



Research Article

Mughal Emperors and the Rise of Hindi: Patronage, Poetry, and Courtly Culture

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ABSTRACT



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The incorporation of Riti poets into the Mughal court during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries reflects a significant convergence of politics, culture, and literary expression. These poets were associated with the courts of emperors such as Akbar, Jahangir, and Aurangzeb. While some enjoyed direct access to the imperial court, others entered the Mughal cultural sphere through Rajput kingdoms, provincial courts, and sub-imperial networks. Together, they became part of a wider world of patronage that linked regional literary traditions with imperial authority.

This article examines the works of these poets to reconstruct the social and cultural relationships that shaped their participation in Mughal court life. Rather than treating them as passive observers of imperial grandeur, it argues that they were active cultural intermediaries who contributed to the making of courtly identity. Their poetry functioned not only as a reflection of power but also as one of the means through which prestige, legitimacy, and refined courtly conduct were articulated and circulated.

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Introduction

The reign of Akbar marked a significant turning point in the cultural life of the Mughal court. As he established matrimonial alliances with various Rajput kingdoms, these relationships brought more than just political stability—they also opened the doors to cultural exchange. Along with the Rajput nobles came their traditions, customs, and language, allowing Hindi to gradually find a place within the Mughal court.

As mentioned earlier, several Mughal emperors became familiar with Hindi and even extended their support to Hindi poets, encouraging a richer literary environment. The Mughal court has long been remembered for its magnificence, elaborate etiquette, and carefully staged displays of sovereignty. Yet imperial grandeur did not emerge through architecture, ceremonies, or military power alone. It was equally sustained through the creative labour of poets, musicians, painters, and scholars who transformed political authority into cultural memory. Riti poets portrayed the court as a space of elegance, order, and exceptional refinement, often elevating its ideals beyond everyday reality. Their verses therefore reveal not merely how the court appeared but how it wished to be imagined.

Akbar's reign marked an important turning point in this process. His matrimonial alliances with Rajput rulers strengthened political relations while also creating new channels for cultural exchange. These connections brought Rajput nobles, intellectuals, and literary traditions into closer engagement with the Mughal court, expanding the presence of vernacular literary cultures alongside Persian.

A brief clarification is necessary regarding the term "Hindi" used throughout this thesis. It does not refer to the standardized Khari Boli Hindi that emerged in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Instead, it is employed in its early modern sense to encompass the vernacular literary traditions of North India—including Brajbhasha, Avadhi, and related linguistic forms—that circulated within and around Mughal political culture. Recognizing this distinction allows these texts to be understood within their historical context rather than through modern linguistic categories.

Against this backdrop, this article explores how the presence of Riti poets reshaped the cultural life of the Mughal court. Their participation demonstrates that the imperial court was not a monolingual Persian institution but a dynamic arena where multiple linguistic traditions interacted, negotiated authority, and collectively enriched the cultural world of the Mughal Empire.

Embracing Hindi: The Mughal patronage of language and literature

The Mughal empire was a Persianate Empire; which means that they adopted Persian as their official language. Emperor Akbar (r. 1556-1605) in 1582 announced Persian as the official language of the administration. According to Muzaffar Alam "*Persian generated and promoted conditions in which Mughals could create out of heterogeneous social group; a class of their allies and subordinate rulers.*" (Alam, 1998, p. 317) According to him "*Persian also drove a wedge between the Mughals and the people.*" (Alam, 1998) Although Persian remained the official language of the Mughal administration and the principal medium of imperial expression, the Mughal was, in practice, a multilingual cultural

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space. (Busch, 2011; Busch, 2010) Alongside Persian, several regional and vernacular languages circulated within the courtly milieu, reflecting the linguistic diversity of the empire and the varied backgrounds of its elites. (Busch, 2010, pp. 267–270)

The incorporation of the Rajputs into the Mughal nobility, particularly from the reign of Akbar onwards, significantly enhanced the visibility of Hindi in the imperial court. As Rajput nobles, poets, and scholars entered imperial service, Hindi increasingly became a language of literary expression and everyday interaction, complementing rather than challenging the dominance of Persian. This linguistic coexistence illustrates that the Mughal court was not governed by a single linguistic tradition but by a dynamic culture of multilingualism.

