Introduction

The period of our study coincides with two significant phases of the history of the Mughal Empire. The first phase covers the decades when it scaled the highest point of glory; towards the end of this phase the first symptoms of decline had also begun to surface. The second phase which covered the long eighteenth century witnessed the withering away of its authority. Both these phases have fascinated the historians. But there are raging controversies around the period which saw the first symptoms of the decay and the years when the beginnings of the demise of the Empire are located. These years being interpreted as decline, crisis or transition traverse through diverse and distinct channels. Though some of the recent researches concentrate on the emerging regional entities, most of the works are largely political. There is a kind of imperial perspective in these studies and thus the interconnection between different regions and different social levels has not been given due attention.

It is not the intention of this study to examine the details concerning the decline or changes in the Mughal political institutions. Our aim is primarily to see the extent to which we can enrich our understanding of the issues related to the political culture or social history by using Reeti-Kal poetry. The period of the Reeti poetry covers a long phase which begins from around 1650 and extends beyond the period of our study down to the late nineteenth century.

Many historians concentrating on the first phase of the Mughal Empire
studied its consolidation or decline in terms the achievements and failures of individuals. Jadunath Sarkar and S.R. Sharma believe that Aurangzeb, being a puritan conducted various acts of oppression or bigotry with the objective of establishing an Islamic State. These views are no more taken seriously as some other historians like S.A.A. Rizvi, I.H. Qureshi and Z. Faruki also project his image with personal bias. Satish Chandra views his religious outlook in two phases and evaluates his acts as political exigencies. Jadunath Sarkar and William Irvine in context of the eighteenth century further explain the decline in terms of weak successors of Aurangzeb.

Institutional shortcomings and inherently flawed administrative system of the Empire have been seen as the major cause of the decline by many scholars. Satish Chandra suggests the failure of the Mughal government to maintain a balance between the peasants, the zamindars and the revenue officials. The problems were further aggravated by the crisis of jagirs that was precipitated by the influx of the Deccani nobles. The aspirants competing to receive a jagir indulged in factional politics that

2. Zahiruddin Faruki in *Aurangzeb and His Times* explains the incidents and events with a sympathetic attitude towards the Emperor. I.H. Qureshi appreciates Aurangzeb for being a believer and convicts Akbar for initiating the decline by alienating the Muslims.
enhanced the decay.\textsuperscript{6} The imperfect revenue policies and the crippled system resulted in agrarian crisis which provided a serious blow to the empire.\textsuperscript{7} M. Athar Ali connects the decline to the shortage of \textit{paibaqi} lands to be assigned to the \textit{mansabdars}.\textsuperscript{8} The claimants competed for a position in \textit{mansabdari} hierarchy. The available resources could not meet the expenses which had swollen up due to inflationary tendencies in the ranking system and influx of the Deccanis. The gap between the actual yield and expected income encouraged the nobles to farm out their \textit{jagirs}. The emergence of revenue-farmers has been interpreted either as causing the decline by exploiting the peasantry or as a high degree of monetization and a feature of money economy.\textsuperscript{9}

The inability of the Empire to adjust its monetary and fiscal system according to needs of growing mercantile economy resulted in disintegration of the Empire.\textsuperscript{10} The 'revisionist' historians reacted sharply to this hypothesis and suggested that the imperial authority was not the only sector governing the production system.\textsuperscript{11} All these arguments appeared valid only if the

\begin{enumerate}
\item Idem, \textit{Parties and Politics at the Mughal Court}, Introduction.
\item Irfan Habib, \textit{The Agrarian System of Mughal India}, p. 317-51.
\item M. Athar Ali, \textit{Mughal Nobility Under Aurangzeb}.
\item Sanjay Subramanyam (ed) \textit{Merchants, Markets and State in Early Modern India}, p. 9-14.
\end{enumerate}

Mughal Empire was treated as the highly centralized State, exercising effective control over the vast territories of India. The definition of patrimonial—bureaucracy as used by Stephen Blake was meaningful in this perspective. However, the idea of centralization has been challenged in some recent enterprise of the historians. The understanding of the Mughal decline was thus reviewed and the period came to be recognized as a period of transition. Within this perspective, contrary to the reflections of collapse of economy and political chaos due to breaking down of the centralized imperial structure, the eighteenth century was viewed as a period of economic vigor. There are views shifting the emphasis in the study of the late medieval India from the high imperial government and administration to the regional economy and local social context of power politics. There is a plea to study history of the period in its own terms, independent of the prejudices of the early British administrators who portrayed it as a dark age.

In the new perspective, the period has been viewed as an upcoming of the inferior social groups in different parts of the Mughal Empire. The factions within the nobility strengthened the tendencies towards provincial autonomy. The governors of the various provinces, in course of time acquired power to administer the province independently. They began to nominate

13. Burton Stein, Peasant, State and Society in Medieval South India, Introduction and Chapter one; see also his article, 'The Segmentary State in South India, in Richard Fox (ed) Realm and Region in Traditional India, p. 1-36. Stein explains dispersion of power among regional chiefs, who, in fact, were the kings of their territories and exhibited allegiance to Chola king as a matter of ritual.
14. Muzaffar Alam, The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India, p. 59-70. He reviews the period between 1707 and 1748 in context of Awadh and the Punjab and shows the ways in which the nawabi rule was established in Awadh and was opposed in Punjab by the local groups.
their successors. The governors of these regions enhanced their position after the Persian invasion, by mobilizing the local landlords and various social groups in their support.

The changes in the understanding of the history of the period came in a large measure because the emphasis in the new studies on the developments in the regions and localities. This comes out in particular from the researches published on different regions and sub-regimes of the Empire. Prominent in such works are the publications of C.A. Bayly, Richard Barnett, Muzaffar Alam, Chetan Singh and recently Meena Bhargava.15

Many a feature of the history of this period taken earlier as signs and symptoms of decay have thus turned into the symbols of dynamism. The zamindar uprisings showed the strength of the locality which became so powerful by binding the local social groups that their leaders established cities of their own.16 The revenue farmers also appeared, as we noticed earlier, as a consolidated social group indicating a highly monetized commercial economy. The eighteenth century then is marked not simply with the dissolution of the Mughal imperioi9d polity, but also the emergence of regional powers which encouraged growth and regeneration.17

The local and regional centers of political power had enough wealth as a result of the bouyant trade and mercantile activities. Herman Goets


17. C.A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazars*, Introduction and Chapter two and three.
however believed that the flourishing states and towns had to live upon the wealth and the livelihood of their neighbours. The public life had become a system of plundering. Inspite of the neglect of political qualities and the sense of responsibility the rulers, with mighty cardinal and aristocratic cliques, with strong and luxurious palaces, artists and courtesans still exhibited high cultural refinement. The fairy like architecture included buildings like Dig palace and Udaipur palace. Wonderful gardens and landscapes indicated perfect harmony. There were flourishing schools of painting in different states like Hyderabad, Poona, Udaipur, Gwalior and Udaipur and notably Kangra. Urdu and Hindi literature was equally cultivated in different courts.

