

Female voices and gender construction in North Indian *sant* poetry

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The importance of female perspective in Krishna bhakti has been stressed out in different studies. On the one hand, the ubiquitous *gopīs* are paradigmatic figures of Krishna devotion, which male devotees have relentlessly impersonated in verse and in life. Amidst the overwhelming male bhakta poets' choir Mīrābāī has been the most prominent (if not unique) and popular female voice to articulate female emotions.

If the theological prominence of female perspective is based, in the case of Krishna, on the mythological narrative, the presence of feminine discourse in *sant* poetry, understood both as (imaginary) gender of the speaker, as well as thematical range, is less obvious.

The purpose of this presentation is to explore aspects of femininity as it is construed in *sant* poetry (with a focus on Kabīr) and, possibly, to confront these elements of gender construction with the vision of actual, though rare, female bhakta poets of the same tradition, like Dayābāī, Sahajobāī, or Indrāmatī.