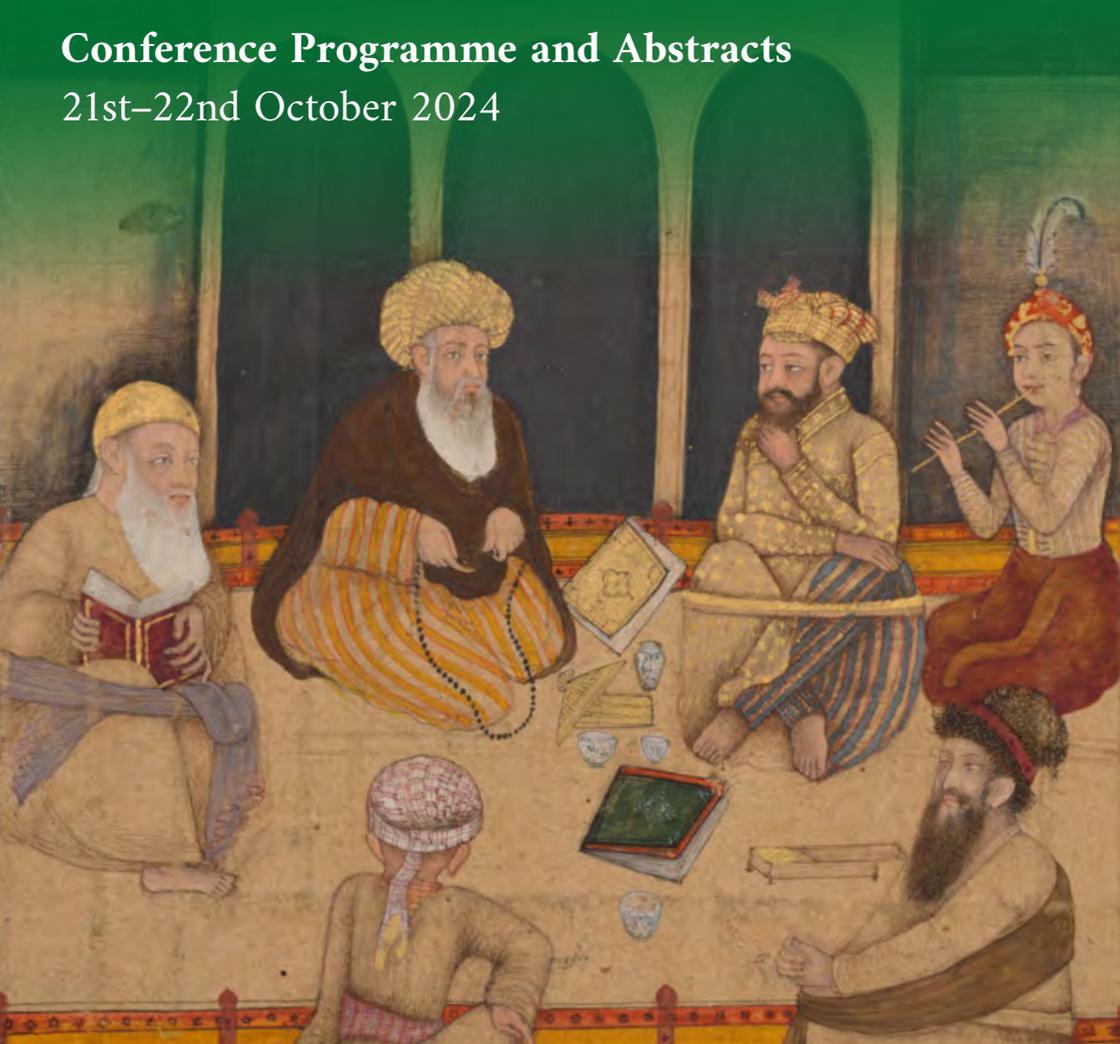# Listening in Many Tongues

Multilingual Interpretive Communities and Acts of Translation in Early Modern South Asia

Conference Programme and Abstracts
21st–22nd October 2024

Nobleman visiting saint at his shrine. The Coralie Walker
Hanna Memorial Collection, Gift of Leonard C. Hanna, Jr.
Cleveland Museum of Art. Public Domain.

Conference Convenors

William Hofmann (IIS)
Hussain Jasani (IIS)
Ayesha Sheth (Independent)

Listening in Many Tongues

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The Institute of Ismaili Studies

AGA KHAN CENTRE

10 Handyside Street, London N1C 4DN
www.iis.ac.uk

Welcome

Recent scholarship on South Asia has exemplified the importance of drawing on multilingual sources as well as multi-disciplinary approaches – reading, listening, and visualizing the vernacular and the cosmopolitan in conversation, rather than through hierarchical relationships. The overlapping and multidirectional networks of patronage and production have led not only to the creation of new genres of text and performance but also to the articulation of pre-existing traditions within new intellectual milieux and expanding communities of contact and exchange. What has emerged in such scholarship is the understanding of translation as a process of transformation and constant reinterpretation, a 'dynamic form of production' (Flood 2007, 107), within new and constantly shifting contexts.

Building on this expansive understanding of 'translation', this interdisciplinary conference brings together scholars across fields, languages, and geographies to address the multivalent methods by which various interpretive communities in medieval and early modern South Asia made equivalences, reinterpretations, and transcreations between and across literary and performative genres. The papers will address questions pertinent to themes of place-making, polyglossia, and self-fashioning, whether courtly or religious, as well as the relationships between text and performance, and phonetics and scripts. The richness of these contributions is heightened not only by the diverse array of languages in conversation – Persian, Sanskrit, Avadhi, Urdu, Arabi-Malayalam, Dakani, Apabhramsa, and Khwājah Sindhi/Khojki, to name a few – but also the geographical breadth traversed by the texts and individuals under examination.

South Asian Studies Unit

The South Asian Studies Unit at the Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS) is an interdisciplinary unit promoting scholarship on the history, culture, and traditions of Muslims in South Asia with particular reference to Shi'i Islam and its Ismaili traditions.

Conference Programme
Day 1: Monday, 21 October 2024

10:00 – 10:05

Welcome Address

(Professor Zayn Kassam, Director, The Institute of Ismaili Studies)

10:05 – 10:15

Introductory Remarks

(William Hofmann & Ayesha Sheth)

10:15 – 11:45

Panel 1: Persian and Hindi Translations (I) (Hybrid)

Rafaello de Leon-Jones Diani (EHESS) – The *Āb-e Zendegī*: Persianate Hinduism or Hindu Persian?