Mughals and their understanding towards Hindi

We cannot deny the fact that Mughals were not totally indifferent to the Hindi language. The growing presence of Hindavi at the Mughal court was not confined to nobles and literary circles; it also extended to the emperors themselves. Zahiruddin Babur who established the Mughal empire mentions many Hindustani words in the memoir. (Babur, 2002) It is said by Abul Fazl that Akbar also spoke good Hindavi at least in its Rajputana form. He also had very good command in writing or reciting poetry and it is believed that he also may have written some hindi couplets. (Abul Fazl, 1873) According to Abul Fazl, Akbar possessed a good command of Hindavi, particularly its Rajputana dialect, and was capable of composing verses in the language. His familiarity with Hindavi reflected more than a personal linguistic preference it demonstrated the cultural accommodation that accompanied the incorporation of Rajput elites into the Mughal polity.

This linguistic engagement continued under Jahangir. His memoir reveals a natural and frequent use of Hindavi words, suggesting that the language had become an integral part of the courtly environment. Jahangir also had habit of giving Hindavi names to many of his cherished possessions. Among his favourite elephants were *Rup Sundar*, *Ratan Gaj*, *Gaj Raj*, *Fauj Sringar*, and *Rah Rawab*, while a prized deer was named *Hans Raj*. Even one of his swords bore a Hindavi name. (Jahangir, 1999) These were not arbitrary choices. They illustrate how Indian linguistic and cultural idioms had become woven into the fabric of Mughal courtly life, where Persianate culture co-existed with indigenous traditions.

The later Mughals rulers also appear to have been well acquainted with Hindavi. Both Shahjahan and Aurangzeb are described as having a sound knowledge of the language. *Dara Shikoh* (eldest son of Shahjahan), renowned for his intellectual curiosity and interest in Indian religious and literary traditions, is also believed to have composed two works of poetry in Hindavi, although these texts have not survived (Gandhi, 2020). Taken together, these examples demonstrate that Hindavi was far more than a language of the common people. Its acceptance by the successive Mughal emperors reflects the gradual emergence of a culturally composite court in which linguistic exchange became an important medium of imperial integration.

The marginalization of Hindi sources in scholarship on the Mughal period can be understood as a reflection of the cultural hierarchy established during the empire's Persianate rule. Persian as the official language of administration and the court, dominated the intellectual and literary landscape. This linguistic hegemony likely influenced modern historians, who prioritised Persian sources as the primary repository of Mughal history, often dismissing Hindi texts as peripheral or less reliable for reconstructing historical narratives. Moreover, the perception that Hindi sources lack historical value underscores the tendency that

Hindi sources have little historical value shows a modern tendency to see only official records as true history. This tendency reflects a bias in historiography that equates official and elite sources, primarily in Persian with "authentic" history, while viewing vernacular expressions, such as peripheral or anecdotal. Hindi sources, often poetic in nature, may not conform to traditional historiographical formats but provide rich insights into the cultural, social and emotional dimensions of the period.

Mughal Court and Patronization of Hindi Poets

The Rajput, known not only for their martial prowess but also as patrons of learning and literature, played a significant role in fostering cultural exchange. Matrimonial alliances between the Mughal and Rajput courts during the Sixteenth century facilitated the integration of Hindi literary traditions into the Mughal court sphere. Many Rajput courts sent their poets to the Mughal court, where they received patronage, signalling the Mughal's openness to linguistic and cultural diversity.