But the explanation how and why the cultural development was taking place as given by Goetz does not seem satisfactory. To Goetz, it was not embodied in real life and was consciously artificial. It was the refuge from everyday life—the refuge into beauty. The Reeti poets, however, portray the regional rulers as perfect kings not devoid of their duties and responsibilities. The patronage to art and literature was a part of kingship and was certainly not escape or refuge from real life. It rather reflected the stability and prosperity of their kingdoms. The political enterprises including warfare as necessary trait was not plundering and it did not affect social life in any way. The regions apart the political changes did not influenced the life of the people even in Delhi. This we speculate on the basis of the study of Dargah Quli Khan’s Muraqqa e Delhi. The observations present a fascinating picture of Delhi’s social and cultural life in the eighteenth century. He wrote on various

18. Herman Goetz, Crisis of Indian civilization, p. 12.
themes which covered sufi saints, the ceremonies of urs connected with them, the market places of Delhi, Hindu and Muslim festivals, religious rituals and others social practices. He also gave account of the Indo-Persian and Urdu poets. It is interesting that all the poets enlisted by Dargah Quli Khan were associated with royal courts. In the declining phase, the mehfils were still embellished. The narratives of Dargah Quli Khan and those of Reeti poets, therefore, open several possible avenues for research. The Reeti literature, if used as source material provides perhaps an alternative approach to the study of the period concerned in support of the revisionist view.

Reeti poetry : Origin and Definition

The historians and researchers who viewed the period as one of the transition and transformation and not as of a general decline have based their works on new sets of regional archival materials or on a more careful study and re-examination of the already used chronicles. Little attention seems to have been paid to assess or reassess the period in the light of literature. Our study is an attempt to understand the period in the light of the Reeti poetry. Reeti Kal poetry unfortunately has also been ignored otherwise by the historians, but more by the litterateurs. There are references to some of Reeti Kal poems like Jungnama, Chhatra Prakas, Sujan Charitra and Nadirshah in some history books. But even these poems, let alone numerous other collections of Reeti poetry, await due attention, more so because the period of Reeti poetry is an important theme of debate among the historians of the Mughal India and early modernists.

The literary people have been indifferent to the poetry for many reasons. In their opinion, the Reeti poetry did not reflect any new features that could merit to become a subject worth the study. Moreover, the literary critics believe that most of the Reeti poets did not have command over Sanskrit poetics, therefore, they could not produce works of good standard. The poets remained limited to a given diction and the literature they produced were stale and stereotyped. There is hardly any one among the Reeti poets who can be identified for their distinctly different style. The language of the Reeti poets has also been criticized for its imperfections and more than that for its deviations from the established grammatical principles. Further, the Reeti poets are commonly dismissed as darbari kavis for their association with one or the other court. It is contended that the main purpose of these poets was to please their patrons by describing them or their courts or by composing poems on the themes and concepts proposed and suggested by their patrons. Their patrons, it is known, were not always aware of the literary accomplishments of the poetics; they wanted poetry merely for pleasure. Reeti poetry has also been condemned for its descriptions of erotic themes. The literary critics consider it prurient and therefore do include it in the subject of serious literary discussions and discourses.

While much of the generally accepted evaluation of the Reeti poetry may not be uncontestable, still its examination as a source of history because demands serious consideration, all the more because the themes of Reeti Kal poems were expressed equally forcefully through other cultural medium,

22. For literary criticism of Reeti poetry, see.
(a) Bhagirath Mishra, Hindi Reeti Sahitya, p. 30-35.
(b) Ram Chandra Shukla, Hindi Sahitya Ka Itihas, p. 161-67.
like music and painting. In the field of music, *dhrupad* occupied the highest place during the reign of Akbar. But by the end of seventeenth century the esoteric *dhrupad* was no more a type of music to which the audiences were exposed by the musicians. It was *khyal* or *thumri* or the regional songs and *bhajans* which were generally performed by the singers\(^23\) and all the compositions in Hindustani music were in Braja *bhasha* around the themes which constituted the core of *Reeti* poetry. The forms and structures of these compositions have also been criticized as being more or less fixed, devoid of any innovative rhythmic schemes.\(^24\) More significant for us is the fact that the *thumri* which was prevalent among the common people had become a dominant feature of the court culture by replacing the most revered *dhrupad* style. On the other hand, the *pahari* Painters were considerably influenced by the themes of love and also by the classification of *nayak-nayika* in the *Reeti* poetry. Radha and Krishna were portrayed as *nayak* and *nayika*. The subject matter of the paintings during the eighteenth century was court and kings, religion and mythology, popular folk themes and ethnological depictions.\(^25\) The painters borrowed the verses from Keshav Dasa’s *Rasikpriya* and presented them in their paintings.\(^26\) They were influenced by Mati Ram’s classification of heroines and picturised different types of heroines. The paintings also depicted the verses of Bihari.\(^27\) Thus the reasons of similarity in themes in literature and fine arts of this period need serious study.

\(^{23}\) Bonnie C. Wade, *Creativity within North India’s Classical Music Tradition*, p. 278.
\(^{24}\) O. Goswami, *The Story of Indian Music*, p. 140.
\(^{25}\) For the description of Pahari paintings, see W.G. Archer, *Indian Paintings from the Punjab Hills: Paintings of the Sikhs*; B.N. Gowami, *Paintings at the Sikh court based on Twenty Documents*.
\(^{26}\) Chintamani Vyas, *Rasikpriya*.
\(^{27}\) M.S. Randhawa, *Kangra Paintings of the Bihari Satsai*. 
Moreover, it is noteworthy that the literary themes which were earlier monopolized by the elites using highly cultured Sanskrit language now became the subject matter of the relatively inferior groups using braja dialect. Reeti poetry in this sense represents also the aspirations of lower sections of the people in different spheres of life.

The term Reeti implies one of the most propounded doctrines of Sanskrit poetics of the eighth and ninth centuries. A brief review of the Sanskrit poetics thus may not be out of place for a better examination of the origin and spread of Hindi Reeti poetry.

The Sanskrit poetics started apparently from some theory which took into consideration the whole domain of poetic figures or emotions, style or suggestion and confined its suggestion to the elaboration of more or less mechanical formulae with reference to the techniques of expression. Numerous definitions of various poetics have been offered, each of which is influenced by the author's views about the essence of poetry. Various schools were formed accordingly. Four principal concepts or theories dominated the critical scene since eighth century onwards. Chronologically the extant works may be termed as rasa (emotive expression), alamkara (figurative speech), reeti (style) and dhwani (indirect expression). The scholars who wrote the history of Sanskrit poetics as a discipline admit that they could only make a few surmises, by implication, from the oldest surviving works on the subject, from stray references in general literature and from the elaboration of similar references in other disciplines. We may however rely on these secondary works to understand the different schools of poetics.