Bhavyansh (JNU) – Transformation of a Genre: Ghazal Tradition in Medieval Rajasthan (Online)

Annalisa Bocchetti (University of Naples "L'Orientale") – Translating Sufi Artistic Vocabularies: An Analysis of the Adaptation of *Usmān's Citrāvalī* (1613) into the *Maṣnawī-e-Qiṣṣah-i Rāja Kunvar Sen o Rānī Citrāvalī* (19th Century)

11:45 – 12:00

Health Break

12:00 – 13:30

Panel 2: Multilingual Locals through Jain and Hindu Sources (Hybrid)

Rosina Pastore (Ghent University) – Translating Vedānta in Vernacular: The Ānandavilāsa by King Jasvant Simh of Jodhpur

Heleen de Jonckheere (SOAS) – Jain Transcreations in the History of India's Literary Cultures

Tyler W. Williams (University of Chicago) – Why Comment? Precolonial Commentaries in Hindi (Online)

13:30 – 14:45

Lunch/Group Photo

14:45 – 15:45

Panel 3: Translating Eschatologies: Ismaili and Pranami Contexts of Millenarian Theologies (Hybrid)

Mohd Rehmatullah (Jamia Millia Islamia) – Writing the Vernacular, Imagining the Cosmopolitan: Contextualizing the Idea of Imam Mahdi in Pranami Literary Traditions in Persianate India

Kartik Maini (University of Chicago) – Between Kṛṣṇa and Muḥammad: Translating the Millenarian Self in Early Modern South Asia (Online)

15:45 – 16:00

Health Break

16:00 – 17:00

Keynote

Brajification and the Erasure of Earlier Literary Idioms in Manuscript Transmission

Speaker: Dr Imre Bangha (University of Oxford)

Discussant: Dr Katherine Schofield (King's College London)

Conference Programme
Day 2: Tuesday, 22 October 2024

10:15 – 11:45

Panel 4: Translation of Musical Aesthetics

Richard David Williams (SOAS) – Interpretation as Intermarriage: Musical Aesthetics between Persian and Hindavi in the Seventeenth Century

Ayesha Sheth (Independent) – 'Tailangi is born in the words of the iron whetstone': 'Sonic' Translations in Early Modern Musicological Writing

Zoë High (University of Chicago) – Renewing the Nine Rasas: The Vernacular Songbook and the Persian Literary Preface in Early Modern India

11:45 – 12:00

Health Break

12:00 – 13:30

Panel 5: Bengali and Malayalam Literary Translations

Tanima Dey (Independent) – *Sri Naradi Rasamrita*: The Making of Bengali Literary Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Dimasa Kingdom in Cachar

Savita Ananthan (University of Pennsylvania) – Reading *Māla* and *Mālai* Poetry as Islamic Modes of Place-Making: Towards a History of 'Polyglossic Spaces'

Hina Khalid (University of Cambridge) – Envisioning a Muslim Self: Tapestries of Being and Belonging in Kazi Nazrul Islam and Rokeya Sakhawat Hussain

13:30 – 14:30

Lunch

14:30 – 15:30

Panel 6: Persian and Hindi Translations (II) (Online)

Namrata B. Kanchan (Brown University) – Persian Nightingales in an Indian Garden: Translating Ḥāfiẓ Shīrāzī's Persian Poetry in Golconda (Online)

Shafique N. Virani (University of Toronto, Mississauga) – A Script of Many Tongues: The Phonology of Khwājah Sindhī (Khojki) (Online)

15:30 – 15:45

Health Break

15:45 – 17:15

Panel 7: Between Bhakti, Buddha, and Bawa Imamshah: Devotional Interactions (Hybrid)

Stephen Cúrto (Union College) – Inglā, Pinglā, and Sukhmanā: The Satpanthī Gināns and the Vernacularized Receptions of Śaivite, Sant, and Nathpanthī Yogic Matrices (Online)

Pegah Shahbaz (University of Göttingen) – Ismaili Shiʻi Literature in Interaction with the Buddhist Narrative Tradition: The Case of Kitab Bilawhar wa Būdhāsaf

Soumen Mukherjee (Presidency University) – Ascetics, Mystics, and Scholars in Premodern South Asia, and their Modern Afterlives: A Conceptual and Methodological Propaedeutic

17:15 - 17:30

Vote of Thanks

Hussain Jasani (Head of the South Asian Studies Unit, The Institute of Ismaili Studies)

18:45 - 20:15

Concert (ACR, Aga Khan Centre)

Light refreshments will be available until 18:40, before the start of the programme.
The event will be open to invitees and registered guests.

Please register if you would like to attend the concert via the link on the conference webpage

Savita Ananthan

Reading *Māla* and *Mālai* Poetry as Islamic Modes of Place-Making: Towards a History of 'Polyglossic Spaces'

This paper focuses on *māla* or *mālai* (garland of praises) poetry common to the Malabar (West coast) and Coromandel (East coast) regions in South India. *Māla* or *mālai* poems were composed in Arabi-Malayalam and Arabu-Tamil or Arwi, respectively, from the seventeenth century CE onwards. These languages appear to be an adaptation of the local languages of these regions into Arabic script but, in fact, evolved as a reflection of complex, premodern multilingual, or polyglossic engagements. These *māla/mālai* poems have been used to render biographical panegyrics of either the Prophet Mohammad or various Sufi saints alongside other Islamic themes to foster shared spaces of belonging. This paper studies one such Sufi-Sayyid saint, *Moulal Bukhāri Taṅgal* (1731–1792 CE), whose genealogy has been traced to migrant Sufis of Central Asia (Bukhara) who arrived on the Malabar coast from Sind in the sixteenth century CE. Basing the study on two near contemporaneous *Bukhāri māla* or *mālai* texts composed by *Icha Mastān* (1871–1933) from coastal Malabar and *Imamul Aroos Māppila Lebbai Ālim* (1816–1898) from coastal Coromandel— I posit two arguments. First, I argue that these nineteenth-century poetic texts engender a premodern mode of Islamic pietistic communication and place-making in the form of 'polyglossic spaces' that elude the confines of modern linguistic nation-state boundaries as well as upset neat associations of print culture with Islamic modernity. Second, I propose that the concept of 'polyglossic spaces' more accurately captures the dynamic and non-hierarchical multilingual and multilocal history of such Arabi-Malayalam and Arwi devotional literature compared to the frameworks of 'vernacular globaletics' (Muneer, 2022) or 'connected literary sensibilities' (Ul Ihthisam, 2023), both of which situate these as vernaculars subordinate to other language(s) on a global or cosmopolitan scale.

SAVITA ANANTHAN is a historian of Islam and Sufism in South Asia from the late medieval to modern period, with a special focus on Southern India. She is a doctoral candidate at the Department of South Asia Studies, University of Pennsylvania, where she is working on her dissertation tentatively titled 'Recovering Polyglossic Spaces: A Socio-Spatial History of Bukhari Sufi Ecumenism in Malabar and Coromandel (c.1700–1900 C.E.)'. Her research interests include the fields of literary and book history, textual materiality and oral and performance history.

Imre Bangha
Keynote Address

Brajification and the Erasure of Earlier Literary Idioms in Manuscript Transmission

Vertical translation between a cosmopolitan and a vernacular language is well attested in South Asia. In contrast, horizontal translanguaging between two vernacular languages or literary idioms has rarely been studied. After presenting some translation strategies from cosmopolitan to vernacular, the paper will investigate horizontal translingualism or rather 'translectism', when the vernacular literary idiom is changed into another, as documented in manuscript transmission, and compares it with vertical translation. Variant readings of texts preserved in manuscripts show that the literary idiom of a given work was hotly contested by scribes. Normally, translectism happened in order to modernise, to 'Brajify', an archaic lect or simply adjust its morphology to more widespread linguistic forms. This phenomenon happened across religious boundaries and obscures our present perception of the scope of Braj Bhasha in early literary works.