The cultural and political exchanges between the Rajputs and the Mughals gave rise to two distinct groups of court poets, reflecting the dynamics of their alliances. The first group consisted of poets embedded within the Mughal court, directly patronized by the Mughal emperors. These poets were integral to the court's cultural milieu and relied on imperial patronage for their sustenance. In turn, their works were instrumental in upholding a propagating the image of the Mughal emperor as a supreme and benevolent ruler.

The second group comprised poets patronized by regional Rajput rulers but who maintained direct access to the Mughal court. (Busch, 2011, pp. 8–12) These poets served as a cultural intermediary, facilitating the transmission of political and cultural ideas between the Mughal empire and Rajput kingdoms. Their works reflect a dual allegiance, simultaneously celebrating Rajput identity while engaging with Mughal imperial culture, thereby contributing to a complex network of cultural exchange and political negotiation.

The phenomenon of Rajput-Mughal cultural and political exchange through court poets reflects the broader dynamics of power, diplomacy, and cultural synthesis in pre-modern India. These exchanges created a unique cultural ecosystem that both reinforced Mughal imperial authority and facilitated the negotiation of Rajput political and cultural identities.

Akbar and Hindi Poets

The presence of Hindi poets and literati at Akbar's court, points to the multilingual and culturally inclusive character of the Mughal imperial establishment. Contemporary and later sources suggest that Akbar himself possessed a working knowledge of *Hindavi/ Braj*, while several members of the imperial elite were equally comfortable in vernacular literary traditions. (Busch, 2010, pp. 267–270) This linguistic environment created opportunities for Hindi poets to participate in courtly life, even if their contributions were not always recorded in official Persian chronicles.

One of the striking features of Akbar's reign is the contrast between Persian court historiography and vernacular literary memory. Although Abul Fazl, in his detailed account of the Mughal court, does not mention the numerous Hindi poets associated with Akbar's patronage, their names and compositions survive in later poetry anthologies and literary compilations. Figures such as Karnesh, Manohar, and Chem frequently appear in literary histories and biographical traditions. (Agarwal, 1950) While the historical details surrounding some of these poets remain uncertain, the repeated preservation of their names is itself significant. Their continued association with Akbar's court indicates that vernacular literary culture occupied a recognized

place within the imperial imagination, regardless of whether every attribution can be verified.

The participation of leading Mughal officials in Braj literary culture further blurs the conventional divide between Persianate administration and vernacular expression. Raja Todarmal, celebrated as Akbar's finance minister, is credited with composing Braj poetry, (Busch, 2010) while the Persian poet Faizi also demonstrated an engagement with Hindi literary traditions. (Busch, 2010, 2011) Such examples reveal that linguistic identities at the Mughal court were fluid rather than exclusive, allowing members of the political elite to move across multiple literary worlds.

Among Akbar's courtiers, Birbal (*Among Nine Jewels of Akbar*) occupies a particularly important position. Beyond his popular image as a witty courtier, he was widely recognised as a man of letters. (Busch, 2010, p. 275) Allison Busch argues that Birbal was unquestionably a Braj poet, a view reinforced by Persian chroniclers such as Badauni and Shah Nawaz Khan, who record that Akbar conferred upon him the honorific title *Kaviraya*. (Busch, 2010, pp. 275–276; Badauni, 1884, p. 164; Khan & Hayy, 1911, p. 128) Surviving Braj verses composed under the pen name *Brahma* further attest to his literary identity. Birbal's career illustrates how integral component of imperial service, enhancing both cultural prestige and political standing. (Busch, 2010, pp. 275–276) Another prominent figure is the poet Gang. Although questions remain regarding the authenticity of some works attributed to him, there is little doubt about his historical existence or literary reputation. His enduring prestige is reflected in the writings of the eighteenth-century critic Bikhari Das, who regarded Gang and Tulsidas as the two greatest masters of Hindi poetry. (Bikhari Das, 1957–1968) This later recognition demonstrates that Gang's reputation transcended his own lifetime and highlights the lasting influence of poets connected with the Mughal court.