The earliest exponent of the Rasa school of Sanskrit poetics is Bharata who wrote Natya Shastra, though speculations about rasa were put forward even before Natyashastra. Rasa primarily means taste or flavour or relish but metaphorically it means the emotional experience of beauty in the poetry or drama. Natyashastra deals with matters concerning the emotional effect desired to be produced on the audience. The theory of rasa therefore has a semi-physiological and semi-psychological basis and it tries to explain how human feelings and emotions are worked upon and roused by poetry. To Bharata, aesthetic pleasure or delight i.e. rasa is only one but the pleasurable feeling, experience or effect could be distinguished as of eight sorts viz. relating to shringar (sex), hasya (humour), raudra (terror), vira (heroism), bhayanak (fear), bibhastsa (aversion), adbhuta (astonishment) and karuna (pity). The rasa as principal sentiment in the composition is a subjective condition of the mind of the reader or audience which is brought about when the principal or permanent mood (sthayibhav) is brought into a relishable condition through three elements, namely, the vibhava, anubhav and vyabhichari bhav. Vibhava may be taken as that which makes the permanent mood capable of being sensed; anubhav as that which makes it a actually sensed; Vyabhichari Bhav is that which acts as auxiliary or gives fresh impetus to it. There is further division of these elements which is not worth mentioning here. Udbhata, Lollata and Abhinavgupta later added Santa rasa (pacific) as the ninth rasa. The rasa theorists however discussed other elements of the poetics though they made these elements subordinate to the principal purpose of awakenging rasa.

Some other theorists of Sanskrit poetics demanded an ornamental fitting out of thought and word. Bhamaha, the earliest exponent of alamkara school, believed that shabda (word) and artha (meaning) make the external framework of the poetry and the alamkaras (embellishment) which adorn these two are to be taken as the essential sign of the poetry. He attempted to classify poetic expression into fixed rhetorical categories and then to give a technical manual comprising of definitions with illustrations and empirical canons. After Bhamaha, Dandi and Kuntaka developed new theories with more stress given to yamak and shelesha almkara. With only four alamkaras quoted by Bharata, the number was raised to between thirty to forty by the time of Dandi and Kuntaka and the commentators of these theorists in fifteenth and sixteenth centuries mentioned hundred alamkaras.\(^{30}\)

Vamana is the foremost representative of the Reeti school. Reeti consists in the special arrangement or combination of words and that the speciality lies in the possession of gunas i.e. qualitative aspects.\(^ {31}\) These gunas or excellences are those essential characteristics which create the charm of the poetry. Vamana gave three types of reetis depending on the combination of gunas, namely, vaidarbhi, guari and panchali. Rudrata, a follower of Vamana added lati riti later. The Reeti theory, inspite of well defined formulations and the advocacy could never wield great influence.\(^ {32}\)

The Dhvani theory is considered to be an extension of rasa theory. The theorists of the school showed that Rasa as the essence of poetry is always suggested and not directly expressed. Hence, best poetry is that

\(^{31}\) P.V. Kane, p. 380.
\(^{32}\) De, Vol. II, p. 103.
which contains a charming sense. The earlier theorists discussed about such a suggested sense in general but they never defined *dhvani* as the essence of the poetry. Dhavanikar wrote that the indicated expression, resolving into the metaphorical is the source of beauty in the poetry because the special motive or *prayojan* is being apprehended without being directly expressed.

Apart from these schools the *Vakrokti* theory was also developed by Kuntaka. He believed that *Vakrokti* or striking mode of expression is the real essence of the poetry. He held that the embellished words, contain some strikingness which is called *Vakrata*; It may be regarded as a new turn to *alamkara* system of Bhamaha.

A number of commentaries on Sanskrit poetics were written during the twelfth and seventeenth centuries. Jaideva, Vidyadhara, Vishwanath, Rupgoswami, Keshav Mishra, Appay Dixit and Jagannath are among the eminent commentators. In medieval period, the theoretical criticism was in the form of translations of some popular works on Sanskrit poetics. A modern scholar, Nagendra informs us that the attempts to translate Sanskrit poetics were also made in other languages during the medieval period. Madhva Kavi translated Dandi's *Kavyadarsh* in Kannada during the sixteenth century; Jayendra translated Appay Dixit's *Kuvalayanand* in the same language; Bhanudatta's Rasamanjari was translated in Marathi and there is reference of several adaptations in Telugu, Bengali and Gujarati literature.33

It was in Hindi/Hindvi that the literature was flooded with translations and adaptations of Sanskrit poetics and rhetorics. General principles of

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Sanskrit poetics, canons and forms of poetic compositions were enunciated in great detail. There are differences of opinion among the scholars who wrote the history of Hindi literature about the beginning of the writings on poetics in Reeti literature. Ramchandra Shukla says that Kriparam, Gang and Karanesh were the foremost writers who discussed the poetics even before Keshavadasa.\(^{34}\) Abdur Rahim Khan-i-Khana who composed various works in Hindi, Sanskrit and Hindi-Sanskrit-Persian mix language wrote Barvai-Nayika-Bhed based on Shrinagar Rasa.\(^{35}\) Keshavadasa was a scholastic poet who applied the rules of rhetorics to exemplify his knowledge power. But it took almost fifty years after Keshavadasa that the trend to discuss the poetics became a general trend. Chintamani Tripathi was the first poet of this phase.

We are however not concerned whoever is given the place of the foremost exponent of the Reeti school in Hindi poetry. What is more important for us is to note that all these earlier Reeti poets were the contemporaries of Pandit Jagannath, the last theorist in the series of Sanskrit poetics. It is also clear that Jagannath and other theorists had been enjoying the fame and honour in the Mughal and other regional courts. We may thus accept the views of some modern scholars who believe that most of the Reeti literature was created for exposing their knowledge of Sanskrit poetics and prove their learning in front of their patrons. The intense instinct to become great acharyas like Sanskritists motivated them to write translations and commentaries of poetics in Hindi. It is not feasible to list all the texts of all the poets of the Reeti period as the number is too large.