IMRE BANGHA is Associate Professor of Hindi at the University of Oxford. He studied Indology in Budapest and holds a PhD from Visva-Bharati. His publications include English, Hindi and Hungarian books and articles on literature in Braj Bhasha and other forms of classical Hindi with special focus on the poetry of Ānandghan, Ṭhākur, Viṣṇudās, Tulsīdās, Kabīr, Bājīd as well as on Nāgarī Rekhtā compositions. Currently, he is working on the emergence of the Hindi literary tradition and on the early literary use of Hindustani.

Bhavyansh

Transformation of a Genre: Ghazal Tradition in Medieval Rajasthan

The literary milieu in medieval Rajasthan was a thriving space of various genres and styles. Khetāl Khatrāgaccha, a Jain scholar from the Persianate courts of Northern India, had arrived in Rajasthan, and his work *Chittor Udaipur ki Ghazal* (1741) marked the inauguration of the 'Rajasthani ghazal' tradition. The ghazal genre had its origins in Perso-Arabic literature, and themes within Hindustani and Braj ghazals had remained restricted to the nuances of love and mysticism. This paper shall investigate why, within Rajasthan, the genre was seen as an effective medium to write an ode to the urban and imperial centres of Rajasthan (*Bikaner ki ghazal, Jodhpur ki ghazal, etc*). What narrative function, historical or literary, did this new genre offer, especially in terms of its style, that it seamlessly allied with the general literary trend of eighteenth-century 'prosification'?

This reinterpretation of the ghazal genre within Rajasthan represents the dynamic exchange of languages, styles, and literature in the precolonial context. The Rajasthani ghazal tradition had become a unique space, manifesting the coming together of Persian, Jain and Rajasthani styles and ideologies of writing. Even at the level of linguistic register, there was the diffusion of Braj, Hindustani, and Persian with existing Rajasthani vocabulary, thereby complicating the linguistic categorization of these texts. The paper shall suggest that the Rajasthani ghazal genre was a product of interactions with the existing socio-political and religious institutions, primarily Rajput courts, Sufi centres and Jain *māthas*. I shall also highlight certain anxieties associated with the acceptance of this genre among the existing socio-textual communities of medieval Rajasthan and the reasons for those, varying from religious, literary, linguistic, to economic. The paper intends to historically situate the emergence of the 'ghazal' genre in late-medieval Rajasthani literature. The questions of origin, authorship, socio-textual communities, patronage networks, and audiences shall remain pivotal in my study to contextualize the 'ghazal' genre and its proliferation in medieval Rajasthan.

BHAVYANSH is a research scholar of Medieval History at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India. His thesis, titled 'Perceptions of the Past: Rajasthani Historical Tradition c. 1500-1850', attempts an historicization of the processes of 'vernacularization' in medieval Rajasthan and brings to fore the historical traditions of the region.

Annalisa Bocchetti

Translating Sufi Artistic Vocabularies: An Analysis of the Adaptation of Usmān's *Citrāvalī* (1613) into the *Maṣnawī-e-Qiṣṣah-i Rāja Kunvar Sen o Rānī Citrāvalī* (19th century)

This paper explores an overlooked source in the Indian literary tradition of Sufi *premakathās*: Usmān of Ghazipur's *Citrāvalī* (1613) and how it was later adapted into an anonymous Urdu romance known as *Maṣnawī-e-Qiṣṣah-i Rāja Kunvar Sen o Rānī Citrāvalī* in the nineteenth century, commissioned by Colonel George William Hamilton (1807–1868). By composing their *premakathās* in a regional language of North India (Avadhi) and drawing on local material, the Sufi authors subverted traditional notions of national identity and literary canons that emerged in the nineteenth century. These narratives, given their composite nature, flowed into India's multilingual oral and written traditions, travelling across languages, scripts, and genres.

This paper illustrates how the *Citrāvalī* has been part of the repertoire of storytellers passing through the multilingual culture of Indo-Islamic courts, and how it was refashioned for a Muslim North Indian audience two centuries later. In the Urdu version, it is noted that historians *(mu'arriḵẖ)* have been narrating this love tale that spread across Hindustan.

A fascinating element of Usmān's *Citrāvalī* is its use of artistic imagery to convey Sufi ontological notions, reflecting the story's aesthetic and theological depth. Usmān envisions God as the Painter (*citera*) and creation as divine art. Through aesthetic concepts such as *citra* (picture), *citera* (painter), and *rūpa* (beauty) resonating through the story's plot, the poet describes the Creator–creation relationship, evoking the principle of unity-of-existence (*waḥdat al-wujūd*). The Urdu adaptation systematically reproduces Usmān's Citrāvalī Sufi aesthetic vocabulary (*naqsh, taṣwīr, maṣūr*). In light of that, this paper aims to analyse how an entire intricate apparatus of aesthetic concepts migrated along with the *Citrāvalī* into a new textual and extra-textual dimension, preserving its philosophical message for socio-religious communities across linguistic and cultural borders.

ANNALISA BOCCHETTI is a scholar specializing in Indo-Islamic literary cultures of the early modern period, with a particular focus on vernacular Sufi narratives. Her work explores the intersections of storytelling, religion, and multilingualism in this context. From 2022 to 2024, she was a junior post-doctoral fellow at Ghent University, supported by an FWO grant, where she explored the seventeenth-century Sufi text *Citrāvalī* and its subsequent adaptations in Islamicate India. She has recently begun a new research fellowship at "L'Orientale" University of Naples, where she is working on a project centred on folk and oral traditions in South Asia.

Stephen Cúrto

Inglā, Pinglā, and *Sukhmanā*: The Satpanthī Ginān and the Vernacularized Receptions of Śaivite, Sant, and Nāthpanthī Yogic Matrices

While the confluences of Vaiṣṇavite elements within the *ginān* tradition have been thoroughly documented, the presence and situatedness of Śaivite, and other "yogic" material, including various tantric, and Mantramārga streams of tradition within the *ginān*s, have not enjoyed the felicity of being as robustly adjudicated. The present work engages evidence of textual, thematic, and typological resonances between the Satpanthī *ginān* tradition, and multiple vernacular receptions of Śaivite Mantramārga yogic threads. As Patton Burchett helpfully reminds us in the context of the *bhakti* tradition, "…*bhakti's* multifaceted relationships with tantra, yoga, and Sufism are critical for an understanding of historical events and processes in the religious landscape of early modern North India." This facet of the *bhakti* tradition is no less germane to the development and trajectories of the *ginān* tradition. Indeed, it is demonstrable though the variegated ginānic appropriations and resituating of "classical" Indic theosophy within a vernacular register. One significant illustration of such phenomena can be seen in the complex yogic nāḍī–chakra somatic theologizing of the body exemplified by *ginānic* references to *inglā, pinglā*, and *suṣhumnā* (*sukhmanā*). This discourse, emerging in *vaidika* and Upaniṣadic texts, reaches perhaps its most familiar articulation in Śaivite yogic material, both within Sanskritic material such as the Netra Tantra and the more vernacular, such as the Gorak Bānī textual tradition. A critical reinterrogation of the framework of the *gināns* within the broader efflorescence of vernacular and non-exclusively Vaiṣṇavite expressions of South Asian theisms (such as the Sant traditions), and the pluriformity of the "panths" (such as the broadly Śaivite Nāthpanth tradition(s), and similar Śaivite – especially, the Mantramārga – streams of tradition), addresses a lacuna in negotiating the situatedness of the pluriform discourse of the Satpanthī *ginān* tradition. This likewise allows us to better situate the gināns within the broader Ismaili, and Subcontinent, theological milieu.