Among the Hindi poets associated with Akbar's court, Mahapatra Narhari Bandipani (also known as *Narhari Sahai*) deserves particular attention (Busch, 2010; Agarwal, 1950). Although only a small body of his poetry survives, the frequency with which his name appears in later Hindi literary traditions suggests that he occupied a prominent position within the literary culture of the Sixteenth century. His significance, therefore, lies not merely in the number of compositions attributed to him but also in the reputation he acquired among subsequent generations of Hindi scholars and poets.

The details of Narhari's life remain fragmentary and are often preserved through later literary accounts rather than contemporary court chronicles. He is generally believed to have been born around 1535 A.D at Asni in present-day Fatehpur district, Uttar Pradesh, and to have died around 1610 (Agarwal, 1950). The uncertainty surrounding these dates is itself indicative of the broader problem that confronts historians of early Hindi literature: vernacular poets rarely received the same level of documentation as their Persian contemporaries. Consequently, their biographies must be reconstructed from scattered literary references, anthologies, and later historical compilations.

Literary traditions further suggest that Narhari enjoyed patronage before his association with Akbar's court. He is said to have received support during the reigns of Humayun and Islam Shah Sur (r.1540-1545), indicating that his career spanned the politically turbulent decades preceding the consolidation of Mughal authority under Akbar. (Agarwal, 1950; Busch, 2010, p. 270) Whether every aspect of this tradition can be historically verified remains uncertain, yet it points to Narhari's recognition as a distinguished poet whose reputation transcended dynastic changes.

An equally debated aspect of his biography concerns the honorific "*Mahapatra*". (Busch, 2010, p. 270) Later traditions maintain that Akbar himself conferred this title upon Narhari in recognition of his poetic excellence. Other scholars, however, argue that "*Mahapatra*" was not an imperial distinction but a hereditary title associated with the *Bhat* community to which Narhari belonged. (Agarwal, 1950) In the absence of contemporary evidence, it is difficult to determine which interpretation is correct. Nevertheless, the debate itself is revealing. Whether the title originated from imperial patronage or community tradition, later Hindi sources consistently remembered him as *Mahapatra Narhari*, demonstrating that the designation had become inseparable from his literary identity.

More importantly, the repeated references to Narhari in later Hindi literary histories underscore the esteem in which he was held. His appearance in works such as *Shiv Singh Saroj*, *Mishrabandhu Vinod*, and other compilations reflects a collective literary memory that regarded him as one of the distinguished poets of Akbar's age. (Sengar, 1878; G. B. Mishra et al., 1913–1934) Even though he is not being mentioned in any Persian sources, the persistence of Narhari's name in vernacular traditions cannot be dismissed. Rather, it highlights the existence of an alternative historical archive preserved within the literary culture—one that records the presence of poets and intellectuals who remained largely invisible in official Persian Chronicles. One unknown poet composed these verses to show the prestige and respect of Narhari gained in the court of Akbar.

शाहू चक्रधर महाकवि नरहरि जी को दीन्ह्यो महापात्र
पद मरजाद जाती में।
तापै चार चौपदार चामिकर पग दीन्ह्यो पालकी में कंच
कैते पुर लिखि पाती में।
गंग कवि हेत घने तैसे गज ग्राम दीन्हे ब्राज लई दान
मान मौज अधिकाती में।
रंग दिल शाह जहाँगीर सउभंग ब्राज देत है मतंग पद
सोई गंग छाती में॥

(Agarwal, 1950; Sengar, 1878)

Narhari career thus serves as an important reminder that the Mughal court was not exclusively a Persianate literary space. The remembrance of his name across generations of Hindi writers suggests that vernacular poets occupied a meaningful place within the cultural world of Akbar's empire, even if their contributions were not systematically documented in imperial historiography.