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The analysis of *rasa* theory was least different from that discussed by the Sanskrit theorists. Still, a logical corollary of excessive preoccupation with the theory of *rasa* in general and that of *shrinagar* in particular resulted in texts containing many subtle ramifications of the erotic sentiment. Love in union, love in separation, the relative superiority of the love of a married woman to that of a paramour, and of a paramour to that of a courtesan, the bliss of the conjugal love in the first flush of the youth, the conjugal quarrels, bickering, the *nakh-shikh* descriptions, the *barahmsas* and *shad-rituvarnana* were indulgently analysed. The treatment of *shringar* as the dominant sentiment became the universal craze. It is therefore that some of the modern Hindi scholars like Vishwanath Prasad Mishra characterize the period as *Shrinagar-Kal*.36

Whereas quite a large number of poets dealt with *rasa* aspect, equal weightage was given to the works on *alamkara* or figurative speech. Apart from reproduction of the theory of Sanskrit poetics, scholastic attempts were made by Kashavdas who divided the *alamkaras* into the ordinary (*sadharan*) and specific (*vishishta*). Ordinary *alamkara* was further subdivided into *bhushree* and *rajshree* which were designated to describe the cities, rivers, kings and kingdoms, queens and places.

Thus, during the period between 1650 and 1850 almost all the prominent doctrines of Sanskrit poetics were adapted by different poets and different works were composed which emphasized one or the other theory of the Sanskrit poetics. Among the important works based on *Rasa* theory are *Rasikpriya* of Keshavdas, *Rasraj* of Matiram, *Sukh Sagar Tarang* of Dev, *Ras Saransh* of Bhikharidas, *Rasprabodha* of Raseleen, *Sudhanidhi*

of Tosh and Jagat Vinod of Padmakar. There are many other poets whose contribution to Reeti literature based on Rasa theory is equally significant.

*Alamkara* based poetic works of the Reeti period included *bhasha bhushan* of Jaswant Singh, Rasik Sumati of Rasikmohan, Lalittal tam of Matiram, Shivraj Bhushan of Bhushan, Kavipriya of Keshavdas, Rasikmohan of Raghunath, Alamkardarpan of Ram Singh, Padmabharan of Padmakar and so on. The works which included all the theories of the poetics in general were Ras rahasya of Chintamani Tripathi, Shabdarasayan of Dev, Raspiyushniddi of Somnath, Roop Vilas of Roop Sahi, Kavya Sidhanta of Surati Mishra and Kavya nirnaya. Keshvadasa also added Antyanupras alankar which made the poetry full of flow with alliteration. *Alamkara* as a poetics was thus broadly interpreted by Reeti poets. It is for this reason Mishrabandhu termed the period as Alamkrit-Kal.\(^{37}\) Bhagirath Mishra realized the simultaneous prevalence of Reeti trend and rasa both in the literature of the period thus termed it as Reeti-Shrinagar-Kal.

It has been visualized that these doctrines of Sanskrit poetics whether discussed by the Sanskrit theorists or by Hindi Reeti poets were not mutually exclusive but were differentiated on account of the emphasis they lay on a particular aspect. It was because the inter-relation of these doctrines in Reeti-Kal that the poetry of the period has been evaluated differently by the scholars. Interestingly, Bhagirath Mishra and Nagendra interpret the term Reeti in radically different ways. To them the term Reeti in context of Hindi literature (1650-1850) does not imply the special arrangement or combination of words in accordance with certain principles as laid down by Sanskritists during eighth and ninth centuries. The feeling to become

great acharyas like Sanskritists, the Hindi poets also began to discuss poetics and assert their knowledge so as to earn fame. These poets also imparted teachings of poetics to their disciples. It was this trend or Reeti on the part of every poet of our period, e.g. to discuss various elements of Sanskrit poetics that the period according to some was termed as Reetikal. These scholars thus suggest that it was not the Reeti school of Sanskrit poetics headed by Vamana after which the literature was called the Reeti literature. In support of this view they further assert that none of the four schools of the Sanskrit poetics and specifically Reeti, received special treatment by the poets during the period concerned. It is thus not correct to consider Reeti a component of the poetics, to be the essential feature of the Reeti-kal poetry.

When Reeti is understood as the trend to discuss Sanskrit poetics, the question as to why people took interest in Sanskritic culture assumes obvious significance. As the theoretical concepts of Sanskrit poetics were elucidated by quoting examples generally taken from epics, puranas, legends or from popular myths, the discussions on poetics certainly indicated an increasing aptitude of the audience in the Sanskritic culture, the audience being the rulers patronizing these poets and their courtiers. Presumably, the rulers encouraging such themes might have been aware of the implications of the concepts or had the desire to learn the concepts at least. This also shows how elements of high culture were appropriated by the newly emerged elites or even by the subalterns.

The Mughal rulers were great patrons of learning and art. It is not well known that they liberally patronized Sanskritic culture, but their courts

were adorned with Sanskrit Scholars and writers of high repute who received encouragement, monetary or otherwise, from them. Rahim, Akbariya Kalidasa and Jagannath were the noted poets in the courts of Akbar and Shah Jahan. Rahim himself was a patron of a number of Sanskrit scholars. The famous poet Keshavadasa was a close associate of Jahangir. Vrind was the teacher of Prince Azam Shah. Kalidas Trivedi, a noted Hindi Reeti poet accompanied Aurangzeb to Golconda. Alam was patronized by Prince Muazzam even after he became the Emperor in 1707. Abdur Rahman Premi lived in the court of Farrukhsiyar while Surati Mishra and Ghananand lubricated the court of Muhammad Shah. It is in this milieu that new local language was enriched with gems of classical Sanskrit poetics.

It was also perhaps a deliberate attempt of the local Hindu rulers to promote the sanskritic culture. The majority of the poets generally brahmans by caste found shelter in the regional and local courts of Braja, Awadh and Bundelakhand. We have tried to prove in the thesis that these regional rulers and local chiefs also attempted to integrate and consolidate their position by mobilising local support in their favour. They appointed for this purpose the learned brahmans or poets of great repute to their courts who narrated Indian legends, Sanskrit dramas and religious themes in local language. The literature produced a common culture out of a vast and heterogeneous mass of local beliefs, myths and legends and this provided strength to the regional rulers. The regions where these poets stayed were significant in the eighteenth century politics. Thus we find that the patronage

39. Jitendra Bimal Chaudhary, Khan-i-Khana, Ch. V.
to Reeti poetry in span of time cut across the distinctions of Mughal or regional rulers.

Significance and Scope of the Reeti Poetry

The Reeti-Kal literature assumes greater significance as a source of history in the light of recent literary criticism. The scope of historical writings expands as one moves away from the traditional ways of analysing and interpreting social reality. The rhetorics and tropes become a tool of interpretive approaches and arguments are being extended in favour of locating texts in their historical, cultural and ideological contexts. The traditional historiography has also been seen as drawing upon the literary conventions containing various literary forms of employment, argument, ideology and tropes, each in turn having different modes of writings. It has also been suggested that by utilizing the metaphors, irony and other literary tropes in the narratives, the explanation and representations of historical reality may be produced. The Reeti literature thus enables us in producing a representational view of the society during the period concerned.