STEPHEN CÚRTO is a doctoral student at Claremont Graduate University, and currently serves as an adjunct professor at Union College of Union County, New Jersey, where he is a professor of Arabic and Philosophy. His research intersects with philosophy of religion, Qurʾanic studies, and Qurʾanic textual theory, as well as Shiʿi and Ismaili studies, and specifically the Ismaili *ginān* tradition. His research within the *ginān* tradition seeks to situate its theology within the broader milieu of the intersection, and confluence, of the Arabo-Persianate Ismaili philosophical tradition, Qurʾanic discourse, and the variegated interleaving of multiple indigenous Subcontinent theosophical streams of tradition.

Tanima Dey

Sri Naradi Rasamrita: The Making of Bengali Literary Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Dimasa Kingdom in Cachar

This present paper examines the origins of Bengali literary culture during the eighteenth century under the auspices of the Dimasa kingdom in Maibang, nestled within the north-Cachar hills. Through a close analysis of the *Sri Naradi Rasamrita*, a noteworthy Bengali rendition of a Vishnu Purana, this study unveils the intricate socio-cultural and political tapestry of the Dimasa domain during its Maibang phase. Revered as the kingdom's secondary capital, Maibang emerges as a pivotal locus wherein the nascent contours of Dimasa socio-cultural identity, particularly their proclivity towards a Brahmanical ethos, begin to crystallize. Against this backdrop, the translation of a Sanskrit Purana into Bengali assumes profound significance, furnishing fertile ground for scholarly inquiry into the dynamics of cultural translation and transformation.

This scholarly discourse converges along three primary axes: firstly, the delineation of a regional Bengali cultural milieu that transcends the territorial confines of Bengal; secondly, an exploration of the nuanced expressions and variations within Bengali language and culture during the pre-modern epoch; and thirdly, an examination of the instrumental role of Bengali literature in the construction and assertion of cultural identities among smaller polities. By delving deep into processes of vernacularization, translation, and reinterpretation, this study unveils the multifaceted dynamics underpinning the evolution of Bengali literary culture.

Moreover, my study sheds light on the complex weaving of multilingual literary communities and the profound ramifications of cross-cultural encounters, thereby enriching our comprehension of the complex interplay between language, culture, and power within the broader South Asian milieu. Through meticulous scholarly inquiry, this study not only elucidates the historical trajectory of Bengali literary culture but also underscores its enduring significance in shaping broader socio-cultural landscapes. In essence, it offers a nuanced understanding of the intricate processes through which literary cultures evolve and intersect within diverse socio-political contexts.

TANIMA DEY holds a PhD from Jawaharlal Nehru University, specializing in medieval and early modern South Asian history. Dey's research delves into regional identity, vernacularization's cultural contexts, and socio-cultural diversities in pre-colonial India. For the past three years, Dey has engaged with middle-school students at an international school in Noida, relishing the opportunity to simplify historical complexities into digestible concepts. This practical experience has yielded valuable insights into the developing discourse at the grassroots level, enhancing comprehension of the constructive influence of historical education.

Raffaello De León-Jones Diani

The *Āb-e Zendegī*: Persianate Hinduism or Hindu Persian?

Translation is the fundamental form of exchange between cultures; yet what happens when one culture translates for itself? Starting in the sixteenth century, Hindu texts written in Sanskrit were translated into Persian, mostly for the Mughal court. Such important texts as the *Mahābhārata*, the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and the *Yoga-Vasiṣṭha* were translated at different times under the Mughals (1526–1857). One text specifically was translated many times over: the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, both as part of the *Mahābhārata* and as a stand-alone text. However, amongst the Persian translations of this philosophical landmark, some versions appear to have been translated by Hindus for their own consumption. This later version, the so-called *Āb-e Zendegī*, was originally attributed to Dārā Šikoh (d. 1659); we have challenged this attribution on philological grounds.

How did Persian become the language of Hindu devotion, and for whom? This is the question we aim to answer by studying the manuscripts of the Persian *Bhagavad-Gītā* translated in a Hindu context. These manuscripts are held in the Bodleian Library and the British Library in England. By studying them and comparing them to other known Persian translations of the *Bhagavad-Gītā* and other Sanskrit texts, a series of features emerge pointing to a different style of translation as that adopted by sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Mughal translators. Having established the general context of their translation, thanks to personal studies and the ground-laying research of Stefano Pello on Persianate Hindu communities, some hints, such as textual variation and marginalia, are to be found that can help to establish which groups were involved and interested in this Persianate Hinduism.

RAFFAELLO DE LEÓN-JONES DIANI is PhD candidate at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris and Marseille, under the supervision of Fabrizio Speziale. He was trained in France and Italy, and he completed a bachelor's degree in Sanskrit at the University of Naples "L'Orientale" and a master's degree in religious sciences at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes (Paris). He focuses on Mughal history, religious interactions, and translations from Sanskrit to Persian.

Zoë High

Renewing the Nine Rasas: The Vernacular Songbook and the Persian Literary Preface in Early Modern South Asia

Often remembered as a religiously eccentric ruler, Ibrahim Adil Shah II (r. 1580–1627), the king of the Deccan Sultanate of Bijapur, famously crafted a persona around performance of *rāga*-based music. He commissioned portraits of himself styled as an instrumentalist and composed a collection of lyrics, the *Kitāb-i Nawras* (New Book), in the pan-regional literary language Dakani. Both the lyrics and the sultan's self-styling as a musician elicited varied responses by multilingual writers at his court – including the Persian poets Ẓuhūrī Turshīzī and Malik Qummī, who had only recently arrived in the Deccan from Iran. Recent scholarship on court culture in the Deccan has understood the composition of this text – and the wide application of the term *nawras*, which holds both Persian and Sanskrit-derived meanings – as serving a conciliatory project, drawing together Hindu and Islamic motifs and Indic and Persianate poetic systems to accommodate a diverse populace. But while this multivalent concept was clearly linked to the king's persona, emphasis on its political meanings has obscured questions of reception. How did Persian writers and scribes engage with a work clearly intended for performance? In this presentation, I will argue that music, and not only the semantic contents of the songs, served as a site of negotiation for Persian authors, who responded to them through commentary and translation. Ẓuhūrī and Malik emphasized music's affective and corporeal dimensions, even as their responses overturned both the language and form of the original *Nawras* lyrics. Finally, I will suggest the *Kitāb-i Nawras* and its responses set a precedent for later engagement with *rāga*-based music in Persian ornate prose, despite the absence of the collection from later histories of vernacular song genres.

ZOË HIGH is a PhD Candidate in the Department of South Asian Languages and Civilizations at the University of Chicago. She works on the literary, intellectual, and material history of the Deccan Sultanates and the Indian Ocean between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. Her dissertation, "Making a New Taste: Aesthetics and the Culture of Consumption in the Early Modern Deccan", focuses on theorizations of literary and sensory taste (*rasa*) to examine the intertwined histories of literature, consumption, and social relations in seventeenth-century South Asia. She is also working on a translation of the *Kitāb-i Nawras* and its Persian glosses, co-authored with Thibaut d'Hubert.