Taken together, these examples suggest that Akbar's court should not be understood solely through the lens of Persian literary production. Instead, it functioned as a multilingual cultural arena in which Hindi poets, administrators, and intellectuals participated alongside Persian scholars. Even where official chronicles remain silent, vernacular literary traditions preserve traces of these interactions, revealing a courtly culture that accommodated multiple languages and literary practices. The absence of Hindi poets from Abu'l Fazl's narrative, therefore, should not be interpreted as evidence of their insignificance; rather, it reflects the selective priorities of Persian court historiography, while vernacular sources preserve an alternative memory of Mughal cultural life.

The reign of Jahangir represents a phase of Consolidation rather than Initiation in the history of Hindi literature culture at the Mughal court. If Akbar's policies opened the imperial sphere to vernacular literary traditions, Jahangir's reign witnessed their growing legitimacy and circulation within elite political and cultural networks. Persian undoubtedly retained its position as the language of administration and high scholarship, yet Braj Bhasha increasingly emerged as a language capable of articulating courtly ideals, political authority, and aesthetic refinement.

This consolidation was made possible by the continued integration of Rajput rulers and Hindu nobles into the Mughal nobility. Their presence created an interconnected network of patronage that linked the imperial court with regional courts, particularly those of Rajasthan and Bundelkhand. Hindi poets were therefore no longer confined to local centres but moved across these overlapping political spaces, carrying with them literary traditions that reflected both regional identities and Mughal courtly culture.

Jahangir's own memoir provides a revealing glimpse of this changing literary landscape. On one occasion, Raja Suraj Singh of Marwar, the maternal uncle of Prince Khurram, presented a Hindi poet before the emperor. Jahangir records the pleasure he derived from listening to the poem and rewards the poet with an elephant (Jahangir, 1999; Busch, 2010, p. 278). The significance of this episode lies not merely in the imperial gift but in what it reveals about the place of vernacular poetry within the Mughal court. By referring not only to Tansen but also a broader community of Hindi poets, Jahangir demonstrates both his familiarity with and appreciation of contemporary Hindi literary culture. His response suggests that vernacular poetry had acquired sufficient prestige to become part of the ceremonial and culture life of the empire.

The careers of poets active during this period further illustrates this process of consolidation. Established figures such as *Abdur Rahim Khan-i-Khana* and *Birbal* continued to enjoy literary prestige, while a new generation of poets expanded the scope of Braj literary production. Among them, *Keshavdas Mishra* (c. 1555-1617) occupies a particularly important position. Born into a family of learned Brahmin in Orchha, Keshavdas spent much of his career under the patronage of the Bundela rulers (Busch, 2011, pp. 25-54). However, the Mughal annexation of Orchha brought the principality into closer contact with the imperial court, creating opportunities for cultural exchange. Although, direct evidence of Keshavdas serving as an imperial court poet is limited, his writings reveal a clear awareness of Mughal political culture and suggest interaction with Mughal officials and courtly circles. His pride in being associated with *Birbal* further reflects the symbolic value that proximity to the Mughal court carried for regional intellectuals (Busch, 2011, pp. 138, 186; Busch, 2010, pp. 275-276). Keshavdas's literary corpus including *Kavipriya* (1601, Handbok for poets) *Ratnabavani*, *Virsinghdevcarita*, and *Jahangiraschandrika* – demonstrates the expanding possibilities of Braj Bhasha as a courtly language (Busch, 2011, pp. 23, 37, 48; Busch, 2010, p. 279). While *Kavipriya* systemized poetic conventions and became a foundational text of the Riti tradition, *Jahangirjaschandrika* is particularly significant because it locates a vernacular poet within the political world of the Mughal Empire. Rather than portraying the Mughal court as culturally distant, the text reflects an engagement with imperial authority through the idiom of Braj poetry.

