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The Dynamics of Pre-Modern Poetic Interchange in Braj Bhāṣā

This paper proposes to study the dynamics of pre-modern poetic interchange in Braj Bhāṣā focusing on a mid-18th century work by Sāvant Singh of Kishangarh, alias Nāgarīdās, the poet-prince and sponsor of Kishangarhi miniatures. The work is *Śrīmad-Bhāgavata-Pārāyaṇa-Vidhi-Prakāśa* "Spotlight on the ceremonies for a full recitation of the Holy Bhāgavata(-Purāṇa)." From the title one would expect the text to consist of instructions for how to arrange for a religious festival where a full reading of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa takes place, but in fact, it is a report of one such occasion organized by Sāvant Singh himself in the monsoon season of the year 1742 when the work was composed. In effect, there is very little attention to the particulars of the recitation, rather we get a transcript of the poetry composed by courtiers for the occasion and read at the outset and at the conclusion of the rites. I have been able to identify in a contemporary miniature the portraits of some of the participants, which provides us with a visual image for the poets.

In the paper, I propose to analyze how the poems of Sāvant Singh, his courtiers, and his concubine Rasik Bihārī, respond to one another and what that tells about pre-modern poetry gatherings, and the role of women in them. I argue that this gathering holds many characteristics in common with contemporary *mushā'irahs* in what was then the brand-new rage of Urdu poetry (called *Rekhtā* at the time, so perhaps better referred to as *murāḳhtahs*), as described in *Tazkirahs*. Thus I propose this hybrid work reflects something of a *murāḳhtah-kathā*, and reflect on the prominent presence of a slave-girl who became a poetess in her own right.