Heleen de Jonckheere

Jain Transcreations in the History of India's Literary Cultures

Recent years have seen growing scholarly interest in Jain literature and its role in shaping South Asia's literary history. Translation, in particular, has emerged as a productive framework for understanding how Jains participated in, and contributed to, India's literary culture, as explored by scholars like John Cort (2015) and myself (2023). Building on this work and insights from my recent studies on Apabhramsha literature, this paper examines the diverse methods, motivations, and strategies Jain authors employed in navigating multiple literary languages. Adopting the concept of "transcreation" from P. Lal, I will analyse how premodern Jain authors "edited" and "reconciled" traditional myths, aligning them with contemporary concerns through new literary forms. I will also investigate how differing aesthetic conceptions of language – some more conducive to political or theoretical discourse, others appreciated for their musical quality – led to varied forms of transcreation and the development of new genres. This exploration will highlight the creative processes and reflections on language in Jain translation. Ultimately, I argue that Jain authors significantly contributed to fostering a pluralistic and dynamic linguistic perspective, reshaping the trajectory of literary culture in India.

HELEEN DE JONCKHEERE is a scholar of Jain literature and Jain history. Her research focuses on the conceptualisation and practice of translation and adaptation in the Jain context and in South Asia in general, and on the religious implications of translation. Her further interests include Jain narrative literature, Jain manuscript culture, and religious plurality in historical India, as well as the interactions of popular forms of religiosity with more established forms of religion. Recently, she has been exploring the role of Apabhramsha in the history of Indian literature. De Jonckheere received her PhD from Ghent University in December 2020 and continued her work at the University of Chicago and the University of Toronto. At present, she is appointed as lecturer in South Asian Religions at SOAS.

Namrata B. Kanchan

Persian Nightingales in an Indian Garden: Translating Ḥāfiẓ Shīrāzī's Persian Poetry in Golconda

During the medieval and early modern era, poets in Indo-Islamicate courts often imitated the stylistic elements and rhyme schemes of old masters such as Khwāja Shamsuddīn Ḥāfiẓ Shīrāzī (c. 1320–1389) and wove them within the tapestry of their own verses. In the late sixteenth century, however, Golconda sultan Muḥammad Qulī Quṭb Shah (r. 1580–1612 CE) translated some of Ḥāfiẓ's Persian verses into Dakani, a burgeoning literary language during this period. Muḥammad Qulī's Dakani poetry marks an important literary milestone in Urdu literature for being not only the first Dakani/Urdu ghazal *dīvān* (collection) but also the first translation of Ḥāfiẓ's work in the subcontinent.

In highlighting this translation effort, I aim to demonstrate that it was not a product of the sultan's "romantic" and "whimsical" personality – adjectives used by twentieth-century scholars to describe the ruler – but a deliberate attempt to experiment in a target vernacular that had transformed into a courtly literary language. In other words, this translation was part of a larger endeavour to confer this vernacular a "cosmopolitan" status and to define its courtly identity and theoretical contours.

Additionally, in modern scholarship, Dakani comes under the umbrella of Urdu studies and has hitherto remained peripheral within this field, with scholars assessing Dakani literature through the standards of northern Indian literary Urdu which developed during the 1700s. I present two such modern analyses of Muhammad Qulī's translations to display these anachronistic interpretations, and I aim to provide a new understanding of the ways in which this translation was integral to a period when courtly Dakani had commenced developing its literary codes.

NAMRATA B. KANCHAN is an International Humanities Postdoctoral fellow at Brown University holding a joint position with the Comparative Literature Department and the Cogut Institute for the Humanities. She works broadly on the literary and visual culture of early modern Indo-Islamicate courts of the Deccan region.

Hina Khalid

Envisioning a Muslim Self: Tapestries of Being and Belonging in Kazi Nazrul Islam and Rokeya Sakhawat Hussain

Notwithstanding the fact that the majority of Muslims live outside of the Middle East, Anglophone scholarship on Islam remains focused on Perso-Arabic templates and has not adequately explored their vernacular translations into Indic idioms. In this paper, I undertake a comparative exploration of the configurations of Muslim selfhood and its relation to the other in the worldviews of two major writer-activists – Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899–1976), the national poet of Bangladesh, and Rokeya Sakhawat Hussain (1880–1932), widely regarded as the foremost Bengali feminist intellectual. Inhabiting some artistically fecund contexts in late colonial Bengal, Nazrul and Rokeya sketched visions of individual agency and collective liberation which intermarry Qur'anic archetypes with Hindu idioms. My aim in this paper is to foreground Nazrul and Rokeya as two key Muslim voices in the theological articulation of a 'vernacular cosmopolitanism': namely, a universal openness to the other rooted in localized idioms that are simultaneously Bengali and Islamic. This ethos of hospitality comprises a skilful engagement with Hindu theological imageries and social sensibilities. My paper will explore how this openness to the Hindu socio-religious other emerged not in spite of, but precisely because of, their distinctive self-understandings as Bengali Muslims. More generally, I argue that the writings of Nazrul and Rokeya furnish important hermeneutical keys to interrogate certain dichotomies – such as Hindu versus Muslim, sacred versus secular, universality versus particularity, and tradition versus modernity – that linger in the study of the religious traditions of South Asia.

HINA KHALID completed her BA, MPhil, and PhD in Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Cambridge. Her doctoral dissertation offered the first comprehensive comparative study of the metaphysical and aesthetic visions of Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938) and Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941). She is particularly interested in the possibilities of comparative theology across Islamic and Indic traditions, and in the ways that shared devotional idioms have formed in and across the Indian subcontinent.

Kartik Maini

Between Kṛṣṇa and Muḥammad: Translating the Millenarian Self in Early Modern South Asia

For years, scholars of subject areas as wide-ranging as Christian heresiology and the aesthetics of sovereignty have repeatedly emphasized that the way to the other often goes through the self. And yet, self-fashioning has only infrequently featured in histories of religious difference and interreligious interaction in early modern South Asia, where, I argue, it played a constitutive role. In their efforts to understand and come to terms with the presence of the religious other, South Asian personages of varied roles and persuasions refashioned their own selves. Such endeavours, eclectic in their time and ours, involved acts of translation between languages, genres, and religious or sectarian divisions. Self-fashioning fostered an ability to interpret religious difference, but also to repurpose one's own traditions. For our disciplines and their calcified constructions of religious, linguistic, and temporal/chronological boundaries, translation is a menacing force. Taking translation to be the labour of transcreating text and subjectivity alike, this paper foregrounds histories that have hitherto occupied the edges of conventional narratives.