Shah Jahan's court represented one of the most refined expressions of Mughal imperial culture, where literary accomplishment and intellectual exchange flourished alongside political authority. The emperor himself was highly educated and is described in contemporary sources as being proficient in *Arabic*, *Persian*, *Turki*, and *Hindavi* (Lahori, 1867-1868; Beach & Koch, 1997). His personal interest in literature and learning shaped an environment in which scholars, poets, musicians, artists, and intellectual from diverse religious and social backgrounds found patronage (Beach & Koch, 1997). Rather than restricting imperial favour to Persian literati alone, Shahjahan continued the Mughal tradition of recognising talent wherever it was found, reinforcing the court's character as a shared cultural space.

The *Padshahnama* offers several glimpses into this inclusive literary culture. One notable episode, dated on 14th September

1629, recounts how Yamin-ud-Daula Asaf Khan introduced two Brahmin scholars to the emperor. Their extraordinary feat of memory and poetic skill impressed the court: after hearing ten newly composed Sanskrit verses (often described in Persian chronicles as *Hindi* verses) recited only once by ten different Brahmins, they reproduced them in the same sequence and metre. They then went a step further by composing ten additional extempore verses on the same themes and in the same metrical form. Deeply impressed by this demonstration of learning, Shahjahan honoured each scholar with a *khilat* and a reward of one thousand rupees (Lahori, 1867-1868; Beach & Koch, 1997). This episode illustrates that intellectual brilliance itself could become a source of imperial distinction, irrespective of the scholar's religious identity.

Among the most celebrated Sanskrit scholars associated with Shahjahan's court was Jagannatha Pandittraja. A distinguished poet and theorist, he composed *Asaf Vilasa* in praise of Asaf Khan and later dedicated *Jagadabharana* to Prince Dara Shikoh (Lahori, 1867-1868; Beach & Koch, 1997). The *Padshahnama* also refers to him as Jagannath Kalawant, highlighting his reputation not only as a scholar but also as an accomplished musician. According to the chronicle, Shahjahan was so delighted by one of Jagannatha's Sanskrit panegyrics that he ordered the poet to be weighed against silver, the value of which amounting to him as a reward such acts of royal generosity demonstrate the prestige accorded to Sanskrit intellectuals within the Mughal court (as reported in later secondary accounts).

These episodes suggest that Shahjahan's court functioned as more than a centre of imperial administration; it was also a dynamic arena of cultural negotiation where Persian and Sanskrit intellectual traditions interacted. Patronage was not merely an act of royal benevolence but a political and cultural strategy through which the emperor projected an image of universal sovereignty. By recognised excellence across linguistic and religious boundaries, Shahjahan reinforced the legitimacy of Mughal rule while fostering an environment in which multiple literary traditions could coexist and enrich one another. The presence of Sanskrit scholars and Hindi literary figures at the imperial court as an exclusively Persianate institution and instead reveals it as a cosmopolitan space shaped by continuous dialogue between diverse intellectual traditions.

Although Aurangzeb is often portrayed as indifferent to vernacular literary traditions, the available evidence suggests a more nuanced picture. Like his predecessors, he possessed some knowledge of Hindi and was reportedly able to converse in the language and recite popular Hindi sayings and proverbs (Pandey, 1940). This indicates that Hindi continued to function as an important medium of communication within the culturally diverse environment of the Mughal Empire.

The reign of Aurangzeb, however, marked a shift in the pattern of literary patronage rather than its complete disappearance. Unlike the courts of Akbar, Jahangir, and, to a considerable extent, Shahjahan, Aurangzeb's court did not produce a large number of celebrated Hindi poets who became central figures in imperial literary culture. This change reflected the emperor's altered cultural priorities and the changing political atmosphere of the late Seventeenth century, rather than the decline of Hindi literature itself.