42. Richard Harvey Brown, 'Poetics, Politics and Truth : An Invitation to Rhetorical Analysis' in R.H. Brown (ed.), Writing the Social text. The author recounts the arguments of various schools since positivism till post-modernism and treats the study of rhetorics containing meaningful voices.

43. The focus on language and rhetorics calls forth a debate on text and context. For text context dichotomy, see Julie Thompson Klien 'Text Context : The Rhetorics of the Social Sciences' in Brown (ed) Poetics, Politics and Truth; See also, Terry Eagleton, 'Ideology and Scholarship' in J.J. McGann (ed) Historical Studies and Literary Criticism and Hayden White, 'New Historicism: A comment' in H.A. Veeser (ed.) The New Historicism.

even as the differences in socio-cultural background of the poets, patrons and audience may not be devied.

Inspite of linguistic and cultural differences, the Mughal patronage to Indian literary heritage need clarification particularly in the light of a recent that Hindvi was accorded significance by the Mughals in the face of asserting regional forces in the eighteenth century.45 There had otherwise been conscious efforts to make Persian a language of the Empire.46 Still we can not say that the unprecedented use by the Mughals of Braja language in the late 17th and 18th centuries was merely a political factor; for certain cultural changes did influence the growth of the language.

Braja bhasha was one among different regional languages in medieval period. Amir Khusro in Nuh Sipahr wrote that Zaban-i-Dehlavi or Hindvi was influenced by Lahori, Awadhi and Khari boli.47 Abul Fazl in Ain-i-Akbari listed the languages of India and braja bhasha found no place there though Keshavdasa had already composed poetry in this language. It can be presumed that braja bhasha was a desi bhasha, which gradually assumed the status of codified literary language. This development was in no way an aberration to the process of growth of linguistic tradition in which Braja, a desi dialect debased the previous literary language.

46. We also notice in the hagiographic text Beetak which constitute our sources, that Aurangzeb did not encourage Hindvi as a medium of conversation. Sudipta Kaviraj believes that language wasnot a determinant of the political ideologies in premodern India. See his article, 'The Imaginary Institutions of India' in Partha Chatterjee and Gyanendra Pandey (eds.) Subaltern Studies, III. The scholars who believe that language did not form the basis in premodern communities should review their understanding in the light of these references.
Moreover, we have the reference of Subedar Nizam Shah (1510-53) under Sher Shah who patronized the great Sanskritician Bhanukar. The poet in turn composed many verses in praise of Sher Shah. The compositions of the Sanskrit scholars and those of the Reeti poets in the course of time included not only the discourses on poetics; the biographies of their patrons constituted a significant part of their writings. Jagannath and Bhanukar wrote the biographies of Prince Khurram and Prince Daniyal; Rudra kavi wrote Nawab Khan-i-Khana charitram and Jahangir Charitram. It is not known if these patrons had an understanding of Sanskrit language. It was possibly a symbol of power and prestige to have learned scholars in the court. Also, the desire to be known in some literary circles might have motivated the Mughals to incorporate Sanskrit into the Mughal literary traditions. When the themes of Sanskrit literature were adapted in Braja poetry, the rulers readily acknowledged braja language also.

There is, however, an element of truth in the opinion that the accommodation to Braja language in the Mughal courts was a political device. The regional rulers thus made special efforts to popularize and make it a literary language in a great measure. The Hindi poets generally received patronage in the courts of Rajasthan, Bundelkhand, Awadh and Agra-Mathura region, where from the resistance to the imperial power during the period came. Braja was emerging as a court language though the patronage to it was yet limited. But it was in search of an independent identity that these rulers encouraged the language. This identity encompassed both the domains of both the politics and culture.

With the Reeti literature continued a classical the tradition which otherwise might have vanished by the sixteenth century. The historians of Sanskrit poetics believe that the stream of Sanskrit theorizing that originated
from Bharata’s *Natya Shastra* had gradually become weak. The maturity of interpretation, subtlety of analysis and logical consistency of exposition tended to disappear in the course of centuries. The innumerable adaptations and commentaries written during the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries were evaluated as low profiles in terms of traditional literary criticism. At this crucial juncture, Hindi *Reeti* poetry emerged to sustain the poetics well before their disappearance. Even if *Reeti* poets did not discuss or added to the already existing doctrines or deviated from the theories, their contribution to the process of acculturation is of considerable significance.

The *Reeti* poets believed in practical and experimental ideology. The Sanskritists produced excessively sophisticated theory lacking practical application. The highly condensed phraseology made their texts thoroughly inaccessible to a common reader. The *Reeti* poets admittedly composed the poetry for the common reader:

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समझें बाला बालकहूं, वर्णन पद्ध अगाध
कवि प्रिया केशव करी, छंदियो कवि अपराध।
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(Even children understand the description of the detailed literature, Keshav composes *Kavi Priya* forgive this the poet for this fault).

These poets explained the theoretical principles by selecting the examples from popular beliefs and everyday life of the common people. The poetry therefore acquires added significance as it reflects the culture and life pattern of its time in a great measure.

Apart from discussions of poetics, the *Reeti* poets created works for spiritual lumination through love and devotion. The abundant literature

based on emotional, devotional and compassionate feelings was created by devotional poets like Ghananand and Bodha, Bakshi Hansraj and Thakur whom we can place in the category of saint poets of sufi-bhakti tradition. These poets like the Sanskriticians of earlier period presented the erotic-religious sentiment wherein physical pleasure was enjoyed by the body and divinity was attained by the enlightened and elevated soul, who otherwise was inflicted and paralysed by the passionate strokes. This aspect of aesthetics had considerably influenced the sufi ideology. Abdul Wahid Bilgrami in his work *Haqaiq-i-Hindi* exclusively dealt with this theme and explained the suggested implications of *ishq* and *nakh-shikh* descriptions of *Reeti* poets. Various themes concerning the divine essence and the reality were discussed at great length. The mystical and philosophical thoughts thus also constituted an important part of *Reeti* poetry.

The *Reeti* poetry signified a perfect blending of different elements of poetics including rhetorical excellences, emotive aspect, style and indirect expression. Though poets during the seventeenth century confined to the poetic expressions with artistic devices and sensuousness, gradually they tended to include different tenets of varied nature. Somnath, for example, wrote *Shringar-vilas* and *Raspiyunidhi* during earlier years of his life and then translated the Sanskrit dramas *Singhansan Battisi* and *Malti-Madhav*. *Shakuntala* was also a poetic version of the love theme of Dushyanta-Shakuntala as narrated in *Mahabharata* and *Abhigyan Shakuntalam* of Kalidasa. The wars and battles, the courts and the palaces were also narrated with great intensity. The poetry of the period concerned thus included body of axioms, aphorism, metaphysics and religion, social and political concepts, myths and legends many of them known even to the unlettered. But the greatest achievement of the *Reeti* poets was reflected in the effective use of
metaphor as a mark of genius. The metaphorical expressions depart from ordinary linguistic usage and become profoundly significant when interpreted deliberately. The metaphorical expressions demand continued tilting of words; it is perhaps for this reason that the Reeti poets changed the words according to their convenience and mixed Awadhi and Braja language whenever it was needed. The use of Arabic and Persian words was also accommodated in poetic articulations. Such use of language may distort the ornate phraseology and figurative styles and make the meaning and interpretation of the poetry difficult. The interpretation of the language in Reeti poetry whether clearly stated or implied should be construed on the basis of the intention and tone of the poet and his social and historical presuppositions.