Using his earliest and most authoritative hagiography – the *Bītak* of Lāldās (in *bhāṣā*/Hindi) – my paper follows the self-fashioning of Prāṇnāth (c. 1618–1694), the preeminent religious preacher of the Praṇāmī tradition. Prāṇnāth's fascinating career straddled Kṛṣṇa-centred Vaiṣṇavism and Nizārī Ismailism to the point of indistinction, mobilizing the twinned resources of Islam and bhakti. His very itinerant life led him from Jamnagar (Gujarat) to the court of the Bundelā rebel-king Chatrasāl (r. 1675–1731) in Panna (Bundelkhand) via Bandar Abbas, Muscat, Thatta, and Shahjahanabad/Delhi. Through a close reading of a specific episode in the *Bītak* – i.e., Prāṇnāth's efforts to have the Mughal sovereign Aurangzeb 'Ālamgīr (r. 1658–1707) recognize his millenarian mantle – this paper examines Prāṇnāth's self-fashioning as a *mahdī*, or messiah, in the line of Kṛṣṇa, Muḥammad, and Christ. My guiding question is this: if we take translation to be capable of fashioning selves, what translative labours did producing Prāṇnāth's promiscuous prophetic lineage involve? I tease out answers from within this pivotal moment in the *Bītak*, when ostensibly incommensurable languages, genres, and religious traditions collide.

KARTIK MAINI is a PhD Candidate in the Department of South Asian Languages and Civilizations at the University of Chicago. Their work is situated at the intersections of social/intellectual history and religious studies, and in a multilingual archive comprising Sanskrit, Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati, and Persian sources. They are interested in histories of ascetic self-fashioning in early modern South Asia, with an eye toward tracing asceticism's emergent worldliness in this period.

Soumen Mukherjee

Ascetics, Mystics, and Scholars in Premodern South Asia, and their Modern Afterlives: A Conceptual and Methodological Propaedeutic

This paper is an enquiry into key aspects of Indian religious thought since the fin-de-siècle. I have argued elsewhere that the heightened interest in the realm of the esoteric and the mystical was not necessarily 'other-worldly' in every respect but was in fact frequently a response to overarching historical exigencies and hegemonic (read colonial) epistemologies. Expanding on core aspects of the thesis, I propose here that a sustained two-pronged engagement with the quintessential Indic idea of *sampradāya* (religious denomination) and spaces and zones that were essentially of threshold nature and/or cut across diverse religious traditions, was pivotal to the evolution of an impressive line of early twentieth-century academic discourse in South Asia that strove to retrieve an idea of an Indian civilization, a civilizational continuum enriched by its signature languages of unity and diversity. Drawing upon a reappraisal of early twentieth-century scholarship on medieval literary cultures and the world of lived practices, the present paper intends to explore a range of interwoven issues, e.g., xenological themes in select 'middle' and the 'late' *Purāṇas* and *Upapurāṇas*, as well as a cluster of shared themes covering both issues of the individual/the self and the collective, ranging, for instance, from key Sufi and *bhakti* (devotion, in its different iterations) idioms, through the many approaches to different schools of yoga, cutting across religious, mystical, and ascetic traditions. It will first examine issues of spiritual authority, technologies of the self, millenarianism, and hopes of or aspirations for almost utopian futures for society in their premodern historical contexts. Second, it will explore how many of these themes were (re)read, (re)worked, and (re)assembled to respond to wider historical forces since the fin-de-siècle, and especially in the early decades of the twentieth century, stoking critical thought beyond hegemonic Euro-American epistemic frameworks or linear (self-)orientalizing exercises. In the upshot, then, this paper seeks to illuminate different aspects of premodern Indic and Indo-Islamic religious and mystical traditions, and their modern afterlives.

SOUMEN MUKHERJEE teaches history at Presidency University, Kolkata. He is the author of two monographs: *Religion, Mysticism*, and *Transcultural Entanglements in Modern South Asia*: *Towards a Global Religious History* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2024) and *Ismailism and Islam in Modern South Asia*: *Community and Identity in the Age of Religious Internationals* (Cambridge University Press, 2017). He has edited *Empire, Religion, and Identity*: *Modern South Asia and the Global Circulation of Ideas* (Brill, 2024); and (with Christopher Harding), a special issue titled 'Mind, Soul and Consciousness: Religion, Science and the Psy-Disciplines in Modern South Asia', *South Asian History and Culture*, 9, 3 (2018).

Rosina Pastore

Translating Vedānta in Vernacular: The *Ānandavilāsa* by King Jasvant Siṃh of Jodhpur

Considering translations of Indic philosophical material in the early modern period, specifically of Vedāntic bent, we cannot but think of the Mughal prince Dara Šikoh (1615–1659). The multilingual and multi-genre dimension of Vedānta philosophies has recently been the object of new scholarship, which has brought fresh insight on the interactions between classical knowledge systems and the vernaculars as well (e.g., Allen & Venkatkrishnan, 2017; Allen, 2017, 2020; Peterson, 2020). Among Dara Šikoh's contemporaries, Mahārāja Jasvant Siṃh of Jodhpur/Mārvāḍ – who defended Dara against Aurangzeb in the Dharmat battle in 1658 – was also an author of works dealing with Vedānta. One of the six philosophical texts composed by Jasvant Siṃh is the Ānandavilāsa (The Manifestation of Bliss, ca. 1669 CE). The Brajbhāṣā composition is structured as a dialogue between the famous Advaita Vedānta teacher and thinker, Śāṅkara, and the jīva (individual self). Moreover, at the beginning, Jasvant mentions Śāṅkara's commentary on the Brahmasūtras and its salvific power. This paper seeks to trace the Ānandavilāsa's relation to the Brahmasūtras. It proposes to read the Brajbhāṣā text not only as a reinterpretation of the Advaitin's bhāṣya but also as integrating influences coming from other sources, both śāstric and not. Therefore, this paper contributes to placing on the map of Vedānta an important regional instantiation, co- existing with the Mughal interest for philosophical knowledge.

ROSINA PASTORE holds a PhD from the University of Lausanne (2022) and is currently FWO postdoctoral fellow at Gent University (Belgium) with a project on the Vedāntic writings of King Jasvant Siṃh of Jodhpur/Mārvāḍ. Her main research deals with early modern philosophy, especially Vedāntas, in the vernaculars of North India, with the support of philology and intellectual and literary history. She has recently published her first monograph, *Vedānta, Bhakti and Their Early Modern Sources*: *Philosophical and Religious Dimensions of Brajvāsīdās's Prabodhacandrodaya Nāṭaka* (De Gruyter, 2023–4).

Mohd Rehmatullah

Writing the Vernacular, Imagining the Cosmopolitan: Contextualizing the Idea of Imam Mahdi in the Pranami Literary Traditions in Early Modern India

This paper explores Pranami literary traditions and vernacular literature as a source of history of Persianate India through a multidisciplinary approach, drawing on various sources to examine the complex connection between vernacular writings and cosmopolitan thoughts. The focus of this paper is Imam Mahdi, a prominent eschatological figure in Islam whose existence (whether concealed or living) surpasses geographical, religious, and cultural boundaries. Historically, in the Pranami 'sect', which emerged as a 'syncretic' religious movement synthesizing 'Hindu' and 'Islamic' viewpoints, the idea of Imam Mahdi acquired extraordinary dimensions, indicating the fluidity, appropriation, and adaptability of religious ideologies as politically and culturally vibrant and volatile in seventeenth-century South Asia. This paper examines Pranami literary traditions, including the writings of Mahamati Pran Nath (*Bani Sahitya*) and the hagiographic works created by his close disciples (*Bitak Sahitya*), with a special emphasis on the *Bitak* of Laldas.