Hindi literary activity continued to flourish through a more dispersed network of patronage that extended beyond the imperial court to princes, nobles, Rajput chiefs, and regional courts closely connected with the Mughal political order. Aurangzeb, either directly or indirectly, extended patronage to several Hindi poets and scholars, including Bir Das, Bhushan, and others (Busch, 2011; Pandey, 1940). Their presence demonstrates

that the relationship between the Mughal state and Hindi literary culture did not end under Aurangzeb; instead, it assumed new forms shaped by changing political realities.

Thus, Aurangzeb's reign should be understood not as a rupture in the history of Mughal-Hindi literary interaction but as a phase of transformation. The centre of cultural production gradually shifted from the emperor's immediate court to a wider imperial network, where Hindi poets continued to negotiate patronage, express political ideas, and participate in the cultural life of the Mughal world.

Hindi poets occupied far beyond that of court panegyrists. They functioned as agents of reconciliation, peace-making, and political mediation. Their literary authority generated trust and social legitimacy, qualities that were indispensable in resolving conflicts where military coercion alone could prove counterproductive. The conferment of the title *Mahakaviraya* (king of poets) upon Sundar Kaviraya by Shah Jahan further reflects the close relationship between literary distinction and political responsibility (Busch, 2010). In the Mughal political imagination, poetic accomplishment itself became a form of diplomatic capital. The continuation of this practice during Aurangzeb's reign further strengthens this argument. Historical accounts mention that Aurangzeb dispatched a Hindi poet—whose name is unfortunately unknown—to the court of Jaswant Singh (Busch, 2010). This indicates that the employment of Hindi poets in diplomacy was not confined to the relatively inclusive reigns of Akbar or Shah Jahan but remained an established feature of Mughal statecraft even under Aurangzeb. Such continuity demonstrates that the use of cultural intermediaries was a pragmatic imperial strategy rather than preference of an individual emperor.

Theoretically, these examples can be understood through the concept of Cultural Brokerage. Hindi poets acted as a cultural broker who translated imperial authority into forms that were intelligible and acceptable within regional political cultures. Their role extended beyond linguistic translation; mediated values, negotiated loyalties, and sought reconciliation between competing centres of power. In this sense, they were not merely representatives of the Mughal court but active peace-makers who attempted to transform political conflict into negotiated settlement through dialogue rather than violence. Therefore, the careers of Sundar Kaviraya and other Hindi poets compel us to reconsider the nature of Mughal governance. Instead of viewing the empire exclusively through the lens of conquest and coercion, these episodes reveal an imperial polity that strategically invested in cultural diplomacy. Hindi poets became indispensable instruments of this peace-making policy, serving as trusted intermediaries whose cultural authority enabled the Mughal state to negotiate with regional powers. Their participation demonstrates that the maintenance of the empire depended not only on sword but also on the persuasive power of language, literature, and shared cultural traditions.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to highlight the role and significance of Hindi poets in the Mughal court and to place them within the larger cultural and political world of the Mughal Empire. Their presence in the court was not limited to the production of poetry or literary expression. They performed multiple roles—as poets, intellectuals, cultural mediators, diplomats, courtiers, and, at times, political intermediaries.

Through their words and their relationships with the court, they helped create bridges between different linguistic, cultural, and political worlds.

The stories of these poets also remind us that the Mughal court was a far more complex and diverse space than a simple Persian-speaking imperial institution. Hindi poets were active participants in its cultural life, and their interactions with Mughal rulers and elites reveal the possibilities of negotiation, exchange, and accommodation that existed within the imperial structure. Their poetry allows us to look beyond the formal institutions of the empire and understand the human relationships, cultural encounters, and everyday negotiations that shaped Mughal court culture.

Thus, this chapter argues that Hindi poets should not be seen merely as literary figures who happened to find patronage at the Mughal court. They were important actors in the making of courtly culture and contributed, in their own ways, to the political and cultural life of the empire. Bringing their voices into the history of the Mughal court not only broadens our understanding of the period but also allows us to see the empire through a more diverse and nuanced lens one in which language, literature, power, and human relationships were deeply intertwined.

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