The court patronage, the influence of Sanskrit poetics, Sanskritic traditions and syncretic linguistic culture encouraged the creation of Reeti poetry during the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries. We have selected the texts of few noted and also of some obscure poets for analysis. Our sources provide an insight into the subaltern and popular culture of the period as the poets generally took their themes not from the genres of high literary culture but from the village routine life. In such literature the orientation of hagiographical and edifying narrations is no exception.

The Reeti-Kal poets and their Anthologies

Hindi scholars have distinguished the Reeti-Kal literature in terms of literary standards and depending upon the nature of the text, accorded their authors a place in the literary tradition. We, therefore, come across various groupings of the poets as great Reeti-Acharyas, specialized in particular branch of poetics; Reeti-Baddha or Reeti-mukta poets, bhakti
and sufi love lyricists and poets dealing with political themes and ethics. Such categorization based on literary and qualitative aspects has its limitations for our study and we thus divide them thematically. The different poets and their anthologies under review have been grouped as Reeti poets, Nakh-Shikh poets, Bhakti poets, and poets dealing with political and miscellaneous themes.

Most of the poets did not reveal their identity except the names of their fathers and native places. Their biographies are therefore generally based on the estimations and scanty information implicitly or explicitly contained in their texts. We also depend on the information available in the histories of Hindi literature and on the editors' preface to the edited texts. We will see that in many cases it was the poets' merits and not their lineage or familial status that secured for them positions in different courts. The poets with obscure identity could also be rewarded for their talents by the great rulers.

A. The Reeti Poets

(1) Bihari. There is great controversy about Bihari's life. It has been suggested by some scholars that Bihari was the son of the Reeti poet Keshavdasa. Agra, Mathura, Gwalior and Orchha have been associated with his birth place. The scholars like Nagendra, Ram Chandra Shuklaand Bhagirath Mishra, however, believe that he was born to Keshav Rai, a brahman by caste, in Basua Govindpur village near Gwalior is 1595 AD. His father later settled in Orchha where he learnt the art of poetry from Keshavdasa. He stayed in Vrindavan for some years and in 1618, when Shahjahan visited Vrindavan, Emperor was impressed by his talent, he then took him to Agra. Disappointed by the factions in the court, the poet
reached Amber where Raja Jai Singh offered him patronage. There he composed his *Satsai* which secured great fame for him. He died in 1663.

(2) **Bhikharidas.** He was Kayastha by caste and his father was Kripaldas. He was a native of Tyonga village in Pratap Garh. He was patronized by Raja Hindupati Singh, the brother Prithvipati Singh of Pratap Garh during 1734-1750. He composed *Ras Saransh, Karya-nirnaya, Shringar-nirnaya, Shabdakosh, Shatranshatika* and *Vishnu-Purana Bhasha.* We have included his *Shringar-Niranya* and *Ras-Saransh* in our study.

(3) **Dev.** On the basis of internal evidence in his works, the scholars treat Dev as a native of Etawah in Uttar Pradesh. He was a brahman by caste. He was born in 1667 and his father was Biharilal Dubey. He lived a life of a wanderer visiting the courts of a number of notables, nobles, princes and kings like Azam Shah, Seth Bhawani Datt Vaisya of Charkhi, Raja Kushal Singh of Phaphund, Raja Bhogilal, Zamindar Udyot Singh of Dondia Khera, Sujanmani, an affluent resident of Delhi, and ruler of Pihani, Akbar Alikhan. He dedicated to each of them a composition. He composed *Bhav-Vilas, Ashtayan, Bhawani Vilas, Kushal Vilas, Prem Chandrika, Sujan Vinod* and *Sukh Sagar Tarang.* We have included in our study his *Sukh Sagar Taranga.*

(4) **Jaswant Singh.** The ruler of Marwar (1626-1673), was an eminent scholar of poetics and he composed several texts but his *Bhasha Bhushan* has been considered as his mature creation. He composed an adaptation of *Prabodh Chandrodaya Natak* also.

(5) **Keshavdasa.** His is believed to live during 1555 and 1616. His father Kashinath, a brahman by caste, was the court poet of Madhukar Shah Bundela. Indrajit Singh, Ram Shah and Bir Singh Deo of the same lineage also honoured Keshavdasa and granted twenty one villages of
Bundelkhand to him. He also acted as an advisor to Ram Shah and Bir Singh Deo. His works *Rasik Priya*, *Kavi Priya*, *Nakh-Shikh*, *Veer Singh Deo Charit* or *Veer Charitra*, *Ratan Bawani*, *Vigyan Geeta*, *Ram Chandrika* and *Jahangir-Jas-Chandrika* have been collected in *Keshav-Granthavali* in three volumes. We have studied of *Veer-Charita*, *Jahangir Jas Chandrika*, *Keshav Priya*, *Kavi Priya* and *Nakh-Shikh*.

(6) **Kriparam.** He has been considered as the foremost *Reeti* poet to have a treatise on *nayika-bhed*. We have no information concerning his life. His collection *Hit Tarangini* has been assigned the period around mid-sixteenth century. This text marks the beginning of a new trend in the *Reeti* literary tradition. We have therefore included his poetry in our study as he deserves credit for initiating the process of creation of such a vast literature.

(7) **Padmakar Bhatt** (1752-1832). A brahman by caste, the poet hailed from Banda, Uttar Pradesh. His father was a court poet of Raja Raghunath Rao of Nagpur. He joined None Arjun Singh, a minister of a local raja Guman Singh of Bundelkhand in the beginning and also received the patronage of Himmat Bahadur Anup Giri Gosain, a mercenary commander. He also visited the courts of Jagat Singh of Jaipur and Raghunath Rao. All his works (*Himmat Bahadur Virdavali*, *Jagat Vinod*, *Kali Pacheesi*, *Prabodh-Pachasa*, *Padmabharan* and *Parkeernak*) have been included in *Padmakar Granthavali*.

(8) **Rasleen.** Saiyid Gulam Nabi Rasleen was a resident of Bilgram, near Hardoi. Though he quoted several names from eight generations of his family and their contribution to the promotion of Hindvi poetry in *Ras Prabodha*, we have no information about his birth. It is believed that he
composed *Ras-Prabodha* and *Anga-Darpan* around 1740. He was a good soldier and was in the service of Nawab Safdarjung.