The paper argues that Pran Nath and the Pranami hagiographers actively looked into the idea of Imam Mahdi, giving new interpretations and views on his role in seventeenth-century Mughal India, a period designated by Laldas in his *Bitak* as *Kaliyug*, a time of crisis and decline. Furthermore, this research scrutinizes the mechanisms and methods that conceptualize the Pranami literary traditions as 'imagined spaces' for cultural connections and exchanges, facilitating dialogue and compromise among diverse religious and linguistic communities. This paper examines the textual depictions of Imam Mahdi and explores the methods used by *Bani* and *Bitak* writers to navigate their identity within the larger Persianate cosmopolis while also preserving their extraordinary syncretic religious identity. It sheds light on the significance of the Pranami literary traditions in defining and redefining the meaning and applicability of Imam Mahdi in the intellectual setting of Persianate India, contributing new insights into the complex dynamics of cultural and religious encounters and exchanges in early modern India.

MOHD REHMATULLAH holds a PhD from the Department of History and Culture, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi. Dr Rehmatullah's research interests lie in exploring the nature of religious interactions and understanding nuances of religious identities in early modern India, with a focus on the growth and emergence of the Pranamis. Dr Rehmatullah has published articles in renowned journals such as *Indian History Congress* and presented at national and international conferences like 'Exploring the Frontiers of Research in Medieval Indian History', organized by the Department of History, Aligarh Muslim University, and Young Researchers' 2nd Indo-Persian Workshop: Writing in the Indo-Persian World, organized by EHESS-CESAH and Georg-August-Universität, Göttingen.

Katherine Butler Schofield
Keynote Discussant

KATHERINE BUTLER SCHOFIELD is Professor of South Asian Music and History at King's College London. She is a historian of music and listening in Mughal India and the paracolonial Indian Ocean. Working with Persian, Urdu, and visual sources for elite musical culture in North India and the Deccan c.1570–1860, Katherine's research interests lie in South Asian music, visual art, and cinema; the history of Mughal India; Islam and Sufism; empire and the paracolonial; music and musicians at risk; and the intersecting histories of the emotions, the senses, aesthetics, ethics, and the supernatural. She has been Principal Investigator of a European Research Council Starting Grant (2011–15/16) and a British Academy Mid-Career Fellow (2018), and she is a Fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society and of the Royal Historical Society. Her books include *Music and Musicians in Late Mughal India*: *Histories of the Ephemeral, 1748–1858* (CUP, 2023), *Tellings and Texts*: *Music, Literature, and Performance in North India*, with Francesca Orsini (Open Book, 2015), and *Monsoon Feelings*: *A History of Emotions in the Rain*, with Imke Rajamani and Margrit Pernau (Niyogi, 2018).

Pegah Shahbaz

Ismaili Shi'i Literature in Interaction with the Buddhist Narrative Tradition: The Case of *Kitab Bilawhar wa Būdhāsaf*

In 1888/9, a version of *Kitab Bilawhar wa Būdhāsaf* was published in Bombay based on the manuscripts that circulated in the Ismaili communities of South Asia for centuries. In 1971, Daniel Gimaret published the French translation of the Ismaili version along with the text in France. He had succeeded in identifying three manuscripts of the text at Bombay University (dating back to 1016/1607), the Grand Mosque of Yemen (1298/1876), and in a personal collection. *Kitab Bilawhar wa Būdhāsaf* is a narrative based on the hagiography of the Buddha in the Arabic language. It had other retellings in prominent Shi'i sources of the ninth and tenth centuries such as in the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* and Ibn Bābuya's *Ikmāl al-Din wa Itmām al-Ni'ma*. Transcreations of this narrative in Arabic and Persian found a new literary function and were used as a frame within which religious and philosophical knowledge was transmitted from generation to generation. Additional chapters about philosophical and didactic subjects were embedded in the main narrative. The principal theme of the story was also reversed from the Buddhist concept of *mokṣa*, liberation from any form of suffering (Sanskrit, *duḥkha*), to enduring suffering for the sake of the divine, close to what we see in asceticism in Islamic mysticism. The present paper will shed light on the differences that the Arabic and Persian versions demonstrate in comparison with the available Sanskrit Buddhist texts about the Buddha's life story, and it will highlight how the narrative was reinterpreted according to Islamic principles, and was thus culturally adapted.

PEGAH SHAHBAZ is a specialist of classical Persian literature and works on questions of narratology, translation and systems of knowledge transmission in the Persianate world, in particular on the reception and domestication of Indian literary, religious and cultural heritage in Persian literature and culture from the tenth to the nineteenth centuries. She received her PhD from the University of Strasbourg and is currently a lecturer at University of Göttingen, Germany.

Ayesha Sheth

"Tailaṅgi is born in the words of the iron whetstone": 'Sonic' Translations in Early Modern Musicological Writing

In this paper, I examine the ways in which musicological texts between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries sought to make legible unfamiliar performance traditions and melodic material by embedding them within familiar local sonic registers. Kṣemakarṇa's *Rāgamālā* (Garland of Melodies; c.1570) was composed at the Gond court of King Jāṭava, who reigned from Harīyāgarh (in present-day central India) during the latter half of the sixteenth century. The *Rāgamālā* is most well-known as the textual source for *rāga* (musical mode) paintings produced at the eighteenth-century Pahari courts located in the foothills of the Himalayas. This paper, however, is interested in a curious set of eleven verses within Kṣemakarṇa's text that make onomatopoeic comparisons between each *rāga* and a 'sound' or 'voice' drawn from the physical world.

Musicological scholarship on the period between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries has identified the myriad ways in which Persian, Sanskrit, and Hindavi music treatises sought to make equivalences between different melodic systems and gloss theoretical terms in a range of languages in order to be useful to the multilingual interpretative communities they circulated within. While acknowledging the range of translation strategies employed by such texts, both linguistic and semantic, this paper is interested in how sound itself was identified as a marker of difference and the ways in which a 'sonic translation' was effected by musicological texts to contextualize and situate the theoretical world of *rāga*-based music within the immediate soundscape of its performance.

AYESHA SHETH is a historian of early modern South Asia, specializing in courtly culture and polity formation with a particular focus on music, literature, and comparative knowledge traditions in South Asia and the broader Persianate cosmopolis. She received her PhD from the Department of South Asia Studies at the University of Pennsylvania. Her research interests span performance studies, early modern literatures, indigenous histories, and mercantile histories of South Asia. She is currently developing two research projects: one on the Gond kingdoms of central India and the other on the role of Jain mercantile networks in early modern literary and cultural circulation.

