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Na téma:

Subjunctive Explorations of Fictive Sufi Discourse in Early Modern Bengal

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The early modern Bangla tales of the legendary or mythic *pīrs* are romantic narratives that speak to the often strange and puzzling encounters between Hindus, especially Vaiṣṇavs, and Muslims, primarily Sufis. Figures such as Baḍakhān Gāji and Satya Pīr navigate a world of foreigners and locals, courtiers and country bumpkins, in encounters ripe with a myriad of false assumptions regarding the place of religion and religious identity. Orientalists dismissed these tales as syncretistic rubbish; religious reformers claimed they were heretical; literary historians banished them to the genre of folk or women's tales; and even linguists characterized their language as something other than Bengali. I wish to argue that these Muslim texts are undertaking a very serious cultural work that is not possible within the available restricted genres of Islamic history, theology, and law. These texts explore the *subjunctive*, not in the sense of the way the world should be, but how it might be imagined, how it might come to be. The work of these texts is to explore how an Islamic cosmology might accommodate itself to and then appropriate the predominately Hindu cosmology encountered in the Bangla-speaking world of the early-modern period. Each narrative operates according to a logic of 'what if . . .' Perhaps surprisingly, I argue that *parody* is the critical mechanism by which Islam in these tales provides a critique of local religion and culture that makes Islam in Bengal distinctive.