(9) **Somnath**: The court poet of Raja Badan Singh, the Jat ruler, was a brahman by caste. His father was Neel Kantha Mishra. He calls himself Shashinath in his poetry. His various works have been collected in *Somnath-Granthavali* three volumes. We have included in our study his *Raspityushnidhi, Shringar Vilas* and *Sujan Vilas*.

**B. Nakh-Shikh poets**

(1) **Abdur Rahman Premi**. The poet is known for his brief text *Nakh-Shikh*. He was patronized by the Mughal Emperor Farrukhsiyar (1712-19).

(2) **Balbhadra**. It is believed believe that Balbhadra was born in 1543 and that he composed his works during the last decades of the century. His *Nakh-Shikh* constitutes the part of our study which marks the beginning of the trend of describing *nayika’s* body as an embodiment of power. He was patronized by Madhukar Shah Bundela.

(3) **Chandra Shekhar Bajpeyi**. He was a resident of Asni (Fatehpur.) His father was Mani Ram Bajpey. He is believed to have been born in 1798. He visited the courts of the rulers of Darbhanga, Jodhpur and Patiala.

(4) **Nrip Shambhu**. King Shambhu Nath Solanki of Sitrara Garh (born in 1681) is known as Nrip Shambhu. He was a contemporary of Mati Ram and had friendly relations with the poet. He composed a *Nakh-Shikh* which has been treated as one of the great works by the modern scholars.

Apart from all these poets, Bhikharidas, Rasleen, Keshavdasa and Dev also produced *Nakh-Shikh* poetry which has been included in our study.
C. The Bhakti poets.

(1) Bakshi Hansraj. He was born in Panna in 1732. He was a follower of Sakhi-Sampradaya and later joined the Nijananda Sampradaya of Prannath which we have noticed in some details in Chapter five. Some modern Hindi scholars keep him in the category of Sufi love poets while some identify him as a poet of Krishnaite cult. The modern Pranamis associate him with Prannathi tradition. His Saneh Sagar, whatever way it is categorized, furnishes details concerning the legends of Radha and Krishna. He was a Kayastha by caste and his father Harikrishan was a bakshi in the court of Bundelas at Panna. Though dates concerning his life and death are not known, it is ascertained that he lived during the reign of Bundela ruler Amar Singh (1752-56).

(2) Bodha. Budha Sen or Bodha was a resident of Raja Pur, Prayag. He was a brahman by caste. He left Payag due to familial disputes and reached Panna where his relatives held important positions in the Bundela court. Due to his poetic skills, he secured a respectful place in Panna court. Scholars attach the story of Subhan, a court prostitute, to whom he is believed to have dedicated his poetry. Hindi scholars consider his works Ishqnama and Viraha-vareesh as allegories.

(3) Tosh. Hindi scholars place Tosh in the category of Acharya Kavis. We have, however, treated him as a bhakti poet because his Sudhanidhi is a treatise on erotic-religious sentiment. He was a brahman by caste. His father Chaturbhiuja Shukla was a native of Singror. Sudhanidhi was composed in mid-seventeenth century. Beyond it our sources furnish little about his life.

(4) Surati Mishra. A brahman by caste, was born in 1674 in Etawah. His father was Singhamani. He is reported to have spent his childhood in
the company of saints and ascetics. He joined the court of Zorawar Singh of Bikaner. The period assigned to his Bhakti-Vinod is 1728 which has not been accepted by many modern scholars. Bhakti-Vinod is a highly devotional poetry, largely on Lord Krishna, but it describes other gods and goddesses also.

(5) Thakur. Son of Gulab Rai, he was a kayastha by caste. His grandfather Khag Rai was a military commander in the imperial army during Akbar's reign. His father Gulab Rai migrated to Orchha after his father died. Thakur joined the court of Kesari Singh of Jaitpur as a court poet. Though he remained in Jaitpur permanently, he visited the courts of many other rulers where he contacted his contemporary poets like Padmakar. Thakur-Thasak contains the verses of Thakur which are largely addressed to Radha and Krishna.

(6) Rasnidhi. He was an affluent Zamindar of Datia. Rasnidhi was his poetic name and his original birth name was Prithvi Singh. The period assigned to his compositions spans between 1603 and 1710. His devotional verses are based on rasa poetics and are collected in Ratan Hazara.

(7) Laldas. He was a disciple of Prannath, the founder guru of Prannathi cult. We have some details of his biography in Chapter five.

D. Poets of Political Narratives

(1) Gore Lal Purohit or Lal Kavi. He was a native of Mau in Bundelkhand. Hindi scholars and also the editor of Chhatra Prakas are silent about his personal life. He has been identified only as the court poet of Chhatrasal.

(2) Man. The identity of the poet has not been established as yet. He is known to us only as the protege of Rana Raj Singh (1653-1680). He
composed *Raj Vilas* which contains lively descriptions of the political development during the Rana’s reign. The period assigned to his composition is (1666-1680).

**3) Shridhar Ojha.** He was a resident of Prayag. It is believed that he was born in 1680. One Nawab Muslih Khan, a noble of Emperor Farrukhsiyar, was his patron. *Jungnama* is a war narrative which describes the war of succession between Jahandar Shah and Farrukhsiyar fought in 1712.

**4) Sudan.** The author of *Sujan Charitra* was a Kayastha (Mathur) by caste and belonged to Mathura. His father was Vasant. He was the court poet of Badan Singh, the Jat ruler of Agra-Mathura region during the eighteenth century.

Keshavdasa’s *Veer Charitra* and *Jahangir Jas Chandrika* also furnish information about the contemporary politics.

**E. Miscellaneous**

**1) Newaj.** The identity of Newaj is disputed. Hindi Scholars generally believe him to be a Hindu brahman. They hold that he composed *Shakuntala* in 1680 under the patronage of Prince Azam Shah, the son of Emperor Aurangzeb. Some scholars think he was a Muslim who composed his poetry during Farukhsiyar’s region. The details of the ambiguity have been given in chapter six.

**2) Gulab Singh and Brijwasidas.** Both these poets composed translation of *Prabodh Chandrodaya Natak* during the eighteenth century. The play was translated from the original Sanskrit text and its medieval and Persian versions.
(3) **Vrind.** Vrind is a famous poet from Merta. He is known for his pragmatic treatment of ethics. He was associated with the imperial court as the tutor of Prince Azam Shah, the son of Emperor Aurangzeb. He later joined Rana Raj Singh in 1703 for reasons not known. *Vrind Satsai* is the only but valuable collection that has been included in the study.