Shafique N. Virani

A Script of Many Tongues: The Phonology of Khwājah Sindhī (Khojki)

From verses of illustrious Sindhi mystics such as Shāh ʿAbd al-Laṭīf and Sachal Sarmast to Persian selections from Rūmī's immortal *Mathnawī*, from the poetry of renowned *bhaktas* and *sants* such as Kabīr, Mīrābāī, Nānak, Ravīdās, and Narsīṃh Mahetā to the *ghazals* of Amīr Khusraw and Shaykh Saʿdī, Khwājah Sindhī manuscripts are among South Asia's richest literary repositories helping us "listen in many tongues". Most significantly, for centuries the script (which Wladimir Ivanow renamed "Khojki") was the foremost curator of South Asian Ismaili literature and a translator between Middle Eastern and South Asian expressions of Islam. How did this script record literature in languages as diverse as Arabic, Persian, Panjabi, Gujarati, Hindi, Sindhi, and Siraiki? The script's sound system must be systematically analysed before we can answer this question. Unlike the scripts of most world languages, Khwājah Sindhī, along with its Brahmī-derived sisters, follows a very logical phonetic order, commonly known as the *varṇamālā*, or "garland of sounds", represented in manuscript and print works as *chālī akharī* or forty-letter-tables. Characters representing implosive phonemes, commonly used in Sindhi and Siraiki, have been a source of ambiguity, as these are absent in most other New Indo-Aryan languages. The script also developed diacritical marks, generally reflecting Arabic and Persian vocabulary and sounds in an Indic environment. Scholarly confusion has led to imprecise and often contradictory systems of romanization in academic studies. While some valuable preliminary spadework exists, no systematic analysis of the Khwājah Sindhī *varṇamālā* tradition exists. In studying the sound system, this paper hopes to establish a phonology of the script, a precondition for cataloguing, translation, and many other studies. In short, this paper analyses how this script recorded literature in many tongues so that its audience could read and listen in many tongues.

SHAFIQUE N. VIRANI (PhD, Harvard University) is a Professor of Islamic Studies at the University of Toronto, where he founded its Centre for South Asian Civilizations. His research focuses on Ismaili and Twelver Shiʿism, Quranic studies, Sufism, and Arabic, Persian, and South Asian Muslim literatures. Translated into over 20 languages, his work has received awards and recognition from the American Academy of Religion, the Middle East Studies Association, the British Society for Middle East Studies, and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, among others.

Richard David Williams

Interpretation as Intermarriage: Musical Aesthetics between Persian and Hindavi in the Seventeenth Century

Paida Beg's music treatise, the *Sabhāvinoda* ("Delight of the Court") was written for Shah Jahan, but it travelled far beyond the reaches of the imperial court. Beg wrote his study in Hindavi, at a moment in time when the Mughals were especially interested in vernacular explorations of musical aesthetics. He envisaged his own contribution as a digest of ideas he had encountered "from a thousand works", in which he reconciled approaches to *rāga*, which he had read about in Hindavi sources, and *maqām* from Persian books on music. He enthusiastically proclaimed that his own synthesis was the son of this intermarriage between languages, the heir to two knowledge systems.

In this paper, I examine Beg's reflections on language, scholarship, and the comparative study of music. I then consider the reception history of his work and explore how this treatise became the primary reference for painters' workshops at the court of Amber-Jaipur, where they rendered his work as *rāgamālā* paintings. Finally, I introduce a manuscript copy of this treatise from the Kathmandu Valley, and consider how Beg's innovative work between languages was reinterpreted by listening communities in Nepal.

RICHARD DAVID WILLIAMS is Reader (Associate Professor) in Music and South Asian Studies at SOAS University of London. A cultural historian of music, he is especially interested in literary engagements with music and sound in early modern and colonial north India, and he is currently writing a book on the history of *rāgamālā*, the art of imagining music through poetry and painting. He is the author of *The Scattered Court*: *Hindustani Music in Colonial Bengal* (Chicago University Press, 2023). In autumn 2024 he is a Visiting Professor at EHESS, Paris.

Tyler W. Williams

Why Comment? Precolonial Commentaries in Hindi

From the late sixteenth through early nineteenth century, many pandits, poets, and princes in north India gained access and insight into Sanskrit works using commentaries composed in the vernacular. Despite the large number of such commentaries in the manuscript archive, they have been all but forgotten in the writing of literary, religious, and intellectual history. This paper looks at the tradition of commentarial writing in Hindi across the long durée – c. 1500 to 1800 CE – in order to reveal salient understandings of the language order in early modern South Asia and techniques for 'making sense' of one language in another. Here, 'Hindi' refers to the constellation of mutually intelligible, vernacular literary registers used across the region of north India that are now grouped together under the umbrella of 'Hindi' literary history.

I combine close reading and analysis of individual commentaries written in Hindi on Sanskrit source texts with observations about the textual structures and strategies used across the tradition as a whole. This reveals that composers and audiences shared very particular and complex understandings of what different languages 'were' and could 'do,' and these understandings in turn precluded the possibility of 'translation' across certain languages, at least in the contemporary sense of the term. Instead of translating, commentators writing in Hindi performed readings of, and recorded their responses to, Sanskrit works. They adopted and adapted certain methods and techniques from the Sanskrit commentarial tradition while abandoning others and even creating some new conventions of their own. In doing so, they helped initiate a kind of renaissance in which the meaning and value of the 'classical' tradition was reassessed using the tools and medium of the vernacular.

TYLER W. WILLIAMS is Associate Professor in the Department of South Asian Languages and Civilizations at the University of Chicago. His research addresses Hindi literature, book history, aesthetics, and religion. His first monograph, *If All the World Were Paper*: *A History of Writing in Hindi* (Columbia University Press, 2024), reconstructs the book culture of precolonial Hindi, tying together ideologies, technologies, and practices of writing and reading prior to the advent of print in northern India.

Convenors

William Rees Hofmann

William Rees Hofmann (PhD, SOAS) is a Research Associate at the Institute of Ismaili Studies, where he explores the connections and intellectual networks surrounding music, poetry, and early Sufi practices of *samā'* in South Asia, particularly as they relate to Nizārī Ismaili and other Shi'i-related devotional thought and practice. He has published on the musical knowledge and Afghan biographies of the poet-musician Amīr Ḵhusraw, and the construction of Hindustani music history in Mughal texts. He is currently working on a monograph, tentatively titled *Amīr Ḵhusraw and Sufi Ecologies of Song*: *South Asian Musical Traditions from the Sultanate to Early Mughal Period*, under contract with EUP.

Hussain Jasani

Hussain Jasani has been with the Institute of Ismaili Studies since 2012, where he currently serves as the Head of the South Asian Studies Unit. Hussain is also a member of the Advisory Board for *The Encyclopaedia of the Ismailis*. He is an IIS graduate and has obtained multiple qualifications from Asia, Europe and North America. He has been serving as a director in an impact company fighting hunger and climate change since 2022. Hussain has presented academic papers at various universities and conducted HR development workshops for several governmental agencies, corporates and NGOs in over a dozen countries. His contribution to the academic and social sectors has resulted in his inclusion in multiple editions of *Asia Pacific Who's Who* since 2000.

Ayesha Sheth

Ayesha Sheth is a historian of early modern South Asia, specializing in courtly culture and polity formation with a particular focus on music, literature, and comparative knowledge traditions in South Asia and the broader Persianate cosmopolis. She received her PhD from the Department of South Asia Studies at the University of Pennsylvania. Her research interests span performance studies, early modern literatures, indigenous histories, and mercantile histories of South Asia. She is currently developing two research projects: one on the Gond kingdoms of central India and the other on the role of Jain mercantile networks in early modern literary and cultural circulation.

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