

Faculteitsraadzaal,
Blandijn, Campus Boekentoren
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29

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The Figure of the *Faqīr*

Recent literature on the figure of *the jogī/faqīr* has suggested a period of transition in the early modern period from the logic of “magic” and technical accomplishment to that of bhakti, or devotion (Burchett 2019; Pinch 2003, 2006). Was the *faqīr* understood in such terms, across North India? This essay explores this question through examination of two texts from the Punjab region, each of which provides a rendition of the story of the star-crossed lovers Hīr and Rāñjhā, an example of a local iteration of the *qissā* literary form that was so remarkably productive across diverse linguistic domains in early modern South Asia. Analysis of the figure of the *faqīr* in these texts allows consideration of the relationship between *jog* and *bhakti*—as well as the relationship between, and dating, of the two texts under consideration: Damodar’s version of the text, which is attributed to the sixteenth century but has relatively recent and limited manuscript attestation, with compelling evidence for at least a seventeenth century dating, if not before, and the classic version of the tale by Waris Shah, dated to C.E. 1766/7. The narrative embellishments of the tale in these two versions allows us to consider their historical relation, and significance of the figure of the *jogī* in the complex religious landscape of early modern Punjab.