(4) **Girdhar.** Some scholars believe that he was the father of Bhartendu Harishchandra and composed his poetry around 1840. Nagendra in his *Hindi Sahitya Ka Itihas* (p. 369) however assigns his work to the period around mid-eighteenth century. We have quoted him in a couple of places in our study to illustrate some changes in the general attitudes of people towards worldly life. He composed verses on ethics which have been compiled in *Girdhar Kaviray Kundaliyan*.

We thus notice that most of our poets came from the ordinary middle order social groups and secured high positions in the courts on the basis of their literary accomplishments. The descriptions of the society in their poetry could perhaps be presumed to represent the social perceptions, beliefs and ideas of the people belonging to the lower and middle rungs.

**Plan of Study**

We have divided our study into seven sections besides introduction and conclusion. In Chapter one, ‘Kula’ *Kutumba* and *Jati* (Family, Kinship and Caste), we discuss the relationship between individual and society. We attempt to see if patriarchal joint families, propounding the notions of *kula* and tied closely to other families through kinship norms constituted the kin group which gradually assumed the form of a caste. We also see some details to suggest that family being the smallest unit of the society, the individual was assigned relatively subordinate status with the society
governing his mind and personality in a great measure. Still, the social norm were often transgressed as a matter of protest by individuals which were deliberately ignored by the society in most of the cases for maintaining harmony. The already existing norms as the guiding principles thus represented the continuity of tradition and transgression of these norms implied change.

The attitude of the poets towards women has been analysed in Chapter two, entitled 'Representations of Women in Family and Society'. Though the poets generally had a conservative attitude towards women which placed them in subordination to men for various reasons, their poetry still reflected a protest against ideal womanhood which encouraged her oppression and treatment as an inanimate object. We analyse various agencies that could conceivably had assigned them an inferior position in family and in the society. We also examine if a change was taking place in gender relations. The construction of feminity in woman centered poetry is apparent in Nakh-Shikh descriptions wherein women tended to represent a power symbol and emerges as an embodiment of all the divine and mythological attributes.

Chapter three ‘The legends of Radha and Krishna’ recounts the gradual development of the images of Radha and Krishna since time immemorial. The descriptions of Radha and Krishna in our sources represented the incidents, attributes and myths attached to the legends of the duo in different stages of evolution of their images. Our sources may further add to the notions of the cowherd-God, the epic-God and the frolic-God in terms of the existing concepts of medieval mysticism, asceticism and literary conventions. Radha also became a symbol of power, over and above the divinity of Lord Krishna and received dominant focus by the poets. The conception of Lord Krishna and Radha in more humanized forms
was the outcome of earlier traditions of Jaideva, Nimbarka and Surdasa and was also influenced by the introduction of new poetics during the sixteenth century.

Inspite of the humanization of the duo during the period under review, they were still objects of devotion. Chapter four 'Bhakti' and Nayak-Nayika describes viraha-bhakti as one of the popular ways of devotion. We will see if even in state of Viraha, Krishna manifested both nirguna and saguna forms and was worshipped in affectionate form of bhakti. The relationship between the Lord and the devotee as the one between the lover and beloved opened the channels for their treatment as nayak-nayika in the Reeti poetry. We attempt to see if such endeavor undermined the divinity of the duo, by altering their images as purely literary genre.

Krishna and Radha became embodiment of varying and divergent trends and traditions of religion, Lord Krishna further received a distinct treatment by Prannath. In Chapter five Prannath and His Nijananda Sampradaya', we discuss the biographies of Prannath and his preceptor, the founder guru of the cult, Devchand. Prannath's life has been discussed in terms of his ideology and struggle due to the literary mode of Beetak of Swami Laldas, which has been utilized as the primary source on Prannath. The formation of the cult depended on the person of the Guru and its growth as institution was envisaged by enunciating strict rules and rituals. In a sub-section Disputations and Dissemination' we discuss conflict, ideological or otherwise, which Prannath encountered in the wake of preaching of his radical religious tenets. The journey of the religious divine from Gujarat and the Imperial court under Emperor Aurangzeb to the court of Chhatrasal of Panna enable him to accommodate divergent religious traditions. The incorporation of Nizari Ismaili tradition, the Brahmanical beliefs, Christian,
Buddhist and Sufi ideas would be examined to assess him claims of being incarnation of many divinities at the same time. We would also take notice of the ways and reasons of its eventual merger into the Brahmanical tradition and its survival in the later period only as a Krishnaite cult.

The invocation of the authority of the Brahmanical scriptures and Indian classics would be discussed in Chapter six, 'Narratives from the Past: *Shakuntala, Prabodh Chandrodaya Natak* and *Sujan Vilas*'. These narratives contain diverse themes—*Shakuntala* is a love story, *Prabodh Chandrodaya Natak* is an allegorical discourse on ethics while *Sujan Vilas* is reiteration of *Singhas Dwa Trinsica* and largely deals with the theme of statecraft. A comparison of these retold stories during our period with the ancient versions may help us in having some idea of the images of the past in the period under study. The extent to which these narrations exhibited a continuity of the past and change has also been examined briefly.

The last chapter 'Images of Contemporary Politics' is an analysis of the political narratives composed by Keshavdasa, Lal Kavi, Man, Shridhar Ojha and Sudan. We include Keshavdasa's text in our study as it furnishes significant information which is essential for understanding the political culture during the period under review. The reading of *Veer Charitra* and *Jahangir Jas Chandrika* of Keshavdasa, Chhatra Prakas of Lal Kavi, *Raj Vilas* of Man, *Jungnama* of Shridhar Ojha and *Sujan Charitra* of Sudan facilitates the study of different regions. Their significance in the historical process as independent entities and their relation with the Mughal Empire is a part of the discussion. We would also see if these sources indicate varied patterns of politics in terms of, political ethics, morals, objectives and values of different ethnic and dynastic groups in the regions.
The issues of identity and legitimacy to rule are described by the poets in great details and it would be worthwhile to trace the similarities and differences between various attributes of legitimacy. The norms of politics and notions of kingship were delineated to justify the acts of the rulers. The organisation of regional powers generally on based the support of various ethnic groups, warfare and conquest, patronage to religion and scholars, palace-building and the grandeur of the courts have thus also been reviewed.

The distribution and sharing of power among regional rulers and also with the Mughal Empire was a matter of alliances and compromises which was determined by the prevailing circumstances to a great extent. During the eighteenth century, it emerges that the regional powers gained an upper hand in defining the terms and conditions of local politics. The shifting patterns of alliances and rivalries between the regions and the Mughal Empire during the sixteenth and early seventeenth century were concluded by the establishment of regional hegemony that undermined the imperial influence on the regions. The mode of consolidating and legitimizing authority were discrete as the course of action on behalf of any ruler was decided according to the situation. We thus also take notice of the complexities as reflected in these narratives.